Thesis Approved

By

[Signature]

Major Adviser

[Signature]

Dean
SATIRE IN CHAUCER

BY

MOTHER ANNE MADDEN, R.S.C.J.

A THESIS

Submitted to the Faculty of The Creighton University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in the Department of English

OMAHA, 1936
TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER | PAGE
------- | -----
I. INTRODUCTION | 1
II. METHOD OF SATIRE | 16
III. OBJECTS SATIRIZED BY CHAUCER | 21
   The Clergy | 27
   Women | 34
   Youth | 46
IV. CHARACTERISTICS SATIRIZED BY CHAUCER | 
   Vanity | 52
   Ambition | 55
   Verbosity and Pseudo-Learning. | 59
   Superstition | 62
   Boastfulness | 66
V. CONCLUSION | 69
BIBLIOGRAPHY | 75
"That satire is woven from the blue of rebuke and the red of wit, --becoming thereby ... the purple patch of literature, --is testified to by satiric theory as well as practice." Frances Theresa Russell, Satire in the Victorian Novel, 7.
### RECORD OF SATIRIC PASSAGES IN CHAUCER

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poems</th>
<th>Satiric Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Book of the Duchesse</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hous of Fame</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anelida and Arcite</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Parliament of Foules</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Troilus and Criseyde</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Legend of Good Women</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Romaunt of the Rose</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Canterbury Tales</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Prose</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boece</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Treatise on the Astrolabe</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>157</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This rating is based on the number of long or significantly long direct satiric passages in the context. It does not take into account the fact that the *Hous of Fame* is a general satire, nor that the stories told by the Pardoner, the Friar, the Somnour, and Sir Thopas are satiric in their make-up. "The Reves Tale" and "The Milleres Tale", though full of fun are not essentially satiric since the element of criticism is wanting.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Tale</th>
<th>Satiric Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Prologue</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Knightes Tale</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Milleres Tale</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Reves Tale</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Cokes Tale</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Tale of the Man of Lawe</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Tale of the Wyf of Bath</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Wife of Bath's Prologue</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Freres Tale</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Somnours Tale</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Clerkes Tale</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Squires Tale</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Frankeleyns Tale</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Pardoners Tale</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Nonne Prestes Tale</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Monkes Tale</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sir Thopas</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Prioresses Tale</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Chanoun Yemannes Tale</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Maunciples Tale</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Was Chaucer a satirist? Or did he merely lapse into the satiric occasionally and almost unconsciously? Had he moments when his "high seriousness" was whipped into the indignation of a true satirist by the existing evils of his day? These and many more questions beg research as soon as the term "satire" is linked with the name of the Father of English Poetry.

Before attempting to determine the quality and quantity of Chaucer's satire, we must first determine the nature of satire. Every true literary quality has its origin in some basic principle common to all the human genus, and to understand satire we must go to the source from which it springs, namely man's vice and folly.

Vice and folly are the fruits of passion; but passion makes the saint as well as the sinner. Curbed by the power of the will, controlled by reason, passion is that fine thing that exalts our clay to claim its place amid the angels; uncontrolled, it becomes vice and folly. This undisciplined passion, when it attracts the understanding eye, brings forth either hard, cold criticism, or humor, or that combination of the two which we call satire. Self-deception, whether it be in
the vicious or in the foolish, is essentially ridiculous, for inevitably there must appear those ludicrous incon­gruities between "What I think I am" and "What everyone else (except myself) sees that I am". The exposure, either by direct method or by caricature, of these "up-side-downs" of life results in satire.

The satirist stands halfway between the preacher and the humorist. He is openly and avowedly for reform, and to effect this he infuses into his humor the acid of criticism and thus transforms what merely amuses into what stings and rouses.

But he seeks to affect the minds of men, not by the congruities of virtue, but by the incongru­ities of vice, and in that he partakes of the wit. . . . . This much then is certain, that the satirist shakes the foundations of the Kingdom of Hell by showing it to be a kingdom of non­sense. He will allow nothing to be serious except the right, and that will always be able to afford a smile.1

According to the diagram on page 1 let us suppose two circles, the one representing humor, the other criticism. In a poem or prose work in which the two are used we may presume that the circles converge, and just in so far as they do so, we have satiric content.

---

Criticism in its broadest sense is the expression of a reasoned conviction about conduct or any other matter. As applied to literary criticism this definition is narrowed by Matthew Arnold to "a disinterested endeavor to learn and to propagate the best that has been known and thought in the world."

Whether in matter of conduct or of literature, criticism always implies the application of judgment, usually with the intention of improving or of sanctioning. Saint Paul exercised all his powers of criticism in his Epistle to the Corinthians, where we find his righteous indignation rising to the point of open denunciation. There was nothing in the mind of the great Apostle of the Gentiles except the correction of an evil by the direct exposition of its folly. He meant to reform directly by his preaching, and humor would have destroyed the effectiveness of his message.

Humor is the mental faculty of discovering, appreciating and expressing the ludicrous or incongruous elements of a situation. Taken loosely it may include everything from the lampoon to the harmless, spineless pun; anything, in a word, which raises a smile may be

said to partake of the humorous, be it a parody, a burlesque, an allegory, or an epigram.

This combination of criticism with humor which we call satire, is of all ages; it tends to be more permanent than humor because the foibles and failings of human nature admit of little variation and present to the thoughtful practically the same matter for criticism. It is, however, in the humor with which the criticism is saturated that the individuality is apparent.

When we say, however, that satire is a union of those two intangible, subjective elements, criticism and humor, we do not assume the equation fully to be expressed by the formula — Antagonism plus Amusement equals Satire. For neither is all criticism humorous nor all humor critical. The relation is that of two circles, not coincident but overlapping.

Confusion has arisen because, while the boundaries of the two separate circles are fairly distinct in our minds, the circumference made by their conjunction is merged in their respective planes. Accordingly, the term satire is sometimes used to denote humorless criticism, which is really invective, denunciation, any sort of reprehension; and sometimes uncritical humor, --which is mere facetiousness and jocularity. Not every prophet, preacher, or pedagogue is a satirist, nor yet every merry clown, or exuberant youth, or mild worldly-wiseman enjoying the blunders of innocent naïveté.
Professor Dewey reminds us that the ideal state of mind is "a nice balance between the playful and the serious." In satire there is always a victim. As soon as the author makes it apparent that he himself is the victim of his own pen, he is no longer writing satire. He must give the impression that he, of all people, is immune to the follies that he ridicules in others. "The humorist runs with the hare; the satirist hunts with the hounds." Satire has a wider scope than humor. It is born to scourge the persistent and ever-recurring follies of the human creature as such. And for anybody who has the humility to realize that it is aimed at him, and not merely at his neighbors, satire has an intensely remedial effect; it purifies the spiritual system of man as nothing else that is human can possibly do. . . . Humor without satire . . . is a perversion.

The humorous rests entirely on the human element. An animal amuses only in so far as we have detected in it some human characteristics. Herein lies the reason for the animal satires of Aristophanes, and of Reynard the Fox, which have retained their popularity throughout the centuries.

5. Ibid., 36.
And to be really attuned to the humorous, utter indifference is necessary. Emotions are humor's worst enemies, and a tear is its death. Great aloofness and imperviousness are the two subjective elements then, that are requisite for the writing or the appreciation of satire which "... is woven from the double strands, the blue of rebuke and the red of wit,—becoming thereby in a chromatic sense the purple patch of literature." 7

The etymological derivation of the word "satire" is accounted for as follows:

It is quite possible that the introduction of the word "satire" into English is to be attributed directly to the Latin. The early history of the English word still seems to be obscure. The earliest use of it which I have found is ... in the preface to Barclay's Ship of Fools. This, I take to be a transfer from the Latin. ... It has been common to refer the word to a French origin, and there is no difficulty in supposing that the French satire exerted its share of influence; but as there was no formal French satire in the sixteenth century, and as the study of the Latin satirists did not come to England through France, there appears to be no reason for giving that influence the earliest place. ... We have seen that when Barclay defined the nature of his work, he used the word "satire" as an equivalent for the "reprehension of foolishness" ... The reference of the word "satire" to the mythological satyrs had two noteworthy effects on Elizabethan satire, apart from its connection

with the idea of rebuke or invective. It served to furnish a semi-dramatic setting for the form having no connection with the body of the satire, but evidently adding to the contemporary interest. Thus in Guilpin we have a sort of stage-direction: "The Satyres flourish before his fencing;" in With we have a notable picture of a shaggy satyr with a shepherd's pipe in one hand and a scourge in the other. . . . The connection of "Satire" with "Satyr" served to add emphasis to the idea that satire [in its beginnings] was characteristically uncouth and crabbed, if not rustic and obscene as well. 8

Some modern Englishmen, notably George Meredith, believe that the English excel in this art of satire. 9 If they do so, it must be precisely because of their real or assumed indifference. However, centuries before a Pope had the effrontery to write the Dunciad or a Dryden the initiative to write Absalom and Achitophel, Aristophanes startled the Greeks with his comic dramas in which the populace of Athens saw themselves pilloried in the guise of Birds and Frogs; and at a later date Juvenal resorted to this art both to irritate and amuse the Romans.

A comparison between the two great Romans, Juvenal and Horace shows clearly the range that there's


may be in satire. Juvenal, the over-serious son of Aeneas, gathered up all his grievances into sixteen compact satires in which he swings the bludgeon of his wrath at every class of society. The humor is grim and growling. Its tone is that of the pessimist, its method that of direct rebuke. "The didactic quality of the Roman's [Juvenal's] invectives against particular vices was not such as to please the humanity-loving nature of the English teller of stories." The spirit of Juvenalian satire lives for us in a diluted fashion in Lord Byron's contributions to English literature. Horace, more gentle, yet not less pungent, was the bard of the kindly, smiling satire; his method was suggestive rather than open. He was humorous, but lacked wit, the intellectual complement of humor. On the whole, the Romans were less witty than the Greeks. Both Juvenal and Horace have little of the keen edge of Aristophanes.

The difference between the man of invective and the man who laughs is fundamental. Both hate the evil, but their manner of exploiting their dislikes is curiously antithetical. In­vective castigates with a blow, and its weapon for social reform is the gaol or the gallows, and thus sometimes it makes martyrs. The comedy of Aristophanes found no one worthy of the martyr's

crown, and its victims are ridiculously unworthy of any fate higher than a good-natured laugh.11

Pursuing this comparison from the ancient world into seventeenth-century England, we see there its development in the hands of Pope, Dryden and Swift. The strong antipathies of Pope strike the dominant note of his satire. The Dunciad is a continued chain of allegories satirizing false taste in literature and learning. This theme constitutes the essential unity of the Dunciad, a unity admirably maintained in the tone of scornful contempt which runs through the poem. These seventeenth-century poets perfected the heroic couplet which had first been used in English by Chaucer, and when the matter for criticism did not carry sufficient weight of itself for satire, they accomplished their purpose by the mere mechanical trick of rhyme and anti-climax. These two devices Pope employed when he wrote:

Here thou, great Anna! whom three realms obey
Dost sometimes counsel take -- and sometimes tea.12

The pungency of this and thousands of other instances in literature have driven many to the conclusion that satire's first business is to destroy and that it is,

at best, only a second-rate type of literature. This is partly true. A satirist is great, not by what he builds but by what he attacks, and in the manner of his attack. The destruction may itself be permanent in its significance, but it will never be great in a positive sense. The work of the thorough-going satirist is essentially negative. It is for this reason that Dryden and Pope are not great poets in the sense that Shelley and Keats and Browning are great.

To medieval Englishmen who knew less of the classics than we do, satire was not the hackneyed, stereotyped weapon of editorial-writers that we know it to be. To them it was a comparatively new product born of the twelfth century.

The remains of old English literature are as void of satiric spirit as it is possible for literature to be and it is not till some time after the Norman Conquest that we find whole compositions which can reasonably be called satire. The earliest of these compositions are not written in the English Language. They are either Latin pieces of what we may call the Classical or Goliardic verses. . . . . In Satire as in all literature and for every purpose of life, the native English prevailed over the foreign tongue; but only after the lapse of some generations. 13

In the early medieval pieces of satiric tend-

ency the allegorical element prevails, and it is in this strain that the earliest satire is found in Chaucer. There is a notable difference between the style of the early English satirists and those of a later day. Those of the earlier period write in a simple, direct and easy style with occasional sallies of irony injected into their allegorical settings.

The type of classical satire was also fairly well fixed, though with numerous minor variations. It was in general a subjective kind of poem, representative primarily of the point of view of the individual writer. Its two characteristic sub-types we have seen to be that of reflective or philosophical satire, and that of the satire of direct rebuke. The early English satire had no such fixed type of subject poem. It might be in a distinctly lyrical or ballad form, it might be in the form of elaborate allegorical narrative. Like the classical narrative, it was largely of the type of direct rebuke; unlike the classical satire, it made slight use of elements which we should call reflective or philosophical. When the narrative element was introduced, it was likely to be of an allegorical, typical, or otherwise unreal sort; while the dramatic element in classical satire was of a distinctly realistic order. The difference lies chiefly in the fact that the pessimism of the classical satirist is modified by a lightness of touch, a certain lack of seriousness, or the predominance of the reflective element, all of which are wanting to the early English satire; while the pessimism of the latter is modified by a hopefulness due either to religious faith or to the spirit of reform. The spirit of the classical satire is on the whole conservative; that of the early English satire is on the whole distinctly progressive. Finally, the spirit of the former is not only
pagan as a matter of course, but largely unreligious; while that of the latter is in a large measure religious and distinctively Christian.\textsuperscript{14}

It is in this sense that Chaucer's satire is medieval. There is an absence in Chaucer of the self-conscious irony of the classical satirist. There is, if you will, more wit in the latter, but more of kindly humor in the former. A spirit of resolute earnestness in the early English writers made banter out of place. The assumption that everything is just as bad as it possibly can be, being indispensable to formally pessimistic satire, made the humor arising from situations more studied and self-conscious than that arising from the inconsistencies of character and conduct set forth in \textit{The Canterbury Tales}.

In this connection there arises the question about satire being a two-edged sword. If satire is to live up to its high estate, is it possible for the humor to overbalance the criticism and thus cause the latter to fall short of its aim? Joseph Hall, an ambitious satirist of the early seventeenth-century, wrote the \textit{Defence of the Remonstrance} in which the phrase "toothless satire" was used. John Milton, insisting that such a phrase was a contradiction in

\textsuperscript{14} Raymond Macdonald Alden, \textit{op. cit.}, 45.
terms, answered him thus in *The Apology for Symectymnuus*:

For as satire was born out of tragedy, so ought to resemble its high parentage, to strike high, and adventure dangerously at the most eminent vices among the greatest persons, and not to creep into every blind tap-house that fears a constable more than a satire . . . .

For if it bite neither the persons nor the vices, how is it a satire? and if it bite either, how is it toothless? so that "toothless satire" is as much as if he had said "toothless teeth".15

However, there is something of this "toothlessness" in the satire of Chaucer. At times he may be a bit vitriolic, but cruelty for the sake of cruelty or pungency for the sake of reform are unknown to him. The traits which most endear him to us today, in addition to his delightful humor, are his simplicity, his tenderness, his wisdom, toleration and broad-mindedness, and his unfailing knowledge of human nature.

Was Chaucer really humorous? Even before his worth as a writer was generally recognized, the term "witty" had been applied to him.

He is a jovial, facetious, merry poet. These qualities of "merry" and "jovial" are applied to Chaucer with two rather different meanings: a. Really pleasant, lively, amusing; b. One who delights in a broad jest, and tells coarse stories. The first meaning is found mostly in the criticisms from about 1570 to 1600, as in Robinson (1574) and Spenser (1579) who speak of Chaucer's "merry Tales" . . . . .

We occasionally find the term "witty" applied to Chaucer and his "wit" is often alluded to at the end of the sixteenth and in the early seventeenth centuries. We know that "wit", which originally meant simply the intellect or understanding, first acquired its secondary and more restricted meaning somewhere about this time, and that a little later the adjective "witty" passed from the signification of "skillful" or "wise" to that of ingenious and quick in a certain imaginative quality of seizing resemblances between two apparently different things. Early in the seventeenth century "wit" appears often as an equivalent for the Italian Ingegno and indeed is used by Jonson as synonymous with "ingenuity". Hobbes tells us . . . that wit had become a synonym for "fancy" and . . . defines the function of "fancy" to be the furnishing of the ornaments of poetry, whereas "judgment" supplies the "strength and structure." His distinction between the two was adopted by later seventeenth and eighteenth-century critics, and wit came to mean quickness of mind in seeing unexpected resemblances. Dryden and Addison both say that to the resemblance of ideas, should be added the sensation of surprise and delight, and so we can see how the particular meaning now attached to the adjective "witty" crept in. . . . . . . . . . . . .

Adjectives such as "merry" or "jovial", in their second meaning of delighting in a broad jest or coarse story, begin to be used about 1575, and for the following 100 years we find this signification occasionally. Towards the end of the seventeenth century it becomes more common, and for the first sixty years of the eighteenth century something of this nature is the characteristic epithet. "Joking", "jocund", "sprightly", "gleeful", "blithe", "merry", "facetious", are among the adjectives used quite constantly in speaking of Chaucer or his work at this time; and one annotator goes so far as to compare Chaucer, as regards this
tendency to jocoseness, with Charles II "who could hardly sustain his gravity long enough to make a speech from the throne!" 16

Any doubt as to whether Chaucer was humorous Mr. G. K. Chesterton dispenses peremptorily by saying that even if we were to consider Chaucer only as a humorist, he was in a very exact sense a great humorist. "... I mean a humorist in the grand style, a humorist whose broad outlook embraces the world as a whole and sees great humanity against a background of even greater things." 17

Having defined the term "satire" and established the sphere of its two constituents, humor and criticism, we shall now turn to the methods and the means of satire.


CHAPTER II

METHOD OF SATIRE

Satire by its nature may be either direct or indirect in its attack. Its effectiveness very often depends on the method used and the vehicle employed to convey the author's message. Editorial-writers during an election are undoubtedly direct in their attack. Tactful teachers and essayists are often indirect; dramatists, as well as story-tellers, may be both.

Chaucer takes his place as the supreme teller of stories, but to pin him to one method of satire is to limit his art. Certainly his revelation of the folly and falsity of the medievals is most realistic, but it has also a certain disinterestedness. Chaucer has no cause to champion, no candidate to elect, no spleen to vent; he shows men as he sees them, and the satire follows quite naturally.

The more genuinely penetrating the satirist's eye, the more simply visible he will be able to make his victim's misfitting pose, and the more irresistible will be the urge to laughter. Though it is of the essence of satire not to make any direct criticism, the fact
that it uncovers untruth or reveals the unsuitableness of a line of conduct is sufficient. There are two methods by which the satirist may attack: the one by simple exposure, the other by caricature. The former is more dignified; its superiority rests in the first place upon the nearer approach to the plain truth of things. It has the dignity of disinterestedness and of honesty. It must be able to seize upon the pose of its victims, and pose is the first point of attack for the true satirist. For this reason the writer of satire must assume the position of perfect self-assurance and utter aloofness.

The second method of attack is caricature, which, lacking the dignity of restraint, has its appeal to a different type of mind than simple exposure. By lengthening the noses of its victims and distorting their charms it calls upon the imagination more than upon the intellect. However, satire is essentially for mental grappling, and perhaps the most evident weakness of caricature is the tendency to get the effect by stretching the truth, therein defeating its own purpose.

Which of these methods did Chaucer employ? Investigation of the satiric passages in his poems seems to show that he prefers the indirect method of satire by means of simple exposure.
The earlier poems, *The Book of the Duchesse*, *The Parliament of Foules*, and *Hous of Fame*, are written with the conventional background of the French dream vision as motif. Stereotyped as it was, Chaucer's conservatism obliged him to use it, but under the spell of his genius there evolved something infinitely greater than a mere literary piece with a dream for setting. And trite though it may be, there are points in favor of the dream-vision as a vehicle of satire. There is about it an impersonality that does not lend itself to any overt expression of the author's ire. By this he is saved from the mistakes of an over-wrought brain. He looks on the whole affair quite dispassionately, an attitude that is of the very fibre of the true satirist, and one which is maintained with difficulty by the essayist or the editorial-writer.

Chaucer recognized, too, the superiority of verse over prose for satire. It is the tool "par excellence" of the satirist, and though Chaucer rarely stoops to that lowest form of intellectual depravity, quibbles and plays upon words, he does frequently resort to the heroic couplet, especially in "The Prologue" of *The Canterbury Tales*, to accomplish his critical-humorous intention. He opens the description of the
monk with these lines:

A manly man, to been an abbot able,
Ful many a deyntee hors hadde he in stable.¹

The second line has a devastating effect on the encomium of the first, and brings out the worldliness of the monk. This same observation couched in prose would have fallen far short of the point.

verse has the hammer-note. . . . . The great writers in prose swing slowly. The horse of indignation must wait long for his shoe. But verse is both furnace and hammer; it strikes as it melts.²

Chaucer is not mincing words when he sums up the whole profession of the Somnour:

He was, if I shal yeven him his laude,
A thief, and eek a Somnour, and a baude.³

The current opinion that all friars led austere, penitential lives is satirized when these words are put into the mouth of the friar:

"Now, dame," quod he, "je vous dy sans doute,
Have I nat of a capon but the livere,

² Humbert Wolfe, op. cit., 27.
³ "The Freres Tale", 1353-1355
And of your softe breed nat but a shyvere,  
And after that a rosted pigges heed,—  
But that I nolde no beest for me were deed,—  
Thanne hadde I with yow hoomly suffisaunce,"

Summarily then, we may say that the satire found in Chaucer is indirect by means of simple exposure. In many points his method and his manner of attack show a closer resemblance to Horace than to other classical writers. Both Horace and Chaucer were disposed to make the best of the world in which they found themselves, not because it suited them especially, but because it was the only one granted them to know. There is found in the satire of both men an absence of bitterness, while the same virility tempered with the same vein of tenderness pervades the work of both.  


CHAPTER III

OBJECTS SATIRIZED BY CHAUCER

The modern satirist has a different outlook from the medieval satirist and even in some sense too from those who lived at the beginnings of our own era. The greatest voices heard today are not satirical; they are too denunciatory to be humorous.

Turning backward six centuries, we find Chaucer with the seeing eye of the satirist, criticizing the men of his own day; but it was the universal folly that he saw in them, the men such as might live in any century, that drew out his satire. His works show very little satire, in fact almost none, directed towards other countries, for nationalism came later as a product of the Reformation. Throughout the entire literary career of Chaucer, England and France were nominally engaged in the One Hundred Years' War, and in his diplomatic relations Chaucer was in close touch with the situation. Still he has not written a single line that would indicate a satiric thrust at the enemy. Apparently he was not worried over the economic situation that
such a war presented nor the theories to which it
gave rise. While we cry down our own progress and
our own philosophies and point to the war as specific
proof of our delinquency, it is interesting to discover
that in all the poems of Chaucer he never refers to
the war either to praise or to blame. The objects of
his interest are people, false, foolish people with
their silly pretensions, their groundless superstitions,
their vaunting ambitions — failings which are of all
times and all peoples. It is this that makes his darts
go home as surely now as when he sent them from his
quiver almost six hundred years ago.

Nations might go to war over thrones or over
rival interests in Flemish manufacturing, but there
was always the great power of union in the Middle Ages
that was invariable, the power of Christianity. It
was the idealized criteria of the good, the true, and
the beautiful; it was the last appeal. Though the
ministers of the Church were recognizably divided into
the good and the less good, neat distinctions were
made. It is Chaucer's criticism of some of the per-
sonalities in the Church that has driven critics,
notably Lounsbury, to the erroneous conclusion that
he, too, following the trend of his day, was at
variance with its creed. It is true that the servants of the Church, whether secular or regular, from the humble limitor to the mighty abbot, come in for the sharpest Chaucerian satire. However, he criticized them as men, as individuals with human tendencies; he did not strike at the Church in her doctrines or in her morals. Like all the medievals, he was broad enough to make the distinction between the Church as a divine institution against which the gates of hell will avail nothing, and the personalities of its servants, who for all their vows and profession are born sons of Adam.

There are passages that would give the impression, if taken by themselves, that their author was filled with feelings of contempt for the men who then swayed the destinies of the Church, and for the measures by which it was guided. The difficulty with these is, that they prove too much. Attacks made upon all those engaged in the enforcement of ecclesiastical authority or connected with the service of religion were the attacks not of the individual, but of the time. . . . . The laziness and luxury of the monks, the greed and licentiousness of the friars, the frauds of the pardoners, the general scoundrelism of the summoners, were too common topics for invective to subject upon that account the one indulging in it to the charge of being specially intent upon the reformation of the church, or specially indignant at its corruptions.

2. Ibid., 467.
When Chaucer satirizes the friar and the somnour he takes them as individuals, and one does not come from reading The Canterbury Tales with the impression that all was awry in the medieval Church. The spirit of a sincerely militant faith lay behind the Canterbury pilgrimage.

The first few lines of Chaucer's poem, to say nothing of thousands in the course of it, make it instantly plain that it was no case of secular revels still linked by a slight ritual to the name of some forgotten god, as may have happened in the pagan decline. Chaucer and his friends did think about St. Thomas. They did definitely believe in the bodily cures wrought for them through St. Thomas, at least as firmly as the most enlightened and progressive modern can believe in those of Mrs. Eddy.3

If the occasion of all true satire lies in the existence of contemporary ills, Chaucer certainly found the time was ripe. Wealth had crept into the Church and had worked the havoc that only the "root of all evil" can accomplish. Besides there was the ignorance among the clergy, which eventually told in the laxity of the laity.4 However, in this regard Raymond MacDonald Alden makes an observation about satire that it is well to remember when reading any satire, but

especially that which touches an institution so sacred as the Catholic Church. He says, in effect, that when one reads the vague statements as to the corruption and degeneracy of an age, he should not take them too seriously, for when we catalog the moral vices attacked we find them, in large proportion, to be those inherent in human nature and society, and equally the property of any age. "The extremes of avarice and prodigality have always been peculiarly susceptible of literary treatment, and one need never go far for illustrations."^5

Early English satire was more concerned with public morals and religion, while its classical prototype laid emphasis on private morals and foolish fashions, and the still later product has tended more and more to individualize. In this respect Chaucer was ahead of his time, since his satire has this individuating quality to a high degree. While his contemporaries, notably Langland, were still grouping and typifying their victims, Chaucer was taking single characters and causing them to live, not as victims but as immortals in literature. Chaucer's humor is flavored with satire, while Langland's satire has only a slight flavoring of humor; the latter

5. Raymond Macdonald Alden, op. cit., 228.
is indissolubly connected with the medieval Church as an institution, while the former turns to ecclesiastical personages who become so thoroughly human that their profession is only secondary.

Chaucer's satire had many of the qualities of Elizabethan satire, of which the central figure was the "gorgeous young dandy" whose

... clothes represent as many countries as may be, the wonder of everyone he meets, his short sword giving warning that he must be allowed the favorite side of the street; his head surrounded with a constant halo of tobacco smoke -- the weed being a foreign one, and its pleasures new and strange; his eyes searching every wind for those of an admirer or a promising victim. 6

Though it is true that Chaucer had the perfection of the later development of the art of satire, he was none the less medieval-minded in the full sense of that word. And there is probably no greater psychological feat than for a thorough-going modern to grasp the mental outlook of the medieval. A nation unencumbered with religious differences, knowing but one religion, and making no breathless efforts to outdo its sister nations in hurrahing, in flag-waving, or in armament, may, in view of our modern complexities, seem Utopian,

6. Ibid., 230.
but it admitted of human foibles as much as does our own day. When these foibles fell under the seeing eye, pens were set in motion, and the result was either open denunciation or satire.

The Clergy

Chaucer had been confined and somewhat cramped by his scrupulous adherence to the French literary models, as well as by his close connection with court circles which made him much in demand as a writer of occasional pieces that permitted little scope for his originality. It is only when we dip into The Prologue to The Canterbury Tales that we begin to see the real convictions of a great mind, a mind that sees the good and the evil in every situation and in every character, judging all with that equilibrium of judgment which permits neither despondent pessimism nor extreme optimism. It is of the essence of true satire that the satirist should have in his heart a love of all that is threatened by the objects of his satire, and it was Chaucer's admiration for the Church that inspired his many thrusts against those in high places, though reformation was certainly not his objective.

The satire directed against the Pardoner is
the more effective because the benighted cleric con-
demns himself out of his own mouth when he begins his
mock sermon: "Radix malorum est Cupiditas", and follows
it in the same breath with an urge to pay tribute to
his very doubtful "relikes":

First I pronounce whences that I come
And thanne my bulles shewe I, all and some.
Our lige lorde seel on my patente,
That shewe I first, my body to warente,
That no man be so boold, ne preest ne clerk,
Me to destourbe of Cristes hooly werk,
And after that thanne telle I forth my tales;
Bulles of popes and of cardynaules,
Of patriarkes and bishopes I shewe,
And in Latyn I speke a wordes fewe,
To saffron with my predicacioun,
And for to stire hem to devocioun.

Nor does he stop his fraudulent business; he goes on to
display his relics for their veneration:

Thanne shewe I forth my longe cristal stones
Ycrammed ful of cloutes and of bones,—
Relikes that been they, as wenen they echoon.
Thanne have I in latoun a sholder-boon
Which that was of an hooly Jewes sheep.

These are the relics for which we were prepared in "The
Prologue":

For in his male he hadde a pilwe-beer,
Which that he seyde was Our Lady veyl;
He seyde he had a goblet of the seyle
That Seint Peter hadde, whan that he went
Upon the see, til Jhesu Crist hym hente.

8. Ibid., 347-352.
Instead then of judging Chaucer hostile to the Church, may we not consider him a great champion of the true spirit of the Church in thus exposing with a humorous pen the detestable fraud of an unworthy Catholic? In the Tale which Chaucer puts into the mouth of the Pardoner we have decided satire of situation: that directed against a man who professes to be leading others to God and who is all the while steeped in worldliness.

The Pardoner is evil to the core -- the one lost soul, as Professor Kittredge once called him, among the pilgrims -- with a single moment of revulsion. . . . The whole is fearless and unsparing satire, and prologue, tale, and setting together are dramatic beyond any other unit of the Pilgrimage.¹⁰

The Friar and the Somnour come in for their share of vitriol. Adroitly Chaucer pits the one against the other and then watches to see who will be the victor. It is interesting to note that the Somnour loses because the very scurrility of his tale about friars turns the tables against him. This is the effect of caricature; because of extravagant overstatement the story falls far short of real satire. In the introduction to the Somnour, Chaucer seems to sin against simplicity, especially in drawing upon his facial disfigurement; this exaggeration,

however, is forgotten when he seizes upon his pretensions as a scholar:

And when that he wel dronken hadde the wyn
Than wolde he speke no word but Latyn,
A fewe termes hadde he, two or thre,
That he had lerned out of som decre --
No wonder is, he herde it all the day.11

Double motives, always repugnant, are especially ludicrous in those who profess to be serving truth and goodness. The following words on the lips of the Friar would be most commendable if they were not at complete variance with his conduct:

To grope tenderly a conscience
In shrift; in prechyng is my diligence,
And studies in Petres wordes and in Poules.
I walke and fisshe Cristen mennes soules,
To yelden Jhesu Crist his propre rent,
To sprede his word is set al myn entente.12

Chaucer is satirizing not only the illicit begging and money-gathering methods of this particular Friar, but he is exposing swindlers of all ages:

When folk in chirche had yeve him what hem leste,
He wente his wey, no lenger wolde he reste,
With scrippe and tipped staf, ytukked hye,
In every hous he gan to poure and prye,
And beggeth mele and chese, or elles corn.13

The crowning satire in "The Freres Tale" is found in the picture of the Somnour and the demon riding quite

13. Ibid., 735-740.
amicably side by side, climaxed when they meet with a poor man whose cart is stuck in the mire. The Somnour, true to type, suggests that they make away with it, but even the fiend will not be guilty of this fraud.\textsuperscript{14}

This thrust on the part of the Friar is answered by the Somnour's insistence that

"Freres and feendes been but lyte asonder",\textsuperscript{15} followed by a graphic description of the way in which the friars swarm about as bees in the infernal regions; a description which may be too obvious to be satire but it has the effect of raising the indignation of the Friar to a fine tempo.

\textit{Vanity is always a target for satire; the inappropriateness of vanity in the monk moves Chaucer to this:}

I seigh his sleves purfiled at the bond
With grys, and that the fyneste of a lond;
And, for to fastne his hood under his chyn,
He hadde of gold ywroght a ful curious pyn;
A love-knotte in the gretter ende ther was.\textsuperscript{16}

Chaucer points out the vanity, but leaves the reader to judge for himself just how far the vow of poverty was being observed. With his "bootes souple" the monk is

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{14} "The Freres Tale", 1420-1570.
\item \textsuperscript{15} "The Somnour's Prologue", 1674.
\item \textsuperscript{16} "The Prologue", 193-197.
\end{itemize}
arrayed far beyond the average man of that day since boots properly tanned and fitted were a rare luxury in the fourteenth century. Another type of vanity, vainglory, is gently hinted at in the Friar for being the herald of his own importance when he announces to the company the high notion he has of his services to the Church:

For whoso wolde us fro this world bireve,  
So God me save, Thomas, by youre leve,  
He wolde bireve out of this world the sonne.  
For who kan teche and werchen as we konne?  

Sometimes it is only in the apt choice of an adjective or adverb that Chaucer emphasizes the weakness or the folly of the object of his satire, as when he says of the Friar:

Ful swetely herde he confessioun  
And pleasunt was his absolucioun  
He was an esy man to yeve penaunce.  

The rigors usually attached to the medieval confession find no place in the ministry of this ease-loving friar. Another instance of the choice of the right word is found in this line describing the Monk:

"Now certeinly he was a fair prelat".  

This is a very satiric touch, following as it does,
on lines which leave no doubt how far he was from the "fairness" demanded by his clerical vocation.

In "The Chanoun Yemannes Tale" there is the story of the priest "annueleer", a type that was the object of much medieval satire because he came but once a year to sing the anniversary masses for the dead; he received the stipends and went his way leaving the parish to its own devices.

In Londoun was a preest, an annueleer,
That therinne dwelled hadde many a yeer,

I wol procede as no
And telle forth my tale of the chanoun
That broghte this preest to confusioun.20

Even the lowly limitour does not escape the acid tongue of the Wife of Bath who, with an uncanny insight into character and a flare for words, says of him:

But now kan no man se none elves mo,
For now the grete charitee and prayeres
Of lymytours and others hooly freres,
That serchen every lond and every streem,
As thikke as motes in the sonne-beem,
Blessynges halles, chambres, kichenes, borees,

This maketh that ther been no fayeryes.
For ther as wont to walken was an elf,
Ther walketh now the lymytour hymself
In undermeles and in morwenyges,

And seyth his matyns and his hooly thynges
As he gooth in his lymytacioun.
Wommen may go now saufly up and doun
In every bussh or under every tree;
Ther is noon oother incubus but he,
And he ne wol doon hem but dishonour.21

These instances give a fair notion of the nature
of the satire that is directed against those in the ser­
vice of the Church. Many more quotations might be cited
to show that when Chaucer satirizes, humor usually over­
rides criticism. The breadth of his humanity and his great
tolerance limit his satire even when it is directed against
the clergy. However, it is significant to note in this
regard that his satire is keenest, not when he is writing
of the drunken Miller or the boasting Merchant, but rather
when he is inveighing against those in high places, those
who by the dignity of their calling and training are set
as leaders and models to others. It is then that the edge
of his humor is sharpened by a balanced though well dis­
guised criticism.

Women

The frivolity of women was a favorite topic among
the satirists of the Middle Ages, if not of every age.
Perhaps it has taken the dawn and the approach to mid-day

of the feminist movement to disperse the fallacy that foibles were native to women rather than to men. However, the medieval satirist gave about equal attention to existing conditions in the Church and to the frailty of woman. In his Wife of Bath Chaucer has immortalized garrulity in woman, just as Sheridan has perpetuated pseudo-learning in Mrs. Malaprop.

If satire consists in laughing at the victim for believing himself to be what he is not, certainly every line of "The Wife of Bath's Prologue" is high satire. **She is the literary characterization of the Samaritan Woman, except that she has Scripture at her fingers' tips to justify her conduct. What most readers would regard as a warning against matrimony might also be considered a satire on celibacy; it is more probable that Chaucer simply intended it as a satire on the indiscreet woman.** Lounsbury believes that Chaucer was influenced in this prologue by his distress at the effect which celibacy was going to exert on civilization.22 This seems to be taking the observations of the Wife of Bath more seriously than they were intended. However, it is true that the prologue to this tale is, for the

age in which it was written, a revolutionary document.

Whatever may have been the message in Chaucer's mind, it is in the character of the Wife of Bath that we are primarily interested. One commentator compares her with Falstaff.

... it is the Wife of Bath, who as a figure, is the greatest of them all. [The Canterbury Pilgrims]. In every line of her Prologue and in the whole, one feels Chaucer's delight in her creation. She is poured out, as it were; ... she is absolutely of a piece. There is nothing else quite like her. John Galsworthy recently remarked, in speaking of the dramatist's tendency to fashion types instead of creating individuals: "Falstaff is perhaps the greatest exception to this rule. We think of the gorgeous old ruffian first and last as a private person, without attaching to him any particular phase of human character." And he, and that other gorgeous old sinner, The Wife of Bath, are in that respect two of a kind. They are not types; they are persons.23

After a racy prologue of some eight-hundred lines one would expect her story to be in the same vein, and it is difficult to ascertain whether it was by design or by chance that Chaucer puts into the mouth of this very unconventional lady the very conventional Arthurian Tale. The pose that she affects in her very proper tale has the effect of satire on her own character. There is for all her gayety and apparent defiance

of convention, a minor note of melancholy and unhappiness with things as they are.

The Wife of Bath is blazing the trail for her twentieth-century sisters when she declares that,

We love no man that taketh kep or charge,
Where that we goon; we wol been at our large.24

One can imagine the smile that went around among the pilgrims to Canterbury as she thus proclaims the platform of the "free lance" wife. But as if to balance this taunt, later in The Canterbury Tales Chaucer makes the Frankleyn observe:

Wommen of kynde, desiren libertee,
And not to been constreyned as a thral;
And so doon men, I sooth seyen schal.25

The Wife of Bath is fully aware that she is no paragon of perfection, and smitten with something akin to remorse, she confesses in speaking of one of her deceased husbands:

... in erthe I was his purgatorie,
For which I hope his soule be in glorie.
For, God it woot, he sat ful ofte and song,
Whan that his shoo ful bitterly hym wrong.
There was no wight, save God and he, that wiste,
In many wise, how soore I hym twiste.
He deyde whan I cam from Jerusalem.26

Such apparent lack of conjugal bliss may have occasioned the following figure of comparison between the married state and purgatory, which was frequently drawn upon, even by the very early English poets who wrote in Latin:

Quid dicam breviter esse coniugum? Certe vel tartara, vel purgatorium.27

The last line of the Chaucer quotation, "he deyde when I cam from Jerusalem", with others earlier in the prologue show the same lust for travel, the same insatiable desire to conquer new fields both in the material and spiritual order (someone has called it "The Novena Complex") that characterizes many well-meaning women even in our modern world. The Wife of Bath multiplies her pilgrimages; she has been to Cologne, to Santiago in Spain, to Rome, and to Boulogne, and three times to Jerusalem and now we meet her on the road to Canterbury. In spite of all her devotion to the holy places, she seems to come away quite unfitted for the duties of her state of life.

Chaucer seems to put his tongue in his cheek and to really enjoy the Wife of Bath when she attests

27. Walter Map, ed. Wright, Camden Society, 84.
her rigorous fidelity to the canons of gossiping even during the penitential season of Lent:

So often tymes I to my gossyb wente,  
For evere yet I loved to be gay,  
And for to walke in March, Averill and may,  
Fro hous to hous, to heer sondry talys --  
Myn housbonde was at Londoun al that Lente;  
I hadde the bettre leyser for to playe  
And for to se, and eek for to be seye  
Of lusty folk.28

If there is one failing above all others for which women have incurred the satire of the ages, it is their traditional inability to keep a secret. Though Midas's wife is bursting with the knowledge of her husband's auricular deformity, she scrupulously abstains from speaking about it to her friends; she finally capitulates and confides the tale to the water:

But nolde nat telle it for her owene shame  
But natheless, hir thoughte that she dyde,  
That she so longe sholde a conseil hyde;  
Hir thoughte it swal so soore aboute hire herte  
That nedely som word hire most asterte;  
And since she dorst telle it to no man,  
Down to a mareys fast by she ran.  
She leyde hir mouth unto the water doun;  
"Biwreye me not, thou water, with thy soun,"  
Quod she; "to thee I telle it and namo;  
My housbonde hath longe assayes erys two!  
Now is myn herte all hool, now is it oute,  
I myghte no lenger kepe it out of doute."29

The story which the Wife of Bath tells is found

in many versions. In the Wife's interpretation of the tale, *What Women Most Desire*, it becomes a platform for feminism. Sovereignty over men is her ambition and the happy effects of such a regime is proved by the Knight of the Round Table who finds the solution of his dilemma by submitting his judgment to his wife's choice. The sermon ends with a moral from the very immoral Wife of Bath. She has proved her point to her own satisfaction and no one has the courage to gainsay her. She believes that she has set the pace for defiant feminism without realizing that she, herself, and her ilk of all times are its greatest enemies. In her are embodied the accumulated sarcasms of the centuries against women and marriage.30

At the opposite pole of the social order is another woman among the Canterbury Pilgrims, the Prioress, Madame Eglantyne. She and the Clerk are, according to Professor Kittredge, the most sympathetically conceived and delicately drawn of all that famous group of travelers.31 Manly, however, sees in her a too great assiduity in the cultivation of the manners, habits, and language of the ladies of the court -- a pose that is not


quite consonant with her profession.\textsuperscript{32} She is, of course, a very pious lady, but one who is never entirely unmindful of her looks even in the midst of her prayers.

It was a virile age and the integrity of a person was gauged by the manliness of the oaths with which his conversation was emphasized. "The Prioress did swear, and she swore by the most elegant and courtly saint in the calendar."\textsuperscript{33} It is probably more by way of proving her extreme delicacy than of criticizing her that Chaucer says:

"Hire grettest ooth was but by Seinte Loy."\textsuperscript{34} Seinte Loy (Saint Eligius in the Latin) was famous for his courtly manner and it is quite consistent that the Prioress should take her oaths in his name. Since this saint was invoked as the patron of goldsmiths, Skeat suggests that perhaps there was some method on the part of Madame Eglantyne who seems to have not a little weakness for gold and corals.\textsuperscript{35}

Whether or not the lines referring to her manner of chanting the Divine Office are satire is open

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{32} J. M. Manly, \textit{Some New Light on Chaucer}, 203.
\item \textsuperscript{33} \textit{Ibid.}, 213.
\item \textsuperscript{34} "The Prologue", 120.
\item \textsuperscript{35} Rev. W. Skeat, \textit{Notes to The Canterbury Tales}, 15
\end{itemize}
to question:

Ful weel she soong the service devyne,
Entuned in hir nose ful semely.36

This is not necessarily satire since this mode of intonation is traditional with the recitative portions of the Church services. Since it is not likely that the good lady, however zealous, would be intoning her Office on an excursion to Canterbury, it is evident that Chaucer knew something of the life of the particular convent to which she was attached. Countess Elizabeth, wife of Prince Lionel to whose household Chaucer was sent as a page, used to make frequent visits to the convent of St. Leonard's where the sister of Queen Philippa was a member of the community. It is not unlikely that Chaucer accompanied the royal party in these visits and learned something of the cloistral method of saying the Office.37

He knew too of the point of discipline about the prohibition of dogs and birds in the convent. The nuns of Chatteras in Cambridge in 1345 were forbidden such creatures lest their presence should interfere with the proper rendition of the Office.38 In telling us of

38. Ibid., 216.
her concern for her "smale houndes" Chaucer is not pitying the Prioress in being deprived of an outlet for her natural affections, as one commentator remarks; rather he seems to be indulging in a bit of satire against the cult of fourteenth-century Pekingese.

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.40

The Prioress's manners at table are given more attention than any modern writer would feel obliged to give them. According to Skeat they were in perfect conformity with the canons of fourteenth-century etiquette, and perhaps the rarity of one so versed in the perfections of these amenities urged Chaucer to make an example of her.41 It is not satire, but to our way of thinking it seems humorous in its minutiae.42

Full of many affectations, the character of the Prioress might be interpreted as a satire on the futility of the effort to combine the spirit of the world with the spirit of the cloister. However, it is

42. "The Prologue", 128-134.
in the tale that she tells that her sincerity is shown. There is in the story, which is the best of the tales having to do with religious subjects, splendid delineation of child character and real pathos.

The satire on women in *Troilus and Criseyde* is rare and more subtle than that in *The Canterbury Tales*. Chaucer is trying to shield the name of Criseyde from the calumny of the ages, though he cannot help seeing the weakness of her character. Criseyde, true to her variable colors, is false to her tryst with the noble Trojan whom she has abandoned for a new-found love in the Greek army, Diomede. When she gives the latter a brooch which Troilus had given her as a pledge of his love, Chaucer condemns her in this one observation:

```
. . . she hym [Diomede] yaf the fair bay stede,
The which he ones wan of Troilus;
And ek a broche -- and that was little nede --
That Troilus was, she yaf this Diomede.
And ek, the bet from sorwe hym to releve,
She made hym were a pencel of hir sleve.43
```

Added to this effrontery is the fact that she has flatly denied any attachment whatsoever to a Trojan suitor. Here the satire is more critical than humorous; but the sting of the criticism is lacking because from

the outset Chaucer is making a case for the much abused Criseyde. There are moments, however, when his sense of justice moves him to show her up. On the whole the story of Troilus and Criseyde is almost devoid of satire except for occasional jibes at the moaning of the lover, or at the immaturity of youth, or at the dilemmas of the "fixer", Pandarus. Chaucer was writing high tragedy in this story and saw that satire was out of place.

It is, however, when the story is at its dramatic height that the tension is relieved with a touch of satire, not of his hero or heroine but of the chatty women who come in to console the disconsolate Criseyde.

But as men seen in towne, and all aboute,  
That wommen usen frendes to visite,  
So to Criseyde of wommen com a route,  
For pitous joie and wenden hire delite;  
And with hire tales, deere ynough a myte,  
These wommen, which that in the cite dwelle,  
They sette hem down, and seyde as I shall telle.44

The story of Constance told by the Man of Laws was a popular subject in the Middle Ages. It is a pious romance of the adventure and final triumph of a Christian heroine over the wiles of two wicked mothers-in-law.

44. Troilus and Criseyde, Book IV, 680-687.
the only really human character in the story is the old Sultaness, whose appearance on the scene is brief but telling. The character of Constance, like that of Griselda, is too impeccable to be interesting; the satirist, it seems, must make more of vice than of virtue.

Youth

Chaucer's heroes, according to Manly, are usually between the ages of twenty and twenty-five. If this be true, then we might expect to find him satirizing youth. And he does; but in dealing with youth, his satire has a more kindly quality. Though he may take humorous thrusts at the extravagance of youthful lovers, he is always in sympathy with his heroes and heroines. There is, for instance, the humorous condescension of the Frankeleyn who praises the Squire for his story "consyderynge thy yowthe". And again of the Squire, the most youthful of the pilgrims, he writes:

So hoo-té he lovede that by nyghtertale,  
He sleep namoore than dooth a nyghtyngale.

The futile anxiety of youthful lovers is satirized when Pandarus chides Troilus about the return of Criseyde:

Ye, God woot! and fro many a worthi knyght
Hath his lady gon a fourtenight,
And he nat yet made halvendel the fare,
What nede is the to maken al this care?48

In The Book of the Duchesse which was written on the death of Blanche, the wife of John of Gaunt, the satire is of a very doubtful kind, but the following seems a humorous dart at the naivete of lovers who, according to the canons of courtly love, put themselves into the power of a mythical god of Love.

Paraunter I was thereto most able,
As a white wal or a table,
For hit ys redy to cacche and take
Al that men wil theryn make,
Whether so men wil portreye or peynte
Be the werkes never so queynte.49

Mental idleness, day-dreams, and the vagaries occasioned by being in love are gently touched:

Nat that tyme turned to nothyng
Thorgh to mochel knowlechyng.
For that tyme Yowthe, my maistresse,
Governed me in ydeliness;
For hyt was in my first yowthe,
And thoo full lytel good y couthe,
For al my werkes were flyttynge


49. The Book of the Duchesse, 779-785.
That tyme, and al my thoght varinge
Al were to me ylyche good
That I knew thoo; but thus hit stood.50

There is more of the lash in Chaucer's thrusts
at old age which attempts to hold its own with youth,
as when the "youth" of sixty says:

For, God be thanked! I dar make avaunt,
I feele my lymes stark and suffisaunt
Though I be hoor, I fare as dooth a tree
That blosmeth er that fruyt ywoxen bee;
And blosmy tree nys neither drye ne deed.
I feele me nowhere hoor but on myn heed;
Myn herte and alle my lymes been as grene
As laurer thurgh the yeer is for to sene.51

In the Tale which the Merchant tells of May and
January, it is the folly of the aged and not the frivo-
lity of youth which is satirized. There is a tinge of
satire in the comparison of the married state with
bachelorhood on the lips of a seasoned bachelor of three
score years who is making a plea for the institution
whose merits he has just discovered.52

The aged who feign deafness or blindness when
these handicaps are to their advantage, but who hear and
see quite well when the occasion pleases them, are sati-

50. Ibid., 795-805
52. Ibid., 1260-1320.
rized in the person of the apparently decrepit husband whose sprightly young wife relies too much on his imperfect vision.53

Of the professions the Law is the most satirized generally, but Chaucer following the trend of the medieval satirists gives most of his attention to women and the clergy. There is almost none in his treatment of the Man of Law in "The Prologue", where he is treated with respect touching on admiration.

There are certain subtleties in the stories told by the Reeve and the Miller which defy classification under any of the heads already touched -- for instance, when the Reeve takes occasion to spar at the ambitious marriage of the miller, who out of policy, has chosen a wife far above his station.54 Here, as in many other places, Chaucer's art is evident, for the reader does not confine his thought to the unhappy miller, if he really thinks of him at all; but his mind at once flies to the same incongruities that he has known or heard of, thus universalizing his literary experience.

53. Ibid., 2330 et seq.

These two stories of the Reeve and the Miller together with that of the Shipman and the revelations made by the Wife of Bath in her breezy prologue, show Chaucer's concern to appeal to all classes. To the conservative his appeal is through "The Knightes Tale", every line of which is in perfect conformity with the canons of the conventional system of courtly love; to the rabble his appeal is through the stories of his tradesmen. But even in the sordid tales Chaucer has the secret of telling common, even coarse things in an uncommonly detached manner. Lounsbury says that he is surpassed only by Shakespeare in this point of his art.56

In the stories among The Canterbury Tales that are classed as "fabliaux" there are found rare examples of the author's ability for character portraiture. There is fun, but it is of the "slap-stick" variety, so that it is debatable whether it can be dignified by the name of humor. There is no criticism, therefore no satire.

In retrospect, then, we see that the classes of persons most satirized by Chaucer are the Clergy, Women, and Youth. Now we shall examine the characteristics which most stir his satiric Muse. From among the tabulated in-

stances of humorous criticism found in his writing, most of them may be classified under the five following heads: Vanity and Vainglory, Ambition and Greed, Verbosity and Pseudo-Learning, Superstition, and Boastfulness.
CHAPTER IV

CHARACTERISTICS SATIRIZED BY CHAUCER

Vanity

Since the day that Solomon's wisdom prompted him to exclaim: "Vanity, vanity, and all is vanity," the vain and the vain-glorious have been a favorite subject for the lash of the satirist. Chaucer seems harder, if he could ever be said to be hard, on the vain man than on the vain woman. He scorns the grandeur of a masculine hairdress that borders on the effeminate thus:

"With lokkes crulle as they were leyed in presse."¹ Vanity in the "parisshe" clerk is indicated by his coiffure:

"Crul was his heer and as the gold it shone."²

Chaucer cannot abide effeminacy. It is never overlooked. Probably no more scathing criticism could be made by one man of another than this concerning the

---

the Pardoner:

A voys he hadde as smal as hath a goat.
No berde hadde he, he nevere sholde have
As smothe it was as it were late shave. ³

This same trait is satirized at length in
"Sir Thopas" with his "sydes smale." This tale is gen­
erally construed as a burlesque on the satirical romance
of contemporary literature whose wordiness and general
futility are all hinted at in the beginning of the story.
Professor Manly, however, sees in it more of a satire on
the Flemish knight with his bourgeoisie pretensions.
Chaucer seems to have conceived of his knight as a very
effeminate person whose every line corresponded to the
medieval conception of a coward. The very name of
"Thopas" has an effeminate over-tone, according to Professor
Robinson, who has found that the topaz was the gem worn
by young women as a charm to protect their purity. With
such a name it was quite proper that Thopas should be
"chast and no lechour". ⁴ His effeminacy is enhanced by
the description of his lily-white armor and a lily in his
crest.⁵

---

5. C. Camden, Jr., "The Physiognomy of Thopas."
Chaucer spends himself on the ridiculous figure of Sir Thopas, not by way of belittling the high ideal of purity to which knighthood was pledged but to show how ludicrous it all is when the ideal no longer exists and only the exterior trappings of knighthood are in evidence. Two centuries later the jester, Cervantes, rode home from Lepanto to pen the most telling invective yet written against decaying knighthood. Chaucer had already foreseen the futility of the nobly born institution that was beginning to forget its pledge to the stars:

But sir Thopas, he bereth the flour
Of roial chivalry!

His goode steede al he bistrood,
And forth upon his way he glood
As sparce out of the bronde;
Upon his creest he bar a tour,
And therinne stiked a lilie flour,
God shilde his corse fro shonde!

His brighte hêlm was his wonger,
And by hym baitheth has dêxtrer
Of herbes fyne and goode.6

In satirizing the vanity of his fourteenth-century men Chaucer seized upon traits that are as old as the race; there is no over-drawing, no forcing. Sometimes it is by the strength of a single word that he will

clinch the description of a dandy and make us hate the folly but love the fool.

**Ambition**

Ambition and greed are more apt to incur criticism than humor, though they have their humorous side, too, when viewed with indifference. Nowhere in literature is Ambition so well satirized as in the *Hous of Fame*, an allegory eloquent of the fickleness of the Goddess Fame. In her castle, built significantly of ice where the names engraved thaw quickly into oblivion, Fame receives the supplications of her clients.

Tho sawgh I al the half ygrave
With famous folkes names fele,
That had iben in mochel wele,
And her fames wide yblowe.
But wel unnethes koude I knowe
Any lettres for to rede
Hir names by;'for, out of drede,
They were almost ofthowed so
That of the lettres oon or two
Was molte away of every name,
So unfamous was woxe hir fame.
But men seyn, "What may ever laste?"7

Their petitions are granted or rejected according to the caprice of the goddess. Sometimes by her decree the good are forgotten and the bad remembered, while those seeking oblivion are remembered and those thirsting for remem-

---

brance are doomed to be forgotten. At other times this order is reversed and justice is meted out with Scriptural fairness. The inconsistency lies in the fact that Fame knows no law but caprice.

One commentator sees the House of Fame as Dante retold by a humorist. Others see in it more self-revelation than Professor Kittredge who says that "the subject of the poem is not Geoffrey Chaucer, but the human race. The poem is a humorous study of mankind from the point of view of a Ruling Passion." In its conception and in its fulfillment the poem is profoundly ironic but it fails to leave a sting as Chaucer's humor has unrestricted play. He is thoroughly detached, for is he not only faithfully recounting a magnificent dream?

Chaucer's day saw the beginning of the bourgeoisie who by fair means or foul had managed to raise themselves out of their condition. To this class Chaucer himself belonged, but he had sufficient indifference to sit loose from class prejudices and to write in a serio-comic strain of a fourteenth-century snob:

A wyf he hadde, yeomen of noble kyn;
The person of the toun hir fader was.
With hire he yaf ful many a panne of bras,
For that Symkyn sholde in his blood allye.
She was yfostred in a nonnerye;
For Symkyn wolde no wyf, as he sayde,
But she were wel yncrissed and a mayde,
To saven his estaat of yomanrye.

She was a digné as water in a dich,
And ful of hoker and of bisemare.
Hir thoughts that a lady sholde hire spare,
What for hire kynrede and hir nortelrie
That she hadde lerned in the nonnerye.10

In the highly caparisoned company of the haberdasher, the carpenter, the webbe, the dyer, and the tapycer, "Of solempe and a great fraternitee," Chaucer sees the germs of an office-seeking gentry, once they have tried their wings in political flight:

Wel semed ech of hem a fair burgeys
To sitten in a yeldehalle on a deys
Everich for the wisdom that he kan
Was shaply for to been an alderman.11

There is a smile at the legitimate but often ludicrous ambition of parents for their children to rise above the station into which they have been born, when the Frankleyn says of his son in a conversation with the Squire:

I have a sone, and by the Trinitee,
I hadde leverre than twenty pound worth lond,
Though it right now were fallen in myn hond.

But for to pleye at dees, and to despended
And less al that he hath, is his usage.
And he hath leverre talken with a page
Than to commune with any gentil wight
Where he myghte lerne gentillesse aright.\(^{12}\)

The pharisical spirit of the religious "kill-joy" who

\[\ldots \text{for a litel glorie veine,}\]
\[\text{They lesen God and eke his reigne,}^{13}\]

is described and satirized in one of the few caustic passages in the \textit{Romaunt of the Rose}.

Occasionally Chaucer has recourse to the sting of the epigram to touch those who have improved their condition but who revert to type when taken off guard:

\[
\text{Lat take a cat, and fostre hym wel with milk}
\text{And tendre flessh, and make his couche of silk,}
\text{And lat hym seen a mous go by the wal,}
\text{Anon he weyveth milk and flessh and al,}
\text{And every deyntee that is in that hous,}
\text{Swich appetite hath he to ete a mous.}^{14}
\]

This with several other examples is applied to mankind in the Manciple's "pourquoi" story, "Why the Crow is Black."

\[\text{12. "The Squires Tale", 682-694.}\]
\[\text{13. } \textit{Romaunt of the Rose}, 447-449.\]
Verbosity and Pseudo-Learning

The verbose and the over-learned always lay themselves open to the attacks of satire. The very nature of their offence is repellent to the thoughtful man, who sees them in the light of the Oxford dictionary definition of a dunce: "One who is void of learning but full of books." The poor blundering human being who "knows everything and understands nothing" brings out the satire of scorn from most writers of a satiric turn, but Chaucer only smiles indulgently at them when he gives this advice:

If that your eyen kan nat seen aright,
Looke that your mynde lakke noght his sight
For though ye looken never so brode and stare,
Ye shul nothyng wynne on that chaffare.16

The bookworm is gently satirized in the most pleasing of all the Canterbury Pilgrims, the Clerk, as the host chides him for his silence and urges him to put aside the books.

For Goddes sake, as beth of bettre cheere!
It is no tyme for to studien heere.17

At the host's invitation to the Parson to preach, the Shipman states his objections to pious Latin sermons. The passage might be interpreted as a satire on sermons in general, but it particularly attacks those that are far above the mentality of the congregation:

Seyde the Shipman: "Heer schal he nat preche; He schal no gospel glosen here ne teche. We leven alle in the grete God", quod he; He wolde sowen som difficulte, Or springen cokkel in our clene corn.

My joly body schal a tale telle, And I schal clynken you so mery a belle, That I schal waken al this compaignie. But it schal not been of philosophie, Ne phislyas, no termed queinte of lawe. Ther is but litel Latyn in my mawe." 18

The Shipman is not afraid of heresy, but he is frankly afraid of being bored.

The tendency to introduce frequent French and Latin quotations ineptly into conversation and story is satirized several times in "The Somnours Tale" when the Somnour has his friar quote glibly from the Latin Gospels to impress his audience with his learning and incidentally to disguise the grossness of his tale. Chaucer seems especially irritable on the point of imperfect French and Latin. We learn of the host's scholarly pretensions when he swears incorrectly by the "corpus dominus." 19


Chaucer's diplomatic contacts with the French put him in a position to judge that the French spoken in London was far from the perfection of Parisian French, and it seems to have had for him the same unpleasant effect that "department-store" French has for us. He says of the Prioress's antiquated Norman-French, which she speaks with the assurance that it is still the French of fashionable circles:

And Frenssh she spak ful faire and fetisly
And after the scole of Stratford atte-Bowe,
For Frensssh of Parys was to hire unknowne.'20

Skeats insists that though Chaucer had been in France and knew well the difference between the Parisian and Anglo-Norman dialects, there is no reason for believing that he preferred the Parisian dialect to the Anglicized version.

There is nothing to show that Chaucer here speaks slightingly of the French spoken by the Prioress, though this view is commonly adopted by newspaper-writers who know only this one line of Chaucer and cannot forbear to use it in jest. 21

It is, however, in observations such as this

one about the Prioress's French that the very heart of satire is found: a person doing something badly, not because it is incorrect, but because it seems to him the perfect thing to do. It is not likely that Chaucer should have missed the humor of this situation.

Probably the best satire in Chaucer on the over-learned is that centered about the character of his academic eagle through whose kindly offices he was born to the dwellings of Fame and Rumor. The eagle is a born lecturer, one that would grace any rostrum. He delights in his own explanations and is proud to be able to instruct an unenlightened man in terms so palpable:

"A ha!" quod he, "lo, so I can
Lewedly to a lewed man
Speke, and shewe hem swyche skiles
That he may shake hem be the biles,
So palpable they shulden be." 22

Superstition

The superstitious, over-credulous person has foes to combat from within and from without. The least harmful of the outside attacks and the most remedial is satire, since it shows him his folly and leads him back to sanity with a genial smile. There still prevailed

22. Hous of Fame, 865-870
in Chaucer's day many pagan superstitions which Christianity had not yet dispelled; it was the period which Lounsbury characterizes as the "interval between the death of Pan and the reign of Christ". In his attitude towards these superstitions, as well as in many other respects, Chaucer was in advance of his century. A salient example of this skepticism is evidenced in his sly distrust (he was too discreet to own open disbelief) in the legend of the mythical King Arthur who was regarded as an historical character by creditable annalists until the end of the sixteenth century. In the opening lines of the Wife of Bath's Tale he sets forth a state of affairs never realized this side of fairyland.

In th' olde dayes of the Kyng Arthour, Of which that Britons spoken greet honour, Al was this land fulfild of fayerye. The elf-queene, with hir joly compaignye, Daunced ful ofte in many a grene mede. 25

The following solemn reference to Pan's wrath was probably intended as a satire on the current superstitions as well as a thrust at the over-seriousness of the devotees of the system of courtly love:

24. Ibid., 496.
For he had well nygh lost hys mynde,
Thogh Pan, that men clepe god of kynde,
Were for hys sorwes never so wroth.26

"The Chanoun Yemannes Tale" is almost entirely concerned with the occult art of alchemy, the "elvysshe craft" as he calls it. Chaucer is satirizing not only those who believe in its powers but those who are taken in by the fakirs of all ages:

Lo which avantage is to multiplie!
That slidynge science hath me maad so bare
That I have no good, wher that evere I fare;
And yet I am endetted so therby,
Of gold that I have borwed, trewely,
That whil I lyve I shal it quite nevere.
Lat every man be war by me for evere!
What maner man that casteth hym therto,
If he continue, I holde his thrift ydo.
For so helpe me God, therby shal he nat wynne,
But empte his purs, and make his wittes thynne.27

There is a note of honest contempt for books of magic bound up in the description of one of the characters in "The Frankeleyns Tale" who is represented as having seen such a book. The poet expresses himself in regard to its contents:

Which book spak muchel of the operaciouns
Touchynge the eighte and twenty mansiouns
That longen to the moone, and swich folye
As in oure dayes is nat worth a flye.28

26. The Book of the Duchesse, 512-515
"The Nonne Prestes Tale" about Chanticleer and Pertelote is, in general, a satire on a superstitious, self-opinionated husband and his matter-of-fact wife. The animal satire, very much in vogue during the Middle Ages, has a universal appeal and is another of those impersonal vehicles for satire which shifts the responsibility from the author's shoulders. The pomposity of the over-powering male is satirized in the description of Chanticleer in the midst of his harem of fowls. Pertelote, the favorite, scorns Chanticleer for his belief in dreams, and suggests a very prosaic remedy for sleepless nights. For all his bravado he is a prey to superstition, to belief in dreams, to a dread of Friday. In spite of all the care he has taken to shield himself, on Friday came his undoing at the hands of "daun Russell", the Fox. Ingeniously he manages to escape the hungry jaws of Russell; the loss moves the fox to the moral conclusion:

... he that wynketh, whan he sholde see,  
Al wilfully, God lat him nevere thee!  
"Nay," quod the fox, "but God yeve him meschaunce,  
That is so undiscreet of governaunce  
That jangleth whan he sholde holde his pees."  

Boastfulness

"The Monkes Tale", "De Casibus Virorum Illustrium," might be taken entirely as a satire of

... hem that stoode in heigh degree,
And fillen so that ther nas no remedie
To brynge hem out of hir adversitee.
For certein, whan that Fortune list to flee,
Ther may no man the cours of hire withholde.
Lat no man truste on blynd prosperitee;
Be war by thise ensamples trewe and olde.30

In this tale Chaucer has his monk begin with a no less illustrious character than Lucifer and conclude with Croesus. The characters are chosen from the Bible, mythology, Ancient History, and Medieval History. Nothing new is added to the stories of these historical heroes but on the lips of the monk their rise and downfall seem a satire on the boastfulness of the apparently successful who fail to reckon with any power higher than the human. "Ful wys is he that kan hymselfen knowe"31, at the end of the story of the Greek demi-god, Hercules, has force.

The boastfulness of the well-groomed Merchant is exposed in these lines:

His resons he spak ful solempnely,
Sownynge alwey th' encrees of his wynnyng.32

31. Ibid., 2139
When Chaucer represents the Manciple as saying,

But for I am not textuél
I will not tell of textes never a del,33

he is not exactly satirizing boastfulness, but he is
giving high praise to the Manciple's simplicity.

Again we see in Chaucer this same note of
honesty with himself and a deliberate tendency to dispel
any illusions he might have of his right to fame. In
the Hous of Fame when a stranger at the temple of the
goddess inquires if he has come hither to secure fame
for himself, the following answer is given:

"Nay, for sothe, frend," quod y;
"I cam noght hyder, graunt mercy,
For no such cause, by my hed:
Sufficeth me, as I were ded,
That no wight have my name in honde.34

The whole of the tale of Sir Thopas is a satire
on the futility of boast and bombast. The host "stynteth
Chaucer of his tale" in this unceremonious speech:

"Namoore of this, for Goddes dignitee,"
Quodoure Hooste, "for thou makest me
So wery of thy verray lewednesse
That also wisly God my soule blesse,
Myne eres aken of thy drasty speche.
Now swich a rym the devel I biteche!
This may wel be rym dogerel," quod he.35

34. Hous of Fame, 1873-1878.
In the Lenvoy de Chaucer à Scogan there is the testimony of a natural philosopher seasoned with years of observation of the pitiable littleness of man's supremest efforts, when he tells his young friend that:

But al shal passe that men prose or ryme; Take every man hys turn, as for his tyme. \(^{36}\)

36. Lenvoy de Chaucer à Scogan, 41-43
CONCLUSION

From these observations the question that occurs to us is: Is Chaucer's satire, in quantity and quality, such as to justify us in classifying him as a satirist?

Strictly speaking, a man is called an artist when he is distinguished by special capacity in an art to which he is willing to subordinate all his other interests and occupations. The significance of the suffix "ist" is better seen when it is compared with the suffix "er". According to Webster the latter forms nouns from verbs or nouns with the sense of "one who has to do with", especially as a matter of trade or occupation, for example, a tinner, a hatter, etc. "Ist", from the Latin demonstrative adjective, "iste, ista, istud", denotes "one who practices a given art of science, one occupied particularly or professionally with a given department of intellectual knowledge, for example, an artist or a scientist. There is between these two suffixes something of the same difference that there is between the artist and the artisan. The artist is one in whom imagination and taste preside over the execution
of the work; the artisan is one skilled in the manual crafts.

An artist does not necessarily give all his time to his art. Rather he gives to it his very best; it is the thing in which he delights. Chaucer and Lamb, among other great artists in the field of English letters, had engrossing occupations which took most of their time; but it was in the hours that they snatched from business to write that they gave expression to their real selves; it was then that they were in their element. Writing was ostensibly their "side-line" or their "hobby", yet it was none the less their art, that by which they lived and will continue to live in English literature.

Strictly speaking, then, to be justifiably called a satirist, according to the definition of satire, a man must be better endowed with the gift of combining humor and criticism than with other powers, and to this he must devote the greater part of his writing. According to this conception Chaucer can hardly be called a satirist -- he is so much more than a satirist that this quality is not the first that comes to our minds when we think of him, as it does when we think of Aristophanes,
Juvenal, Dryden, Pope, and Swift.

Chaucer, because he has written satire, is not therefore to be dubbed first a satirist. But he is in so many ways the actual fountain-head of all succeeding verse, that unless he be studied, the later deliberate satirists cannot be rightly understood.¹

Just as no experience of life was ever lost on Chaucer, so there is no ability that he does not turn to account. He uses the lesser art of satire to heighten the effect of his great art of story-telling.

Such, then, is the status of Chaucer. Though not a satirist, he indulges in satire almost intuitively and with a fine art. He is not concerned with his effect as a satirist, nor does he go out of his way to find the satiric. M. Legouis compares Chaucer's satire to that of Molière:

Usually Chaucer's satire resembles that of the great comic writers. It is simply an insight into the hidden feelings and unconscious motives of the human machine. Like Molière, he sees the selfish causes of a man's actions, and views them with an equanimity, a serenity of which Molière was not always capable.²

In his position in life, at the crossroads between royalty and bourgeoisie, enough satire of life and manners found expression naturally in his stories

---

2. Emile Legouis, op. cit., 154.
without any search for vehicles especially shaped for criticism. Mr. G. K. Chesterton has stated the unique position of Chaucer precisely:

There are four facts which are the four corners of the world he lived in: the four conditions of Christendom at the end of the fourteenth century. In themselves they can be stated very simply. Chaucer was English at a time when the full national identity was still near its beginnings. Chaucer was Catholic at a time when the full Catholic unity of Europe was near the beginning of its end. Chaucer was chivalric in the sense that he belonged to the world of chivalry and armorial blazonry, when that world was in its gorgeous autumn, glorious with decay. Finally Chaucer was none the less bourgeois... in the sense that he himself was born and bred of burgesses and of tradesmen, working under the old guild system. . . . .

His figure bestrides the gap between the two last systems. It is as if he had the Trade Guild for a mother and the Order of Knighthood for a father. 3

Chaucer saw men making themselves absurd by believing themselves to be what they were not, but he saw in them much more than that. Their very weakness attracted him, and if he could not admire them, at least, he could understand them. There was coupled, with a very secondary notion of criticism, another idea that was intensely fascinating and beneficent. We glean

from his humorous touches his real philosophy of life, since laughter throws a far more illuminating light on the laugher than on the laughed-at. And if men "aim rightest when they aim in jest", certainly we have the right and enduring testimony of an honest man (no one else has the right to use satire) when Chaucer lines up his characters and makes immortal twenty-nine travelers to Canterbury, immortal not because of their great deeds or their virtues but because of the composite of virtue and weakness which they exhibit.

To see only the exterior of things, as the satirist must often do lest he lapse into pity and thus sacrifice his aloofness, is to be in danger of becoming superficial; yet just as surely does one's perspective suffer by a preoccupation with what is deep within. The more rounded out the view, the better the chance to get at the truth of things and to interpret that truth in art. So it is that each acquisition of a new point of view made by an author not only adds to the clarity of his vision but extends it. The process of re-evaluation results in a better understanding of what the individual parts mean to the whole—which understanding goes far

in wisdom. In contrast with most of his contemporaries, Chaucer seems to have had this saving vision. This insight -- disengaged from, yet interested in his characters -- seems to have grown with the years. His earlier poems, many of them occasional poems, had very little of the satiric spirit. It is especially as he matures, as shown in the _Hous of Fame_ and _The Canterbury Tales_, that the fine sense of satire grows upon him just because of this wider vision. And for all the banter in _The Canterbury Tales_ there is evidence of the "high seriousness" resultant upon seeing life whole.

Thus while admitting the inferiority of the satiric to other of Chaucer's literary powers, such as his ability to sustain interest in a story and to draw characters with exactness, yet we should not undervalue the satiric perception as a partial equipment for great writing. Art is always the result of vision; the wider the vision, the greater are the possibilities of noble art.
BIBLIOGRAPHY
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Spurgeon, Caroline, *Five Hundred Years of Chaucer Criticism and Allusion*. 3 vols.; Cambridge at the University Press, 1925.

Swift, Jonathan, *Gulliver's Travels*.

