

THE RANGE OF CHAUCER'S SATIRIC ART IN THE CANTERBURY TALES

by

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Preface

This paper has as its primary function the exploration of the satiric methods used by Chaucer in his Canterbury Tales, and it assumes that the reader is already familiar with the tales. All quotes from the body of Chaucer's poetry are taken from The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, edited by Fred N. Robinson (2nd edition, Boston, 1961).

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THE RANGE OF CHAUCER'S SATIRIC ART IN THE CANTERBURY TALES

I

Chaucer was a man of letters, and one of his literary arts was satire; yet, his inclinations and point of view as a satirist were most clearly one step removed from reformation. The Canterbury Tales can not be considered primarily a satiric statement, for satire sees "not the truth, but one aspect of the truth; not the whole man, but one side of him."¹ Kittredge voiced the opinion: "Chaucer is not a reformer. He is not even, if rightly taken, a satirist."² How, then, does the reader best consider the satiric elements which are undeniably part and parcel of Chaucer's verse, and regard Chaucer in his English tradition?³

The answer to these queries lies in artistic intention, and the achievement of an understanding of Chaucer's role as a poet and a satirist is inherent in a close inspection of the Canterbury Tales. Through a study of Chaucer's range of satiric art, the reader can best comprehend the author's intentions.

What Chaucer lacked in satiric attitudes he more than compensated for in satiric methods. The reader can scarcely attribute the posture of superiority to the poet or his persona, yet this and a keen sense of the ludicrous are often coupled to achieve an exaggeration necessary for the spirit of earnest reformation. Still, it is irrefutable that Chaucer's verse often "shoots folly as it flies," as the following inspections of certain pilgrims and their tales will show. The pattern for presentation of Chaucer's satire will, in one manner, follow Professor Tucker's dichotomy of Chaucer's satiric method into two types: the direct and the indirect.⁴ The first, also labeled descriptive, is used in the General Prologue and the

individual prologues to state rather explicitly from the poet's point of view the habits and characteristics of each particular pilgrim. The indirect, also referred to as the dramatic, is the method employed in the individual tales and general scheme of the whole, allowing characteristics to become known in the manner of the drama and the judgements to be more implicitly inferred by the reader. With this general bifurcation in mind, the reader can more easily classify the various attitudes manifested by the poet.

II

One of the first portrayals in the General Prologue which attracts the reader's notice to its satirical bent is that of the Prioress. She is the fourth pilgrim mentioned (following the Knight, the Squire and the Yeoman), and her description is the first that allows for interpretation by the reader. In the forty-four lines allotted to her portrait--and that is all the reader is allowed, for her individual prologue is a prayer and her tale is a homily--the poet begins with the simplest characteristic, but subtly allows his verse the language of double entendre. The study of the Prioress has attracted much commentary, for here is Chaucerian satire at its very lightest effect, lacking almost entirely in denunciatory consequences.

Madame Eglentyne is not only a member of a religious order, but is the dignified Superior of her convent. Yet, the first satiric note, though it remains unexpressed, is that she is a pilgrim at all, for there were frequent injunctions from the Archbishop forbidding such travels by a member of the nunnery.⁵ Chaucer's first remark concerning the Prioress is that "hir smylyng was ful swete and coy." She seems a person of the world, capable of handling the intricacies of secular affairs; she is not the cloistered saint unaware

of the world's happenings. As a Prioress she enjoyed much of the same prestige as a lord of the manor, perhaps more so because of her religion, but the Church hierarchy and their sermons were continually preaching for less secularity, especially journeys to shrines and travels to manor-houses and inns, and greater seclusion for the nuns.⁶

The Prioress is a gentlewoman by birth, yet there is a straining of her manners which leads the reader to suspect the authenticity of her devotion. She scarcely seems the Prioress-type, and here Chaucer scores his second satiric point:

And sikerly she was of greet desport,
 And ful plesaunt, and anyable of port,
 And peyned hire to countrefete cheere
 Of court, and to been estatlich of manere,
 And to ben holden digne of reverence.

(Gen Pro1 137-41)

The Prioress has the manner of imitating the ways of the court, and, of course, this is scarcely decorous for a nun. When Chaucer indicates through a reference to her French that her nunnery was "the scole of Stratford atte Bowe," the reader senses that this nunnery possesses merely average social prestige; some scholars suggest that this reference forces a comparison of her nunnery with the better endowed and more famous nunnery at Barking, for both neighbor London. At Barking the Prioress would not have needed to imitate courtly manners, because its Prioresses were only from distinguished families.⁷ But our Prioress, Madame Eglentyne, came from a house having no distinguished court patrons. Similarly, her French, as Chaucer is quick to note, sounds like the home-learned insular product of untravelled teachers. She can not enjoy the niceties of Parisian French ("For Frenssh of Parys was to hire unknowe"), and this coupled with her aping of court manners to distinguish her deportment as pretentious, even if only slightly so. John

Manly believes that the personality of the Prioress may be ascribed to a real contemporary of Chaucer's, or perhaps Professor Kuhl's less particular observation of the Prioress' mannerisms is right: "the verses more than amply produced a ripple of laughter, and presumably were enjoyed no less by the author himself, whose two relatives were at Barking at the time."⁶ Regardless of the reality of such a character, Chaucer pokes fun at her mannerisms:

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

(Gen ProI 127-35)

On just these fastidious habits does the poet dwell, to show an almost-too-polite Prioress.

Of her other habits the poet is just as courteous in description, for apparently the conscience of the Prioress can be read in her countenance:

She was so charitable and so pitous
 She wolde wepe, if that she saugh a mous
 Kaught in a trappe, if it were deed or blode.
 Of smale houndes hadde she that she fedde
 With rosted flessh, or milk and wastel-breed.
 But soore wepte she if oon of hem were deed,
 Or if men smoot it with a yerde smerte;
 And al was conscience and tendre herte.

(Gen ProI 143-50)

The poet only relates the facts as he observes them. Nowhere does he censure the hypocritical nature of weeping for a dead mouse, despite the unsanitary habits and the frequent plagues which are caused by such rodents, but certainly she weeps for sentimentalized suffering. It is suggested that it is not her neighbor, but her pets she loves with the whole of her charitable nature.

And all this in spite of ecclesiastical regulations forbidding nuns to have such pets.⁹

Her physical attributes are just as "cynple and coy" as her mannerisms. That she is good looking is no secret, although in good taste the poet forbears from concluding exactly that, but instead compliments her "fair forheed," "nose tretys," "eyen greye as glas" and "hir mouth ful smal, and therto softe and reed." She strikes the reader more as the subject of a romance than the head of a nunnery, and her name and figure suggest that she is rather a dark lady of mystery.

Her appearance is aided by these accoutrements:

Of smal coral aboute hire arm she bar
A peire of bedes, gauded al with grene,
And theron heng a brooch of gold ful sheene,
On which ther was first write a crowned A,
And after Amor vincit omnia.

(Gen Prol 158-62)

Perhaps some vanity dictated to the Prioress that her rosary was most comely when decorated. The brooch was used to decorate herself, and was clearly in defiance of regulations forbidding nuns to wear furs, silks, rings and brooches.¹⁰ More equivocal was her Latin motto, Amor vincit omnia, from Virgil, who originally, in his Eclogues, considered only profane, or worldly, love. John L. Lowes questions whether the poet meant for the Prioress to possess a mind distinguishing between celestial and earthly love.¹¹ Of course, the heart and mind of a nun should be turned towards the heavens, but can the reader determine which the Prioress really feels after the preceding summary by the poet of her earthly vanities? Lowes concludes: "I think she thought she meant love celestial." Perhaps the personal motives are obscure to Madame Eglentyne herself.

One phase of Chaucerian satire is demonstrated in the few lines devoted to introducing the Prioress. The poet must be comprehensive, for it is only in these lines that the reader can learn to know and regard the Prioress; her own prologue is devoted to other tasks. The most noticeable element of this introduction is that the poet refuses to pass judgement on his creation, although he devotes considerable efforts to describing some of her habits and idiosyncrasies. He is enough intrigued by his own creation to give a "living," or real, personality to the nun, yet he refuses to tell the reader all about her, either in dress or mannerisms. He neither praises nor condemns her, almost in the spirit that he feels he ought not because she is a real person and one of God's creations. "Judge not, lest ye be judged." F. N. Robinson writes: "Chaucer's characterization of the Prioress is extremely subtle, and his satire--if it can be called satire at all--is of the gentlest and most sympathetic sort."¹² He has developed his character as a mild mystery, giving some relevant details, leaving some ambiguous clues and impelling the reader to draw his own conclusions.

The range of Chaucer's satire in this introduction--and it can be seen that the portrayal is of such a mild and equivocal sort that satire, with all its charged implications, seems to be dubious nomenclature--ranges from humor to slight deprecation. Perhaps it would be fruitful to know, as Professor Manly suggests, that there was a particular nun whom Chaucer copied, but what the reader can be more certain about is that the poet used the elements of mild satire in portraying her. The poet concentrated on the real and the particular; his detailed account of her person and her personality lacks continuity in some instances, but certainly is concerned with particularities. The poet can be accurate in describing her, but only suggestive in discussing

her character and foibles. Chaucer hints that the Prioress is, as Lowes states, "the delightfully imperfect submergence of the woman in the nun,"¹³ but nowhere does he explicitly say this. He only shows the reader several worldly vanities intertwined with a feminine heart.

"Suggestive" best describes the treatment given the Prioress by the poet, and it is this technique which creates the mildly satiric, almost humorous, vein of her characterization. "If Chaucer did not mean to disparage the character of the Prioress, there are certain laxities in conduct--matters of discipline rather than morals--which he does imply in her case as well as in that of other ecclesiastical figures among the pilgrims."¹⁴ As Robinson notes in this reference, the description of the Prioress depends on "if," only "certain laxities," more "matters of discipline ... than morals," and "imply" in determining Chaucer's approach to his subject. Certainly, the poet says, she should be less worldly, but, the reader asks, could she be more human?

Chaucer's portrait of the Wife of Bath is bipartite, first appearing in the General Prologue, then in her individual prologue. As in his description of the Prioress, the poet presents particular characteristics of her person and her temperament, but here he does not tell the reader everything, only allowing the Wife to partially describe herself through her own narrative. Juxtaposed to his previous mild implications suggesting "certain laxities in conduct," the method of the teller is here more obviously satirical, tending closer to denunciation than before. When the reader first is introduced to "a good Wif was ther of biside Bathe" and then learns of her arts and her previous performances, the direct irony of "good" rings in the reader's ear, and this, while certainly not an overt disapprobation,

first mixes the comic sympathy which was extended toward the Prioress with irony of a more inflexible nature. In the General Prologue the reader learns that this veteran of five marriages and more than five pilgrimages, ranging from Cologne to Jerusalem, is both ebullient and masculine: "Boold was hir face, and fair, and reed of hewe."

The spirit of Chaucer's portraiture of the Wife of Bath, his most complete single characterization of any of the pilgrims, is piquant, as her introduction becomes both a series of confessions and a discussion of theories, on love, marriage and wisdom. The Wife's zest, a spontaneous overflow of words and ideas, is her first quality suggested by the narrator in the General Prologue; he says: "A good Wif was ther of biside Bathe,/ But she was sonde! deef, and that was scathe." There he implies, as any listener to the advice and logic propounded in her own Prologue will attest to, that if she could better hear her own tongue, perhaps she might have talked proportionately less. She bursts on the scene with much the same manner as the blustering Miller and choleric Reeve had earlier disrupted the tranquillity of the pilgrimage. Essentially the Wife's Prologue, an autobiographical account of her own attitudes and actions, serves as a tale; she is, in effect, telling two tales.

The comic spirit of the Wife's tale of herself, her Prologue, is controlled by the tone of gusto which permeates all that she says or does and also by the tone of irony which dictates the reader's reactions. Little that the Wife says is comic by itself; in fact, much of it is baseless, illogical or even self-contradictory. Certainly her own admitted actions do not testify to the sincerity of her beliefs, and a tone of incredibility coupled with a humor issuing from her variations from the norm, perhaps even

distortion, is avoided by her monologue. The reader can laugh as the relationships of the Wife to the rest of her society and its conventions and of the Wife's reactions to her own ideas are delineated; in each there is a comedy of contrast, exposed by the ironic tone seen only in the confusion of ideals, in her logic as well as in her own actions, that besets the Wife's garbled account of herself. Perhaps, she represents a "humor" comedy, where her obsession with the roles of marriage and of sexuality has created a tone which colors her whole autobiography. This is the tone of satire.

If the manner with which she adheres to her ideas were not so determined and so positive, one reaction to her account might be that she is either confused or senile. Because she is so strong in her argument and has embellished each facet of her total outlook toward marriage and sex with so many classical references and attempts at logic, the reader must conclude that she is intelligent, just different.

Authorities, especially those of classical or Biblical references, are not a requisite for veracity to Alice, but she remains the pure empiricist only during her initial remarks; after that she resorts to authority, perfectly willing to play the game of countering one authority with another. It is only a referral to a lack of authority on the part of experience that even momentarily impedes the beginning of her self-confession:

Experience, though noon auctoritee
 Were in this world, is right ynogh for me
 To speke of wo that is in mariage;
 For, lordynges, sith I twelve yeer was of age,
 Thonked be God that is eterne of lyve,
 Housbondes at chirche dore I have had fyve.
 (MBT 1-6)

At the inauguration of her Prologue the reader is introduced to four ideas:

(1) she will base much of her argument on experience, (2) to the Wife a cited authority is recognized as a proof, (3) she will speak of marriage wocs, and (4) she has been married five times, the first at age twelve. This straight-forward beginning ought to have been enough to obtain the full attention of all her companions. But, when the Wife decided to speak of marriage wocs, she referred to herself, not to a tale as the Merchant was later to do. She begins to defend her having married five times, and immediately the comic tone of the zesty, even lusty, speaker and the affixed satire of her performance become apparent.

Because it is recorded that Christ attended only one wedding, the authorities tell the Wife that she should follow this example and take only one husband:

"Thou hast yhad fyve housbondes," quod he,
"And that ilke man that now hath thee
Is noght thyn housbonde," thus seyde he certeyn.
What that he mente therby, I kan nat seyn.
(WBT 17-20)

She chooses not to understand a lesson through a parable; after all, "God bad us for to waxe and multiplie;/ That gentil text kan I wel understonde." Besides, Solomon was a wise and good king, and he had many wives; so also did Abraham and Jacob. These precepts she can understand. God may have defended the chaste life, but where did he command virginity: "And certes, if ther were no seed ysowe,/ Virginitee, thanne wherof sholde it growe?" Alice's most extended fling at a logical discourse involves the comparative state of perfection in which each person lives:

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

Virginite is for those who would seek perfection: "He spak to her that
 weide lyve parfitly;/ And lordynges, by youre leve, that us nat I." This
 theme she pursues, saying that men and women were made for sex and by sex,
 and that, once again, she is not the type made for perfection: "Lat hen be
 broced of pure whete-seed,/ And lat us wyves hoten barly-breed."

When the Pardoner interrupts Dame Alice's discourse and praises her
 for being a "noble prechour in this cas," her prologue has finished one of
 its three principal purposes. She has, in this first segment, defended the
 married state against virginity, and even provided enthusiasm for many
 marriages. Her comic role has hardly begun, for it is one of contrasts and
 in this first section she has generally provided a united front for her
 arguments. The reader sees some small contrasts; first, when her enthusiasm
 for marriage and sex bubbles forth in this statement, "Yblessed by God that
 I have wedded fyve!/ Welcme the sixte, whan that evere he shal," second,
 when her interruption comes from the Pardoner, the eunuch and sole pilgrim
 who probably understood very little of her arguments except that she stated
 her case well and most certainly would have made a fortune had she elected
 to make money preaching as he does. He offers a marked contrast, but she
 rebukes his praise of her teaching abilities, and says, "For myn entente is
 nat but for to pleye." Her theoretical defense of marriage and lust is
 followed by two sections, the account of browbeating her first three husbands,
 and the dramatic adventures she encountered with her fourth and fifth
 husbands. With the second part her confessions begin, and the talkative
 shrew asserts herself not in theory but in practice. The contrast is obvious,
 and the reader notes the distortion between true happiness and her animated
 exertions.

The first three husbands of the Wife remain nameless, and therefore indistinguishable, but they were her three "goode" husbands. Her strict criteria which established them as good were that they were all rich and old. Her treatment of them would scarcely classify her as a good wife, but she insisted that they were happy, and so was she. She has prefaced her account with a defense of marriage and she will follow it with a tale based on the tradition of courtly love, but in her confessions she is anything but the considerate and contrite lover. She wore each of them out with extensive bedtime maneuvers and constant chiding. She first made each give to her all his treasure and land, and she repaid him as only a shrew can. She blamed him for visiting with the neighbors, for not bringing her presents, for keeping her arrayed in dull clothes, for being suspicious--anything to put her husband on the defensive. Her main doctrine was that only when the wife is supreme will the husband be happy and the marriage secure. Her goal was government and her weapons were lying and swearing, and at each she was superior:

Deceite, wepyng, spyynnyng God hath yive
 To woman kyndely, whil that they may lyve.
 And thus of o thyng I avaunte me,
 Attē ende I hadde the better in ech degree,
 By sleighte, or force, or by son maner thyng,
 As by continuell murmur or greccchyng.
 Namely shedde hadden they meschaunce:
 Ther wolde I chide, and do hem no plesaunce;
 I wolde no lenger in the bed abyde,
 If that I felte his arm over my syde,
 Til he had paid his raunson unto me;
 Thanne wolde I suffre hym do his ryvettee.

(WBT 401-12)

Here, too, the Wife relies on authority, but her only available source is from the housewife proverbs of her times. She claims she did not truly want his treasure or his land, but in order to keep the marriage stable she

continues to plague her husband. "With empty ~~some~~ men may none ~~housbonde~~ lure;" here the husband learns a lesson too. When the husband finally yields to all her demands, she consoles him: "Oon of us two moste bowen, doutelees;/ And sith a man is moore resonable/ Than woman is, ye moste been suffrable." Her logic conflicts with itself, her practices contrast with her earlier sermonizing on the rewards of idyllic marriage. A tension exists between the true wisdom of her preaching and her own "purveyaunce" and shameless practices.¹⁵ Within her own discourse the term wit is ironically construed to mean "deceit and bullying." To be wise is to become self-indulgent, to treat all the passions and lusts of the body and mind. Of course, the antithetical positions of such terms as wit and folly aggravate her confusion; she does not distinguish between that which is good and just, and that which is pleasurable. Her comic situation originates in this confusion, as she presents within herself the polarity between wisdom and folly.

The juxtaposition of what she thinks and what she actually is continues as she describes the relations she maintained with her bad husbands, numbers four and five. "My fourthe housbonde was a revelour;/ That is to seyn, he hadde a paramour;" so Alice describes him. She was young, then, and loved to dance and sing, and especially after drinking wine "on Venus moste I thynke." Yet, her husband beat her with a staff and tried to curtail her activities and rule her passions. This, of course, presented a good fight for the Wife, and she responded with all her wiles and personal touches of torment. "Ther was no wight, save God and he, that wiste,/ In many wise, how soore I hym twiste." Her attitudes toward her fourth husband, to whom she refers as "the foule cherl, the swyn," are as confused as her positions regarding marriage bliss. She hated him enough to torment him, but now

her thoughts return to a well-wishing for him:

That in his owene grece I made hym frye
For angre, and for verray jalousye.
By God! in erthe I was his purgatorie,
For which I hope his soule be in glorie.

(WBT 187-90)

He had been with her in the good old days, which are no longer for either of them. He is dead and she has lost her beauty and youth; only her youthful enthusiasm remains:

But, Lord Crist! whan that it remembreth me
Upon my youthe, and on my jolitee,
It tikleth me aboute myn herte roote.
Unto this day it dooth myn herte boote
That I have had my world as in my tyme.
But age, allas! that al wole envenyme,
Hath me biraft my beautee and my pith.
Lat go, farewell! the devel go therwith!

(WBT 169-76)

At the funeral of her fourth husband the Wife obeyed her dictum for foresight, even there looking for a fifth husband; "whan that I saugh hym go/ After the beere, me thoughte he hadde a paire/ Of legges and of feet so clene and faire." Jankyn was twenty years old, half her age, and a former clerk at Oxford. He was a poor man and, when married, beat Alice with regularity; however "in cure bed he was so fressh and gay" that she could refuse him nothing. For her explanation of her own actions she turns to proverb and to astrology. In her statement of her love for Jankyn she betrays some secrets of women:

That thogh he hadde me bete on every bon,
He koude wynne agayn my love anon.
I trowe I loved hym best, for that he
Was of his love daungerous to me.
We women han, if that I shal nat lye,
In this matere a queynte fantasye;
Wayte what thyng we may nat lightly have,
Therafter wol we crie al day and crave.
Forbode us thyng, and that desiren we;
Pre . . . on us faste, and thanne wol we fle.

(WBT 511-20)

For her own refections, she was born under Taurus, with the unusual conjunction of Venus and Mars occurring at that time.¹⁶ So, she was bound to be both lustful and rancorous, easily temperamental and often bellicose.

Her young husband was also fond of relating the authorities, and he used his learning and books to deprecate the goodness of women. He cited the Bible, the works of Theophrastus, St. Jerome and Ovid and the lives of Paris, Solomon and Adam to show that woman has brought about man's ruin. His list seems all-inclusive; for Jankyn, woman indeed begins with woe. Alice had once before ripped several pages from a book belonging to her husband, and for her reward she received a thump on the ear, and a resulting deafness. When she had heard enough of his sermoning and proverbs ("A fair woman, but she be chaast also,/ Is lyk a gold ryng in a sowes nose."), she ripped some pages from the book as he was reading from it. Jankyn retaliated by smiting her on the head, so stunning her that she fell prostrate and assumed the look of one near death. Alice waited for him to apologize and draw near, hit him and at once achieved final superiority. Her estate, which she had once entrusted to him, became hers again and she ruled as sovereign of her household.

The comedy of the Wife draws to a conclusion. She follows her preamble with a tale of an old hag, the Loathly Lady, who achieves mastery over a young knight by telling him the answer to the Queen's question and thus saving his life. Once the knight acknowledges her mastery she metamorphoses from an ugly hag to a beautiful young maiden, and eternal happiness is achieved for the now-young couple.

The Wife's many arguments for woman's superiority must have seemed a supreme joke for the poet, Chaucer, for the late fourteenth century was a

time when medievalism occupied much of the traditional writings.¹⁷ Chaucer neither praises nor blames her. He lets her have her say and in this her many charges of cruelty return only to herself; she, in effect, exposes many of the weaknesses of her own sex. The incongruities of what she considers good and bad, and the result of how in the end she respected, even affectionately, the characters and actions of her last two husbands, are two instances of comic juxtaposition. There is irony in the domestic Alice battling the bookish Jankyn, finally respecting him, as she did the fourth husband, for having fought a good fight. After all, the Wife, more clearly than anyone else, knows that no man has a chance against her.

There is some poetic justice that an unnatural marriage between a forty-year-old shrew and a twenty-year-old clerk results in such harsh handling for the Wife. In the end, the comedy results from the tone dependent upon the mirror tradition, where "what the characters ought to be and what they are" are two distinct entities.¹⁸ The Wife has made an enthusiastic attempt to combine the two entities, transforming herself, as she did her tale's Loathly Lady, into her dreams of lost beauty and youth.

Again Chaucer has achieved a satiric portrait without inveighing against the Wife's many abnormal practices and beliefs. The poet respects his creation for her distinguishing characteristics, and is careful not to censure them. The material of love and marriage was certainly a much discussed topic in Chaucer's time, as it is in our own, but seldom have such radical views been scanned with so little prejudice on the part of the author. Editor Robinson notes that "some elements in his description of her are undoubtedly derived from the account of La Vieille and from speeches of the Jealous husband, Le Jaloux, in the Roman de la Rose, and the influence of that work

is apparent in many passages throughout her Prologue."¹⁹ However, the forcefulness of the Wife's characterization, with its almost fanatic gusto eliciting from the reader an appreciation of her exhilarating performance, is original, and could in all probability have been partly drawn from life, as both Robinson and Manly suggest. As in most good satire, the poet's materials refer to an individual with particular traits; here, as with the Prioress, the poet refuses to cast judgement on his subject. Her portrait is more extensive than that of the Prioress, both in satiric range, for it is more suggestive of denunciation, and in range of characterization, for the portrait, like the life of the person, is fuller and demands more exhaustive efforts to be comprehended.

The only character in the pilgrimage who can rival the Wife's personality for artistic invention and depth is the Pardoner, and his development also extends the range of Chaucer's satire in the direct method to the poet's extreme suggestions of denunciation. It remains true that Chaucer refuses to judge, but the characteristics which are attributed to this pilgrim force an opinion from the reader. He is, however, such a dramatic creation that part of the reader's antipathy toward all he represents is neutralized and the reader, conforming with the attitudes of the pilgrim's creator, must acknowledge superior artistic inventiveness. The satire, dealing with a standard target of ridicule--a member of a religious order seeking monetary gain, or earthly reward--is the most censorious of all. Only the strength and artistry of the Pardoner's fervent sermon, or tale, protect him from reprehension by the reader.

The description of the Pardoner in the General Prologue is one of villainy, and he strikes the reader, even one without a knowledge of the

...a professional Londoner, as a person with peculiar physical traits and perhaps debased character. Riding with his compeer, the contemptible Summoner, at the rear of the procession, the Pardoner certainly poses the oddest figure among the individuals:

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

(Gen ProI 675-91)

This is his strange appearance, with wax-yellow hair, glaring eyes and effeminate features. Fellow pilgrims must have felt uncomfortable, and at first the Host suspects the merits of his storytelling. What sort of tale should such a fellow tell? Yet, Chaucer gives to the Pardoner "one of the great performances of the Canterbury pilgrimage"²⁰ for his tale, and so the reader can not judge the man and his follies on the basis of an indecorous or tedious story. The total performance of the Pardoner, beginning with the Host's appeal for a tale and ending with the Pardoner's communication with the pilgrims to forgive his momentary relapse following his tale, provides the reader with the sharpest direct satire among the Canterbury pilgrims. Again, the poet refuses to judge the moral fabric of his creation; again, the character is delineated by isolated yet real particularities which, despite the satirical bent, bring the character to life; again, the

Reader is left with an impression of a politician--not looking for the Pardoner's despicable professional methods, although his talents were admittedly considerable, and a certain liking for this odd, but abashedly forthright, vagary of nature as seen through the poet's eyes. "In the Pardoner's Prologue we witness Chaucer's most subtle comment upon evil emanating from the heart and mind of a man committed not only by nature but by instinct and intellectual conviction to opposing the good."²¹

The reader's first reaction, especially from the description of his gnarled physique in the General Prologue, is that the Pardoner is evil personified, and this reaction is further supported by the professional diatribe in his own prologue and tale. However, the obvious quickly turns to the subtle, for this is not the typical "expose-the-hypocrisy of sham religious fakirs" which provides the moral to so many sermons and exempla. With Chaucer's ending to the Pardoner's performance, the reaction is changed from the obvious satire of the evil gnome representing the vice of a politically powerful Church to one of uncertain intentions. The chief performer captures not only the reader's enmity, but also his respect, however grudgingly given, for his intense depravity and his curious attractiveness. The satire, while more denunciatory than in either the Prioress' or Wife's introduction, becomes less clear, because the tone is confusing and the humor, a trademark of the previous, lighter satire, is evident but more bitter. The treatment of the subject in a satirical manner is conventional as long as it exposes the hypocrisy of religious orders, but when the tone forces a shift of the reader's attention to the motivation of the Pardoner, the satiric spirit remains but the tone, were it a color, would be very black indeed. Although most critics have rejected Kittredge's

claim that the Pardoner is a "lost soul,"²² their reasons generally relate to the realism with which the poet has given "life" to the character and their hope that no "live" characters are "lost souls." To say the least, the Pardoner is a baffling figure.

A pardoner generally engaged in three activities: selling indulgences, selling relics, and preaching. By Chaucer's time the Church practice of sending pardoners, or quæstors, on missions to preach and collect money brought only discredit to itself, for often the pardoners, many of them priests, misrepresented their own powers in order to obtain material gains.²³ The Pardoner begins his prologue by telling his fellow-pilgrims about his relics and Papal bulls. He exposes his own profession; after telling how he promises poor villagers that his sheep's bone and mitten will cure diseases, raise crops, restore health to animals and prevent jealousy, the Pardoner admits:

By this gauge have I wonne, yeer by yeer,
 An hundred mark sith I was pardoner.
 I stonde lyk a clerk in my pulpet,
 And whan the lewed peple is down yset,
 I preche so as ye han herd bi foore,
 And telle an hundred false japes moore.
 Thanne payne I me to strecche forth the nekke,
 And est and west upon the peple I bekke,
 As dooth a dove sittyng on a berne.
 .yne handes and my tonge goon so yerne
 That it is joye to se my bisynesse.
 Of avarice and of swich cursednesse
 Is al my prechyng, for to make hem free
 To yeven hir pens, and namely unto me,
 For myn entente is nat but for to wynne,
 And nothyng for correccioun of synne.

(PardT 389-404)

He establishes his own spirit of professional pride, and at the same time earns the reader's disgust. Nowhere in the Canterbury Tales does Chaucer so

castigate vice as he sees it in the loathsome display of the Pardoner's talents. The Pardoner confesses:

I wol noon of the apostles countefete;
 I wol have maneie, wolle, chese, and whete,
 Al were it yeven of the povereste page,
 Or of the povereste wydwe in a village,
 Al sholde hir children sterve for fanyne.
 May, I wol drynke licour of the vynes,
 And have a joly wenche in every toun.

(PardT 447-53)

Through the use of exaggeration, even to the point of absurdity, the poet achieves an initial assault on vice in his satire of the Pardoner's profligate ways. Yet, the satire of the Pardoner becomes less one-dimensional as his character and mannerisms become strengthened by the energy of his narrative.

After telling his tale, which is a conflation of the attributes of a variety of literary types--confession, sermon, exemplum, moral tale--and further emphasizing his preacher's creed (though not his personal criterion), Radix malorum est Cupiditas ("Avarice is the root of all Evil"), the Pardoner attempts to sell his wares to his fellow-pilgrims:

Now, goode men, God foryeve yow youre trespass,
 And ware yow fro the synne of avarice!
 Nyn hooly pardoun may yow alle warice,
 So that ye offre nobles or sterlynges,
 Or ciles silver broches, spoones, rynges.
 Boweth youre heed under this hooly bulle!
 Cometh up, ye wyves, offreth of youre wolle!
 Your names I entre heer in my rolle anon;
 Into the blisse of hevne shul ye gon.
 I yow assoille, by nyn heigh power,
 Yow that wol offre, as cleue and eek as cleer
 As ye were born. --And lo, sires, thus I preche.
 And Jhesu Crist, that is oure soules leche,
 So graunte yow his pardoun to receyve,
 For that is best; I wol yow nat deceyve.

(PardT 904-18)

The undoing of his wickedness comes in the same lecture where the Pardoner most explicitly directs the attentions of his fellow-travelers toward his own sins of deceit and avarice. He offers to sell them relics and to let them beseech his pardon, and is only quieted by an angry rebuff and a threat of retaliation from the Host. This Pardoner becomes so angry that he remains mute: "So wrooth he was, no word he wolde he seye."

What prompted these reactions by the Pardoner? And why did the poet shift the concern of his satire from a statement of institutional decay to a portrait of personal motivation? It is precisely the exploration of personal inducement which the poet attempts to discern. There has been some argument, notably Frederick Tupper's "The Pardoner's Tavern,"²⁴ concerning the drunkenness of the Pardoner and expressing this as his reason for exposing himself. He proposes that the tale was told in a tavern, to lend credibility to the teller's inebriation and further enhance the appropriateness of the didactic sermonizing of his tale. But the Pardoner in his prologue and with his closing remarks is only himself, and Chaucer's satire relates the demonic temperament of the teller to his gnomish figure. The vigor of the exposition and his lapse, when the Pardoner tries to sell his fake relics to the same pilgrims to whom he just previously exposed himself, prompts the reader to consider that for a brief moment the Pardoner comes alive to his own profligate and lost ways. Whether he is carried away by his own professional enthusiasm and pride or by a rapture in his own abilities now pitched by fervor as he preaches against sin, the Pardoner has no particular motivation for personal gains here. According to Kittredge this mood lasts only a brief moment, for there is no question of true repentance or honest reformation as its product.²⁵ Most readers, however,

refuse to be so easily convinced that this wily craftsman is capable, or ever capable, even momentarily, of true repentance. Whatever his true feelings, the Pardoner retreats with "I wol yow not deceyve."

Chaucer's satire exposes personal wickedness and hypocrisy. In its energetic method the portrait employs a perverseness of detail and description to fully expose the perverted soul. The liveliness of the character brings vivid realism sharply to the reader's attention, and this satiric portrait, more damning than any of Chaucer's other portraits, offers both good entertainment and poetic artistry at a fine pitch. The discerning poet, even in his realistic and very personal sketch, only reveals and still refuses to condemn.

III

Chaucer's second method of satiric exposure involves the dramatic process, or revelation through the actions of the players. The dramatic presentation is used by the poet again and again, for it is only through dialogue that the reader comes to know the Host, Harry Bailey, or either of the pilgrims, the Miller and the Reeve, at all. Whereas the Wife and the Pardoner in essence preach a sermon about themselves; the words of the other characters seldom refer to themselves, only to their reactions toward an occurrence or an idea. Chaucer achieves a fine satiric description of religious attitudes in the belligerency which exists between the Friar and the Summoner.

The subject matter evolving from this verbal dispute, the exposure of hypocrisy and folly within religious orders, was a conventional target for satirists, and Chaucer's irreverent treatment of their practices and personal greed was a common practice. In the contention between the two religious

figures, Chaucer's satiric elements are developed out of the action upon which their stories are dependent. Here the satire of the two bickering pilgrims achieves a social implication involving their religious traditions. Later, the same dramatic technique will be used to personify a character, and achieve a personal revelation in the tale of the Merchant.

Often the target of social criticism, friars were not popular in England by Chaucer's time. Their orders were an attempt to reassert the virtues of obedience, chastity and poverty, and they were sent from Rome to preach and teach, living by begging. They were vested with the powers of absolution and were entrusted to deliver the sacraments, but because they were vagabonds they frequently superseded the local priest who, rigorously following Canon Law, excluded the corrupt and undesirable. The ambitious friar, getting paid on a commission basis, would absolve virtually anyone, and hence religious order disintegrated. Furthermore, the friars quickly abandoned the policy fostered by their founder, St. Francis of Assisi, of maintaining no possessions, for many of them owned ornamented saddles and other goods; a supposed desire for poverty was often betrayed by their full and ruddy cheeks. Still, they attracted congregations, for preaching was their principal talent. "In an age devoted to the pulpit, the friars were the masters of the art, far superior to the average parish priest whose comparative ignorance of theology often hampered him and forced him to reduce his sermons to brief comments lacking the oratory of a skilled preacher. The friars became successful,"²⁶

The attack on friars, almost as old as Chaucer's time as the one hundred and sixty year old institution itself, concerned their practices of confession and of mendicancy. Generally, the arguments of their attackers

claimed (with much justification) that confessions through friars robbed the local priest of both authority and money. Furthermore, such a confession should be regarded more as a purchase than a true penitential sacrifice. With this loss at the parish level the entire order of the Church was weakened.²⁷ On the topic of begging, contemporary critics pointed out that begging is a social and economic evil never endorsed by the Bible and the teachings of Jesus.²⁸ Certainly Jesus never recommended that an able-bodied man depend on the labors of others for his own provision. Mendicancy forced the considerations of the friars to be distracted from the Lord's work, and their attentions were turned toward money and the favors of prosperous men. Too often luxuries were the results of their begging, and the friars refused to be content with only the staff of life. Such arguments by Chaucer's contemporaries, implemented and reflected in Chaucer's coverage of the Friar and his mendicant order, were prevalent in his time and form the basis for Chaucer's social and religious satire. Only the memory of the great tradition of St. Francis was still alive, and the disgusting performances of friars were often the targets for satirists.

The role of the satirist is not necessarily to tell the whole truth or be entirely fair to his subjects, just as an idealized portrait of the local parish priest is not the complete truth, but the satirist assumes the responsibility of reproving evil, even if his treatment is exaggerated and unjust. In the eyes of the satirist a friar was one by whom young women were frequently impregnated and by whom poor people were defrauded. These evils were the subject of Chaucer's feud between the Friar and the Summoner.

The direct satiric description of the Friar in the General Prologue is typically detailed and personalized. Chaucer discusses his lechery

("He hadde been al meny a marriage/ Of yonge women as his owene doot") and his uselessness ("He was the best beggere in his hous"). He was quick to grant absolution for money and if possible he concentrated his efforts on the rich:

He knew the tavernes wel in every toun
And everich hostiler and tappestere
Bet than a lazar or a beggestere;
For unto swich a worthy man as he
Acorded nat, as by his facultee,
To have with sike lazars aqueyntaunce.
It is nat honest, it may nat avaunce,
For to deelen with no swich poraille,
But al with riche and selleres of vitaille.
And over al, ther as profit sholde arise,
Curteis he was and lowely of servyse.

(Gen Prol 240-50)

Muriel Bowden suggests that the Friar was modeled after a particular friar Chaucer knew, and adds that the Friar's name, Hubert, was uncommon for religious men.²⁹ Other traits, such as lisping and his neck as white as the fleur-de-lis, are humorous suggestions of both his attractiveness and his worthlessness.

The description of the Friar is further complemented by his verbal confrontation with the Summoner, for it is in this dispute and the two dramatic narratives told by the disputants that yield the indirect, but scarcely less subtle, castigation of the practices of their religious orders. A summoner was clearly the Church's henchman, whose duty it was to summon to ecclesiastical court those offenders of the Church's canons. In each diocese the archdeacon was the potentate of the moral law, and under his order and in his court persons were convicted of immorality, witchcraft, perjury or heresy. The summoner, acting as a police constable, often used the power of his office to extort personal gains from his victims, with the promise that, for

a price, the award of the court could be delivered. "The summoners were clearly hated, and justifiably held to be corrupt and wicked in themselves as though the sin they admit with had in some way rubbed off on them. Archdeacons, however, were similarly accused, especially of being bribable."³⁰

The physical appearance of Chaucer's Summoner matched his shady occupational evils; he is described: "lecherous as a sparwe,/ With scalled browes blake and piled berd./ Of his visage children were aferd." The lecherous Summoner often altered the allotting of justice by accepting bribes from his prey:

He wolde techen him to have noon awe
In swich caas of the ercedekenys curs,
But if a mannes soule were in his purs;
For in his purs he sholde ypunysshed be.
"Purs is the ercedekenys helle," seyde he.

(Gen ProI 654-8)

In the best vein of poetic justice and comic spirit the meting of literary justice for the Friar and the Summoner, both personally and institutionally, is done by themselves. In the drama of their two tales each exposes the other, and the rancor of the teller is in neither case reason for the reader not to believe that in this dramatic way Chaucer is indicting them for corruption and folly. The blame is shared equally by themselves and by the religious orders which foster such depravity.

The bickering Friar announces that in his tale he will brand summoners for what they really are:

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

(FrT 1279-85)

The Host attempts to halt the debate before it develops, but the Summoner interjects that the Friar may say as he pleases, for he will be fully repaid with a tale of what "it is to be a flaterynge lymytour," or friar. They each proceed to expose the other.

The Friar's tale, more a fable than the retributive yarn of the Summoner, involves the extortionate practices of an unscrupulous summoner whose depravities are cataloged:

This false thief, this somonour, quod the Frere,
 Hadde alwey bawdes redy to his hond,
 As any hawk to lure in Engeland,
 That tolde hym al the secree that they knewe;
 For hire acquoyntance was nat come of newe.
 They weren his approwours prively.
 He took hymself a greet profit therby;
 His maister knew nat alwey what he wan.
 Withouten mandement a lewed man
 He koude sonne, on peyne of Cristes curs,
 And they were glade for to fille his purs,
 And make hym grete fiestes atte nale.
 And right as Judas hadde purces smale,
 And was a theef, right swich a theef was he;
 His maister hadde but half his duetes.
 He was, if I shal yeven hym his laude,
 A theef, and eek a somnour, and a baude.

(FrT 1338-54)

The teller gives equal stature to each of these three professions, for in his opinion, a summoner is no better than a thief or a bawd.

The summoner of the tale meets the Devil, and both feign to be officers of the law, for the summoner "dorste nat, for verray filthe and shame seye that he was a somonour." The Devil and the Summoner make good helpmates, for they each know that extortion is their province: "looke how thou rydest for the same entente." The Devil comments that sometimes he acts as God's instrument, and pays tribute to the Divine Authority for achieving his will "in diverse art and diverse figures." The teller insinuates that the Summoner is God's means of using the Devil incarnate. In the tale the two hear a

curser consign his wayward name and entropic art to the Devil, but the Devil refuses to accept such damned objects because he knows the blasphemer does not mean what the emotions of the moment force him to say. Later, when the Summoner is damned to Hell by an old widow from whom he admittedly tried to extort money, the Devil asks the widow if her curses were heartfelt, and when she answers in the affirmative the Devil takes his prizes, the Summoner and the pan, to Hell, "where as that somonours han hir heritage."

The Summoner's reply is immediate: "This Frere bosteth that he knoweth helle,/ And God it woot, that it is litel wonder;/ Freres and feendes been but lyte asonder." His tale concerns a friar whose task it was "to preche, and eek to begge, it is no doute," and he deceived the people who donated goods in return for his prayers, for after he left their neighborhood he planed away the names which supposedly were permanently engraved on his ivory tablets. The Friar of the tale is quick with his compliments toward the wife and repetitious with references to himself as a model of Christ, "and fische Cristen mennes soules." The glib Friar apparently knows everything; he saw the dead child ascend into Heaven and his authoritative sermon on charity is almost as persuasive as it is prolix. However, the ailing Thomas tires of the Friar's tendentious loquacity and artfully gives to the windy Friar an appropriate gift which must be shared equally with his brothers, whom Thomas supposes justly deserve such a portion.

The narrative comedy of the two religious combatants draws to an end, and at the conclusion of their satiric performances the reader is both enlightened and amused. The verbal pugilists are scarcely offended, because, as the poem's episodes have indicated, each is so crass as to be hardened toward his own vices and spiteful toward the other's. To the reader the malice of each teller is coupled with various ironies, especially in the case

of the Knight's Tale,³¹ and both the comic and satiric intentions blend with the gravity of the latter to project the ideological and social meanings. Chaucer is supremely aware in this dramatic contest that actions speak louder than words, and, in spite of any admiration which the reader might fashion for the achieved skills of the contestants, the satire is markedly denunciatory on the social level.

Using similar dramatic techniques, Chaucer reveals the character of the Merchant, and this satiric portrait yields a good perspective of an individual's follies on a personal level. In the General Prologue the poet's few descriptive facts about the Merchant indicate that he has a forked beard and supposedly is an entrepreneur who has lost money while trading in the Low Countries. The tale of the Merchant becomes satiric because in January, the tale's central figure, the reader recognizes the Merchant himself.

The comedy of the Merchant's Tale develops through a tone of mordancy which deprives the tale of the genial humor often developed by realism, or animalism; this missing humor is replaced by a seeming intelligence and unpitying analysis of the state of decay of old January and his marriage plight. In this story the sourness of the narrator permeates throughout, and the reader neither sympathizes with the central figure nor laughs at the comedy of adultery. Chaucer has given this comedy such bitter intonations that its mockery is often not humorous and its triumphs are little motivation for rejoicing.

Like the Reeve's Tale, this is the story of an old man being outwitted by youth; however, unlike the former tale, even with the Reeve's moralizing on pride which made the tale somewhat unusual for a fabliau, the Merchant's tale extends in tone and meaning far beyond the fabliau-source and into allegory. Critic J. Burrow says that "its persistent irony, the seriousness

which informs even the farcial climax," converts it into a moral fable.³² The meaning is coupled with a generalizing impulse, characteristic of allegory. The fabliau-source of the tale can not, however, be denied, and Germaine Dempster's detective work on the origin of the tale of deception concludes that the Italian Novellino narrative should probably be credited as its source.³³ Boccaccio included a similar tale in his Decameron (Day 7, Tale 9) but with a significant difference: the old man sees the pear-tree incident with the normal vision which he had maintained throughout the tale, but is merely convinced that he is seeing an optical illusion. In Chaucer's, the old man is blind and later duped; the tone is bitter.

There are relatively few events in the tale, and most of the reader's attentions are focused on the conversation and verbal philosophizing of the satire's characters. Here tone is as important as action. In the tale a worthy knight living in Lombardy has reached the age of sixty, has remained single his entire life and fervently wishes to change his marital status. Old January invites a discussion with his two brothers on the propriety of his decision, but he finally establishes the criteria his future spouse must meet; she must be under thirty and good-looking. After searching, he meets young May, who turns his head and fulfills all his qualifications, and they are joined in holy matrimony, "his paradys terrestre." Unfortunately, the old man does not provide a paradise for May, and she falls in love with the young, handsome servant, Danyan. After January becomes physically blind, May decides that she and her true lover can maintain a physical, amorous affair of their own in the top of a pear-tree; however the god Pluto grants January his eyesight back, and January spies the lovers in his pear-tree. The goddess Proserpine rescues May by granting her sufficient wit to continue to deceive the old knight by claiming that her actions were prompted by a foreknowledge

that such activities would restore his sight. He believes her, and remains as spiritually blind as he once was physically.

The bones of the Merchant's tale is first announced in his prologue: "Weeping and wailing, care and oother sorwe/ I knowe ynogh," and he explains the cause of his grief:

Al forke firs Meost, I have yowdele bee
Thise wretchede lye, and Iowre hit, pynke;
And yet, I knowe, he that all his lyve
Myfles hadd been, though that man wolde him ryve
Unto the herte, he koude in no manere
Tellen so wachel sorwe as I now heere
Koude tellen of my wyves cursednesse!

(Merchant 1233-39)

The bitter, rancorous teller soon sets his ironic mood, as his story's hero chooses to be married, and he ironically praises the married state:

Noon oother lyf, seyde he, is worth a bene;
For wedlok is so esy and so clene,
That in this world it is a paradys.
Thus seyde this olde knyght, that was so wys.

(Merchant 1263-66)

The purpose of his belated undertaking is comfort in old age and an heir:

And certainly, as sooth as God is kyng,
To take a wyf it is a glorious thyng,
And namely whan a man is oold and hoor;
Thanne is a wyf the fruyt of his tresor.
Thanne sholde he take a yong wyf and a feir,
On which he myghte engendren hym an heir
And lede his lyf in joye and in solas.

(Merchant 1267-73)

That the later cuckolding of an old man, who is temporarily enthralled with the absolutes of the beauty and necessity of wedded life, can develop into a comedy is due to the many erroneous judgements which January forces on himself; because of his lack of common sense the tale becomes one of distortion, of the folly of passions dictating to the reason, of common

some thing wicked out of word, and the reader sympathizes no sympathy for
 the old man. At the very first, January is the recipient of sound advice
 from the doctor: "I browe sayment wylly, good diligence/
 Thy good to kepe, than thyn owne wyf," and "And if thou take a wyf unto
 thyn hoold,/ Ful lightly mynstow been a cokewold." But January knows better;
 he knows that "marriage is a ful greet sacrament," that Eve helped Adam
 make a paradise on earth, and that a wife is a good worker and a person who
 "wasteth never a deel." From these arguments January provides examples
 from the Bible, such as Jacob and Rebecca, Esther, Judith, and also advice
 from the Romans, Seneca and Cato. Certainly, it seems that even an old man
 set in his ways could see that with Eve came the fall of Man, that Judith
 slew Olofermus, that a wife is scarcely an economical addition to the house-
 hold.³⁴ But January prattles on: while God's other gifts "alle been
 yiftes of Fortune,/ That passes as a shadwe upon a wal," not so with a
 woman, "a wyf wol laste, and in thyn hous endure;" further, she is obedient,
 "she seith nat ones 'nay,' whan he seith 'ye.'/ 'Do this,' seith he;
 'Al redy, sire,' seith she." These two will return to haunt the old knight
 after his marriage.

That senseless January deserves nothing but contempt is further
 evidenced when he receives counsel from his two brothers. The qualifica-
 tions which will satisfy the old lord are announced, and Justinus is repelled:

Now, brother syn, be pacient, I preye,
 Syn ye han seyde, and harkneth what I seye.
 Senek, amonges othere wordes wyse,
 Seith that a man ought hym right wel avyse . . .

I warne yow wel, it is no childes pley
 To take a wyf withouten avyserent.
 Men shoulde enquire, this is myn assent,
 Whether she be wys, or sobre, or drenkelewe,
 Or proud, or elles ootherweys a shrew . . .

But natheles it aghte ynough tuffine
 With any wyf, if so were that she hadde
 Two goodes thewes than hire vices hadde.

(MerchF 1521-24, 1530-34, 1540-42)

For this same advice, January, who had previously used Seneca as a reference, expostulates, "straw for thy Senek, and for thy proberbes! I counte nat a panyer ful of herbes/ of scole-ternes," and then turns to his other brother, Placebo, the yes-man. "I holde youre owene conseil is the beste," says trusty Placebo, and with such a recommendation January plunges headlong into his own whisnies. In a gesture uncharacteristic of our gentle poet, Chaucer uses this as a bitter attack on all men of the court who are there only to court political favors. Says the fool Placebo:

A ful greet fool is any conseilour
 That scrveth any lord of heigh honour,
 That dar presume, or elles thenken it,
 That his conseil sholde passe his lordes wit.

(MerchF 1501-04)

One final counsel remains for January to settle his senseless senses; if marriage brings a paradisiacal state to man on earth, is he still entitled to the eternal bliss often promised in the Bible? Justinus fears to answer falsely although he here uses some tact: "Dispeire yow noht, but have in youre memerie,/ Paraunter she may be youre purgatorie!"

Until the selection of May and the marriage ceremony are performed, the tale has consisted mostly of dialogue, of philosophy with irrationality pitted against wisdom. With the union of the old lecher and the young maiden the tale returns more to the genre of the fabliau. It will still maintain "a perceptible drift towards allegory,"³⁵ with its allusions to paradise and January's garden, to blindness and deception, but the elements of portraiture and reality in detail become more important. The intellectual arguments with Justinus and Placebo, an ethical bent uncharacteristic

of the *Epilogue*,³⁵ are neglected and the reader's attention is focused on January.

January is the only character well developed by the teller. The reader is uncompassionate towards him, first for his foolishness, second for his acts prompted by a combination of old age and lechery. The decorated palace and the merry old man are to participate in the scene "whan tendre youthe hath wedded stoupyng age." Two thoughts enter old January's head:

This Januarie is ravysshed in a trauunce
At every tyme he looked on hir face;
But in his herte he gan hire to manace
That he that nyght in armes wolde hire streyne
Harder than evere Parys dide Eleyne.

(MerchT 1750-54)

But January will never be a match for Paris's anorous strains, even in his own mind, if the wedding guests persist:

And that the nyght wolde lasten evermo.
I wolde that al this peple were ago.
And finally he dooth al his labour,
As he best nyghte, savyng his honour,
To haste hen fro the mete in subtil wyse.

(MerchT 1763-67)

To bolster his already blooming ego, the lecher indulges in aphrodisiacs "t'encresen his corage." The wedding bed is sanctified, ironically so, for only grisly details of the physical juxtaposition of young May and old January follow:

The bryde was broght abedde as stille as stoon;
And whan the bed was with the preest yblessed,
Out of the chambre hath every wight hym dressed;
And Januarie hath faste in armes take
His fresche May, his paradys, his make.
He lulleth hire, he kisseth hire ful ofte;
With chikke Brustles of his berd unsofte,
Lyk to the skyn of houndfyssh, sharp as brere--
For he was shave al newe in his manere--
He rubbeth hire aboute hir tendre face.

(MerchT 1818-27)

After claiming: "I can say do no synne with his wyf, / Ne hurtis hymselfen with his owne maye," other details of the wedding night betray the spirit of bliss for those involved:

Thus laboureth he til that the day gan daw;e;
 And thanne he taketh a sop in fyn claree,
 And upright in his bed thanne sitteth he,
 And after that he sang ful loude and cleere,
 And kiste his wyf, and made wantown cheere.
 He was al coltish, ful of ragerye,
 And ful of jargon as a flekked pye.
 The slakke skyn aboute his nekke shaketh,
 Whil that he sang, so chaunteth he and craketh.
 But God woot what that May thoughte in hir herte,
 Whan she hym saugh so sittynge in his sherte,
 In his nyght-cappe, and with his nekke lene;
 She preyeth nat his playyng worth a bene.
 Thanne seide he thus, "My reste wol I take;
 Now day is come, I may no lenger wake."
 And down he leyde his heed, and sleep til pryne.
 (MerchT 1242-57)

After such selfishness, such egotism, the reader is prepared for the vanquishing of such an old lecher.

The other two human beings in the last half of the tale are May and Danyan, and their characters remain undeveloped and, therefore, do not commit the sympathetic involvement of the reader. May is a type character, much like the daughter in the Reeve's tale, to show the foolishness of an old man and to be seduced by the courtly lover. This young lover, Danyan, suffers as Troilus does, from courtly agony, with the sexual pleasure as his only goal. However, the reader fails to sympathize with him, for, like Kay, he is debased by the poet. His aches are those of a courtly lover, but his actions and the reactions of his object of love scarcely are. He smuggles a letter to her, only to have it read while she is in the bathroom and have it torn up and cast into the privy. His actions hardly match those of a true knight bound to the code, as he sees fit to

side behind a bush while playing fastie with both old January and young May. The final scene of poetic justice, the seduction in a pear-tree, is somehow fit only for Danyan and May.

The physical comedy returns to the depressing character of January, a lecher and an egotist. John McGalliard calls the comedy of January, a "humor comedy,"³⁷ as Ben Jonson later described his own comedy in Every Man Out of his Humour ("As when some one peculiar quality/ Doth so possess a man, that it doth draw/ All his affects, his spirits and his powers/ In their confections, all to run one way"). Certainly January's humor is that he can not penetrate the world of others, that he thinks only of his own desires and refuses to see others as they are. With the use of physical blindness the poet deftly returns the reader to thoughts of irony, to thoughts of January's spiritual blindness.

That January's physical blindness is relieved, only to prove that his senselessness compels him to remain blind toward every action contradictory to his own selfish interests, focuses the reader's attention on other of Chaucer's ambivalent but meaningful images. The "heigh fantasye" of the old knight, as he talked of and sought to find a paradise on earth, his own Garden of Eden, dissolves when he achieves the married state; he finds that extreme jealousy exists and feels that he must ever keep a watchful eye on his Eve. When he constructs his own garden, he, like Adam, finds that his woman becomes dissatisfied and is lured away from him. Did he remember his own words that a woman will be economical, easily satisfied, always satisfying? Did January recall alleging that, "but certeynly, a yong thyng may nan gye,/ right as men may waru wex with handes plye," when he finally must conclude that May, unlike the "waru wex" she was supposed to be,

Good old time "worn and" on days her husband:

This I speak now, that I speak of no more,
In which he hath expiated the priest,
That January bar of the small flock,
By which into his garden ofte he wente;
And January, that knowal hire entente,
The clerk countrefeted pryvely.

(Mercht 2116-21)

A large part of the comic tone is dependent upon the poet's images and references. The reader sees old January's attempt to sanctify his marriage bed with a religious ceremony as ridiculous as his attempts to prove fruitful now when his temperament and body seem least productive. Contradictory images abound throughout the poem. January's intentions for productivity and his praise of the wedded life contrast with the actual man and his selfishness. The castle and his provisions for a life of ease, especially his garden, a bower where all life seems abundant, contrast with his own personal barrenness--a matter of superfluity opposing vacuity. Sharply contrasting with each other are the arguments of wiser men, particularly Theofraste and Justinus, and the foolishness of January; age is juxtaposed with youth. January says, "Old fissh and yong flessh wolde I have ful fayn./ Bet is, quod he, a pyk than a pykerel,/ And bet than old beef is the tendre veel." He claims of a woman over thirty: "It is but bene-straw and greet forage." While his mate can be too old, not so with January:

Though I be hoor, I fare as dooth a tree
That blosmeth er that fruyt ywoven bee;
And blosmy tree nys neither drye ne deed.
I feele me nowhere hoor but on myn heed.

(Mercht 1461-64)

The choice of the names used by the poet is rather common, giving youthful May an appellation referring to spring and fertility, January a name referring to winter barrenness. J. S. P. Tatlock allows that while Justinus is obvious

reader waits no longer for compassion. Poetic justice is maintained in the end: Parsonsgate alone suffers for his irrationality; while he initially only duped himself and hurt Ray, now he is being duped by both Ray and himself. No one innocent suffers. Sex, as in most fabliau comedy, provides the mode of poetic justice. A complex juxtaposition is established: the garden achieves fertility, adultery is more satisfying than the sanctioned lechery of his marriage, and marriage has proved itself no blessing. Combining tenets of both comic fabliau in its detail and allegory in its generalization and irony, the tale carefully enforces its delineation of comic error with a mixed tone of the hilarious and the mordant.

IV

Chaucer employs a vast range of satiric techniques in the Canterbury Tales. Using the direct method the poet, as observer, can tell the reader what he sees, lending to each detail the suggestiveness of innuendo, implying that this character is both very complex and very real. None of the poet's characters is perfect and no one is entirely evil. The Prioress is a good woman, but fond of worldly pleasures which she ostensibly has denied to herself. For the Wife of Bath the world is meant for living and pleasure, but her zealous attitudes and masculine aggressiveness make the reader like her, yet shrink from approval of her activities and beliefs. Like the Wife, the Pardoner is his own informer, and the poet's innuendoes here are less subtle than those concerning the Prioress, more damning than those concerning the Wife. Yet, with all three pilgrims the poet has refused to condemn, instead giving support for admiration of whatever talent each possesses. In each the reader sees personal idiosyncrasies which sometimes lead to condemnation of a social structure, sometimes to reproof of personal folly.

Similarly, in the cases of indirect exposure of social or personal shortcomings and comic spirit with satire, disparagement with denunciation, in achieving certain didactic purposes. Again, the reader is distressed by the social and personal follies, but is entertained by the dramatic activities. The satire is both obvious and delightful.

After examining satiric modes in Chaucer's poetry, the modern reader can pose the question: is Chaucer's satire in the Canterbury Tales a social or an artistic function? Alternately worded, was Chaucer primarily interested in reform or in literary artistry? In either case the diversity of satiric techniques, employing either the direct or the dramatic methods, discovering social or personal revelations, using innuendo and the comic spirit or graphic delineations of character and actions, lends strength to Chaucer's poetic performances. Although there is absolutely no proof, it seems that Chaucer was an artist first, a reformer second; his range of satiric methods is a display of his literary abilities, rather than a device contrived to hold the reader's attention for a sermon on the world's ills. This in no way lessens the value of reform or cultural benefit when Chaucer, the poet of the Canterbury Tales, provided "a conspectus of medieval English society ... a survey of fourteenth century English life."⁴¹ He presented such a vista, but this was not his principal intention (although the fact that there is one and only one of each "type" is obviously intentional). First Chaucer was interested in being a poet, a "maker." In conjunction with this was his desire to be realistic, so his incidents and even his language were designed to correspond with this desire.⁴² In being a "maker," the poet was interested in presenting a human comedy, this apparently being most compatible with his own spirit. The poet may have used particular individuals for his

details, for a human society is best created with real personalities. His diversity of approach and wholesome attitude of exploration provide the best entertainment. In his drama, goodness did not always win, but neither did evil. And that is certainly the way of the world.

Appendix 1

That Chaucer employed satire in exposing human weaknesses, from slight habits to scurrilous villainy, is evident. Although Chaucer's performance as a poet and satirist is celebrated far more than those of his English contemporaries and predecessors, his follows in the tradition of the verse complaint and sermon. Chaucer wrote several complaints and other poems in the tradition of the verse complaint, and, in all probability, could have been London's most famous preacher in his day had he selected that profession instead of a combinative occupation, mixing government appointments and poetics.

The complaint is a poem, not in fact a sermon, yet with a sermon's theme. Following the Roman satire, which lost most of its effectiveness as pagan poetry declined and the Bible became more accessible in Christian England, the voice of the Old Testament and of Christian monitors and critics became the common didactic message.⁴³ This didacticism, often in the form of a homily or a morality play, achieved the form of the verse complaint, not employing the denunciatory wit or invective typical of satire, particularly Juvenalian, but the clichés and generalities of early Christianity. The stauncher members of the clergy in England struck out against levity, idolotry and wickedness of their society through the convenient form of the verse complaint. Using tireless couplets, the complaint was easier to perform than general satire. The writer of the complaint attacked the system and the convention, not the intricacies of personalities; the writer often employed allegory, while satirists work with particulars of real life and strive to attain a relative sophistication.⁴⁴ Despite the differences, several centuries of sermonizing by virtue of verse complaints established a tradition of near-satire, from which Chaucer's verse could emerge.

Chaucer's satire, indeed most of his verse, differs from the complaint through its dependence on particularities. Where the complaint tends to portray a caricature or an incarnate abstract of vices as a class, Chaucer resorted to detailed descriptions of individuals and specific activities. His commendatory studies, such as the Knight or the Parson, are often general, and his praise usually came in generalities. However, his satire or his individuals' portraits (the Knight and Parson are merely types) are detailed and his human traits and motives are specific. Too, the distinction between verse complaint and Chaucer's work is that in the latter the reader is made aware of the author, for his verse reflects his own personality.

Chaucer, however, does not precisely fit the satirist's role, either, for he often seems to be deficient in some, perhaps most, of the satiric variations. He is urbane, yet not malevolent; he neglects the use of raillery and often the "proper" traces of cynicism are unsuccessful in prevailing on the poet's humanitarian attitudes. The subject matter Chaucer utilizes in his Canterbury Tales is mainly conventional; it is his method that is new and more effective.⁴⁵ Chaucer does not use his poem solely as a vehicle for attacking the ills of the world or the hypocrisy of the religious orders; "the satire of Chaucer is not that of a reformer; hence no polemic note is sounded."⁴⁶ What Chaucer achieves in his satire is a personal introspection of characters. His concern does not concentrate itself on didactic tendencies or moral indignations, as did the verse complaint, and his voice is not the voice of general Man or the reformer in the pulpit articulating a denunciation of the world's decadence.

Appendix II

Marjorie J. Hussey, editor of The Merchant's Prologue and Tale (Cambridge University Press, 1966), adds these notes concerning the Biblical references used by the foolish January (page 82).

1. Jacob was given a kid's skin to throw over himself in order to deceive his father into thinking he was Esau. In this exemplum there is not only a female trick--the idea came from Rebecca--but a blind father.
2. Judith saved the Israelites by her cunning in killing the sleeping Holofernes. While it was a crime with a fortunate outcome, it shows the Merchant picking on images of female cunning and violence rather than foresight and planning.
3. Abigail saved her husband, but later made a marriage treaty with David.
4. Esther arranged for the destruction of Haman and the salvation of herself and Mordecai who was advanced in position under King Ahasuerus.

Nothing in the Merchant's straight-faced recital suggests that deception is the true theme of the exemplum.

NOTES

1. James Sutherland, English Satire (Cambridge, 1955), p. 15.
2. George Wittke, "Chaucer's Pardoner," Atlantic Monthly, LXXII (1895), p. 329.
3. See appendix I, page 43 of this paper, for a brief comment on the derivation of English satire before Chaucer.
4. Samuel Tucker, Verse Satire in England Before the Renaissance (New York, 1966), p. 100.
5. Eileen Power, Medieval English Nunneries (Cambridge, 1922), p. 373.
6. Power, p. 69.
7. Ernest Kuhl, "Notes on Chaucer's Prioress," Philological Quarterly, II (1923), p. 308.
8. Kuhl, p. 309.
9. Richard Schoeck, "Chaucer's Prioress: Mercy and Tender Heart," Chaucer Criticism: The Canterbury Tales, ed. Richard Schoeck and Jerome Taylor (Notre Dame, 1960), I, p. 248.
10. Kuhl, p. 305.
11. John L. Lowes, Convention and Revolt in Poetry (Boston, 1919), p. 66.
12. The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, ed. Fred W. Robinson, 2nd edition (Boston, 1961), p. 653.
13. John L. Lowes, "Simple and Coy: A Note on Fourteenth Century Diction," Anglia, XXXIII, p. 442.
14. Robinson, p. 653.
15. Sister Ritarary Bradley, "The Wife of Bath and the Mirror Tradition," Journal of English and Germanic Philology, LV (1956), p. 625.
16. For a discussion of her astrology see W. W. Skeat's The Oxford Chaucer. For a prediction of her own horoscope, see W. C. Curry, "More About Chaucer's Wife of Bath," MLA, XXXVII (1922), pp. 30-51.
17. Robert A. Pratt, "The Development of the Wife of Bath," in Studies in Medieval Literature, ed. MacEdward Leach (Philadelphia, 1961), p. 45.
18. Bradley, p. 627.
19. Robinson, p. 698.

- 30 Paul Ruggiers, The Art of the Canterbury Tales, p. 122.
- 31 Ruggiers, p. 123.
- 32 Kittredge, p. 832.
- 33 Joseph Burrow, A. C. Sparring and James Winny, An Introduction to Chaucer (Cambridge, 1965), pp. 78-9.
- 34 Frederick Tupper, "The Pardoner's Tavern," Journal of English and German Philology, XIII, pp. 553-65.
- 25 Kittredge, p. 832.
- 26 Hussey, p. 62.
- 27 Arnold Williams, "Chaucer and the Friars," in Chaucer Criticism: The Canterbury Tales, ed. Richard Schoeck and Jerome Taylor (Notre Dame, 1960), I, p. 70.
- 28 Williams, p. 72.
- 29 Mariel Bowden, A Commentary on the General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales, p. 119.
- 30 Hussey, p. 76.
- 31 Ruggiers, p. 97.
- 32 J. A. Burrow, "Irony in the Merchant's Tale," Anglia, LXXV (1957), p. 199.
- 33 Germaine Dempster, "On the Source of the Deception Story in the Merchant's Tale," Modern Philology, XXXIV (1936), p. 133.
- 34 See appendix II, page 45 of this paper, for a brief comment on the meaning of January's Biblical references.
- 35 Burrow, p. 203.
- 36 Ruggiers, p. 112.
- 37 John McCalliard, "The Merchant's Tale, Jonson and Moliere," Philological Quarterly, XXV (1946), p. 344.
- 38 J. S. P. Tatlock, "Chaucer's Merchant's Tale," Modern Philology, XXXIII (1936), p. 371.
- 39 Charles Owen, "Crucial Passages in Five of the Canterbury Tales," in Discussions of the Canterbury Tales, ed. Charles Owen (Boston, 1961), p. 250.

42 Charles Muscatine, Chaucer and the French Tradition (Los Angeles, 1956), p. 116.

43 J. R. Hulbert, "Chaucer's Pilgrims," in Chaucer: Modern Essays in Criticism, ed. Robert Wagnonecht (New York, 1957), p. 23.

44 See Charles Muscatine's view on the role of language in explicating some of the tales, in Chaucer and the French Tradition (Los Angeles, 1956).

45 John Peter, Complaint and Satire in Early English Literature (Oxford, 1956), p. 24.

46 Peter, p. 9.

47 Tucker, p. 98.

48 Tucker, p. 98.

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During this century Chaucer's Canterbury Tales has been regarded as "the conspectus of medieval English society," and his satiric art has been acknowledged as reformatory in spirit, unleniently following the moral tradition of the sermons and complaints, from which his own critical arts were inaugurated. In fact, these attitudes towards Chaucer as a reformer and an early "sociologist" have come, in some ways, to overshadow the poetic accomplishment of this work. Chaucer was first a poet, a "maker," and his satiric abilities, as well as his comic and poetic talents, form a conspectus of the satiric art in narrative poetry. An examination of the range of his satiric arts, his methods and scope, provides a better insight into the work as a literary creation.

The poet employed two methods for satiric presentation: the direct and the indirect. The first, also labeled the descriptive method, allows the poet to state from his point of view, as he does in the General Prologue and in individual prologues, what the habits and characteristics of a particular pilgrim are. His language, though often explicit, is sometimes less than direct. Through innuendo the poet suggests of the Prioress that she is a good woman, but perhaps too much of the world, perhaps indecorous in her actions concerning emotions and insignia. The poet allows the Wife of Bath to plead her own case for woman's supremacy and for perpetual activity, yet through her performance the reader sees her zealotry and attempts to understand her aggressiveness. She indicts herself as she explains herself, yet the poet forces no conclusions about her personal follies. The Pardoner achieves the most directly denunciatory portrait, yet he, too, is allowed to expose himself. The revelation of his professional habits and his personal traits convicts him of both social hypocrisy and personal folly.

The second poetic method, the dramatic or dramatic technique, employs the highest standard in presenting an indictment of the follies of the world, whether they are concerned with social issues or personal failings. In the argument between the Friar and the Summoner, each exposes the possible social evils of the other and, in this way, the poet castigates the professional depravities of both. In the Merchant's Tale the reader soon recognizes in old, foolish January the character of the Merchant, and personal follies--especially lechery and blindness--are exposed.

In seeing the range of Chaucer's satiric art, the reader also sees the working of the artistic mind, and in Chaucer's artistry the reader sees both a mirroring of the world's peculiarities and a supreme poetic accomplishment.