THE HISTORICAL IDEA OF CHARACTER AND THE CANTERBURY TALES

THE HISTORICAL IDEA OF CHARACTER AND THE CANTERBURY TALES

BY
CAROLINE ELIZABETH WOOD B.A.

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE
MASTER OF ARTS

McMASTER UNIVERSITY
SEPTEMBER 1971

MASTER OF ARTS (1971) McMASTER UNIVERSITY
(English) Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: The Historical Idea of Character and The Canterbury Tales

AUTHOR: Caroline Elizabeth Wood B.A. (Nottingham University)

SUPERVISOR: Dr. C. Wood

NUMBER OF PAGES: v, 119

CONTENTS

PREFACE

The purpose of this study is to make some distinctions between medieval and modern attitudes and assumptions concerning the individual and his relationship to society, in order to discern Chaucer's methods and purposes in the characterisation found in some of The Canterbury Tales. Critical dispute, which I will summarise in Chapter One, suggests that the assumptions and preconceptions related to our own idea of "personality" are inappropriate to and misleading in an evaluation of Chaucer's characters.

The fourteenth-century idea of the self and of man's relation to society, ultimately to creation, and God, is contrasted with some aspects of our own "self-picture", the implications of our possession of "personality" in Chapter Two. I will look briefly at the beliefs to be inferred from the theological doctrine of personalitas, and outline some medieval conceptions of the Inner Man, and of his objectives and his inadequacies.

My remaining three chapters will comprise a detailed study of the characters found in The General Prologue, The Man of Law's Tale, and The Wife of Bath's Tale. In Chapter Three we shall see how the external details of the portraits implicitly lead to moral assessment, to a knowledge of spiritual condition which reaches its culminating statement in

The Parson's Tale. This chapter applies the findings of the first and second parts of Chapter Two. Chapter Four pursues the ideas of the third section of Chapter Two, medieval ideals and virtues. Constance embodies some of these ideals and qualities; the Man of Law is an elaborate foil for such characteristics. My final chapter explores the characterisation of the Wife of Bath as the presentation of contrasting qualities and attitudes, a conviction and constancy in sinning and falling. In endowing medieval man and medieval characters with "personality" we are presupposing in the man a moral autonomy and a manner of introspection he is unlikely to have expressed, and in literary characters, a verisimilitude, external or "psychological" calculated to elicit the sympathetic identification of the reader. My contention is that Chaucer's characters are highly artificial, that they comprise elements of iconography, exemplary materials, theological, literary and contemporary allusion, calculated to arouse a rational response, and ultimately, an ethical judgment.

I

CHARACTER AND CRITICS

"God's plenty"[1] is as pertinent to Chaucer criticism as to Chaucer's pilgrims; as a means to defining my approach to the characterisation of The Canterbury Tales, I shall begin with an outline of the diversity of treatment given to the characters in twentieth-century criticism.[2] The dominant critical approaches to the characters, particularly in the case of the pilgrims, can be seen to be in conflict with one another because of differing presuppositions: in regarding Chaucer's characters should we see them as figures of fiction, and apply criteria similar, say, to those suited to the modern novel?[3] Should we treat them as personalities,

---

[1]John Dryden, Preface to Fables Ancient and Modern (London, 1700).

[2]The criticism I will be discussing in this chapter deals chiefly with the Canterbury Pilgrims; on the whole, interest in Chaucer's characterisation in the tales themselves has either been considered as subordinate to themes in the process of interpretation, or the conclusions of consideration of individual characters have been confined in significance to the exigencies of that specific tale.

[3]Cf. Trevor Whittock, A Reading of The Canterbury Tales (Cambridge, 1968), pp. 78, 84, 124, finds in the Wife of Bath an admirable earthiness associated with the heroines found in the works of D. H. Lawrence. Similarly, John Speirs (Chaucer the Maker, London 1951) finds Chaucer "profoundly moral and religious" in a "Lawrentian sense"; he throws in, for good measure, passing comparisons too, with Johnson, Crabbe, Jane Austen . . . (p. 204).

or as figures of drama?[4] Or should we adjust our view to place ourselves in the lives of a fourteenth-century reader, or audience? As Donald Howard warns us, in considering this hypothetical auditor

> we would not understand much of his behaviour--it would not have the meaning a glance or a grimace conveys among those that live at the same time, in the same culture.[5]

This difficulty emerges with progressively greater stubbornness; R. E. Kaske's review of The Preface to Chaucer (D. W. Robertson Jr., 1962) implies a state of impasse in Chaucer criticism. He sees Robertson's works as "a wholesome corrective pushed to an improbable extreme." He cites Robertson's interpretation of the Wife of Bath as raising

> further questions as to whether such qualities (her "human qualities") may not be recognized without sentimentality, and whether the only alternative to a sentimental reading is a consistently allegorical one.[6]

This apparent dichotomy of approach in twentieth-century criticism is, needless to say, of more complex origins than simply the opposition of two distinct approaches to Chaucer's characters. It is part too of a divergence common to criticism

---

[4]R. M. Lumiansky, Of Sondry Folk (Austin, Texas, 1955), and Bernard Huppe, A Reading of The Canterbury Tales (New York, 1964); both approach the characters as protagonists in dramatic action.

[5]Donald R. Howard, The Three Temptations: Medieval Man in Search of the World (Princeton, 1966), p. 9.

[6]R. E. Kaske, "Chaucer and Medieval Allegory", ELH, XXX (1963), p. 181.

between the methodology expounded by Hirsch and that represented by so-called "New Criticism".[7]

R. K. Root in 1906 employs three primary considerations in dealing with Chaucer's characters which have proved to be the precursors of three distinct avenues of approach. They overlap and subdivide much as did medieval "Trees of Deadly Sins"[8], and for convenience I too must schematise and simplify. Since intervening criticism has successively expanded upon the points originating in Root's work so I will outline this development and conclude with a summary of my own approach.

The strength of the General Prologue lies, according to Root,

> in the vividness of its individual portraiture and in the representative character of the whole series of portraits as a true picture of English life in the fourteenth century.[9]

He praises "the successful blending of individual and typical" by which the "abstract type is made visible and real as embodied in the individual."[10] Critics have since been divided in stressing the individuality or the typicality of the portraits. Inevitably such generalizations have been

---

[7]E. D. Hirsch, Validity in Interpretation (New Haven, 1966) advocates a hermeneutic approach, asserting that the task of interpretation should precede evaluation. F. R. Leavis, (and New Criticism) is concerned primarily with evaluating a work for a modern audience.

[8]Cf. John Livingston Lowes, "Chaucer and the Seven Deadly Sins", PMLA, XXX (1915), pp. 244-9, and this chapter, p.7.

[9]R. K. Root, The Poetry of Chaucer (Boston and New York, 1966) p. 160.

[10]Ibid., p. 161.

extensively modified or redefined, yet until recently one or another of these features has generally been stressed in assessing Chaucer's characterisation. The third point which has proved to be of prophetic significance for later criticism occurs in Root's reminder that

> the life of the Middle Ages lent itself particularly well to such a process of portraiture. Though the dawning of the Renaissance was beginning its emphasis on the individual, society was still organised on a communistic basis. Life was less complex, members of the various crafts were banded together in guilds and mysteries, each with a particular livery. Each member of a guild was conscious of himself as one of a body, its representative and type. Today things are very different . . . with the majority of us the typical is lost in the individual as far as character goes . . .[11]

This third consideration introduces the need for readjustment to a different conception of individuality, a need felt or implicitly denied ever since. Thus in Root's work three distinct tendencies of subsequent criticism can be discerned. Firstly, the individual may be stressed (with "portraiture" implying that the subject of study will be divorced from either literary or historical context). Secondly, interpretation may see the character as a type, in Root's case, a social type. Thirdly, some critics have confronted the need for an awareness of the differences which distinguish Chaucer's time from ours.

Kittredge (1915) finds in Chaucer's characters "an individuality that goes much beyond the typical." He extends

---

[11] Ibid., p. 162.

his discussion of character to the tales and maintains that while the initial portraits give an erroneous impression of typicality, the pilgrims later become "not tale-telling puppets, but men and women".[12] With Kittredge we have an early suggestion that Chaucer's characters, at least his pilgrims, can be regarded as "personalities", with a variety of relations, actions, reactions and distinguished in many cases by a "moment of intensest self-revelation", the mark of Chaucer's "supreme genius". Kittredge finds this self-revelation comparable to the soliloquies of Iago, Hamlet and Macbeth.[13] The validity of such comparisons will be considered in Chapter Two. It is sufficient here to note the use of the idea of "personality" in connection with Chaucer's pilgrims; worth noting too, with Christopher Gillie, that, exceptionally in medieval literature, it is in Chaucer's work that we are tempted to isolate character.[14]

The stress on individuality appears in a different form in a work by John Manly appearing in 1926. He says that of course the General Prologue does not present an inclusive picture of fourteenth century society, but that Chaucer's basis of choice was influenced by the fact that some of the pilgrims

---

[12]George Lyman Kittredge, Chaucer and His Poetry (Cambridge, Mass., 1915) p. 154, 155.

[13]Ibid., p. 155.

[14]Christopher Gillie, Character in English Literature (London, 1965) p. 41.

were real persons, thus initiating a documentary approach which has since sent a number of sleuths in search of "originals". He asserts that "they were typical no doubt, of their status and occupation, but typical only as a happily chosen individual may be".[15] This is helpful in recapturing professional and vocational backgrounds to the portraits, it offers a stimulating insight into social conditions as Muriel Bowden's study of the General Prologue shows.[16] It certainly adds little, however, to our understanding of Chaucer's methods and purposes. The acclaim given to Chaucer's "realism" falls equally short of these problems. Besides, as Robertson points out:

> although the characters in the General Prologue have an undeniable verisimilitude, consistent with the increasing use of verisimilitude in the visual arts, they are in no sense "realistic". The function of verisimilitude is, first of all, to attract attention, and ultimately to show the validity of the underlying abstractions, as they manifest themselves in the life of the times.[17]

Together with direct description and statement, Chaucer's chief technique, according to Manly, is psychological analysis "comparable to the best in Clarissa Harlowe". Appreciation of psychological truth-to-life again stops short at

---

[15]John Manly, Some New Light on Chaucer (New York, 1926), p. 74.

[16]Muriel Bowden, A Commentary on The General Prologue to The Canterbury Tales (New York, 1948).

[17]D. W. Robertson, A Preface to Chaucer (Princeton, 1962), p. 247.

our acquiescence in the illu. ion. We are convinced, by one means or another, of the consistency of the characters, but the nature of our insight remains unexplored. Besides, Chaucer's documentary capacities as well as his artistic intentions are likely to have been subject to a mode of perception different from our own, the implications of which will be discussed in Chapter Two.

Meanwhile Walter Clyde Curry is exploring a different aspect of the individuality of the pilgrims. He offers (1926) medieval documentation to support the theory that physiology, physiognomy, astrology, medicine, are all employed by Chaucer to establish traits of character of evaluative significance to his audience.[18] The "psychology" of medieval times relates outward manifestations to temperament and personal propensities; this process should not be confused however with modern ideas of psychology which will be mentioned in Chapter Two. Curry adds much to our ability to interpret physical detail, his study implies that "individualising traits" so loved by other critics,[19] such as the Wife's celebrated gat-teeth, the Miller's wart, the distinctive physique of the Reeve, are part of a complex of detail to be construed as the indications of character. At this point the arbitrary division of the individual and

[18]Walter Clyde Curry, Chaucer and the Medieval Sciences (New York, 1926).

[19]Eg. J. R. Hulbert, "Chaucer's Pilgrims" (anthologised in Edward Wagenknecht, Chaucer: Modern Essays in Criticism, New York, 1959), p. 24.

the typical becomes more elusive. Now we have accrued a number of "twigges" to the idea of individuality in characterisation. Hence, interest in the pilgrims has diversified into three main "schools", those concerned with historical "originals", those concerned to interpret details as signals of social or moral condition, and those stressing social or psychological verisimilitude.

The typical aspects of the portraits can refer to vocational, social, moral, spiritual status, and to generalised types of temperament. Where each character is related to, or representative of, a social typology, physical details and even behavior, are seen as representative of a group. Curry's study suggests that distinctive details may set the pilgrim apart from his fellows but suggest kinship of another kind. The Cook's and the Summoner's diseases, for instance, distinguish them as the moral casualties of a dissipated life. The physiological aspects of Reeve, Miller and Pardoner assign them to roles suggestive of the figures of the vices to become the familiar stock in trade of fifteenth century morality plays. Curry however still retains a more thorough going (more modern?) idea of individuality.

> Out of the fusion by the creative imagination of of otherwise incoherent elements, emerges the mirage, the unified and unique personalities respectively of the Summoner and the Cook . . . the symptoms of these maladies upon face and body become unfallible indices of character.[20]

---

[20] Curry, p. 50.

The search for underlying significance of character was taken up by Frederick Tupper's work (1914), where he presupposes a role for the artist contrary to the modern one of debarring the pointing of a moral. Tupper wants to demolish one idea that Chaucer was not intrigued by the homiletic aspect of medieval life. He finds an "architectonic use of motif"[21] in certain of The Canterbury Tales and asserts that, apart from the passing mention of the Seven Sins, there is

> yet another treatment of the sins, not casual, but organic; that in several of the stories the poet finds these familiar conceptions of medieval theology so serviceable a framework that he refers often to the well-known formula as a convenient and suggestive device for construction.[22]

---

[21] Frederick Tupper, "Chaucer and the Seven Deadly Sins", PMLA, XXIX (1914), p. 126. The reconstruction of a possible moral rationale underlying the structure of The Canterbury Tales is fought for in "The Quarrells of the Canterbury Pilgrims", JEGP, XIV (1915), p. 256. "The natural alliance between morality and class satire was immeasurable strengthened in the Middle Ages by the then universal habit of mind which reduced all conceptions of right and wrong to fixed formulas, and which combined these formal categories of the view, and a systematic survey of the evils of every calling". He cites Langland and Gower. He seems too ready to see Chaucer's characters simply as abstractions of single sins, reluctant to credit them with a moral complexity.

[22] Tupper, "Chaucer and the Seven Deadly Sins", p. 96. Cf. too, E. Talbot Donaldson, "Medieval Poetry and Medieval Sin" (in Speaking of Chaucer, London, 1970). He presents a fresh and irreverant view of the "business of harmia-metrics". Seeing criticism as having more to do with appreciation than historical interpretation, he counters analysis of moral and anagogic meanings in The Canterbury Tales with a plea for a less moral Chaucer, "What Chaucer was not good at was the formulation of doctrince on sin, but the revelation of the marvellous variety of life in a world which, however sinful, is the only world we've got, and one that can mingle delight with its inevitable corruption."

Tupper sees some of the tales as exemplary of the sins, and their tellers as the embodiment of these specific vices thus:

> Wife of Bath: Pride (in the form of Inobedience)
> Manciple: Wrath (as chiding, one of its branches)
> Physician: Lechery
> Pardoner's Prologue: Avarice and Gluttony
> Pardoner's Tale: Covetousness
> Second Nuns Prologue: Idleness (the case of the Second Nun's sloth being probable but conjectural)
> Man of Law: Envy

The Parson's Tale is, he says, the source of much borrowing in the tales, and this is "deliberately designed".[23]

The schematisation of the sins, as Lowes demonstrates, is by no means as systematic or rigid as Tupper has implied. Lowes's exhaustive analysis of the organization of sins in the Parson's Tale, in Miroir de L'Omme, Confessio Amantis, Ayenbite of Inwyt, and Jacob's Well, leads him to conclude that while

> Chaucer makes abundant use of the Seven Deadly Sins, he dealt with life, and life, like the categories, is a labyrinth of the vices and virtues.[24]

In the following year, Tupper reinforced his argument in the light of Lowes' criticisms. His theory, as applied to character does oversimplify but his study is valuable in furthering the attempt to relate characterisation to Chaucer's thematic concerns, even if "love and sin" puts it too broadly. He does presuppose a formative consciousness different from

---

[23] Ibid., pp. 96-115.

[24] Lowes, "Chaucer and the Seven Deadly Sins," pp. 255, 367.

our own.[25]

Howard Patch introduces another consideration, also to have repercussions, he brings Chaucer into the foreground of the dispute on characterisation as strongly displaying "a liking" for his characters, of which one is highly conscious in the General Prologue. He stresses the poet's approval of Parson and Plowman. He grants the representative quality of the pilgrims in social level and occupations, but argues for another dimension, that of Chaucer's knowledge of human feelings and interest in human nature:

> he does not view human nature primarily from a moral angle [yet] he shows his own prejudice about what is foregiveable.[26]

Allowance is now generally made for a manipulated narrator and for a consequent irony to which the General Prologue portraits are particularly subject.[27] But the recognition of irony recalls us to the problem of fourteenth-century attitudes to social role and duty.

---

[25]Frederick Tupper, "Chaucers Sins and Sinners" JEGP, XV (1916).

[26]Howard Rollin Patch, On Re-reading Chaucer (Cambridge, Mass., 1939) p. 155.

[27]Cf. Kemp Malone, Style and structure in "The Prologue to The Canterbury Tales" ELH, XIII (1946), pp. 38-45; Ben Kimpel, "The Narrator of The Canterbury Tales", ELH, XX (1953), pp. 77-86; E. Talbot Donaldson, "Chaucer the Pilgrim", PMLA, LXIX (1954), pp. 928-936; Edgar H. Duncan, "Narrator's Points of View in the Portrait General Prologue to The Canterbury Tales, pp. 77-101 in Essays in Honour of Walter Clyde Curry (Nashville, 1955); Rosemary Woolf, "Chaucer as a Satirist in the General Prologue", Crit. Q. I, (1959), pp. 150-157, John M Major, "The Personality of Chaucer the Pilgrim", PMLA, LXXV (1960), pp. 160-162. Also Bertrand H. Bronson, In Search of Chaucer (Toronto, 1960).

Discrepencies in the portraits, the failure of the ecclesiastics in particular, to live up to the standards of their vocation, have now been extensively studied. Characterization in the tales is likely also to be qualified by the attitudes of the narrator, and, beyond that, Chaucer himself. As Donaldson has demonstrated, "Chaucer uses a deceptively simple style".[28] Consciousness of tone and of the manipulation of expectation helps to gauge nuances of character. To attribute without qualification, a "hearty kindness" to the wife, "perverse vitality and perverted charm", to the Pardoner, as Patch does, is to offer but a partial view.[29] It leads Patch into the embarassing paradox of suggesting a Chaucer both "concerned with proper conduct for saving the soul" and yet deliberatly not placing his characters "according to a Christian scale of values."[30]

The desire to extricate the Pilgrims from a moral or ethical significance extrinsic to themselves recurrs in the work of Paull F. Baum (1951), Van Dyke Shelly (1940), and Helen Storm Corsa (1964). Baum infers the pilgrimage to be of only "nominal religious intent", asserting that Chaucer's

---

[28]E. Talbot Donaldson, Speaking of Chaucer (London, 1970), Chapter IV, "Women of Style".

[29]Chaucer's liking for the likeableness of his characters is the chief concern of J. S. P. Tatlock, The Mind and Art of Chaucer (Syracuse, 1950); John Speirs, Chaucer the Maker (London, 1951); Derek Brewer, Chaucer ("Men and Books" Series, London and Toronto, 1953).

[30]Patch, On Re-reading Chaucer, p. 184.

interest was

> in people and their strange ways, not in life with its great aims, its troubles of the spirit, and its tragical "mysteries". Is there one of his characters who seems to have a soul and to be concerned about it?

Baum's work is significant in applying to Chaucer's characters an aspect of our concept of personality; in the absence of self-awareness he presupposes Chaucer's lack of interest in things spiritual. He discards the Parson's Tale as "an ersatz finale" and concludes that "the ways of God to Man were not his province, but the ways of Man to Man."[31]

A similar line of argument encourages Shelly to find the Wife of Bath "all the more admirable for having had five husbands".[32] Helen Storm Corsa obligingly supplies her characters with self-awareness. The portraits "are charged with the possibility of dynamic revelation of personality." She discerns in the Tales

> a tension in the degree of struggle necessary to maintain equilibrium, to maintain in whatever terms it can, the balance between what the pilgrim is and what he senses or has sensed, he should be.

For her, The Canterbury Tales represent the "spectacle of the warring soul".[33] Here we are confronted not with the

---

[31]Paull F. Baum, Chaucer, A Critical Appreciation (Durham, N. C., 1958), pp. 67-73.

[32]Percy Van Dyke Shelly, The Living Chaucer (Philadelphia, 1940), p. 201.

[33]Helen Storm Corsa, Chaucer: Poet of Myth and Morality (Notre Dame, Ind., 1964), pp. 78-81.

"individualising touches" which lead earlier critics to an appreciation of personality, but with the manifestations of a fully fledged personality comparable to those found in modern fiction.

In contrast to the increasingly common assumption that Chaucer's characters are in some way, (and here there is a vagueness as to Chaucer's methods and intentions) comparable to the creatures of modern fiction, Ralph Baldwin (1955) presented a systematic analysis of the General Prologue portraits taking into account medieval methods of characterisation and, briefly, the medieval concept of individuality. He examines the rhetorical principles governing the portraits and finds that

> A plenary characterisation is conceived on this basis: the exterior or physical; the interior or moral portraits, the social class, rank, or profession; and the dress

which the narrator in fact announces (l. 37-42).[34] Rhetorical practice accounts, he says, for the extravagant use of superlatives. He turns to Boethius, Aquinas and Gregory of Nyssa for clarification of a view of the person alién to our own.[35] When Baldwin does use "personality", it is in the restricted sense employed in medieval personalist philosophies, which relate man to the three persons of the Trinity by the Christian

---

[34]Ralph Baldwin, The Unity of The Canterbury Tales (Anglistica Vol. V, Copenhagen, 1955), p. 37.

[35]Ibid., pp. 38, 39.

doctrine of man's creation in God's image. His analysis of the portraits reveals that "we do not find in Chaucer the density of specification which is so much a part of the naturalistic technique". He also points out that

> Chaucer's first technical move in each self-contained portrait is the affirmation or the denial of the type and an emphasis on the incarnate pre-eminence of the person in terms of the type approved or derogated.[36]

Baldwin's attempt to redefine "personality" in a medieval sense receives additional support from Robertson (1962). He points out that

> In spite of the conclusions of some modern critics, medieval literary art did not develop the means of analysing such phenomena ("strong motions of the soul"). It is, as distinct from romantic, or modern literary art, rigorously non-psychological . . . Most commonly human behaviour was thought of in terms of abstractions which retained their individuality without reference to the psychological condition of the subject.

He is suspicious even of the term "characterisation" as misleading, "since the aim is not to delineate character in a psychological sense but to call attention to abstractions which may manifest themselves in human thought or action".[37]

Baldwin and Robertson stress the underlying significance of character. This approach demands the support of an approximated medieval view of the individual which

---

[36] Ibid., p. 47.

[37] Robertson, Preface to Chaucer, pp. 35, 248.

Baldwin only briefly suggests, and Robertson fails to provide documentation for. The alternative approach, to infer that Chaucer's characters possess "personality" comparable to our conception of ourselves, and to stress that sense of individuality as a prime objective of Chaucer's, raises two major difficulties. These difficulties are themselves subject to controversy, and I hope the following chapter will help to clarify my case.

The first problem, suggested by Kaske's reservations, mentioned above, is the apparent incompatibility of the interpretative approach with its stress on thematic significance, and the concern with characters as personalities in a twentieth century sense. Stress on the individuals potrayed by Chaucer tends to uproot them from their literary context and from the wider context of fourteenth-century England. It carries with it the implication that character determines thematic design rather than vice-versa. Robertson's exposition of medieval aesthetics and literary practice[38] strongly suggests that narrative detail and plot construction are subordinated to underlying meaning; hence characterization is likely to have been similarly controlled by overall design.

The second reservation is that our own idea of individuality is likely to be qualitatively different from the medieval conception. To enjoy and evaluate Chaucer's

---

[38] Ibid., Chapters II and IV.

figures as we relate to, and judge, the creatures of contemporary fiction, will lead to a partial and distorted view. Muriel Bowden sees the medieval period as

> peopled with human beings whose loves and hates, sins and virtues, were very much the same as they had been within a thousand years or as they are today, or as they probably will be for a thousand years to come.[39]

Underlying generalised feelings may be permanent and universal, but expression and conceptualisation alter, even in our own life times, so that styles of behaviour and attitudes are constantly evolving. In An Anthropologist Looks at History, A. L. Kroeber points out that,

> owing to the largeness of this highly variable component of culture in the makeup of human behaviour, it is evident that "human nature" is a much less steadily uniform thing, and much harder to characterise, than gorilla, or elephant, or tiger nature. Its hereditary features carry an enormous overlay of variable features due to culture.[40]

The caution shown by Kroeber in generalising about "human nature" should also check our impulse to credit Chaucer's characters with "personality"; its implications are liable to lead to a distorted view. In particular we should be inferring such features of our own conception of individuality as powers of introspection, a high degree of

---

[39] Bowden, Commentary, p. 4.

[40] A. L. Kroeber, An Anthropologist Looks at History (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1963), p. 202.

moral autonomy, and self-determination, to figures created for a totally different kind of interest and appreciation. Robertson suggests that

> the individuals in that society were individuals, each with his own peculiar character, talents, and disposition; but they lacked something that most of us enjoy today: "personality" . . . where practical applications are made in realms we would consider to be "psychological", medieval writers concern themselves with morality, that is, with the evaluation of behaviour within a group, rather than with the potentialities of the individual. Medieval men thought of one another, therefore, not as personalities with deep inner drives and tensions but as moral characters whose virtues and vices were apparent in their speech and actions.[41]

My task in this study will be to examine Chaucer's characterisation as the outcome of a distinctly different conception of the individual from that implied by our "personality". Some of the sources of this contrast will be considered in my next chapter.

---

[41] D. W. Robertson Jr., Chaucer's London (Toronto, 1968), p. 4. Regrettably Robertson does not support this theory with his normal documentation and analysis.

II

TWO VIEWS OF MAN: MEDIEVAL AND MODERN

In this chapter I shall try to point out some of the contrasts between the modern conception of "personality" and medieval configurations of ideas about man, his relationship to society, to the framework of creation and ultimately to God. This brief study will form the groundwork for the last three chapters in contributing to an appreciation of the purposes and methods in Chaucer's characterisation, whose emphasis and implications is likely to be misread by the application of an anachronistic frame of reference.[1]

Such distortion was illustrated in the last chapter. The intentions of Chaucer's characterisation have become obscured by the concern for our liking, or Chaucer's liking, or personal approval of his characters. In empathising with the pilgrims, and the protagonists of the Tales, as the

---

[1] Extreme examples of the attempt to evaluate Chaucer's characters by purely modern criteria, drawing on psychological and psychoanalytic terminology, can be found in: John Hagopian, "Chaucer as Psychologist in Troilus and Criseide", Literature and Psychology, XVI (1966), pp. 6-11. He interprets Troilus as the victim of paternal coldness and "an Oedipal tie to his mother". The plot is that of "the past psychological novel of the English Language". Maurice Cohen, "Chaucer's Prioress and her tale: A Study of Anal Character and Anti-Semitism", Psychoanalytic Quarterly, XXXI (1962), pp. 232-49. According to Cohen her brooch is the symbol of anal-eroticism, her invocation of the Virgin represents "genital strivings" and the fantasy of divine rape.

modern novel has trained us to do, we neglect implications in the portrayal of character relating it to a framework of social and moral values. A third danger is that, in attributing to Chaucer's creatures, the manifestations of "personality" we are lead to assume from their behaviour a complex interior life, moral autonomy (with the quality of freedom this implies), and a self-awareness, all comparable to our own. We appreciate his characters for what they are, without paying attention to clues suggestive of what they should be. Conversely we fail to appreciate some of the characters because they do not conform to what we feel, as children of our own time, they ought to be.[2]

I hope to recreate some of the aspects of the medieval idea of individuality. I will look at some recent definitions of "personality" and formulate from this an approximation of our own conception of ourselves as individuals. A contrast can then be made between this and the views expressed by medieval thinkers. The latter part of the chapter presents an analysis of the implications of the medieval "self-picture", firstly as it concerns the manner in which the interior life of man was conceived, secondly as it concerns the ideals and objectives, and norms of behaviour which were most prominent to him, and finally the attitudes

---

[2] I demonstrate this point with detailed reference to to the General Prologue, in Chapter III.

towards moral failure and social delinquency.

A. Personality and 'Personalitas'

In seeking to reach a working definition of "personality" some aspects of our own idea of individuality should emerge for contrast with the medieval view. I have chosen examples from modern psychology, since the materials presented by literary theory and practice are too diffuse for the scope of my present discussion. The first problem we are confronted with is the predictable one of the great range of connotations to which the word itself is susceptible. Gordon Allport has enumerated fifty possible kinds of usage in his attempt to control the implications for his own study.[3] Allport, is considered a leading figure, and even a founding father, in the field of psychological studies of personality. He traces the concept of personality back to Cicero, whose definition of personalitas is of interest to us. According to Allport this can be represented by four distinct meanings:

a) as one appears to others (but not as one really is);

b) the part someone (eg. a philosopher) plays in life;

c) an assemblage of personal qualities that fit a man for his work;

or d) distinction and dignity (as in style of writing).[4]

---

[3]Gordon Allport, Personality: A Psychological Interpretation (New York, 1937), Chapter II.

[4]Ibid., p. 26.

The first point (a) is the type of definition underlying the modern idea of personality, while the last three variants are perhaps of less importance to us and peripheral to our feeling of identity. The first is based ultimately on the idea of persona, meaning mask, and the feeling of discrepancy between interior and exterior life underlies the "stream of consciousness" and the autobiographical tendency of the modern novel. For Freud and the discipline of psychoanalysis the exterior offers clues for the penetration of a complex inner structure, the psyche, which is discovered by the interpretation of external behaviour. The last three definitions are of far greater significance for the medieval view as Baldwin's comment suggests:

> The furniture of house and person, the profession which was a concretion of the mysterious vocation of each person, the conformatives of place and position--all these became synechdoches of the person and his character. [He also suggests that] The boast of a proletarian bourgeois society is that one becomes, so to speak what one eats; this is a shift from the earlier "traditional" society where one became, so to speak, what one did.[5]

The problems of reaching a more inclusive definition of personality are seen by Liebert and Spiegler as that of understanding the whole theory of a particular psychologist. Here I can do no more than draw on some of the definitions they present in their recent (1970) survey of personality

---

[5]Ralph Baldwin, Unity of the Canterbury Tales (Copenhagen, 1955) pp. 40, 42.

studies. I exclude behavioral statements since they are governed by experimental requirements:

> Allport: "Personality is the dynamic organisation within the individual of those psycho-physical systems that determine his characteristic behaviour and thought."
> Eysenck: "Personality is the more or less stable and enduring organisation of a person's character, temperament, intellect and physique, which determines his unique adjustment to his environment."
> Cattell: "Personality is that which permits a prediction of what a person will do in a given situation. . .Personality. . .is concerned with all the behaviour of the individual, both overt and under the skin."
> Hilgard: "The sum total of individual characteristics and ways of behaving which in their organisation or patterning describe the individual's unique adjustment to his environment."[6]

In this representative sample we have the concern with both external manifestations and internal factors whose infinite permutations guarantee the uniqueness of each person.[7] The tendency is to try to isolate this quality, the distinguishing marks of the individual, from the "common denominators" signified by the social and vocational dictates which place the individual in a predetermined role. As Baldwin points out, the professional and social milieu of medieval man were seen as an integral part of his identity. Our stress on

---

[6]Robert M. Liebert and Michael D. Spiegler, Personality: An Introduction to Theory and Research (Georgetown, Ont., 1970), pp. 3-5.

[7]Ibid., p. 5. All personality-orientated psychological studies agree in stressing the uniqueness of the individual.

uniqueness is the product of a sense of self-determination; our freedom to find and shape the various roles of different social groups in which we participate, to our own potential and needs as personally perceived. We consider rationality to be largely subjective, and subscribe to a more or less solipsistic view.[8] The functioning of moral absolutes implicit in the community of religious faith is perhaps forestalled by our conception of ourselves. It is significant that Liebert and Spiegler see personality as independent of ethical evaluation.[9]

In order to have a working definition, of necessity generalised, I shall henceforth take "personality" to imply three distinct features. Firstly we will understand that it implies a hypothetical construction whereby the individual is seen largely in isolation from moral and social judgment, and individuality regarded as inhering in personal attitudes, feelings, desires and fears. Secondly, and leading on from this, the individual is now seen as autonomous and self-determining, free in so far as he may understand his attitudes, feelings, desires and fears. Thirdly, personality confers

---

[8]This can be seen in contemporary principles behind the rehabilitation of criminals. Appeals to moral absolutes have been abandonned for approaches based on re-education by the appeal to utilitarian values, and by using psychiatry to mediate between individual needs and the requirements of society.

[9]Liebert and Spiegler, Personality p. 6.

on this individual a uniqueness by which his circumstances of environment and role fulfilment define but a part of the whole complex of his identity, and are but aspects of a volatile and changing whole, comprehending conscious, subconscious and unconscious experience and potential.

Before passing on to the contrasting medieval conception we should be clear that the distant roots of our own conception were distinctively different. Allport, in discussing the historical evolution of the idea of personality implies that our own view has much in common with that of medieval man. The tradition initiated by the Boethian definition was developed by Aquinas and Duns Scotus most notably. Before detailed analysis of implications we must see whether the "personality" the medieval philosophers were concerned with was in fact qualitatively comparable to our own. John Morrall goes as far as to imply that the whole idea of man's personality originated in medieval times. Indeed, he claims that "in the realm of art, as in other spheres, the recognition of personality forms the hall-mark of the medieval genius."[10] Allport is more specific in his claim. Aquinas, he says, drew on the Boethian definition; persona est substantia individua rationalis naturae; in Aquinas we

---

[10]John Morrall, The Medieval Impact (London, 1967) p. 60.

find the person

> exalted above every other reality observed in nature; nothing, he thought, was superior in dignity to the beings who possess rational individuality. The cultivation of personality was not specifically emphasised in medieval times, but in as much as man should live a life that is rational, the growth of personality was clearly in implied good. In this manner the emphasis was gradually taken from Aristotle's belief that the individual existed for the good of the species, and came to be placed on respect for the integrity and value of the individual.[11]

He does however make the distinction between these origins and the personalistic doctrines dating from Kant, where personality is of supreme value, where persons are metaphysically distinguished from things, and where subjective experience is the final court of appeal.[12] But his presentation of Aquinas' doctrine is misleading in that it excludes all spiritual considerations; hence it contrasts sharply with the suggestion given by Baldwin that, following Boethius, Aquinas, and Gregory of Nyssa

> the ineradicable dignity, personality, and propriety of Chaucer's fellow men [overlays the] indivisible, ineradicable image of Christ incognito.[13]

---

[11]Allport, Personality, p. 30. However a different impression from that given by the latter half of this passage is implied by Christian orthodoxy. According to Paul Henry, S. J., (Saint Augustine on Personality, New York, 1960) "Augustine teaches us the fundamental truth that we are really persons only in as much as we recognise the full status of other persons as related to us; that personality is not egocentric but altruistic." (p. 23).

[12]Allport, Personality, p. 33.

[13]Baldwin, Unity, p. 39.

Personality here seems to be indissolubly linked with Christian belief.

Etienne Gilson in The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy gives an account which explains these undertones of spiritual significance, as integral to the philosophers' concept of personality. If we follow his account of its evolution in medieval times[14] we become aware of contrasts with our own view so great that ours, as I have defined it above can be seen as qualitatively different. The medieval man did, according to Gilson, feel himself to be endowed with distinct individuality: furthermore, he was responsible for his own destiny; but the theological concomitants of these feelings make them very different from our own. The change instituted by Aquinas transformed the idea of individualism (originating with Aristotle) from that of being merely the phenomena of material differentation, to one by which individuality originated in the soul.[15] Since the essence of personality lay in liberty, and the basis of this was rationality

> the principle of personality and the principle of individuality come back to the same thing. The actuality of one reasonable soul in communicating itself to the body, determines

---

[14]Etienne Gilson, The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy (tr. A. H. C. Downes, New York, 1936), p. 182. Aquinas' position is that "The soul is neither a substance, nor yet a form which could not possibly be a substance, but a form which possesses and confers substantiality.

[15]Ibid., p. 202.

> the existence of an individual who is a person, so that the individual soul possesses personality by definition.[16]

This introduces the ideas of liberty and rationality, but to understand this concept of personality we must search further, its theological corollaries. Boethius' definition quoted above occurs in a treatise on the two natures of Christ. The "personalist" elements of medieval philosophy are largely devoted to the Trinity. The "personality" of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost is shared by man in so far as his rationality is employed in realising his likeness to God

> we are persons because we are the work of a person; we participate in his personality even as, being good, we participate in his perfection.

Thus the concept of personality is inseparable from that of the upward striving of the Christian in quest of perfection, and the far view of Heavenly reward

> The whole interior life of the Christian now consists in gradually building up, constantly rectifing, unwearidly perfecting a personality which will only attain its true stature in the future life.[17]

---

[16] Ibid., p. 204. Gilson says, rhetorically "how could personality be anything but the mark of a being at the very summit of its perfection?"

[17] Ibid., p. 203. Gilson interprets Augustines nec ego ipse capio totem quod sum to mean that "if as a divine image he eludes his own grasp, it is because the last word of self-knowledge was the first word on God." (p. 221, and Augustine's Confessions, Chapter V).

The object of all self-knowledge is to function as a means to this fulfilment, as a reading of the Parson's Tale confirms. St. Augustine's conception of the human psyche as memoria sui, intelligentia sui, and voluntas sui reproduces the idea of Trinity, which

> bound Man to God, viewed as proceeding from Him and constituted in his personality by a sort of fundamental preawareness of God as the source of his being, that is to say, memory, intellect, illumination and love of self--identical with the ecstatic love of God.[18]

Is we now turn back to the suggested definition of a contemporary view of personality we can make some initial comparisons. Firstly, I suggested that we ourselves see "personality" largely in isolation from social and moral evaluation. Medieval "personality" was attained by imitatio Christi, by social and spiritual strivings for perfection. Secondly moral autonomy and self determination now seems to depend on knowing personal desires and fears. Fulfilment was then a matter of knowledge in the sense of conforming oneself to predetermined spiritual and social objectives negating the "self", casting out the sins and temptations

---

[18]Paul Henry, St. Augustine, p. 19. Cf. too, Peter Lombard, Sentences, (Book 1, Distinction III, trans. by Richard McKeon, Selections from the Medieval Philosophers, Vol. I, London, 1928) on the XIVth Book of De Trinitate, "In the mind itself even before it is a partaker of God, his image is found. . .indeed the mind is the image of God in that by which it is capable of him and by it can be partaker of him. . ." (p. 194).

obscuring your journey to God and your vision of Him. Thirdly, our sense of uniqueness seems to have been for medieval philosophers, a spiritual distinction conferred by God, and to be of no great practical significance beyond demanding that each should strive towards God as he was able. The excuses we might find in heredity and environment for any inadequacies we feel, were then denied to the sinner.[19]

B. The Inner Man

Our own internal life may be located in the brain, the mind, the psyche, or the Freudian typography of conscious, subconscious and unconscious. The idea of soul is probably progressively more confined to a distinctively Christian view. As we shall see, the idea of the soul of man is firmly rooted in religious belief, and it is not as surprising, as perhaps it should be, that this implies its spiritual origin and functions. Thus in proceeding to isolate man from society for detailed consideration we immediately find that the interior man of medieval times is inseparable from the idea of order, harmony and hierarchy within the whole of creation. Man is central to a complex configuration of perceptions by which he is part of a continuum, a vertical "chain", and also integral to a larger pattern, as has been suggested by the relationship of the Trinity to the structure of the soul itself.

---

[19] I shall discuss this further in the last section of this chapter.

Aquinas' treatment of the subject is a discussion of the powers and functions of the soul and their relative levels in the hierarchy of the microcosm. He discusses the theories of many authorities and arbitrates between them by methodical inquiry and the use of physical analogies. The parts of the soul, the powers, ways of living, however subdivided, conform in spirit to a scheme placing rational at the highest level, vegetative at the lowest. Schematisation embraces the outward going functions and the internal phenomena of sense experience, and cogitation within a hierarchical system.[20] The external and internal senses are interdependent[21]; rationality and the will are placed in a pre-eminent position within the larger framework of creation

> Other animals are so far below man that they cannot come to know the truth which reason is seeking. Man, on the other hand, does come to know the intelligible reality the angels know, but in a less perfect manner. And so the angelic power is not in a different general category from the rational power of knowledge, but compares with it as the finished to the unfinished.[22]

God-given rationality should be in control of the

---

[20]St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae (trans. and ed. by Timothy Suttor, New York, 1968), Vol. XI, 1a, 78-82.

[21]Ibid., 1a 78, pp. 140-144.

[22]Ibid., 1a 79, pp. 176-177.

senses.[23] Anselm describes the ultimate responsibility of judgment.

> When sight and other faculties of sense seem to report to us many things as being other than they really are, the fault is not with the senses, which report in accordance with their natural powers, but must be attributed to the souls faculty of judgment, which does not clearly see what the senses can and should do.[24]

Thus the ultimate court of appeal is not subjective psychological experience but God's gift of rationality, and the support of moral absolutes. Freedom of choice demands reason and will "the reason by which to recognise it (uprightness) and the will by which to hold it fast".[25]

The Lay Folk's Catechism describes the five wits again in terms of spiritual function; Will, Reason, which should rule, Mind (or memory) to be "good and honest", Imagination, "to be speedy in loving God", and Thought "grounded in Joy of Heaven", for "oure soule was maad to

---

[23] Augustine and Duns Scotus asserted that the will was prerequisite to understanding, while St. Thomas said that nothing is willed unless known (Gordon Leff, Medieval thought from St. Augustine to William of Ockam, London, 1958, pp. 234-5). Cf. also Armand A. Maurer, Medieval Philosophy (New York, 1962), pp. 8-18 and 239-40.

[24] Anselm of Canterbury, De Veritate Chapter VI (trans. and ed. by Jasper Hopkins and Herbert Richardson, Truth, Freedom and Evil: Three Philosophical Dialogues by Anselm of Canterbury (New York, 1967) p. 101.

[25] Anselm, De Libertate Arbitrii Chapter IV (Hopkins and Richardson, Truth, Freedom and Evil, p. 129).

lyknesse of þe trinte, Goddes hyȝ name was prentyd þeryn."[26]

We have seen the way in which the interchange of exterior and interior communication was seen; Aquinas describes the wider relationship between man and the exterior world thus:

> human life enjoys a wide range of powers. . . because it exists at the boundary between the spiritual and the physical creation, so that the powers of both come together in it.[27]

Gower's rendering is that

> For man of Soule resonable
> Is to an Angel resemblable
> And lich to beste he hath fielinge
> And like to Trees he hath growinge. . .
> The man, as telleth the clergie
> Is as a world in his partie
> And whan this litel world mistorneth
> The grete world al overtorneth.[28]

Conversely, man's nature was reflected in the macrocosm, a reversal of the schematisation of one soul. John of Salisbury's description of the commonweal as reflecting the structure of the soul is one example,[29] and an analogy with the body of Christ was applied repeatedly to the organisation of the church.[30]

---

[26]Bishop Thoresty, The Lay Folk's Catechism (London EETS, Original Series 118, 1901), pp. 19, ll. 349-58 and 8, ll. 86-7.

[27]Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, XI, 1a 78, pp. 120-21.

[28]John Gower, Confesio Amantis, Prologus, 949-958.

[29]John of Salisbury, Polycraticus, Book IV (trans. John Dickinson, The Statesman's Book of John of Salisbury, New York, 1927, p. 3).

[30]Cf. Ernst H. Kantorowicz, The King's Two Bodies (Princeton, 1957), pp. 199-200.

The medieval schematisation and interrelationship of ontological concepts manifests a confidence in man's powers of rationality, and in the complexity and minuteness which could be comprehended harmoniously within the divine scheme. It is important to note that the internal life of man was no exception to this sense of coherent form. The unknowable and incomprehensible part of man was that of the higher reaches where rationality confronts the Divine Mystery. Duns Scotus maintained that the philosopher's knowledge of the soul is limited since philosophy cannot prove that the soul has been separately created by God or that it is an immaterial or immortal substance, which can be known only by faith.[31] Faith was also the unquestioned bed-rock of ethics. But external experience and participation were regarded as integral to a system which extended from inanimate nature to God. This is in sharp contrast to our own highly volatile conception of ourselves and of the sense of order and reason in the external world. The sense of coherence in internal life again contrasts with our own idea. The objectivity with which this was regarded in medieval times is reinforced by the habit of allegorising, which C. S. Lewis suggests is "the subjectivism of an objective age".[32] Barfield sees a

---

[31]Maurer, Medieval Philosophy, p. 237.

[32]C. S. Lewis, Allegory of Love (Oxford, 1936), p. 60.

tendency to combine

> two ways of approaching phenomena; ways which we are accustomed to regard as quite distinct from one another. These are the litera on the one hand, and the symbolical or metaphysical on the other.[33]

While the knowledge of spiritual things was conveyed by what we would call abstractions, the carnal in man was presented in vivid detail in its physical manifestations. This constrasts with its antithesis of simplicity and order in the realm of the spiritual which reached down to potentially regenerate man.[34]

Before discussing the spiritual aspect of individuality I should like to mention comparisons which have been made between the medieval and modern views of interior life (as represented in the Freudian typology). B. F. Skinner says that

> Freud conceived of the ego, superego and id as distinguishable agents within the organism. The id was responsible for human behaviour . . . reinforced with primary biological reinforcers. It was not unlike the selfish aggressive "Old Adam" of Judeo-Christian theology, preoccupied with basic deprivations and untouched by similar requirements on the part of others. The superego --the "conscience" of Judeo-Christian theology-- was responsible for the behaviour which controlled the id. The superego and the id were inevitably opposed to each other, and Freud often conceived

---

[33]Owen Barfield, Saving the Appearances (New York, 1965), p. 73.

[34]Cf., Robert de Brunne, Handlyng Synne, Owst's comment on Chaucer, and of course my last three chapters, on The Canterbury Tales: G. R. Owst (Literature and the Pulpit in Medieval England, p. 230) maintains that the realism found in Chaucer and Langland was shared by the preachers of Medieval London.

> of them as in violent conflict. He appealed to a third agent--which, besides achieving a compromise. . .dealt with the practical exigencies of the environment.[35]

Donald Howard suggests a similar comparison: he sees the intervention of the ego in terms of the Christian will.[36] The Freudian typology suggests, apart from this apparent correspondence, four aspects significantly different from the medieval soul. Firstly, in place of a natural hierarchy we have in Freud's view, a potential for anarchy. Secondly, any mental act of inhibition or intervention can be seen in Freud's theory as a source of ill health;[37] the action of the superego is undesirable, but the interference of the conscience was to medieval man utterly healthy and desirable. Thirdly, the Freudian view comprises the conscious, subconscious and unconscious. As we have seen, only the higher reaches of spiritual experience were seen as inaccessible in the medieval view. All else was open to the influence of rationality, and, with God's grace, the will. The Parson's Tale is based on this very assumption. Finally, as Howard points out,

> self knowledge is salutary, both in Christianity and psychoanalysis, but for widely different reasons--in the one because it encourages repentence and a renewed vigilance against suggestions,

---

[35] B. F. Skinner, Science and Human Behavior (New York, 1953), p. 284. Also, Sigmund Freud, An Outline of Psychonalysis (trans. James Strachey, London, 1949), pp. 16-24.

[36] Donald K. Howard, The Three Temptations: Medieval Man in Search of the World (Princeton, 1966), pp. 258-9.

[37] Freud, An Outline of Psychoanalysis, p. 26.

> in preparation for the after-life; in the other because it mitigates repressed feelings of guilt, enabling one to be more able to avoid pain and know pleasure in this life.[38]

Thus medieval man was in possession of a self conceptualised as an ordered soul; component of a structured scheme of creation. Rationality affirmed the relation to God and the value of the spiritual. The beast in man was acknowledged by the submission to the appetites. Our identity is the unstable product of the on-going process of choice; the sense of form and fitness has gone, so we must remind ourselves of the large portion of the medieval identity unquestioningly assigned to predetermined roles, patterns of conduct, and values.

C. Man Striving

We have already seen something of the ideals of life, and the spiritual in man, in the fundamental conception of imitatio Christi, identifying the potential of the upper part of the soul with the "personality" of the Trinity.[39] Man was also seen as the inheritor of innate natural goodness

---

[38]Howard, Three Temptations, p. 258.

[39]Cf. Gareth W. Dunleavy, "Natural Law as Chaucer's Ethical Absolute", Trans. of Wisconsin Academy of Sciences and Letters, LII (1963), 177-187.

by which wrong doing was imagined to be against his nature.[40] In De Planctu Naturae, Nature represents order and reason; She is the vicar of God. Man resembles the pattern and harmony of the seasons, when well-regulated. When this harmony is threatened by his Deadly Sins, particularly idleness and sexual licentiousness (which we might consider "natural"), She demands restraint, temperance and generosity.[41]

Not only was rationality and will demanded of Man, but obedience, essential to cultural continuity and the maintenance of a stable hierarchy. Disobedience implied failure of rationality and will and abandonment to the appetites, as we shall see in the case of the Wife of Bath. Conversely, freedom was vitiated by such subjugation to the senses.

The hereditary determinants of the structure of society depended not only on obedience, but on clearly defined duties and roles to which the individual must conform. Occupational and domestic obligations were thus partly the inheritance of one's social station, and partly reinforced by the Church's concern for the maintenance of the status quo

---

[40] According to Gilson "Theologians from the fourteenth century onwards will henceforth situate the divine image in what is highest in Man, that is to say, either in his intelligence or in his freedom". Duns Scotus and Aquinas both asserted that the image was not imperfect unless man was turned towards God. (P.202).

[41] Alain de Lille, De Planctu Naturae (trans. Douglas M. Moffat, New York, 1908), Prose V--Metre IX (pp. 49-90).

which lead to the full development of the practical implications to be inferred from scriptural doctrine. It was this tendency which lent itself to the abuses of the Friars in their disturbing disrespect for authority in exegetical practices. Obligations and objectives were thus transmitted; they were reinforced by the practice of public "shaming" still found in primitive tribes today, and, in subdued form in the influence of gossip.[42] But on the positive side, the duties of the chief stratum of society were also outlined in the great variety of Estates Literature.[43]

On a more exalted plane the plan for the edification of the general community,[44] systematised the virtues (just as the sins had been more notoriously arranged) according to either the Ciceronian or the Macrobian schema.[45] The arrangement presented by Macrobius treats the four cardinal virtues each in four modifying states. Thus Prudence, Temperance, Courage and Justice are seen in different aspects as adjuncts of the active life of the "political animal", the

---

[42]Cf. D. W. Robertson Jr., Chaucer's London (Toronto, 1968), for many examples, such as hanging a whetstone round the neck of a liar and of course, the stocks and the pillory.

[43]Cf. Ruth Mohl, The Three Estates in Medieval Literature (New York, 1961) and James I. Wimsatt, Allegory and Mirror (New York, 1970) Chapter VII.

[44]Eg. The Lay Folk's Catechism.

passive life of the contemplative, the serene life of the ascetic, and finally, in their true form emanating from God.[46] Hagiography was another highly popular form that gave spiritual inspiration to fourteenth century Christians.

Here we are offered the dignity of man in his powers of spiritual ascendancy. In The Canterbury Tales this state is signified by the deeds of the Knight, Clerk, Parson and Plowman, and St. Cecilia of The Second Nun's Tale is its most perfect representative. She has transcended physical needs to the extent that she can survive extreme torment. The absence of physical detail in the portraits of the good pilgrims is significant in this respect. But rewards in this life were also envisaged. Boethius says

> The serene man who has ordered his life stands above menacing fate and faces good and bad fortune unflinchingly. He who hopes for nothing and fears nothing can disarm the fury of these impotent men. But he who is burdened with fears and desires is not master of himself. He throws away his shield and retreats; he fastens the chain by which he will be "drawn".[47]

The strength of the community of unsceptical belief is demonstrated time and again in Chaucer's meaningful use of

---

[46]Macrobius, Commentary on the Dream of Scipio (trans. by Harris Stahl, New York, 1952), pp. 120-24. This is of particular interest for the understanding it gives us of the portrayal of Constance. In the active life, "courage endows one with magnamity, composure, nobleness, constancy, endurance and steadfastness." (p. 122).

[47]Boethius, A Consolation of Philosophy (trans. by Richard Green, Indianapolis & New York, 1962), p. 9.

scriptural allusion, with spiritual pertinence even in such unexpected places as the Miller's Tale. In place of such moral absolutes we now are left with a profound sense of relativism. Consequently we must be prepared for characterisation based on fundamentally alien assumptions. Christopher Gillie suggests that

> For us, who feel destiny, environment, and the operations of human nature itself, to be uncertain factors, fictions become explorations, and the characters have to be defined, or to achieve definition. For medieval man, character was predefined by the nature of the world and its creator; fictions were demonstrations of roles.[48]

D. Man Failing

The option was open to man to become less in bending to the demands of appetite, or more, in obedience to will and reason. In this final section we will briefly consider how sin and error were conceived in their influence on man, and how the sinner himself was regarded.

In relating evil and misconduct to the appetites, sin is seen as having physical manifestations. In itself it is seen by Boethius as a kind of disease, and

> if sickness of body is not something that we hate, but rather regard with sympathy, we have much more reason to pity those whose minds are afflicted by wickedness, a thing worse than any sickness.[49]

---

[48]Christopher Gillie, Character in English Literature (London, 1965), p. 41.

[49]Boethius, A Consolation, p. 88. Hence perhaps, Chaucer's compassion, sometimes mistaken for moral indifference.

Augustine[50] and Pseudo-Dionysius both saw evil as a deficiency of good. Pseudo-Dionysius says

> the efficient causes of evil results, however, are not any laws and faculties, but an impotency and weakness and an inharmonious mingling of discordant elements. Evil things are not immutable and unchanging, but indeterminate and indefinite; the sport of alien influences which have no definite aim.[51]

The discordant interludes in The Canterbury Tales, the jangling, chiding, quarrelling and quitting, drinking and bag-piping will be seen to signify just such disharmony.

In the continuity to be seen between interior condition and exterior manifestations already suggested, one expects to find a relationship between physical traits and distinguishing marks, and inner state. Walter Clyde Curry has demonstrated just this consistency in the Canterbury Pilgrims.[52] But apart from such tangible signs of degeneracy, and the interdependence of physiological and spiritual states, there are the iconographic significations of deafness, blindness, drunkenness. The drunken pilgrims are morally benighted; as Arcite, in a similar state of error points out in a Boethian allusion

---

[50]St. Augustine, Confessions (trans. by R. S. Pine-Coffin, London, 1961), p. 119.

[51]Pseudo-Dionysius, De Divinis Nominibus (trans. by Herman Shapiro in Medieval Philosophy, New York, 1964), p. 67.

[52]Walter Clyde Curry, Chaucer and the Medieval Sciences (New York, 1926).

> We witen nat what thing we preyen heere:
> We faren as he that dronke is as a mous.
> A dronke man woot well he hath an hous,
> But he noot which the righte wey is thider,
> And to a dronke man the wey is slider. (I. 1260-64)

Boethius speaks of having wilfully wandered from the true country, of a confusion resulting from "having forgotten what you are".[53] We shall take a closer look at deafness and blindness in Chapter V.

The manifestations of sin were elaborately schematised for the practical purposes of penance; the section on the Seven Sins in the Parson's Tale is quite typical.[54] The abstract concepts of the sins were thus seen as recogniseable responses to life whereby the tendencies of venial sins were displayed, and the machinations of vice were exposed for salutary contempt and ridicule. Sins were seen as the activated strategies of the pursuit of particular appetites whose social destruction and ultimate rewards were shown in appeals to shame, fear and for the restoration of the rule of rationality.

Helen Storm Corsa, we may recall, saw the pilgrims in a state of individual conflict, suffering from "warring souls". I have yet to find evidence for this; but Anselm

---

[53] Boethius, Consolation, p. 19.

[54] On the relation of the Parson's Tale to this tradition see H. G. Pfander, "Some Medieval Manuals of Religious Instruction", JEGP, XXXV (1936), pp. 243-58. Cf. also John Livingston Lowes, "Chaucer and the Seven Deadly Sins", PMLA, XXX (1915), pp. 237-371.

makes it clear that sin is committed by the consenting will; conflict does not take place until the will is aided by God in casting out sin and restoring uprightness.[55] The conflict in The Psychomachia of Prudentius takes place only when the virtues start to rout the vices. The Parson's Tale is designed to provoke just such a confrontation.

The operation of temptation was normally seen in terms of the Aristotelian tradition whereby the three stages of cognition, via the senses, the imagination, and rational thought, capitulated in turn. Not only did this result in suspension of the influence of the will, but also in the perversion of rationality "whereby the power of discriminating between true and false, if disturbed by strong feeling, may result in illusions."[56] Sometimes the process is seen physiologically, as in The Knight's Tale and Troilus and Conseide whereby the victims of the eye, fall into excessive meditation which finally results in the suspension of reason and single-minded pursuit of the sense-object.

Despite the static quality of the portraits of the fraudulent and churlish pilgrims, they are in a state of quiescent and deluded bondage, not victims of constitutional or congenital handicaps. The Wife of Bath's horoscope, as

---

[55]Helen Storm Corsa, Chaucer: Poet of Mirth and Morality (Notre Dame, Ind., 1964) p. 81.

[56]Anselm, De Libertate Arbitrii, Chapters II-VII

we shall see, is an outstanding example of attempted self-vindication still imposing upon many. The South English Legendry make it plain that no such extenuation is possible.[57]

vnder ȝare (the planets) miȝte iwis
Schollep habbe ȝare diuerse lif euere as ȝare
uertue is
Somme lechors & somme glotons and somme oper
manere
And napeles a man of god inwit of al pulke
mai him skere
For planetes ne dep no oper bote ȝiuep in
manes wille
To be(o) luper oper god as hure vertu wole
to tille
And ȝifp him also qualite to do so and so
And noȝt for pan after is inwit ech wis
man may do
For such qualite nap noman to be(o) lechour
o er ssrewe
Pat he nemay him witie pere aȝen . . .[58]

If we turn once again to the working definition of personality suggested earlier in this chapter we can see now perhaps more clearly, some contrasts with the medieval view of individuality. Firstly, I pointed out the quality of the hypothesised structure of self as comprising desires and fears, feelings and attitudes, as being insusceptible to moral evaluation. The medieval basis of self was the soul, a concept inseparable from moral and theological issues. Secondly, the sense of self-determination we enjoy was precluded from medieval consciousness, to a great extent, by

---

[57]Marshall W. Stearns, "A Note on Chaucer's Use of Aristotelian Psychology", SP XLIII (1946), pp. 15-21.

[58]South English Legendary, EETS original series, 236, Vol. II, St. Michael Part III, ll. 427-436.

the formation of one's place and conduct in society by the strength of shared belief and established tradition. Finally, our feeling of uniqueness is part of a complexity unknown to the systematised conception of society in the fourteenth century.

III

ACCORDAUNT TO RESOUN: THE PILGRIM'S AND THEIR GUIDE

The Parson has the last word on the pilgrimage, except of course for Chaucer's Retraction, which suggests confirmation of the Parson's testament. After considering the General Prologue I shall turn to the Parson's Tale as the culminating statement on the significance of the pilgrimage. Further, the Parson's "knitting up" will offer explicit statements on the three aspects of Chaucer's characterisation. I wish to stress where the modern concept of "personality" is most at variance with the medieval view. As I briefly outlined in the last chapter our sense of moral autonomy can be contrasted with the medieval sense of the absolute, not only in articles of faith, but in ethics ratified by that faith, whereby one's role in society implied unquestionable duties, and one's conduct in that society was subject to a universal code of right and wrong.[1] This will be my first point in examining the pilgrims. Secondly I shall consider the means by which the pilgrims are individualised. Our idea of personality stresses the uniqueness of the individual, we feel ourselves to be unique not only in our personal

[1]Cf. Robert M. Liebert and Michael D. Spiegler, Personality: An Introduction to Theory and Research (Georgetown, Ont., 1970), p. 6, on the absence of evaluation in the concept of personality.

qualities, but in possessing a whole psychic organisation (of conscious and unconscious attitudes and feelings) quite special to ourselves. The attributes distinguishing the pilgrims are those of fictive creations (a fact surprisingly often forgotten); I shall show how these details relate to referents extrinsic to the character, and in what sense the pilgrims can be considered as individual and distinctive. This leads on to my final point, the internal life of the pilgrim, which a modern outlook would interpret as psychological; the last chapter revealed a medieval view of the self which gave pre-eminence to rationality and to moral and ethical considerations both in structure and content. How far does this account for the insight into the pilgrims offered in the General Prologue?

Derek Brewer sees Chaucer's pilgrims as "judged by the exalted ideal of Christian ethics".[2] Now in place of the sense of moral autonomy we enjoy, Chaucer's pilgrims are presented in such a way that we must evaluate them. This evaluation is not the outcome of applying exacting ideals, but of appreciating details which suggest discrepancy and incongruity in the light of two considerations, the criteria to be inferred from the narrator's overt comments, and the demands implied by occupational and more general social obligations.

---

[2]Derek Brewer, Chaucer and His Time (London, 1963) p. 136.

First let us assess the capacities of the narrator as our guide to the assembled company. He will, he says, describe

> . . . the condicioun
> Of ech of hem, so as it semed me,
> And whiche they weren, and of what degree
> And eke in what array that they were inne. (l. 38-41)

This seems methodical enough, but it is not, as Baldwin points out,[3] conventional. It is an expansion of normal rhetorical practice whereby Notatio, moral description, is broken into "condicioun" and "degree" and Effectio is replaced by "whiche" (i.e. having some quality or other) and "array". The conventional head-to-foot physical examination is transformed by the co-mingling of internal and external traits.[4] The portraits which follow are far less systematic than this would suggest. Each is introduced by the occupation of the pilgrim, and of course we are never allowed to forget this. The one exception is Huberd the Friar, a dubious honour since the other Christian names to emerge do so at moments of undignified familiarity in the quarrels and in some over-familiar exchanges with Harry Bailley.

Each portrait is also self-contained by some tacit reminder of occupation. Apart from that the structure seems

---

[3]Ralph Baldwin, The Unity of The Canterbury Tales (Copenhagen, 1955), p. 37.

[4]Cf. Robert M. Lumiansky, "Benoit's Portraits and Chaucer's General Prologue", JEGP, LV (1956), pp. 431-438.

to follow the sequence of the narrator's observations, interspersed with affirmations and speculations on his own part, or ventriloquistic explanatory comments apparently from conversation, or biographical detail whose ommiscience is, in this welter of details, unobtrusive. It is in this range of tone and material that Chaucer creates his opportunities for irony. The narrator becomes discredited by the realisation of the apparently insignificant "so as it semed me". In retrospect this qualification to the narrator's declared method takes on the implication of offering a limited view. Firstly the epithets "worthy", "wise", the attributions of "conscience", "good felaweship", become progressively more debased. In the process we are led to compare the worth of the Knight with that of the Merchant or the Wife of Bath, wisdom in the Knight as against wisdom in the Manciple or the Guildsmen; Friar, Summoner, Wife of Bath, Shipman are praised for "felaweship". Secondly we wonder about the exuberant endorsement of those pilgrims who are explicit about their attitudes or their conduct. It becomes clear that we are being presented with an indictment of many of the pilgrims in the very terms in which they assert, either verbally or by behaviour, their deviance from the requirements of their occupational or social duty, since what we are told, despite the tone and manner in which we are told, invariably reflects on the fitness of that character to properly fulfil his work.

The incapacity of the Squire as a knight in training is made apparent partly by the juxtaposition of his portrait with that of his father. Deeds of real chivalry, service in Gods Army, on the part of the Knight, is marked in the son by "chyvachie" directed towards campaigns notorious as political fiascoes, the spiritual humility (even to shabbiness) of the one, by social lowliness (but resplendent garments) on the part of the Squire. The Knight came without rest, to pilgrimage, the son "sleep namore than dooth a nygtingale" as an inevitable consequence of his "hope to stonden in his lady grace". The Knight as the paradigm of the aristocratic estate is living comment on the superficiality of good breeding in his Squire, the active assertion of Noblesse Oblige is set against the passive enjoyment of "gentilesse".[5]

The consciousness of inappropriateness of the Prioress's behaviour to her calling is achieved not chiefly through juxtaposition, though the similarity of the Monk's exploitation of occupation gives it added weight, but within the structure of the portrait itself. The Yeoman's appearance and skills are perfectly attuned to his craft, but the Prioress, as

---

[5]The Franklin unwittingly draws attention to this in his appreciation of the Squire (V, 680-694), since the Franklin's idea of refinement and "gentilesse" is that of the social climber anxious to establish his son as a gentleman.

Donaldson points out,[6] presents a problem for the narrator, who appears to vacillate between an enjoyment of her refinements and attempts to reassert the idea of this woman as a Prioress. This results in a very funny mixture of gentility of appearance, singing, table manners, "of great desport", of pets, clothes, features, entangled with reminders of her vocation in her mild oaths, intonation, French enunciation, cleanliness of dress, her reiterated conscience and her splendid brooch, with its legend "Amor Vincit Omnia", whose very ambivalence rescues the narrator yet leaves her with less dignity than she could desire. The portrait shows her as tolerably adequate as a lay person with some social pretension, but we are not allowed to forget her minimal reverence and charity, which are inadequate for her ecclesiastical responsibilities. The virulent anti-semitism displayed in her Tale simply affirms the gravity of her weak understanding.[7]

Grounds for doubt about the worth of the Physician are introduced with equal blandness. The Knight is a "very parfit gentil knyght" (72), the Physician, a "verray parfit" praktisour" (422). The catalogue of physician's authorities leads us to suppose that the narrator recounts what he has

---

[6]Cf. E. Talbot Donaldson, Speaking of Chaucer (London, 1970), p. 61.

[7]This is, as she herself says, "but as a child of twelf month oold" (VII, 484).

been told, hence the ingenuous corroboration of

> He kepte his pacient a ful greet deel
> In houres by his magyc natureel. (415-6)[8]

But collusion with Apothecaries is inescapable; the prescription of gold, a profitable cordial, as climax to his tightfistedness

> . . .he was but esy of dispence;
> He kepte that he wan in pestilence, (441-2)

establishes the limits of the integrity of the man as well as of his capacities as a doctor. Then "His studie was but litel on the Bible" is suspect too.[9]

The Shipman is a more extreme example of the incapacities of the narrator, of his unshakeable joviality, and of the extent to which Chaucer's ironic method can subvert the shortcomings of the object. Hot on the heels of a physical description suggesting some pugnacity comes "certainly he was a good felawe". The fact that the Shipman's aggressiveness is displayed by habitual drowning of any opponents is sandwiched innocuously between his taste in wines, his disrespect for "nyce conscience" and his skills as a navigator. As in the case of the Physician, his moral delinquency

---

[8]Cf. Chauncey Wood, Chaucer and the Country of the Stars (Princeton, 1970), Chapter I, for a discussion of medieval attitudes towards astrology and the manner of belief, which suggests that the Physician's practices are but visible rituals of archaic superstition.

[9]The Physician's Tale, with its gratuitous eulogy to nature for the beauty of the victim, and its "sentence", a non-sequitur on the failure to conceal a "wikked life" from God, is consistent with this portrait.

is given scope and camouflage by his occupation.

Again in the portrait of the Lawyer, the profession is matched by failings which are given scope in such work. His legal activities offer the appearance of reverence, wisdom, and "bisynesse". Such traits are also given scope by his Tale, as we shall see in Chapter Four. But here it should be noted that the subtle intrusion of betraying details is not what condemns the Lawyer. He is shown outright as a counterfeit, and therefore no fit lawyer, by the reiterated "semed".

These examples are consistent with the other portraits of the "worldly pilgrims" in establishing professions with individual members who find the calling, for one devious reason or another, suited to their moral failings. Not only are we made aware of the inappropriateness of pilgrim to occupation, but of the appropriateness of the occupation to the failings of that man or woman. The moral indictment implied by this discovery is more grave, in view of positive exploitation of role, than in mere unfitness to it. The operation of Chaucer's irony destroys any suggestion that these individuals might not be responsible to society for their failings, though each one might long for freedom from moral restraint, (our moral autonomy) at least after The Parson's Tale, as fervently as the Wife of Bath bemoans "that ever love was sinne".

Turning now to my second concern in this chapter, the question of uniqueness, we can see the origins of this illusion, in the narrator's effusions, by turning back to the Lawyer "full riche of excellence" and the Physician "in al this world ne was ther noon hym lik". It may be that "personality seekers" are taken in by this assertion, and fail to weigh it, with the fulsome superlatives[10] and the other stylistic traits of the narrator. It smacks of the Music Hall preamble "There never was another one like her for. . ." which prefaces the stock joke about the stock mother-in-law. More seriously however, we must turn to other sources for this impression of individuality. We have very precise documentation of the activities of the ecclesiastics, both the regulars and the hangers-on of the church system, Summoner and Pardoner. Extensive scholarship demonstrates the literary and popular sources of much of this material.[11] Further, we have the equally categorical provenance of some of the pilgrims which sent Manly and his disciples in pursuit of originals. Perhaps some of the attraction of these "individualising touches" lies in the fact that they cannot be subsumed by a theory of characters

---

[10] Baldwin, "Unity", p. 38.

[11] Eg. scriptural allusion and medical lore are suggested by one such detail, Chauncey Wood, "The Sources of Chaucer's Summoner's 'Garleek, Onyons and eke Lekes'", Chaucer Review, V (1971), pp. 240-244.

based on iconography, radix traits, moral types. Undoubtedly the Narrator is intent on claiming for his fellows a truth to life and a uniqueness. Undoubtedly too, both are illusory, the second because it alludes to mere surface detail of appearance and biography, and makes no claim for the thorough-going individuality we appreciate in ourselves, if not in our acquaintances. Here I must distinguish between similarity of appearance, dress, or overt behaviour and the readiness to credit fictional (or, in all probability real-life) people with a uniqueness inhering in inward qualities (what we would, I suppose, call psychic complexity). For all their diversity (of such interest to the Narrator) the pilgrim's are ultimately seen (and this is the concern of Chaucer's irony) to be very similar in objectives, and even in methods, once one has divided fruyt from chaf.

To take the exemplary pilgrims first, we have Knight, Clerk, Parson and Plowman. They represent paradigms of the three estates, the Aristocratic, the Clerical, the Commons, with the Clerk in abeyance, and suggestive of the ideal of asceticism. They are conspicuous for the spiritual nature of their ideals; the biographical sketches, with a consistent development uncharacteristic of the narrator, reveal lives totally absorbed by deeds fitting to station and calling, transcending the individual in the way the personalistic philosophies suggested assimilation to the "personality" of

the Trinity might be undertaken.[12] Their function as paradigms in The Canterbury Tales has not, as far as I know, been questioned; here the wealth of mundane and specific detail has an inescapable extra-personal object. This group offers a matrix of values in which the other pilgrims are measured, as most cogently demonstrated by Harold Brooks.[13]

It would be tedious to examine all the unregenerate pilgrims,[14] so the "churls", and the Wife of Bath for good measure, must suffice. The pilgrims of the final group, (with the exception of the Manciple) are, except for the Wife of Bath, the most elaborately described by visual details. As we shall see, the Cook also belongs to this group in the sense that he shares the physical marks of degeneracy.[15] The Host tells us more of the private life of the Cook which consolidate the implications of his disease, scabies, associated in medieval times, with "unclean clothing and contaminated women".[16]

---

[12]Cf. Chapter II, pp. 5-6.

[13]Harold Brooks, Chaucer's Pilgrims: The Artistic Order of the Portraits in the Prologue (London, 1962).

[14]Nevill Coghill, The Poet Chaucer (re-edition, London, 1967), curiously finds these pilgrims the manifestations of normality "he did not look for freaks, he delighted in the world as he found it" (p. 90).

[15]In discussing the Cook and the final group of "churles" I shall draw heavily on the conclusions of Walter Clyde Curry, Chaucer and the Medieval Sciences (New York, 1926), based on medieval physiological and medical lore.

[16]Host on the Cook I 4346-4355. The Cook's account of the prodigal apprentice who ends his career as a whoremonger confirms the details of the portrait.

The narrator's habit of juxtaposing morally qualifying detail with glib assertions of professional know-how gives a very unfortunate impression here

> . . . on his shin a mormal hadde he.
> For blankmanger, that made he with the beste. (386-7)

The impression of individuality achieved by specific detail can be accounted for by the significance of this detail; so also in the case of the Summoner, the Reeve, the Pardoner, and the Miller, where physical grossness takes the form of symptoms of moral depravity. The Manciple, aptly self-effacing, lacks visual definition. As a foil to the rest of the group, his devious practices are disguised, apparently by his own assertions of respectability.[17] The physical distinctiveness of the rest of the churls gives them a uniqueness, which, as we shall see, belongs properly to the moral implications of their specific strategies. The nose of the Miller suggests a Brobdingnagian coarseness, and signifies, according to Curry, lust, and domestic discord.[18] The Reeve's choleric temperament signifies a sharp wit and a good memory most appropriate to his methods, and the associated hastiness of vengeance and undertones of cowardice are born out in the course of the pilgrimage.

In the case of Summoner and Pardoner, the weaknesses

---

[17]The Manciple's role as a backbiter, suggested in his Prologue and Tale, is consistent with the emphasis on apparent irreproachability in the portrait.

[18]Curry, p. 119.

of the men again form the basis for exploitation of rôle. Precision of detail vitalises the methods of operation, only too familiar to a medieval audience. The physical traits are understood as correlative to moral, rather than distinctly personal, attributes. The consistency of the portraits, and the illusion of uniqueness, can be seen as a detailed analysis of a recognisable human condition, rather than a synthesis constituting the presentation of "personality" with its stress on the unique. The density of physiological and literary allusion is behind the specificity of detail whose implications would lead a medieval audience to form a composite picture of familiar abuses and familiar traits concentrated in one pilgrim. The Summoner's manner of exploiting the "ercedekenes curs" his use of the ecclesiastical judicial system to spread, not restrict vices, by his corruption, emerges with little concealment on his part, and little disguise in narrative method. The abuse was familiar. The connection of his "saucefleem-disease" or alopicia, with degenerate living, and of his unwholesome diet, incidently exacerbating that disease, with its Biblical counterpart,[19] establishes his moral and physical malformation simaltaneously.

The suggestions of animality in the imagery of the last group of pilgrims takes, in the Pardoner, the form of an

[19]Cf. Chauncey Wood, Ch. Rev., V (1971), on the biblical allusion to Numbers 11:5.

unnatural bodily grotesqueness. The final dehumanising iconographic view of the Summoner (665-8) is followed by a lengthy visual description of the Pardoner which gives him the eye of a hare, the voice of a goat, and the climactic observation "I trowe he were a geldyng or a mare". The elaboration of his methods includes relics of pigs-bones, and the desire to make people "his apes". The familiar notorious Pardoner coalesces with the image of human and moral aberration. The epitome of ecclesiastical abuse is manifested as a creature of physical deformity. His love song with the Summoner is a comic refinement of the pride in singing shown by Prioress and Friar. The quasi-rational self-dramatisation of Prologue and Tale elaborates the "upsa-doun" moral depravity suggested by the portrait. The parallel found in Palemon's description of Favorinus[20] again exploits the perfect consistency of physical feature with perverted values. Precision of detail points to moral state, not to any personal uniqueness.

It seems appropriate to discuss the portrait of the Wife of Bath with this group since she too is described in elaborate physical detail, in her case amounting to the comic absurdity of generous proportions "hipes large", decked by equally bulky clothing "hir coverchiefs. . .weyeden ten pound. . .", and quirks of dress whose iconographic significance emerges in her Prologue. Her deafness can be explained by

---

[20]Curry, Chaucer and Medieval Sciences, p. 63.

the special deafness of Midas, the subject of an exemplam in her Tale,[21] her gat-tooth betokens her fleshly inclinations, and her aggression is signalled by "a paire of spores sharpe". The narrator is in fact quite explicit about her failings, the "compaignye" of her youth, the "wandrynge by the weye" which takes the form of recreational pilgrimage, her knowledge of "that arte the olde daunce". Biographical details demonstrate a desire for social distinction (whose frustration in church puts her "out of alle charitee"), and wanderings, ostensibly matrimonial or devotional. Again visual definition and the cataloguing of her excursions give a fleeting impression of a woman in some way unique, but this is undercut by qualities placing her firmly as representitive of sex and species. Her kinship to the caricatures of anti-feminist literature is to emerge with her turn in the story-telling.

This leads to my last point, a consideration of manifestations of interior life in the General Prologue, which, as may be already apparent, lead to evaluation, rather than empathetic appreciation. As we have seen in the case of the Pardoner's portrait, some insight is given into his methods which are further expanded in his prologue, by the colloquial presentation of what appear to be scraps of monologue. This method of characterisation is most pronounced in the descriptions of the Monk and the Friar. How revealing is this

---

[21] Cf. Chapter V, p. 8.

presentation of opinions? Does it give us any knowledge of the inner workings of the pilgrim? If the Prioress is seen primarily as a lady, the Monk's portrait opens with stress on his "maistrie", his lordliness in hunting pursuits; the description closes with his resplendent accoutrements and his gourmet tastes, whilst physically the manliness of the Monk is suggested by

> He was a lord ful fat and in good poynt;
> His eyen stepe, and rollyng in his heed,
> That stemed as a forneys of a leed. (200-202)

a lustiness pointedly more appropriate to a horse. Between these two groups of attributes occurs an exposition of the Monk's defiance of rule, of text, and of monastic tradition reaching back to Augustine's doctrine of the value of work as a strategy to outwit the devil. The vigorous refutation of rules "somdel streit" is heartily disrespectful. He can jovially disregard texts "that seith that hunters ben nat hooly men", and deny without argument that monk out of cloister is like fish out of water, yet each item, in its very denial, gives his conduct serious overtones

> . . .How shal the world be served?
> Lat Austin have his swynk to him reserved! (187-8)

That question persists long after the narrator has reverted to his admiring commentary on the Monk's extra-mural activities. The Monk's portrait is based on an antithesis of monastic values and objectives. His opinions reveal no more than non-rational disrespect for these, they lead to no further

conclusion than that those qualities stressed by the narrator are the very ones which make him a bad monk and the unscrupulous exploiter of ecclesiastical laxity.

Insight into the Friar's opinions are of the same nature; in his case the portrait draws its strength not from the audacity of flouting patristic authority and the monastic tradition, but from attributing virtues to vicious behaviour, and from prostituting the sacraments for the sake of his own pocket. We are confronted in turn by the gainful sweetness and pleasance of his ministration of confession, absolution, penance, the manipulation of his fellow hard-of-heart sinners, false generosity to wives, the gift of weddings to wenches he has spoiled, the honesty that avoids the company of lepers for that of the wealthy, the virtue of being "beste beggere in his hous". His calculating conduct is set in a social context which reflects badly on his moral qualities. The disparity between the man and his vocation is apparent to us; here the inner life of the man partakes of the debased values of his conduct; the implications of what we are told are primarily ethical, not psychological. The travestied piety of the ecclesiasts reaches its climax with

> . . . Ther he was not lik a cloysterer
> With a thredbare cope, as is a povre scoler,
> But he was lyk a maister or a pope (259-61).

Papal authority has its sacrilegious parody, and, nearer at hand, the Clerk's spiritual pre-eminence is contrasted with flagrant worldliness in its most destructive form.

The characterisation of the General Prologue thus relies chiefly on an intellectual apprehension of the pilgrims vis-à-vis spiritual and social values and obligations, of similarity of moral entity underlying diversity of detail, of the evaluative exposure of attitudes and strategies. The very methods by which the pilgrims claim our attention offer an ironic commentary on a precisely defined mode of living. The consciousness behind that particular response to life is seen implicitly as either that of the spiritually guided rational being, or the world-fettered organism responsive to the dictates of appetite. The hypocrisy and self-deception practiced by many of the pilgrims is the unquestioned product of surrendering to such needs, for which it would be quite inappropriate to apply the modern criteria implied by "personality" of an interior life whereby such conduct might be extenuated.

It is fitting that we should now look to the Parson as the final spokesman of The Canterbury Tales and as the guide concerned to offer the means to redemption in the large, figurative, pilgrimage. His Tale concerns the salvation of the individual as seen in Christian terms. The narrator of the General Prologue has, he tells us, given

> Th'estaat, th'array, the nombre, and eek the cause,
> Why that assembled was this compaignye (716-7)

and in the case of Knight, Clerk, Plowman, and Parson, this reason is plain. Of the other pilgrims, the cause is uncertain,

and this loose end is finally "knitte up" by the sermon of the Parson. The Prologue to his tale is a grave statement of the advance of time towards reckoning and judgment.[22] The wandering ways of these pilgrims, can, says the Parson, be relinquished through penitence and absolution, for "the righte wey of Jerusalem celestial" (X 79). As his sermon proceeds to emphasise, proper confession, effective amendment, stems from recognition and admission of sins. This is the self-knowledge, the spiritual apprehension of right and wrong, to which his worldly companions are blind, "the synful man, that loveth his synne, hym semeth that it is to him moost sweete of anythyng" (X 122). In outlining the means to contrition the Parson sees sin as bondage, and ultimately as destruction of the soul (X 153).

Apart from re-establishing spiritual values in an explicit statement of the means to salvation, the Parson's Tale seems to concern the pilgrims of the General Prologue, in their immediate spiritual condition, in its lengthy examination of contrition, and in the extensive examples of the permutations of the Seven Sins to follow. For instance the Parson enumerates three sources of anger to God, recklessness

---

[22]Cf. Wood, (Chaucer and Country of Stars, Chap. VII), for the significance of the Parson's Prologue, particularly the implication of the sign of Libra as token of Christ's judgment, fusing two themes running intermittently through the Tales, that of the Old Law of retribution and the New Law of Mercy.

of speech, delight in thinking, and "wikked synful werkinge" (X 111). Sinful speech exposes sinful deeds in the parasites of the church in particular, in the Prologue to the Tales. The power of delusion is at work in the Knight's, Miller's, Merchant's Tales, whilst conversely, in the Clerk's and the Man of Law's Tales the strength of faith in the heroine guards against the demoralising power of thought.[23] The Parson repeatedly invokes two powerful incentives to repentence, the omniscience of God, and the terrors of Hell.

The vigorous exposure of sin demanded by confession, and the prerequisite understanding of those aspects of one's thoughts and deeds which are culpable before God, obviate the shelter we may claim in our self-determination and relative moral autonomy. There can be "nothyng excused ne hyd ne forwrapped" (X 319). The Wife of Bath's attempt to claim extenuating circumstances in her horoscope is a fine example of self-excuse. The way in which the philosophies of Monk, Friar, Summoner and Pardoner are presented constitutes admission of sin without recognition of guilt.

Original sin is the inheritance of man in general, therefore "be we all borne sones of wratthe and of dampnacioun

---

[23]Marshall Stearns, in "A Note on Chaucer's use of Aristotelian Psychology", SP, XLIII (1946), pp. 15-21, shows how Chaucer drew on the Aristotelian stages of cognition, sensation, imagination, and rational thought, "whereby the power of descrimination between true and false, if disturbed by strong feeling, may result in illusions" (p. 19). This process is in fact described by the Parson (X 351-356).

perdurable. . .the peyne dwelleth with us as to temptacioun, which peyne highte concupisence" (X 354). Our sense of uniqueness may give us a loophole, scope for self-extenuation, in our awareness of the formative influence of heredity and environment. For the medieval sinner, responsibility for his soul, thus for his thoughts, and his deeds, lay squarely on his own shoulders, a burden of inhuman weight but for God's grace and the mercy of Christ. Baptism and penitence weakened the prompting of temptation "that it may wel wex fieble and faille" (X 339). But for the sinner hardened by his way of life, failure to amend lead ultimately to justice untempered by mercy, and Hell.

The Parson's conception of Hell is psychological only in the strictly limited sense of providing fit punishment for the failings of the soul in its dependence on "honours, delices and richesses". For the first, Hell offers shame and confusion; for lovers of gold, "the misese of poverte"; the greed for wine or food will be deprived of all but "venym and gall of dragon"; those loving clothing will be naked, as their souls are of "all manere vertues which that is the clothyng of the soule" (X 185-97); the appetites of the five wits will be confounded with hideous sensations. The sinner will be deprived of friendship (recalling the narrator's stress on "felaweship") and surrounded by chidings and cursings (X 205). The Parson exhorts his listeners, many

of them so obviously qualified for these punishments, to a remembrance of Christ's passion, his suffering for man's sins, for in "mannes synne is every manere ordre or ordinance turned up-so-doun" (X 259).

In the Parson's Tale, even in the few points I have mentioned, the whole picture of the pilgrimage presented by the company of the General Prologue seems to be given x-ray exposure, bringing out the spiritual significance of the material details and worldly concerns revealed by the narrator. The failings of each wayfaring pilgrim so blandly related in the General Prologue are finally cast in the sombre light of ultimate judgment. The impression of carefree vitality in the initial portraits is recalled in the contrasting blind animation of the examples illustrating the permutations of the Seven Sins. This catalogue is enlivened by many of the stylistic methods of the portraits, now divested of the distinctive details which cripple the judgment of the narrator and sway the unwary reader.

IV

EMPEROR'S DAUGHTER AND DAUGHTER OF CHRIST'S CHURCH: THE HEROINES OF THE MAN OF LAW'S TALE

The description of the Man of Law in the General Prologue twice accentuates the possibility that this man is not all he should be. The appearance of reverence and wisdom, and the illusory "bisyness" of the man are exposed as but "seming" (I. 313, 321). This overt recognition of the discrepancy between the pose and the practices of the man, on the part of the narrator, cannot be found elsewhere in the General Prologue, except in the case of the Merchant (280). This prompting of suspicion was perhaps necessitated by the enumeration of legalistic duties implying no more than adequate (if gainful) fulfilment, to the unwary. We are left with the impression of a man advancing himself in land, possessions, "heigh renoun" by apparent reverence and a knowledge, not so much of law, but the means to its manipulation

> Thereto he koude endite, and make a thyng
> Ther koude no wight pynche at his writynge
> And every statut koude he pleyn by rote. (325-7)

In turning back to the General Prologue one finds qualities not only characterising the Lawyer, but in all probability qualifying his capacities as a story teller. Thus before considering the characterisation of Constance we

must be alert to traits in the Man of Law which might impart a bias to the tale; in order to make the distinction between Constance and her re-creator I will discuss first the elements of her character which can be seen independently of the reactions and judgments of the Man of Law. As we shall discover, there seems to be a fundamental contradiction in her portrayal. This can then offset the effects of the lawyer's faulty judgment.

The genre of the Saint's Legend was highly popular in England during Chaucer's life-time; Gordon Gerould believes that in fact the period 1375-1400 "was the most brilliant period in English hagiography. . .since the time of Cynewulf and his school."[1] However, despite the proof the tale offers that "Chaucer was capable of understanding the spirit in which legends ought to be written," Gerould expresses the reservation that "the story of Constance is, after all, a romance."[2] There are a number of contemporary versions, including Gower's, originating chiefly from Trivet's rendering, in his Chronicle.[3] It seems reasonable to assume the Chaucer's audience may have known the story, and that they were familiar with the genre to which it belongs. The use of Rhyme Royal,

---

[1]Gordon H. Gerould, The Saint's Legends (Boston and New York, 1916), p. 233.

[2]Ibid., pp. 239, 240.

[3]Cf. Neil D. Isaacs, "Constance in Fourteenth Century England", NM, LIX (1958), pp. 260-77.

whatever the implications of the Man of Law's intentions to use prose;[4] is shared by three other Canterbury Tales, all tales of saints or saintliness, the stories of the child martyr, of St. Cecilia, and of "patient Grisildis". The Man of Law's grudging complaint that Chaucer had used up all the tales of "loveris up and doun", and the disgust at the "unkynde abhomynacions" to be found in Gower, offer no clue as to what kind of story the Lawyer is to tell, though it does tell us something of the teller. He has, however, been astutely chosen by Harry Bailley as likely to give relief after the "idelnesse" to be gained from the Reeve's Tale, and he speaks in a mood of seriousness comparable to that preceding the Parson's Tale.[5]

The characterisation of Constance given by the "commune voys of Rome" is in complete conformity with the initial portraits of St. Paul and St. Bridget in the South English Legendary, according to Michael Paull,[6] where the description combines spiritual nobility and physical beauty, with a final reference to alms-giving. The Man of Law's Prologue

---

[4]This is usually considered to be an inconsistency of an unamended text.

[5]The Introduction to the Man of Law's Tale and the Parson's Prologue are both distinguished by Harry Bailley's comments on the passage of time (II 18-31, X 70-73) associated with the desire for "som virtuous sentence".

[6]Michael R. Paull, "The Influence of the Saint's Legend Genre on the Man of Law's Tale" Chaucer Review, V (1971), p. 182.

seems, at this point, to be out tenuously related to the matter of the tale; it sets a tone of pious solemnity, but its significance to the story is not immediately apparent. Constance herself is known only by hearsay until she appears for her leave-taking, bound for a marriage to a converted heathen, who not only has never seen her, but resorts to baptism and marriage only after "magyk and abussion" have been rejected as ineffectual in the accomplishment of his desires.

The Man of Law cannot neglect this opportunity for histrionics and for his own speculations on the action. For the sake of clarity I shall however try to distinguish his interpretation of his materials from the framework of the story and the identity of its protagonist. I will start by considering the structure of the tale in relation to the portrayal of Constance, and those qualities revealed by the action, before proceeding to consider the materials peculiar to the interpretation of the teller.

The Tale forms a sequence of trials of Constance's faith. Each of her confrontations with catastrophe is enclosed by renewed voyage, whose spiritual nature as the voyage of life is established by further isolated and protracted trial. The sense of form in the story is strengthened by repetition and contrast of various narrative elements within each phase of action. Thus the first episode encloses departure by boat,

arrival in state, the machinations of a servant of the Devil, the Soldan's mother, disaster, and departure by boat. After a long period at sea, the second episode opens with arrival, but this time in humility and anonymity. Her first arrival was to a country only nominally converted. Here the country is heathen, though there are some true Christians, and, as we see, the King, Alla, is good, wise, and eventually an active believer. The sequence of this section of the tale is again formalised. Constance is adopted by a kindly couple; a miracle is followed by the machinations of a lustful servant of the Fiend. Her goodness inspires the constable and his household, and later King Alla, but in the Knight it implants evil desires. He is destroyed after a second miracle. Alla is converted, a true conversion contrasted with the cynical conversion of the Soldan. Joy is destroyed by the machinations of another mother-in-law and servant of the Devil, and Constance again embarks. She now prays to Christ and Mary, as mother. This lengthy voyage is punctuated by one incident, conjectured landing, and meditated rape by another lustful servant of the devil, followed by his destruction. In the final phase of the tale Constance again arrives in anonymous humility, her two mother's-in-law having meanwhile been done away with. She is adopted by a kind couple, and of course she is now at home in true Christendom. Her joy is re-established by reunion with husband and father. One

more rapid alternation of joy and woe brings her back to her original status as Emperor's daughter, though now also Emperor's mother, and to her former life of "vertu and hooly almus deede".[7] A sense of form in the structure of the story can also be seen in the increasing hardship of her trials, with the climax of apparent betrayal by husband and the increased responsibility of motherhood.

Leaving aside for the moment, as far as possible, the lavish interpolations and apostrophes one can ascribe directly to the narrator, what are Constance's reactions to her tribulations? The dominant response is that of submission.[8] When we see her, she is pale, and sometimes weeping, and we only see her at times of trial. She is the passive victim of assaults on her fortitude, and her honour. Her first speech affirms obedience to "mannes governaunce" on her departure from Rome (274-87). The weeping that the Lawyer so sympathetically enjoys is however followed by the admission that "she peyneth hire to make good contenance". We next hear her prayer at sea after the destruction at the Soldan's palace. She prays for protection from the devil and strength to amend her life (451-62). Her tears and prayers convert

---

[7] Ibid., p. 180., Paull complains that Constance never speaks her lines, only prays them, "that she is too good, too saintlike and consequently one-dimensional".

[8] Lines 265, 645, 822.

Hermengyld, and she next speaks in succinct explanation to the Constable, who stares amazed by the miracle wrought by Hermengyld. She simply says

> . . . sire, it is Cristes myght
> That holpeth folk out of the feendes snare (570-71)

The irrepressable evangelising of Trivet's heroine[9] contrasts with Constance as a strong but silent woman whose very prayers affirm faith while the narrator is busy talking miracles. She only prays for aid to avert death in the face of false blame, she is quiescent to the trials of her voyage; all the agonising is on the part of the Man of Law. The dignity of her fortitude is realised in the prayer for aid from Mary following her resolute courage at the apparent betrayal by her husband

> "Mooder", quod she, "and mayde bright, Marie
> Sooth is that thurgh wommanes eggement
> Markynde was lorn and damned aye to dye,
> For whiche thy child was on a croys yrent.
> Thy blisful eyen sawe al his torment;
> Thanne is ther no comparison bitwene
> Thy wo and any woman may susteene.
>
> Thou sawe thy child yslayn bifore thyne yen,
> And yet now lyveth my litel child, parfay!
> Now, lady bright, to whom alle woful cryen,
> Thou glory of wommanhede, thou faire may,
> Thou haven of refut, brighte sterre of day,
> Rewe on my child, that of thy gentilesse,
> Rewest on every reweful in distresse."

---

[9]Bernard Duffey, "The Intention and Art of the Man of Law's Tale", ELH, XIV (1947), p. 187. and John A. Yunck, "Religious Elements in Chaucer's Man of Law's Tale", ELH, XXVII (1960), p. 251.

Not only does Constance's self-abnegation and humility control the comparison of her plight to that of the mother of Christ, but her strength is subtly assimilated by that of Mary. Further, we gain insight at the climax of the tale into the rational understanding beneath the consistent demonstration of faith. Mary is here appealed to as the embodiment of maternal care whose fortitude in the face of her sons suffering contrasts with Eve's failure to mankind. Eve, as traditionally seen, represents the weakness of the flesh and the vulnerable aspect of humanity, two aspects of Constance the Man of Law is so quick to dramatise, yet these are repeatedly refuted by her stoical resistance to attacks from the Devil's agents, and by her implicit obedience to Man and God, and to the dictates of rationality. Her final speech reverts to the tone of filial humility to her father, the state in which the Man of Law finally leaves her.

As Paull suggests, the story is made up of a sequence of scenes, each representing the pattern of confrontation, passion, and triumph. The formal elements of the structure discussed above call attention to the framework of "a typological paradigm of what was considered the central event of fourteenth century Christianity, the passion of Christ".[10] The consistent resistence to the attack of external events on

---

[10]Paull, "Influence of Saint's Legend. . .", p. 185.

Constance's faith establishes her as an allegorical figure of Fortitude;[11] elements extraneous to this conception of her identity will be discussed in relation to the Man of Law. Her spiritual stature is well-founded in the practical aspects of her faith. She arrives in Northumberland in chosen anonymity; her active virtues-"she was so diligent, without en sloth" (530)-and her piety are divorced from her rank and reputation, and it is by her spiritual qualities alone that she achieves the conversion of the people and their loyalty.[12] The importance of deeds and works is stressed in the good pilgrims of the General Prologue (and Augustine's statement to the effect that work must activate faith so disparaged by the Monk). The theme recurs most noticeably in the Clerk's Tale, The Second Nun's Tale and the Parson's Tale. Constance, Griselda, and Cecilia are primarily abstract in concept, yet the practical manifestations of their spiritual endowment, makes them less remote, and more forceful as figures to inspire and edify.

---

[11]Here I have in mind the criterion of allegory suggested by Bernard F. Huppé, that "the narrative of facts and events is governed by their significance. They exist because of what they represent". (A Reading of the Canterbury Tales, [Albany, N. Y.], 1964, p. 94).

[12]The populace of Northumbria is unshakeable in its admiration of Constance. This contrasts with the erratic judgment of the people of Lombardy in the Clerk's Tale. Constance however, in her long periods of solitude, is removed from this source of possible support to her faith.

The implicit analogy to the sufferings of Christ is made plain at Constance's trial before Alla

> . . .as the lomb toward his deeth is broght
> So stant this innocent bifore the Kyng. (617-8)

The trial is followed by two further tests of her strength; physical assault and the forgiveness required for a man who had, as far as she knew, been her betrayer, again suggesting parallels with the passion of Christ. In the court-room she is isolated, driven back upon her spiritual resources, as she was in her voyages.

> Have ye nat seen sometyme a pale face
> Among a prees, of hym that hath been lad
> Toward his deeth, wher as hym gat no grace. . .?
> (645-8)

Again this recalls the last hours of Christ, suggesting the depiction of his condemnation by the crowd.

The analogies for Constance's suffering interpolated by the Man of Law raise the whole question of his own attitudes to his materials, which I shall now consider. Duffey tried (1947) to reconcile two contradictory critical judgments of the Man of Law's Tale by examining Chaucer's intention.[13] Earlier critics had found the tale of general emotional appeal, written with sincerity of expression,[14] while more recent

---

[13]Duffey, "Intention and Art", p. 182.

[14]Robert Kilburn Root, The Poetry of Chaucer (Boston and New York, 1906), p. 181.

critics tended to stress the conventionality and artificiality of the tale. Duffey concludes that the Tale is appropriate to the Man of Law as a member of the rising bourgeoisie; that it is designed to satisfy middle-class taste.[15] He compares Constance unfavourably with Heathcliff and Lear and complains of the lack of explanation and motivation in the heroine, concluding that

> The story is obviously a low order of romance. It is repetitious, pedestrian, and lacking in the glitter and finish of that order of composition. It has little of the psychological analysis or decorative detail that we expect.[16]

The tale's conformity to the genre of the Saint's Legend has more recently been supported.[17] Psychological analysis was inappropriate to the form, and, as I have tried to show in Chapter Two, psychological analysis as such is not to be expected of medieval literature. Human understanding entailed in the projection of attitudes, perhaps,[18] but this is not by any means the same. This demand is completely inappropriate to the conception of figures of spiritual pre-eminence.[18]

---

[15]Duffey, "Intention and Art", pp. 192-3.

[16]Ibid., pp. 185-7, 192.

[17]Paull, "Influence of the Saint's Legend. . ." p. 181.

[18]As we shall see in Chapter V the so-called psychology often discovered in the unregenerate pilgrims, is more correctly an understanding on Chaucer's part of the moral implications of attitudes and approaches to life, not the exploration of psychological states in the modern sense.

Other critics have traced this contradiction of response to a contradiction in the purposes of the tale, "the religious elements are at cross purposes with the humanising process."[19] The clue to this discrepancy in treatment has now been found by turning to the Man of Law's portrait at the opening of the tales, and to the Prologue and Introduction to the Tale itself. Here there is much to cast doubt on the Man of Law's capacity to tell the kind of story he has chosen. William Sullivan (1953) pointed out the contribution the Introduction and Prologue make to the characterisation of the Man of Law. He reveals an inaccurate knowledge of Chaucer and Gower, which however, he is anxious to display; his condescension towards Chaucer and his ludicrously misplaced condemnation of Gower betrays him.[20] Alfred David corroborates this judgment of the Lawyer as an "ill-informed and pretentious literary critic"; he sees him as a fool, "something of a knave . . . (with) extremely straight-laced notions about literature, telling an impeccably

---

[19]Yunck, "Religious Elements . . .", p. 250; and before him, Edward A. Block ("originality and controlling purpose and craftsmanship in Chaucer's Man of Law's Tale", PMLA, LXVIII, 1953)--"in trying to make her (Constance) more religious, and at the same time more human, he was motivated by what is fundamentally an irredeemable dualism of purpose." (p. 592).

[20]William Sullivan, "Chaucer's Man of Law as Literary Critic", MLN, LXVIII (1953), pp. 1-8.

moral tale."[21] The use of a passage from De Miseria Humanae Conditionis, or rather its misuse, in his Prologue reveals again the materialism of the Man of Law seen in the General Prologue. With a panache quite equal to that of the Wife of Bath, he substitutes his own ending for the condemnation of wealth.[22] As Robert Enzer Lewis shows, the lawyer borrows Innocent's passage on poverty only to substitute for Innocent's ensuing fervent condemnation of wealth, an expostulation in praise of the wealth of merchants. He is evidently cooking the books, and any vestiges of confidence in his own spiritual and moral awareness can be finally dispelled by Chauncey Wood's exposure of the major spiritual handicaps under which the Man of Law labours.[23] The lawyer takes a materialistic view towards literary "property" in the Prologue, hugely ironic in the face of his exploitation of borrowed texts. In his tale he exposes himself in his many apostrophes and interpolations, as the representative of an "anti-Boethian, anti-

---

[21]Alfred David, "The Man of Law vs. Chaucer: A Case in Poetics", PMLA, LXXXII (1967), p. 220. David sees the tale as the product of two different impulses, Chaucer's concern with "sentence" and with "solaas" in his art. Through the lawyer, Chaucer, according to David, satirises the concern for respectability rather than morality to be found in his audience "of limited and established literary taste". (217-25).

[22]Robert Enzer Lewis, "Chaucer's Artistic use of Pope Innocent III's De Miseria Humanae Conditionis in the Man of Law's Prologue and Tale", PMLA, LXXXI (1966), pp. 485-92.

[23]Chauncey Wood, Chaucer and the Country of the Stars (Princeton, 1970), Chapter V, "Astrology in The Man of Law's Tale", pp. 201, 195.

humanistic, anti-religious approach to life." His sights are limited to Fortune, the ways of Providence are beyond him, and God is the provider of miracles. For him, disaster can be averted by the "eleccioun" of astrologers. His apostrophe

> O firste moevinge! Cruell firmament
> With thy diurnal sweigh that crowdest ay. . .(295-315)

shows, as Dr. Wood demonstrates, a profound falsification of the passage taken from Bernard Silvestris.

> The joy at the beauty of creation that marks Bernard's work is turned to despondency at the inevitability of astral determinism by the Man of Law. A passage on birth has been changed to one on death. The order of creation has been turned into an order of fatality.[24]

So much for the "reverent" Man of Law.

The General Prologue warns us that allowance has to be made for an intermediary whose observation is more akin to the outlook of a Harry Bailly than to Chaucer himself, whose judgment is revealed by the observations the narrator fails fully to comprehend. In the Man of Law's Tale we must expect comparable failures of judgment leaving a discernable discrepancy between the subject of the tale and the attitudes projected on to it. Our conception of Constance will consequently encompass both the saintly figure of a tale of spiritual edification, and also a heroine whose qualities are directly traceable to the spiritual incapacities of the narrator. I

---

[24] Ibid., p. 218.

would suggest that the Man of Law's treatment of the tale can be seen to diminish the spiritual impact of the heroine. Chaucer has left us with sufficient knowledge of the thematic backbone of the story, as we have seen, for us to discern the saintly Constance yet intact; the Man of Law's efforts are easily distinguishable in the rhetorical distinctness of the action of the tale.

We have two clear indications of the Man of Law's attitude to his material. At the climax of the trial scene he turns to his audience;

> O queenes, lyvinge in prosperitee,
> Duchesses, and ye ladyes everychone,
> Haveth som routine on hire adversitee!
> An Emperours doghter stant allone;
> She hath no weight to whom to make hir mone. . . (652-5)

He reveals two aspects of his interest in the tale. Firstly, his heroine is the object of pity; secondly, she is the Emperor's daughter, the focus of romantic interest.[25] By this I mean that the lawyer's enthusiasm for her is repeatedly seen to be in close association with her rank, and her marriageability. The second hint we get of what the lawyer finds in this tale is suggested by his question

---

[25] Cf. II 271-3 and 284-87 as the most conspicuous example of the Man of Law's incapacity to see the wider significance of Constance's departure in his preoccupation with the marriage, which has already been shown to be a spiritually dubious enterprise (211-31). Paul E. Beichner points out that disparity of worship in marriage was then considered a dangerous undertaking, spiritually ("Chaucer's Man of Law and Disparitas Cultus, Speculum XXIII, 1948, 70-75). The echoes of judicial terminology suggest that in his preoccupation with legalities this has escaped him (218-24).

How may this wayke womman han this strengthe
Hire to defend agayn this renegat? (932-3)

At other junctions in the tale, when the triumph of Constance's faith seems to the lawyer to require comment he turns to his idea of the God of Miracles. It is this God "who saved Danyel in the horrible cave" (474), who "kepte Jonas in the fisshes mawe" (484), who "yaf Judith corage or hardynesse/ To sleen him Olofernus. . ." (940).[26] Always he must stress her weakness, and miraculous intervention. The significance of her escapes as the reward of faith escapes him.

Constance invokes the aid of Christ and Mary. The Man of Law however, consistently draws on the Old Testament for his examples, and his God, as a god of supernatural intervention and punishing wrath, is apt to a man whose concern with the letter of the law identifies him with the Law of the Old Testament. This talionic law is superseded by Christ's New Law of Mercy; the Man of Law enjoys the destruction of Constance's enemies more, perhaps, than is necessary.[27] The worst threat to her life is the false knight, "yet Constance hadde of his deeth greet routhe" (689).

---

[26]Cf. Rodney Delasanta, "And of Great Reverence: Chaucer's Man of Law", Chaucer Review V, (1970), p. 294, on the misinterpretation of biblical allusions (not found in Trivet) as part of the Lawyer's" pursuit of his extra-legal reading with an eye to intellectual posturing and didactic gesture".

[27]Ibid., p. 298.

The apostrophes and interpolations revealing the Man of Law's anti-Boethian benightedness are distinct from the action of the tale. Is it possible to be equally clear in our distinction between the Constance of ideal Fortitude and the Man of Law's pitiful, helpless, aristocratic, and romantic heroine? Throughout, one can fairly easily distinguish the Man of Law's response from the spiritual figure beyond. When she first appears, the Man of Law seizes on her weeping as signs of the tender apprehensions of a daughter, the protected child, departing for an unknown husband (267-73). Her submission to paternal and male authority is interspersed with the resignation to Christ's will, "his leestes to fulfille" (284). This spiritual obedience, with its concomitant independence of Fortune, is what shapes her future life, not the state of dependency the lawyer is glad to see her safely bestowed in. Consequently this quality is more fundamental to her nature, and dramatisation of temporal instability and woe interpolated by the Man of Law, accounts for incongrous "humanizing touches".

The practical and emotional difficulties of the voyage from Syria are lavishly expatiated upon by the lawyer. From Constance we have only a humble prayer, not to the God of Miracles for rescue, but from protection from the Fiend (450-62) in which her own suffering is made light of in the

thought of the great sufferings of Christ.[28] Her prayer at her trial is in dignified contrast to the Man of Law's agonising at her fate. When the converted Alla weds her, the narrator sees this not as the suitable spiritual union it proves to be, but as a temporal reward and the re-establishment of her nobility of rank. "And thus hath Crist ymaad Custance a Queene". This is followed by narration which recalls the prudish condemnation of Gower, the tasteless pursuit of the couple behind the closed doors

> . . . Hooly thynges
> They mooste take in pacience at night
> Swich manere necessaries as been plesynges
> To folk that han ywedded hem with rynges. (709-11)

The gratuitousness of his voyeurism is exposed by its clumsy conspicuousness in a tale remarkable for lack of specific detail in action. He seems to have an impulse to divest Constance of her saintly dignity at every likely opportunity.

The people of Northumberland, and particularly the Constable, replace the Lawyer in bewailing Constance's fate. The questionings of the Constable are similar to the questions implied in the Man of Law's attitude to Providence and sharply contrast with Constance's composure at this point. The voice of the Lawyer is not heard until the next attack has been averted, as though Chaucer was deliberately circumventing this refrain at the moment of Constance's greatest

---

[28] Cf. Mary Virginia Rosenfeld, "Chaucer and the Liturgy", MLN, LV (1940), pp. 357-60.

triumph.

The lawyer's preoccupation with the "woful" Constance may explain the fragmented ending. The fluctuations from joy to woe, which are accentuated by his narrative and disarmed in the stoicism of the heroine, are concentrated at the end into a rapid progression of joys and woes, apparently extensible beyond the sequence of trials. The indecisiveness of the ending suggests that the lawyer is caught between presenting the restoration to an even tenor of the dramatic life of a saint, to him unexciting in the lack of opportunity for pious dread and maudlin woe, and in showing her domestic cares and long-term griefs. Naturally it is to the latter that he succumbs.

As far as the lawyer is concerned, his handling of the genre evinces a sentimental and romantic interest in his materials which must have been plain to Chaucer's audience. More seriously, his interpretation partially obscures the identity of the central figure, debasing it by gratuitious emotionalism and a failure of spiritual comprehension. The attitudes of piety struck by the less plausible ecclesiasts and "respectable" figures of the General Prologue do seem to be hoist with their own petard in that their out spoken religiousity fails to conceal their contradictory interests. As Delasanta suggests, there is a relation between "rhetorical excess and religious exhibitionism", and these "rhetorically

hyperactive" pilgrims are not among Chaucer's favorites.[29] Delasanta finds in the Man of Law's excoitations of Mothers-in-Law the manifestations of "pharasaical schizophrenia".[30] This sounds too like a confusion with modern psychiatry; what we do have, however, is the exposure of a vengeful impulse extraneous to the materials of the tale, yet quite in keeping with the restricted spiritual vision of the narrator.

The Man of Law thus serves as the mouthpiece of the worldly incomprehension of the superlative spiritual qualities and attainments represented by Constance. We are confronted with a consistently myopic attitude which throws the virtues of the heroine into sharp relief. The interest accrued is not focused on the Man of Law per se. It is not the revelation of "personality", but the exposure of a familiar moral stance.

The figure of Constance, as the triumph of faith and action, however passive she may appear, can be easily discerned from the projected pathetic victim and romantic heroine. Her resoluteness and dignity emerge unscathed and her qualities transcend the lawyers capacity for appreciation. The objective of the Man of Law is not to humanise her, but to make her more accessible to his understanding. As the embodiment of an ideal she has the human appeal of a workable paradigm. By frequently evoking his astrologer's God the Man of Law

---

[29]Delasanta, "And of Great Reverence. . .", pp.301, 298.

[30]Ibid., p. 304.

would detract from the accomplishments of her fortitude. He would like to dilute her spiritual humility with attentions to her dependency and helpless femininity. Duffey complains that

> We must take her as a modus operandi, as a basically mechanical, though skilful implement for exciting the reader's superficial emotions.[31]

The superficial emotions are directly traceable to the Man of Law. Her strength, her appeal to a medieval audience, with its appetite for hagiography, lies in her transcendence of the influence of Fortune and of the incapacities of human weakness. Maybe there is more Man of Law in us today to account for the disappointment voiced by Duffey.

Having seen that the individuality of the figure of Constance is largely a product of the Man of Law's efforts to turn her into a qualitatively different kind of heroine, I shall turn now to the Wife of Bath whose claims to "personality" appear to be much stronger to judge from her critics. Does the emphasis on human weakness found in unregenerate pilgrims develop into an exploration of personality in the protracted form of the Prologue to the Wife of Bath's Tale?

---

[31]Duffey, "Intention and Art. . .", p. 187.

V

Of all the pilgrims, the Wife of Bath seems to have attracted most attention from critics in search of the "personality" of Chaucer's characters. Defense of this approach has seldom been offered, at least until D. W. Robertson's categorical denial of its validitiy. He finds her

> not a "character" in the modern sense at all, but an elaborate iconographic figure designed to show the manifold implications of an attitude. . . the femininity she represents was in Chaucer's day a philosophical rather than a psychological concept. . .Those who grow sentimental over her "human" qualities are, from a fourteenth-century point of view, simply being misled.[1]

Walter Clyde Curry's enthusiasm for "her dual personality" prompts him to try to locate "definite causes for the coexistence of more incongruent elements than are ordinarily found in living human beings".[2] It is significant that Curry's great contribution to the understanding of iconographic details

---

[1]D. W. Robertson Jr., A Preface to Chaucer (Princeton, 1962) p. 331. Robertson's conclusion is based on an examination of the exegetical materials in the Wife's Prologue. Further materials support this view appearing in criticism, and my own arguments, will ensue in the course of the chapter.

[2]Walter Clyde Curry, "More about Chaucer's Wife Of Bath" PMLA, XXXVII (1922), p. 30. This incongruity is, according to Curry, explained by the peculiar elements of her horoscope, whereby the feeling for the beautiful inherited by venerians, is cheapened, coarsened, distorted, by Martian influence(pp. 46-8). To him, she is the most tragic figure, and "the most nearly completely human" of The Canterbury Tales (p. 51).

in the other pilgrims contrasts with this approach, which is supported by a misinterpretation of her horoscope.[3]

The most recent defense of the Wife of Bath's appeal as a "personality" comes from David Parker. He explicitly takes issue with Robertson's assertion; his defense is based on the display, in fourteenth-century biography of

> a much more pronounced and direct interest in the moral consequences and implications of human behaviour, but this moral interest is not necessarily divorced from "psychological" interest, and indeed rarely is in any work of value. Properly speaking, the fourteenth-century biographer, when he was doing his job properly, made no distinction between ethics and psychology.[4]

This assertion is not documented, but certainly autobiography[5] represents what we would consider psychological states as manifestations of spiritual condition.[6] The three arguments

---

[3]Cf. Wood, note 24 below.

[4]David Parker, "Can we trust the Wife of Bath?" Chaucer Review IV (1970) pp. 90-98. The last sentence of Parker's statement seems in fact to beg the whole question of where the emphasis in fact lay. The unquestionably representative figure of Everyman he sees as "an individual, a fact not affected by his standing for every individual at the same time" (p. 92).

[5]Cf. Guibert de Nogent, Memoirs and Peter Abelard, Historia Calamitatum.

[6]Hagiography too, according to Leclercq is concerned to "advance a moral thesis and a religious idea. No interest is taken in the individual as such, in the memory he has left behind him. . .Not the things he did, only the ideal he illustrated, will be remembered". His purpose is to edify, to offer examples for emulation. Cf. Jean Leclercq, The Love of Learning and the Desire for God (New York, 1962) pp. 163-4.

he offers for taking the Wife of Bath as an individual are drawn from the nature of Chaucer's art. Firstly he suggests that irony can only be personal, "you can't be revenged on abstraction", and that this proves Chaucer to have had "at least a poetic apprehension of individual personality".[7] I imagine he here confuses irony with satire; the irony most central to the Wife of Bath is that which associates her spiritual incapacities, together with those of the Pardoner, January, the Friar and Summoner, to mention but a few, with the generalised state of blindness in which the sinner contemplates his life without spiritual comprehension.[8] By its nature the insight achieved is of a moral order, the limits of the self-awareness of the individual are those of material commitment. Secondly Parker argues that

> there is an invitation, so palpable in the text to twentieth century readers, to participate in the act of creation, and construct a human identity for the Wife.[9]

But her lengthy "preamble" is a garbled and one-sided dialectic prompting rational, not gratuitously imaginative, participation.

---

[7]Parker, "Can we trust the Wife of Bath?", p. 93.

[8]Cf. Parson's Tale X. 122-3. "Right so the synful man that loveth his synne, hym semeth that it is to him moost sweete of any thyng; but fro that tyme that he loveth sadly oure Lord Jhesu Crist, and desireth the lif perdurable, ther nys to him no thyng moore abhomynable."

[9]P. 97. Besides, he rather spoils the argument in implying that we must construct her identity, that we must draw on materials possibly otherwise intended.

Finally, he says, there is the problem of her inconsistencies,[10] more amenable to the "character approach" than the "iconographic approach".[11] Like a sophist she is continually shifting her ground; this demands intellectual penetration, not psychological understanding.

The comedy of the Wife's Prologue has been amply appreciated, and this will not be one of my chief concerns. The illusion of farcical re-enactment in the autobiographical "tale of wo that is in mariage" is comparable in technique to the tradition assumed to have been begun with Theophrastus. His Characters, are without specific visual details, his types are without name, hence escaping acclaim as "personalities". The Wife, as David Reid suggests, can be regarded as"a stock figure in a varied sort of pantomime".[12] It is the exaggeration and distortion which "makes us lay hold of them and endow them with life";[13] but in the case of the Wife of Bath, her gross figure, bulk of kerchiefs, spurs, gat tooth, deafness

---

[10]His example here is 811-25, 503-24, the Wife's contradiction of demanding "maistrie", and yet loving the husband most who thwarted this desire. This, however is recogniseable as the Wife's temporary defeat by a male armed with all her tactics whose ascendancy is achieved by comparable moral failings.

[11]Ibid., p. 97.

[12]David S. Reid, "Crocodilian Humor: A Discussion of Chaucer's Wife of Bath", Chaucer Review, IV (1970), p. 74.

[13]Ibid., p. 75.

signal the presence of the aggressively wilful, proud, lecherous scarecrow[14] of anti-feminist propaganda, the threat to rational and spiritual progress. Except in the case of the Pardoner (for obvious reasons), no other pilgrim has such an opportunity to air his opinions; given such scope, she surely hangs herself with her own rope. The very fabric of social custom, and moral and spiritual tradition she so belligerently flouts with costermongering effrontery challenges her. The autobiographical excursions with their lavish commentary from "experience" have a robust appeal which in the spirit of the fabliaux, which underlies the up-so-doun logic of misrule.

In this chapter I shall show how the Wife's Prologue is fundamentally dialectical in form, being a fragmented debate between spirit and flesh, rationality and sub-rational wilfulness in which peace and order can be achieved only by subordination to the appetites embodied by the Wife, by the abandonment of Church teaching and of rational and moral conduct, and by subordination to the penance exacted by the material and physical snare she represents. The very nature of the weapons she selects, and her use of them, invites moral evaluation. We will then trace the relationship of her attitudes to contemporary configurations of ideas on the role of women. The tale she tells will be seen to supply a final statement on her philosophy of life.

---

[14]Cf. William Blake, whose reaction is at least chronologically closer to Chaucer's contemporaries.

I will conclude by discussing some of the qualities responsible for the Wife having been posthumously endowed with "personality".

The Prologue opens with the confrontation of "auctoritee" with "experience", or, as soon becomes apparent, the conflict between the wisdom of the church and the "wisdom" of the Wife's "secte". For, she says,

> Ye wise wyves, that kan understonde
> Thus shulde ye speke, and bere hem wrong on honde
> For half so boldely kan ther no man
> Swere and lyen, as a woman kan. (225-8)

The polygamy of the "wise kyng Saloman" encourages her in her defense of her multiple marriages, despite the fact that this was seen as the destruction of that King's wisdom. The Wife's exegesis, as Robertson demonstrates, is a garbling of "auctoritee",[15] pruning and manipulation of texts recognisable to an audience familiar with the Scriptures. She employs also an inverted glossing, interpreting the New Testament in the light of the Old; Solomon and Jacob and Abraham (55-6) are co-opted to support her own polygamy. The Wife finds loop-holes in the fact that scriptural authority offers counsel "but counsellyng is no commandement" (67). The irrefutable evidence of her anatomy, and of course her experience, make short work of counsel of perfection; virginity and chastity are not what she was made for.

> In swich estaat as God hath cleped us
> I wol persevere; I nam nat precius.
> In wyfhood I wil use myn instrument
> As freely as my makere hath it sent. (147-50)

---

[15] Cf. D. W. Robertson, Preface, pp. 317-31 for an exposition of the Wife's falsification of her texts.

Her husbands however pay dearly for such use, as the Pardoner is the first to recognise. The antithesis of "parfit chastitee" is not for her, imperfection, or the contravention of "auctoritee", but a proper resignation to the wifely status of "barly breed".[16]

The concept of duty in a wife is dextrously replaced by the idea of "debt"; in the Parson's Tale this is quite distinct from the venial sin of avoiding lechery by union, or the deadly sin of assembling "oonly for amorous love". It signifies that "neither of hem hath power of his owene body".[17] The Wife's concept of marital debt is predictably commercial. Paul's advice to wives to obey their husbands is excised; he "bad oure husbondes for to love us weel" (161), meaning that he must be "my dettour and my thral". The duty and the debt are his, not hers, and exacted with the ruthlessness of an intractable creditor, "that is to seyn, myself have been the whippe" (175).

The difference between counsel and command gives the Wife licence. Her demand for sovereignty is for the power of domestic scourge, control of goods and land, but above all power to be a law unto herself; the sacrilegious aspect of this demand is brought out in her own words in her establish-

---

[16]Ibid., p. 329. "The five loaves of barley bread had been taken since St. Augustine's memorable exposition as a figure for the hardness of the Old Law.

[17]Parson's Tale, X. 938-943.

ment of her own judgment as the ultimate court-of-appeal (68) and her role as self-appointed scourge (156-8), as domestic law-giver (219); "In erthe I was his purgatorie" she boasts, of the fourth marriage (489).

Warfare is inevitable, as the "testament" of the adversary, one of the first three husbands, demonstrates. Peace must be on her terms

> . . . sith a man is moore resonable
> Than woman is, ye moost ben suffrable. (441-2)

Man's rationality must give way to domination by the worldly appetites so fully represented in the Wife.

The spiritual sacrament of marriage is confronted with a lively sense of the physical and material gains to be achieved from thorough exploitation of marriage. She blithely suggests prostitution to one victim (447) but the reiteration of the gains of rendering the debt makes it clear that her conduct amounts to a gainful trade in her "bele chose" (411) and her thoughts of the future are not without hopes of further trade "The bren; as I best kan, now moste I selle" (478).

Having thoroughly exploited the counsels of the church we discover that the Wife has even found recreational use for religious observances. An opportunity

> to se and eeke for to be seye
> Of lusty folk, What wiste I wher my grace
> Was shapen for to be, or in what place?
> Therfore I make my visitaciouns
> To vigilies and to processiouns
> To prechyng eek, and to thise pilgrimages. (552-557)

The possibility of spiritual advantage is vitiated by the pursuit of pleasure.

From the chopped logic of an exegetical technique of defense the Wife moves to outright defiance of criticism in the form of a series of retorts from the unassailable position of power on the domestic front. Chiding, bullying and deception are used for her profit, and her ease (201); lands, gifts, and toil at night, are the price paid by her husbands for peace. The dilemma of the husband is a foretaste of the Knight's dilemma. Poor or rich, ugly or beautiful, each wife brings her own punishment (248-262). The wife merely retorts with imprecations. After the covert and devious establishment of her own right of choice in the number of marriages, her rights of "engendrure" and "dette", the practical implications of her sovereignty are enacted with shamelessness. In her catalogue of the sufferings inflicted by the rich, the poor, the ugly or the beautiful Wife, she is clearly the epitome of them all. The testament of care and toil in the charges of the first three husbands are met with coarse insults, and the intractable retort, "we wol ben at oure large", (322) "I wol nat wirche as muchel as a gnat" (347). For occasional possession of her "queynte" all reasonable demands on her must be relinquished. She must be gorgeously decked and given the freedom of the cat, an animal notorious for its lechery in bestiaries. Preaching, the invocation of

Apostolic wisdom, and practical counter-ploys, are met with swearing and abuse, a perpetual reminder of the spiritual jeopardy of surrender to the demands of the flesh.

> . . . no wys man nedeth for to wedde
> Ne no man that entendeth unto hevene. (274-5)

The counsel of the church denied by the Wife's submission to the promptings of "thynges small" is again flouted, often in the face of the irresistible, and of course God-given, tendencies,

> . . . all swich wit is yeven us in oure byrthe;
> Deceit, wepyng, spinning God hath yive
> To wommen kyndely, whil that they may lyve . (400-402)

Hence chiding, sleight, force, relentless quitting, until the will prevail husband surrenders.

The fourth husband and Janekyn confront Alice with her own kind of weapons; jealousy meets with jealousy in the fourth marriage, the fifth husband "was of his love daungerous to me" (514), a tactic the ageing Wife must come to terms with as she forced her first three husbands to. The recital has come full circle, for Janekyn's method is to subdue the Wife with texts, this time from anti-feminist literature.

Robert Haller points out that the Wife's marital ventures and her tale presents a sequence of husbands representative of the Three Estates; the first four are commoners, the fifth a churchman, by training if not occupation, and the Knight of the Tale is a member of the aristocracy.[18] Each

---

[18]Robert S. Haller, "The Wife of Bath and the Three Estates", Annuale Mediaevale, VI (1965), pp. 47-64.

is vanquished by sexuality. The first three are confronted by her bargaining powers, and by her own home ground. The Clerk's texts suggest an indulgence in anti-matrimonial propaganda as futile as bolting the door when the horse has gone, but a degeneration of learning which the aggression of the Wife finally vanquishes. Similarly the Knight, albeit an unregenerate member of the aristocracy as were the previous husbands of their estates, is defeated by his sexuality, a defeat in the guise of "gentilesse".

Through her telling use of exegesis the Wife is related to the Samaritan woman whom Christ would recall to rationality. The coming of the sixth husband which the Wife welcomes unwittingly alludes to the promised coming of Christ. The Wife of "biside-Bath", like the Samaritan beside the well,[19] in this connection represents the bondage of the five wits, the inferior part of reason. The carnal significance of her life and the literal sense of the texts she invokes are the limits of her understanding. Her espousal of imperfection is the relinquishment of rationality to the demands of the flesh in herself, and in the men married to her.

In betraying her own spirit, and the spiritual aspect of her husbands, she is daughter to Eve; stung to retort by the ammunition of the fifth, she attempts to shift the blame

---

[19]Robertson, Preface, pp. 320-22.

> By God! If wommen hadde written stories,
> As clerkes han withinne hire oratories,
> They wolde han writen of men moore wikkednesse,
> Than al the mark of Adam may redresse . . . (693-696)

In glaring antithesis to the fortitude of Constance, the Sainthood of Cecile, and the patience of Griselda[20] she embodies the willing flesh contrasting with their triumphant spirit. Her happy consignment of all adversaries to the devil marks her as the blood-relation of Friar, Summoner and Pardoner.

Her kinship with the villainesses of the Clerk's book need not be laboured. Anti-feminist and anti-matrimonial treatises flourished at this time, and the tradition, traceable back to Theophrastus, repeatedly drew on material from his work, from Jerome, and Walter Map's epistle. The bulk of extant manuscripts come from Oxford,[21] where the battle to maintain celibacy in the priesthood was fiercest.

---

[20]Cf. Sister Ritamary Bradley, "The Wife and The Mirror Tradition", JEGP, LV (1956), 624-30, who suggests the debt of the Prologue to mirror literature whereby wisdom is seen, in the Scriptures and in various forms of encyclopaedia, as the antidote to the follies of worldly prudence; "influenced by the Augustan theory of knowledge, moralists thought of the Soul as a mirror illumined by these abstract truths . . . person's whose lives were 'examples", whether good or bad, were mirrors in the strict didactic sense". (p. 624).

[21]Robert Pratt, "Jankyn's book of Wikked Wyves: Medieval Anti-matrimonial Propaganda in the Universities", Annuale Mediaevale, III (1962), pp. 5-27. The staples of the tradition were the Disuasio Valerii ad Ruffiarum ne uxorem diccat of Walter Map, the Aureolus liber Theophrasti de Nuptiis, and Jerome's Epistola Contra Jovinianum. Another allusion to the tradition can be found in ll. 257-262, largely drawn from Jerome and Theophrastus, and the passages on why men marry, from Isidore. (Cf. Pratt, "Chaucer and Isidore on Why Men Marry", MLN, LXXIV, (1959), pp. 293-4).

As Chauncey Wood has shown, the details we are given of the Wife's horoscope do not support Curry's interpretation of the Wife as the product of constellations which have ruined her "original nature", she is not the victim of "bitterness which has been forced upon her by an unholy constellation".[22] It is a familiar failing of the sinner to find extenuating circumstances, as the Parson points out.[23] But according to Dr. Wood's interpretation the significance of her horoscope suggests deviousness and probable promiscuity in the influence of Mars in Taurus. The precise influence of Venus is not clear from what she says, but far from suggesting vestigial "artistic impulses" or indeed regret--she is consistently shameless. The combination of "both Mars and Venus in the same astrological breath invariably brings forth references to adultery and fornication".[24] Dr. Wood's reference to Thomas Usk's Testament of Love shows the connotation of venerien to be far from an object of pathos, for Veneriens "so lusty ben and so leude in thier wits, that in such thinges right litel or naught don they fele".[25]

Thus the Wife's exploitation of the exegetical tradition, of the Pauline teachings on matrimony, of her own

---

[22]Curry, Chaucer and the Medieval Sciences, p. 49.

[23]Cf. Parson's Tale, X. 319, and Chapter II, (South English Legendary)

[24]Chauncey Wood, Chaucer and The Country of the Stars (Princeton, 1970) pp. 172-80).

[25]Ibid., p. 180.

"experience", an expansion on practical strategy, of all possible arguments in her extenuation, of the extremes of anti-feminist propaganda, all serve to weight the case against her. She defies wisdom and ecclesiastical authority with her own law, revealed as the sovereignty of worldly desires. The required obedience of the Wife is the lot of the husband in her upso-doun scheme of things. The sacrament of marriage becomes a material contract; aggression replaces "gentilesse" just as "gentilesse" appears to vanquish the brutality of the Knight in her Tale. The New Testament is subordinated to the examples taken from the Old Testament with the same literal-mindedness which denies validity to perfection and justifies sexual licence with the evidence of the anatomy. The very materials she uses for her defense associate her with spiritual abuses, with the moral tyranny of domestic strife. The multifold aspects of the dominant trait of wilful carnality are the ground work of her characterisation. Our interest is aroused in her attitudes, and their moral significance; the process by which we understand the Wife is one of intellectual engagement, not empathetic identification with her psychology. We are confronted with the tortuous workings of perverted rationality, demanding to be disentangled and interpreted. The figure glimpsed in the General Prologue is a mouthpiece for the ironic presentation of an extreme of behaviour. Her Prologue takes the form of a rambling and

sophistical dialectic in which the adversary is located in the values and assumptions of the contemporary audience.

The Tale the Wife tells appears at the outset to be a romantic fairy tale, but before the illusion is well established the Wife must seize on the opportunity to "quit" the Friar. When it resumes, the promising Knight riding through woods very soon disenchants us by promptly raping a maid. The quest which follows takes us straight back to the Wife's preamble.[26] In seeking to discover "what thyng is it that wommen moost desiren" (905) the replies he is offered are a refrain to the Wife's own exposition of female desires. As if to underline the relationship of Tale to Prologue the Wife launches into a digression, an exemplum featuring Midas, a tale from Ovid's Metamorphoses which has undergone some transformation in substituting a wife for Ovid's barber. Judson Boyce Allen and Patrick Gallacher have demonstrated the significance of the exemplum, which appears at first sight to be but tenuously connected to the narrative. The exemplum offers yet another sidelong glance at the Wife herself, since Midas was glossed by Giovanni del Virgilio as "a man who considers only the external sound and not the inmost part".[27]

---

[26]Furthermore 925-950 adds a further gloss to the Wife's identity as the epitome of female desires.

[27]Judson Boyce Allen and Patrick Gallacher, "Alisoun Through the Looking Glass: or Every Man his own Midas", Chaucer Review, IV (1970), p. 101. The quotation from Armulf's commentary on the Metamorphoses (pp. 103-4) will be discussed later in the chapter.

The fact that the Wife is described in the General Prologue and in her tale as "som-del deef" confirms an appropriate identification with the infirmity of Midas besides that of his confidante.

This underlines the continuity with the Wife's Prologue. The object of the quest, the manner of its instigation heighten our awareness of the teller. The Knight himself is anonymous, and consistently unknightly, and the absence of narrative detail leaves the tale bare of romantic associations.

The loathly lady of analogues to the Wife's version is portrayed in horrific detail.[28] The Hag here is fouler than any man can devise (999), but we do not see her until the transformation has taken place. The Knight is hauled off to marriage and bed with a single-mindedness reminiscent of the Wife's handling of her husbands. The answer to the riddle is the narrator's own maxim

> Wommen desiren to have sovereynetee
> As well over hir housbonde as hir love,
> And for to been in maistrie hym above. (1038-40)

Her pillow talk on "gentillesse" was a familiar and possibly commonplace passage from Dante,[29] in attitude and

---

[28]Cf. Theodore Silverstein, "The Wife of Bath and the Rhetoric of Enchantment; or How to make a Hero See in the Dark", MP, LVIII (1961), pp. 162-70, for a comparison with The Marriage of Sir Gawaine, The Wedding of Sir Gawen and Dame Regnall, and Gower's tale of Florent, in Confesio Amantis.

[29]Dante, Purgatorio VII 121 tt, and Convivio, canzone prefixing Fourth Tractate, and IV Tractate, Chaps. 3, 10, 14, 15. Cf. also Chaucer, Gentillesse (Robinson, p. 536).

also method suggestive too of the techniques ironically advocated by Andreas Capellanus, in De Arte Honesti Amandi. Her lecture offers unquestionably sound morality, but we must not lose sight of her objective. The final capitulation of the Knight to the hag's demand for sovereignty follows an impossible dilemma, a choice "imported from the incongruous realm of Roman social satire and patristic denunciation of marriage".[30] The capitulation is representative too of the Wife's exposition of the crippling alternatives in the choice of a wife (249-270).

When the illusion created by the tale is thus reduced to a minimum we are asked to accept the metamorphosis of the hag, a sleight of magic in an un-fantastic tale, and asked too, to believe, despite all the Wife's warnings, that the Knight does get a true and beautiful wife, and that they live in "parfit joye", ever after.

Aaron Steinberg offers a Freudian interpretation of the Knight's decision, to him implausible. He interprets the Knight as "a fragment of fantasy, the unconscious projection of the Wife of Bath".[31] The appeal of the sexual rampancy of the Knight need be traced no further than the Prologue to the tale. He has been outwitted perhaps as the five husbands were,

---

[30] Margaret Schlauch, "The Marital Dilemma in the Wife of Bath's Tale", PMLA, LXI (1946), p. 418.

[31] Aaron Steinberg, "The Wife of Bath and her Fantasy of Fulfilment", CE, XXVI (1964), pp. 187-191.

by the superior argument of "gentillesse". But the abrupt metamorphosis is as incredible as January's sudden sight at the end of the Merchant's Tale. January's accession of vision leaves him spiritually blind; the machinations of Pluto and Proserpyna prepare us for the denouement, and their dialogue offers clues to its significance.

We have seen the continuity between Prologue and Tale. The Prologue suggests a metamorphosis in the Wife from youth to age. The Midas story presents a second metamorphosis. The Knight is in the power of the hag because he, like the husbands, has fallen prey to his appetites. He too must consequently accept the answer to the riddle, that of sovereignty. The dilemma can be seen, in the light of the Wife's prologue, as an emblem of the Wife's own idea of marriage, to which the only response can be submission to the worldly appetite such a wife represents, and which the hag has promised to fulfil (1218). January, in falling prey to his lust, becomes the victim of illusions, and the power of the appetite to lead to blindness to reality is there attested.[32]

Since the theme of the Tale is so pre-eminently that of the Wife of Bath herself perhaps we should consider how far the final metamorphosis can be related to her stance. We

---

[32]Boyce Allen and Gallacher, "Alisoun through the Looking Glass" pp. 103-4, quoting Armulf of Orleans (Fausto Ghisalberti, "Arnolfo d'Orleans, un cultore di Ovidio nel secolo XII".)

can see that within the context of the pilgrimage it may signify that the tired exterior is still meant to hold out the promise of sexual commerce for a sixth husband. But if we take up again the clue offered by the symbolic metamorphosis of Midas we can find a more appropriate interpretation for the ending. Allen and Gallacher quote Arnulf of Orleans on the subject of Ovid's Metamorphoses. He sees the intention of the Metamorphoses as the discussion not simply of change in physical things, but of change in the soul.

> There are two motions in the soul, one rational, the other irrational; the rational is that which imitates the firmament, which is from East to West, and conversely the irrational imitates the motion of the planets which move in opposition to the firmament. . .seeing this Ovid wishes to show us the internal movement of the soul through fictional narrative. . .The intention is ethical because it teaches us to despise temporal things which are transitory and changeable--which is a moral consideration.[33]

As Allen and Gallacher suggest, the Wife follows her planets, rather than the firmament, she is, in her sensuality, the antithesis of rational man, a lover of temporal things whose tale of the metamorphosis of a hag to a maiden may well be interpreted as the irrational desire to move from West to East, to reclaim, or at least preserve, the pleasures enjoyed in youth, closing her eyes, as January does, to the life of the spirit to come.

---

[33] Ibid., pp. 103-4.

Thus the element of wish-fulfilment implied in the tale originates in moral insight rather than psychological phenomena. This aspect of the characterisation also leads away from the individual to a representation of the general spiritual condition of man, and its denial by bondage to the flesh.

I hope to have made clear in this brief look at the presentation of the Wife of Bath, that she has no more claims to "personality" than a ventriloquist's dummy, she represents the point of intersection between a number of configurations of ideas about women. She is at once the mouthpiece and the target of elaborate irony by which she becomes impaled on the very instruments she choses for her defense. Her incapacities may lure the modern critic to regard her as "living", "human", as a "personality", but her Prologue elicits rational, not sympathetic, participation, and her peccadilloes are signals of a threat, comic perhaps, but also suggestive of destructive misrule. We might mistakenly attribute "personality" to the candid forthrightness a medieval audience would recognise as shamelessness and aggression. We might find pathos in her age, her yet importunate desires, whereas her contemporaries would see the profound spiritual indignity of her performance.

CONCLUSION

This has been no more than a preliminary exploration, regrettably cursory, to establish some clues to an alien way of seeing the individual, alien, that is, to our own conception of our personalities. Secondly, I hope to have shown how Chaucer's characterisation, in consequence of this fundamental difference, is inseparable from the moral and intellectual issues of the immediate literary context. The characters prompt analysis, discrimination, moral evaluation, but not the sympathetic indentification the personal response elicited by the inhabitants of modern fiction. Finally I have demonstrated that, in the detailed analysis of Constance and the Wife of Bath, medieval characterisation was concerned either to celebrate the exemplary as an object for emulation, or to lay bare the strategies and incapacities of the weak with warning implicit in the unequivocal assessment. As the General Prologue shows, moral condition can be concealed, it cannot be denied. To reveal this state was Chaucer's prime concern. The ambivalence of our own values, spiritual, moral, or social, should not obscure the demand for critical attention made by the calculated ethical "placing" of each character.

In trying to disinter and re-assemble a different manner of perceiving the individual, I have been reminded

continually of the medieval tendency to see man in multifold relations. This is in sharp contrast with our own capacity for regarding ourselves in isolation from external relations, roles, and their rewards and obligations, which are but a fractional, and even transitory part of our sense of the self. Medieval man was a component in a spiritual framework, a social hierarchy, a material structure; much of his identity was consequently predetermined by his place within a larger system. This is so much a truism that its significance for Chaucer's characterisation may escape us. In keeping it in mind, we can more readily perceive and accept the stress on occupational proficiency, in its fullest sense, to which even the most deceptively random of details can be traced. The polarity between Constance and the narrator of her life is intelligible as an ethical counterpointing. The Wife's exploits, and her seemingly enigmatic tale, affirm her precise moral bearings within an extended social and spiritual milieu.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

ABELARD, Peter, Historia Calamitatum (trans. J. T. Muckle, Toronto, 1954).

ALANUS DE INSULIS, De Planctu Naturae (trans. D. M. Moffat, New Haven, 1908).

ALLPORT, Gordon, Pattern and Growth in Personality (re-edition, New York, 1961); Personality: A Psychological Interpretation (New York, 1937); and Personality and Social Encounter (Boston, 1960).

ANSELM OF CANTERBURY, Truth, Freedom and Evil (Three Philosophical dialogues, trans. Jasper Hopkins and Herbert Richardson, New York, 1967).

AQUINAS, St. Thomas, Summa Theologiae (trans. Timothy Sutton, London, 1970).

ST. AUGUSTINE, Confessions (trans. R. S. Pine Coffin, London, 1961).

BAKER, Donald C., "Chaucer's Clerk and the Wife of Bath on Gentilesse", SP LIX (1962), pp. 631-40.

BALDWIN, Ralph, The Unity of The Canterbury Tales (Anglistica Vol. V, Copenhagen, 1955).

BARFIELD, Owen, Saving the Appearances: A Study in Idolatry (New York, 1965).

BAUM, Paull F., Chaucer: A Critical Appreciation (Durham, N.C., 1955).

BEICHNER, Paul E., "Chaucer's Man of Law and Dispiritas Cultus", Speculum, XXIII (1948), pp. 70-75.

BLAKE, William, "The Canterbury Pilgrims" (1809) in English Critical Essays: Nineteenth Century ed. Edmund D. Jones (London, 1916).

BLOOMFIELD, Morton W., The Seven Deadly Sins (East Lansing, Mich., 1952).

BOWDEN, Muriel, A Commentary on the General Prologue to The Canterbury Tales (New York, 1948).

BOYCE ALLEN, Judson, and GALLACHER, Patrick, "Alisoun Through the Looking Glass: or Every Man his own Midas", Chaucer Review, IV (1970), pp. 99-103.

BRADLEY, Sister Ritamary, "The Wife and the Mirror Tradition", JEGP, LV (1956), pp. 624-30.

BREHAUT, The Encyclopaedist of the Dark Ages (New York, 1912).

BREWER, Derek, Chaucer (Men and Books Series, London and Toronto, 1953).

BRONSON, Bertrand, In Search of Chaucer (Toronto, 1960).

BROOKS, Harold F., Chaucer's Pilgrims: The Artistic Order of the Portraits (London, 1962).

CHAPMAN, Coolidge O., "The Parson's Tale: A Medieval Sermon", MLN, XLIII (1928), pp. 229-234.

CHYDENIUS, John, The Theory of Medieval Symbolism (Helsinki and Copenhagen, 1960).

COPLESTON, F. C., Medieval Philosophy

CORSA, Helen Storm, Chaucer: Poet of Mirth and Morality (Notre Dame, Ind., 1964).

COULTON, C. R., Medieval Panorama, (New ed.,(London, 1961).

CURRY, Walter Clyde, Chaucer and the Medieval Sciences (New York and Boston, 1926).

CURRY, Walter Clyde, "More about Chaucer's Wife of Bath", PMLA, XXXVII (1922), pp. 30-51.

DAVID, Alfred, "The Man of Law vs. Chaucer: A Case in Poetics", PMLA, LXXXII (1967), pp. 217-225.

DAVID, Henry P. and VON BRACKEN, Helmit, Perspectives in Personality Theory (London, 1957).

DE BRUNNE, Robert, Handlyng Synne (EETS, Original Series, 119, 123, London, 1901, 1903).

DELASANTA, Rodney, "And of Great Reverence: Chaucer's Man of Law", Chaucer Review, V (1970), pp. 288-309.

DE NOGENT, Guibert, Memoirs (trans. John F. Benton,(New York, 1970).

DONALDSON, E. Talbot, "Chaucer the Pilgrim", PMLA, LXIX (1954), pp. 928-936.

DONALDSON, E. Talbot, Speaking of Chaucer (London, 1970).

DUFFEY, Bernard, "The Intention and Art of The Man of Law's Tale" ElH XIV (1947) pp. 181-193.

DUNCAN, Edgar H., "Narrator's Points of View in the Portrait Sketches, Prologue to The Canterbury Tales", in Essays in Honour of Walter Clyde Curry (Nashville, Tenn., 1955) pp. 77-101.

DUNLEAVY, Garek W., "Natural Law as Chaucer's Ethical Absolute", Trans. of Wisconsin Academy of Arts and Letters, LII (1963), pp. 177-187.

DUORAK, Max, Idealism and Naturalism in Gothic Art (trans. Randolph J. Klawiter, Bloomington, Ind., 1967).

ERIKSON, Erik Hornberger, Young Man Luther (New York, 1962).

FRANK, Robert Worth, "The Art of Reading Medieval Personification Allegory", EGH, XIX (1953), pp. 237-50.

FREUD, Sigmund, An Outline of Psycho-Analysis (trans. James Strachey, London, 1963).

GEROULD, Gordon H., The Saint's Legend (Boston and New York, 1916).

GILLIE, Christopher, Character in English Literature (London, 1965).

GILSON, Etienne, The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy (trans. A. C. Downes, New York, 1936).

GOWER, John, Confessio Amantis (Complete Works, ed., G. C. Macaulay, Oxford, 1899-1902, Vol. II).

HALL, Calvin S. and LINDZEY, Gardener, Theories of Personality (New York, 1957).

HALL, D. J., English Medieval Pilgrimage (London, 1966).

HALLER, Robert S., "The Wife of Bath and the Three Estates", Annuale Medievale, VI (1965), pp. 47-64.

HASELMAYER, Louis A., "The Portraits in Chaucer's Fabliaux", RES, XIV (1938), pp. 310-14.

HENRY, Paul S. J., St. Augustine on Personality (New York, 1960).

HIRSCH, E. D., Validity in Interpretation (New Haven, 1966).

HOWARD, Donald R., The Three Temptations: Medieval Man in Search of the World (Princeton, 1966).

HUPPÉ, Bernard, A Reading of the Canterbury Tales (Albany New York, 1964).

ISAACS, Neil D., "Constance in Fourteenth Century England", NM, LIX (1958), pp. 260-77.

IVES, Doris V., "A Man of Religion", MLR, XXVII (1932), pp. 144-148.

JOHN OF SALISBURY, Polycraticus (trans. John Dickinson, in The Statesman's Book of John of Salisbury, New York, 1927).

JONES, Richard F., "A Conjecture on the Wife of Bath's Prologue", JEGP, XXIV (1925), pp. 512-47.

KANTOROWICZ, E. H., The King's Two Bodies (Princeton, 1957).

KASKE, Robert E., "Chaucer and Medieval Allegory", ELH, XXX (1963), pp. 175-192.

KATZENELLENBOGEN, Adolf, Allegories of the Vices and the Virtues in Medieval Art (London, 1939).

KELLOGG, Alfred L., "St. Augustine and the Parson's Tale", Traditio, VIII (1952), pp. 424-430.

KIMPEL, Ben, "The Narrator of the Canterbury Tales", ELH, XX (1953), pp. 77-86.

KITTREDGE, George Lyman, Chaucer and his Poetry (Cambridge, Mass., 1915).

KOBAN, Charles, "Hearing Chaucer Out: The Art of Persuasion in The Wife of Bath's Tale", Chaucer Review, V (1970), pp. 225-239.

KNOWLES, David, The Evolution of Medieval Thought (Baltimore, 1962).

KROEBER, A. L., An Anthropologist Looks at History (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1963).

LECLERCQ, Jean, The Love of Learning and the Desire for God (New York, 1962).

LEFF, Gordon, Medieval Thought from St. Augustine to William of Ockam (London, 1958).

LEWIS, C. S., The Allegory of Love (London, 1936) and The Discarded Image (Cambridge, 1964).

LEVY, Bernard S., "The Wife of Bath's Queynte Fantasye" Chaucer Review IV (1970) pp. 106-122.

LEWIS, Robert Enzer, "Chaucer's Artistic Use of Pope Innocent III's De Miseria Humanae Conditionis in the Man of Law's Prologue Tale", PMLA, LXXX (1966), pp. 485-492.

LIEBERT, Robert M. and SPIEGLER, Michael D., Personality: An Introduction to Theory and Research (Georgetown, Ont., 1970).

LINTON, Ronald, The Cultural Background of Personality (New York, 1945).

LOWES, John Livingstone, "Chaucer and The Seven Deadly Sins", PMLA, XXX (1915), pp. 237-371.

LUMIANSKY, Robert M., "Benoit's Portraits and Chaucer's General Prologue", JEGP, (1956), pp. 431-8.

MACROBIUS, Commentary on the Dream of Scipio (trans. William Harris Stahl, New York, 1952).

MASOR, John M., "The Personality of Chaucer the Pilgrim", PMLA, LXXV (1960), pp. 160-162.

MALONE, Kemp, "Style and Structure in The Prologue to the Canterbury Tales", ELH, XIII (1946), pp. 38-45.

MANLY, John Mathews, Some New Light on Chaucer (New York, 1926).

MARIELLA, Sister, "The Parson's Tale and the Marriage Group", MLN, LIII (1938), pp. 251-256.

MAURER, Armanda, Medieval Philosophy (New York, 1962).

MISENER, Geneva, "Iconistic Portraits", Classical Philology, XIX (1924), pp. 97-123.

MOHL, Ruth, The Three Estates in Medieval and Renaissance Literature (New York, 1962).

MORRALL, John, The Medieval Imprint (London, 1967).

OWST, G. R., Literature and the Pulpit in Medieval England (Cambridge, 1933).

PANOFSKY, Irwin, Form and Meaning in the Visual Arts.

PRUDENTIUS, Psychomachia (trans. H. S. Thomas, Cambridge, Mass., 1949).

PARKER, David, "Can we Trust the Wife of Bath?", Chaucer Review, IV (1970), pp. 90-98.

PATCH, Howard R., "Characters in Medieval Literature", MLN, 40 (1925), pp. 1-14.

PATCH, Howard Rollin, On Re-reading Chaucer (Cambridge Mass., 1939).

PAULL, Michael R., "The Influence of the Saint's Legend Genre on The Man of Law's Tale", Chaucer Review, V (1971), pp. 179-194.

PFANDER, H. G., "Some Medieval Manuals of Religious Instruction and Chaucer's Parson's Tale", JEGP, XXXV (1936), pp. 243-258.

PRATT, Robert, "Chaucer and Isidor on Why Men Marry", MLN, LXXIV (1959), pp. 293-294.

PRATT, Robert, "Janekyn's book of Wikked Wyves: Medieval Anti-Matrimonial Propaganda in the Universities", Annuale Mediaevale, III (1962), pp. 5-27.

PRATT, Robert, "A Note on Chaucer and the Polycraticus of John of Salisbury", MLN, LXV (1950), pp. 243-246.

REID, David S., "Crocodilian Humor: A Discussion of Chaucer's Wife of Bath", Chaucer Review, IV (1970), pp. 73-89.

RICKERT, Edith, Chaucer's World (New York, 1948).

ROBERTSON, D. W. Jr., Chaucer's London (Toronto, 1968).

ROBERTSON, D. W., A Preface to Chaucer (Princeton, 1962).
"Observations on Methods of Literary Studies", NLH, I (1969), pp. 22-31.

ROOT, R. K., The Poetry of Chaucer (Boston and New York, 1906).

ROSENFELD, Mary Virginia, "Chaucer and the Liturgy", MLN, LV (1940), pp. 357-60.

RUGGIERS, Paul, The Art of the Canterbury Tales (Madison, 1965).

SCHLAUGH, Margaret, "The Marital Dilemma in the Wife of Bath's Tale", PMLA, LXI (1946), pp. 416-430.

SHELLY, Percy Van Dyke, The Living Chaucer (Philadelphia, 1940).

SILVERSTEIN, Theodore, "The Wife of Bath and the Rhetoric of Enchantment: or How to Make a Hero see in the Dark", MP, LVIII (1961), pp. 162-70.

SKINNER, B. F., Science and Human Behavior (New York, 1955).

SLAUGHTER, Eugene E., "Alas, Alas! That Ever Love Was Sinne!" MLN, XLIX (1934), pp. 83-86.

--------, The South English Legendary (EETS Original Series, 235, 236, London, 1956).

SPEIRS, John, Chaucer the Maker (London, 1951).

STEARNS, Marshall W., "A Note on Chaucer's use of Aristotelian Psychology", SP, XLIII (1946), pp. 15-21.

STEINBERG, Aaron, "The Wife of Bath and her Fantasy of Fulfilment", CE, XXVI (1964), pp. 187-191.

SULLIVAN, William, "Chaucer's Man of Law as Literary Critic", MLN, LXVIII (1953), pp. 1-8.

TATLOCK, J. S. P., The Mind and Art of Chaucer (Syracuse, 1950).

THEOPHRASTUS, The Characters of Theophrastus (trans. Philip Vellacott, London, 1967).

JOHN DE THORESBY, The Lay Folk's Catechism (EETS Original Series 118, London, 1901).

TOWNSEND, Tranasg, "Chaucer's Nameless Knight", MLR, XLIV (1954), pp. 1-4.

TUPPER, Frederick, "Chaucer and the Seven Deadly Sins", PMLA, XXIX (1914), pp. 93-128. "The Quarrell's of The Canterbury Pilgrims", JEGP, XIV (1915), pp. 256-70. "Chaucer's Sinners and Sins", JEGP, XV (1915), pp. 56-106.

TUVE, Rosamond, Allegorical Imagery (Princeton, 1966).

WAGENKNECHT, Edward, Chaucer: Modern Essays in Criticism (New York, 1959).

WHITTOCK, Trevor, A Reading of The Canterbury Tales (Cambridge, 1968).

WIMSATT, James, Allegory and Mirror, (New York, 1970).

WOOD, Chauncey, Chaucer and the Country of the Stars (Princeton, 1970). "The Sources of Chaucer's Summoner's 'Garleek, Onyons & Eke Lekes'", Chaucer Review, V (1971), pp. 240-244.

WOOLF, Rosemary, "Chaucer as a Satirist in the General Prologue" Crit. Q., I, (1959), pp. 150-57.

YUNCK, John A., "Religious Elements in Chaucer's Man of Law's Tale", ELH, XXVII (1960), pp. 249-261.