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# Chaucer's Consistency in His Portrait of the Monk in the Canterbury Tales

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CHAUCER'S CONSISTENCY IN HIS PORTRAIT OF THE  
MONK IN THE CANTERBURY TALES

BY

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## VITA AUCTORIS

He was born in Chicago on December 6, 1918. In 1925 he entered St. Mark's Grammar School, where he completed his elementary education in June of 1934. For the next three years he studied at St. Mel High School on Chicago's West Side. For his fourth year of high school he went to St. Ignatius High School. Upon graduating in 1938 he entered the Society of Jesus and made part of his undergraduate studies at St. Xavier's University, Cincinnati, Ohio. Later he transferred to Loyola University, in 1942, and received his A.B. in 1943.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

In the beginning of Chaucerian criticism, about 1598, some critics interpreted the character of the Monk as immoral. Outstanding among these were Francis Thynne, who based his conclusions on the spurious tales of the Plowman, and the Pilgrim,<sup>1</sup> and John Dryden, who in his introduction to his version of the Canterbury Tales indicated his belief that the Plowman's Tale, which attacked the immorality of monks, was by Chaucer.<sup>2</sup> However, two leading Chaucerian scholars of the present generation, Mr. Manly and Mr. Tatlock, greatly modified this opinion of the Monk. Both agreed that the Monk was not, properly speaking, immoral, but they differed in their opinions on Chaucer's consistency in portraying the Monk as a worldly man.

While Mr. Manly believed that Chaucer portrayed the Monk of the Prologue, not as a grossly immoral man, but as a man given to the worldly pursuits and the joys of the table, still, he was convinced that Chaucer completely changed this picture of the typical medieval monk when he began the Monk's Tale, substituting for him a gloomy, pious, proper, scholarly man:

As to the Monk, although Chaucer completely

1 F. Thynne, Animadversions on Chaucer's Works, N. Trubner and Co., London, 1598, 6

2 J. Dryden, The Poetical Works of John Dryden, Houghton Mifflin and Co., Cambridge, 1909, 745.

threw over the one described in the Prologue and substituted for him a gloomy, uninteresting person, who retains nothing of the original brilliant figure except the horse with its jingling bells, he [Monk of the Prologue] seems to me real...<sup>3</sup>

Mr. Tatlock took issue with Mr. Manly. He claimed that Chaucer was consistent in his picture of the Monk from beginning to end. The picture, he said, is consistently the portrait of a worldly monk, though not strictly an immoral man:

Here I must wholly dissent from Mr. Manly: "Chaucer completely threw over the (monk) described in the Prologue and substituted for him a gloomy and uninteresting person, who retains nothing of the original brilliant figure except the horse with his jingling bells." To others, on the contrary, the Monk's Prologue has seemed one of the most consistent passages in the whole poem.<sup>4</sup>

Therefore, briefly, this thesis will examine the theories of Mr. Manly and Mr. Tatlock, together with the proofs they offer. Accepting Mr. Tatlock's position as the stronger, the thesis will enlarge and develop what Mr. Tatlock in his brief essay on the subject could not discuss at length. However, since certain details of Mr. Manly's position indicate that Mr. Tatlock's theory is not entirely correct, the necessary adjustments will be made in Mr. Tatlock's theory.

Here it may be well to note that in speaking of the various sections of the Canterbury Tales that deal with the Monk the custom accepted by

<sup>3</sup> J.M.Manly, Some New Light on Chaucer, H.Holt and Co., New York, 1926, 251-262.

<sup>4</sup> J.S.P.Tatlock, "Chaucer's Monk," M.L.N. 55, 1940, 352

scholars will be followed. Thus to avoid any confusion, and not to give any verdict as to Chaucer's consistency, references to the Monk described by Chaucer in the General Prologue will be made by using the term "the Monk of the Prologue;" whereas references to the descriptions of the Monk, to be found in various links, the prologue to the Monk's Tale, the Monk's Tale, and the epilogue to the Monk's Tale will be made by calling him the "Monk of the Monk's Tale."

## CHAPTER II

### INTERPRETATIONS OF MR. MANLY AND MR. TATLOCK

The first suggestion of any inconsistency in Chaucer's portrayal of the Monk was made in 1926 by Mr. Manly in his lectures entitled Some New Light on Chaucer.<sup>1</sup> Here he presented the thesis that Chaucer conceived the Monk of the Prologue as a "splendid worldly scorner of labor and books."<sup>2</sup> When Mr. Manly examined the Monk's Tale, he was convinced that Chaucer changed that concept of the Monk and

...completely threw over the Monk of the Prologue and substituted for him a gloomy and uninteresting person, who retains nothing of the original brilliant figure except the horse with his jingling bells.<sup>3</sup>

To support this statement, he volunteered the opinion that Chaucer changed his conception of the Monk of the Prologue after he had produced the masterful creation of the Nun's Priest, a zealous, modest, gentle priest. Mr. Manly thought that Chaucer would want to avoid the unfavorable appearance that the Monk would have in contrast with the Priest.

It was perhaps that he conceived the Priest in such form and character and gave him the tale which has immortalized him that Chaucer felt obliged to change his original conception of the Monk and transform him from the splendid

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1 J. M. Manly, Some New Light on Chaucer, H. Holt and Co. New York, 1926

2 Ibid., 222

3 Ibid., 261-262



worldly scorner of labor and books whom we know in the Prologue to the sad-faced pedant with a hundred tragedies in his cell who greets our astonished ears when the Host calls upon him to tell his tale.<sup>4</sup>

Unsatisfied with this explanation, he later returned to the question in the same series of lectures. This time he offered another suggestion as to why Chaucer changed the concept of the Monk. Perhaps the picture was too lifelike. Perhaps some clerical dignitary recognized in it a portrait of himself. But this statement Mr. Manly wanted to be taken as no more than a "suggestion of a more or less speculative character." However, he offered a substantiation for his guess. He thought that, given a few guesses, he could even name the man's monastery. But that was a subject too involved for the short lectures he was then giving:

Perhaps he was too real. Perhaps he or some powerful friend of his read the sketch in the Prologue and suggested to Chaucer that it was unmistakable and undesired. Even now, after the lapse of more than half a millennium, I think that, given two or three guesses, I could name his monastery. But that is too long a story to be told now.<sup>5</sup>

Not until two years later did Mr. Manly return to a discussion of his theory. This time, in the notes on the Monk in his edition of the Canterbury Tales,<sup>7</sup> he offered more conclusive proofs. First, he showed why a Monk

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 261-262

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., ix

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 262

<sup>7</sup> J. M. Manly, Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, H. Holt and Co. New York, 1928, 508-511, 635-636

holding the position which the Monk of the Prologue held would be worldly because of his outside activities:

It is difficult to form a conception of the enormous possessions of some of the wealthier abbeys and consequently of the degree to which the abbot and some of his chief officers were obliged to devote themselves to purely secular business....It is not strange that the men upon whom the management of the larger monasteries devolved had to give most of their time to worldly affairs or that some of them acquired the tastes and habits of secular lords.<sup>8</sup>

After this explanation showing why many medieval monks could easily become worldly, he went on to give a few details which showed the characteristic of worldliness:

Professor Skeat notes that "fashionable riders were in the habit of hanging small bells on the bridles and harness of their horses," and quotes passages to show that this was done both by laymen and by worldly members of the clergy...Recchelees is frequently applied to persons neglectful of their duties, and is more than once applied to vagabonds...Ecclesiastical authorities were continually disturbed by monks who left their cloisters and clerics who wandered free from jurisdiction.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to these two details, that the Monk wore bells on his bridle and that he was outside his monastery, Mr. Manly pointed out that in his habits of dress and food he was worldly:

The dress of the Monk must have been very expensive. Furs and fur-lined garments were

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 508-509  
<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 509 & 510

much worn in the Middle Ages, because the houses were not well heated in winter, but the fine gray fur with which the Monk's sleeves were trimmed was not for comfort only but for ornament. Under ordinary circumstances Monks were forbidden to wear boots, but this prohibition, like most others, was often violated...The regulations of the monastic orders prescribed only plain food for monks, and meats were not to be eaten by them except when ill or feeble, but the wealthier monks had long disregarded this regulation.<sup>10</sup>

All that Mr. Manly has said thus far on the Monk of the Prologue could be summarized thus: Although he was a worldly Monk, in his dress, his food, and in his departure from his monastery, he was not to be supposed an immoral man. The duties of his office were such that one could easily see how he would take on the habits and tastes of a world lord; in fact, his duties obliged him to give himself mostly to secular business. But in all this there was no indication of any sin or of grave moral turpitude.

Mr. Manly referred to the rule of St. Benedict, where the Saint laid down his doctrine of "Laborare est orare," in his note on the lines of the Prologue which allude to the precepts on work and study.

The reule of Seint Maure or of Seint Beneit,  
By cause that it was old and somdel streit--  
This ilke Monk leet olde thynges pace,  
And heeld after the newe world the space...  
What sholde he studie and make hymselfen wood,  
Upon a book in cloystre alwey to poure,

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 510 & 511

Or swynken with his handes, and laboure  
 As Austyn bit? How shal the world be served?  
 Therefore he was a prikasour aright:  
 Grehoundes he hadde as swift as fowel in flight;  
 Of prikyng and of huntyng for the hare  
 Was al his lust, for no cost wolde he spare.<sup>11</sup>

This was an added proof of his worldliness, for he gave up the duties his rule imposed upon him in order that he might serve the new world by hunting. Mr. Manly pointed out the case of the Abbot Samson, who did such service to the world. Jocelyn of Brakelond gave an account of his monastery under the Abbots Hugh and Samson. The first, he declared, was "a kind and pious man, a good and religious monk, yet not wise or far-sighted in worldly affairs." He allowed the property to go to ruin, became involved in many debts with Jews, and "everything daily got worse and worse."<sup>12</sup> Then the Abbot Samson took over. He was a man rich in worldly prudence. In a very businesslike manner he went out and drew up a survey of the monastery's properties, of rents due, of the names of laborers and their families, of tenants, and of the amount of service due from each of these latter. He repaired the old halls, put roofs on several roofless buildings, built new chapels and chambers, added upper stories in many places where only barns had been before. Furthermore, he enclosed parks and granges which he replenished for the chase, keeping a huntsman with dogs -- all for the benefit of any persons of quality who might visit the abbey. All this happened at the Abbey of St. Edmund in Bury, and was told by the chronicler

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<sup>11</sup> Robinson, 21, 11. 173-192

<sup>12</sup> Manly, Chaucer's Complete Works, 508

of the monastery, Jocelyn.

The service of the world was only hinted at in the chronicler's account. It was apparently so normal a thing that it needed no explanation. The abbot kept a well stocked grange where his noble patrons could hunt. In return, they gave him the means to carry out his extensive repairs and building programs. Thus the Abbey of St. Edmund's became one of the wealthiest in the land because its abbot was prudent.

Now Chaucer's Monk of the Prologue, dressed so richly and so in love with hunting, a man who had greyhounds and many fine horses, would fit well in the place of the Abbot Samson. Indeed, Chaucer said he was "to been an abbot able." And if he had given up his hunting, "how shal the world be served?"

But this service of the world led him to disregard his other duties. His hunting and going out of the monastery, to the detriment of his study and manual labor, were duties of his office which lured him to the tastes and habits of worldly lords. He was worldly, though not immoral, therefore, as a result of the secular and social tasks that fell to the heads of great monasteries, for these duties precluded any chance of monastic study or labor. That he had not always been a ruler in his monastery, that he was not always exempt by his office from study and labor, and therefore must have studied and labored at one time in his life, did not seem to occur to Mr. Manly.

That Mr. Manly did not consider that the Monk could have been a student at one time in his life was obvious from his remarks on the Monk of the Monk's Tale. This Monk he found sedate, proper, studious, and learned, in contrast to the Monk of the Prologue:

The Monk here seems to be a distinctly sedate and bookish person, altogether different from the conception given in the Prologue. Has Chaucer forgotten? Or did he change his mind? Which conception is the later?<sup>13</sup>

In his new edition of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, Mr. Manly made no changes in his notes on the Monk, and shortly afterwards he became engrossed in the Six Manuscript Edition of the Canterbury Tales, never again to return to the discussion of the dual presentation of Chaucer's Monk.

Not until 1939 was the question approached by any author in print. In that year, Miss Ramona Bressie published her article in the Modern Language Notes,<sup>14</sup> advancing Mr. Manly's theory of Chaucer's inconsistency in the portrayal of the Monk. She repeated and developed Mr. Manly's remark that the Monk of the Prologue was too lifelike and too unfavorable for a certain Augustinian Abbot of Leicester, whom he resembled at least in habits and in physical characteristics. Therefore Chaucer, she cautiously suggested, had given the Monk of the Monk's Tale a more favorable, a more complete character, lest William of Cloune, Abbot of Leicester, take offence.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 635-636

<sup>14</sup> R. Bressie, "A Governour Wily and Wys," M.L.N., 54, 1939, 477-490

In Miss Bressie's opinion, William of Cloune was exactly like the Monk of the Prologue, for he kept greyhounds at Leicester. While he served the world and offered lords a place and opportunity to hunt, the monastery enjoyed great prosperity. But after William's time came another Abbot, Philip de Repindon, who was interested in alchemy, got rid of the taint of Lollardy which William encouraged, was irreproachable, conventional, and intellectual, in all things like the Monk of the Monk's Tale. This change in abbots suggested to Miss Bressie the solution of Mr. Manly's remark that he thought he could identify the monastery of the Monk.

Is Cloune the person who has been sought in the records as the living model portrayed -- presumably -- in the Monk?<sup>15</sup>

To show that William of Cloune very probably was the living model who might have resented Chaucer's picture in the Prologue, Miss Bressie alleged many parallels between the Abbot of Leicester and Chaucer's first picture of the Monk. Both were hunters:

The abbey chronicler says that Cloune was  
 "The most famous and notable hunter of hares  
 among all the lords of the realm"...As with  
 the Monk,

Of prikyng and of hunteyng for the hare  
 Was al his lust...<sup>16</sup>

In the parallel which he drew between the Abbot Samson and the

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 489

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 477

Monk,<sup>17</sup> Mr. Manly implied that the Monk of the Prologue did his hunting for the sake of gaining patrons for his monastery. This, according to Miss Bressie, was what Cloune had done:

But the abbot often declared in private that it was not these "frivolities" that he enjoyed so much as paying deference to the wishes of his noble patrons and having the benefit of their patronage.<sup>18</sup>

In addition to the similarity in hunting, the imaginary and the real monks were alike in the details of their dress:

Chaucer's lines on the Monk's person, though they ridicule, suggest that his appearance was striking and prepossessing, as does the chronicler's remark that the abbot's "face and his presence were inexpressibly gracious to everyone," though of course compliments of this kind were a convention. As to the Monk's dress...Augustinians of that time wore cassocks lined with fur and hoods made entirely of grys...put on like a shawl and usually not joined in front though it was sometimes fastened, like the Monk's with a morse,  
 "And for to festne his hood under his chyn  
 He hadde of gold y-wrought a ful curious pyn,  
 A love-knotte in the greeter end ther was."<sup>19</sup>

The mention of the love-knot occasioned a long dissertation on the mystical signification of such ornaments in the next few pages of Miss Bressie's article. After this digression, she pointed out that the Monk liked a fat swan better than any other roast, just the dish that William of

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<sup>17</sup> Matter referred to in note 12, p. 8

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 478

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 481



Cloune once had at a Christmas dinner at the castle of the Earl of Leicester.<sup>20</sup>

In conclusion, Miss Bressie apologized for not having consulted all the material that was at her disposal concerning William of Cloune. But even if she had, she believed that it could not be proved conclusively that he was the living model for the Monk of the Prologue:

In short, in order to know whether Cloune is or is not the Monk, it would be necessary to know much more about hunting monks and about Chaucer and the Canterbury Tales than is possible now.<sup>21</sup>

Briefly, Miss Bressie's argument to substantiate Mr. Manley's remark avowing his belief in his power to identify the Monk's monastery was a series of parallels between William of Cloune (of Leicester) and the Monk of the Prologue. They both were hunters; both were dressed in the same fashion; both liked fine food. But now it will be seen how Mr. Tatlock answered the arguments from these "similarities."

Early in 1940, Mr. Tatlock published his reply to Mr. Manly, in which he also responded to the arguments of Miss Bressie.<sup>22</sup> He advanced immediately an answer to the argument that the picture of the Monk in the

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 488

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 490

<sup>22</sup> J. S. P. Tatlock, "Chaucer's Monk," M. L. N., 55, 1940, 350-354

Prologue might have been offensive to some dignitary. He declared Chaucer was producing literary creations; all the characters were types. In these types, Chaucer showed his genius for the realistic to such a degree that the portraits might seem portraits of persons living in Chaucer's day. However, to take the next step and say that the imaginary person and the living model were one would be beyond the range of accurate scholarship:

Chaucer's Pilgrims are mostly vivid types... But the vivid type is more harmonious with the essential nature of poetry, even as actually set forth by critics from Sidney's predecessors down...and its vividness was inevitable to Chaucer with his deep regard for the concrete. This led him often to verge on an individual look, with local habitations, and names... No doubt many a trait was recalled by a man of Chaucer's wide acquaintance, from this or that actual person; such traits might even though rarely be recovered by a student from oblivion (as at times perhaps by Mr. Manly), even by extraordinary luck in sufficient numbers to justify calling one of the descriptions something of a portrait. But the suggestion that The So-and-So is Such-and-Such would be almost always unprovable and also too exact...By showing resemblances to certain actual persons of the class for whom there is record, the truth to type has been forced upon us by many critics, especially by Mr. Manly, and now in the case of the Monk by Miss Bressie. The former's parallels between some Pilgrims and actual persons he announces not as proof that the poet was portraying actual persons but as "suggestions of a more or less speculative character"; Miss Bressie evidently would like to claim more, too much.<sup>23</sup>

Furthermore, William of Cloune could not have objected to Chaucer's picture in the Prologue, since he died some nine years before Chaucer wrote the Prologue.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 350

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 354

Having disposed of that question, Mr. Tatlock turned to the other arguments of Mr. Manly. He did not directly challenge each statement as it was made, but denied them all together. In a sense, this was all that he could do. Mr. Manly had given his pictures of the Monk of the Prologue and of the Monk's Tale, indicating a fundamental difference in the personality of the two, and asserting that the two pictures were so dissimilar that all they had in common was the horse with its jingling bells. The Monk of the Prologue was essentially worldly, a bright, cheerful man, handsome, well-fed, lordly; but the Monk of the Monk's Tale was a gloomy, studious, sedate, conventional man. To this argument alleging two different Monks, Mr. Tatlock responded by showing that the picture of the Monk was consistent. First he drew the picture of the Monk of the Prologue, and since he maintained that they were essentially the same, he drew also the picture of the Monk of the Monk's Tale. Chaucer's Monk was an important man, not young, a lord and a prelate, not abbot but presumably prior; he was physically attractive and vigorous, worldly, no student, free-and-easy, a sportsman, a gourmet, and handsomely dressed. That is all.

The Monk is shown in the Prolog as not young, an important man, a "lord" and a "prelate" (172, 200, 204). Therefore presumably he belongs to an important house, for he is not abbot but merely an "out-rider," in charge of monastic estates, and seemingly a prior (172). He is physically attractive and vigorous; without ridicule he is worldly, no student, free-

and-easy, a sportsman, a gourmet, and handsomely dressed...This is essentially all.<sup>25</sup>

When the Monk reappeared he was essentially the same. He was a distinguished person to whom the other Pilgrims paid respect. He was prudent and able. There was one change; he was acutely conscious of his profession now, because circumstances had placed him on his guard. Therefore, Mr. Tatlock had to disagree with Mr. Manly. The Monk of the Prologue was a vigorous and expansive man, as Mr. Manly himself had indicated, and he would naturally react to the unwise impudence of the Host by becoming sedate and conventional:

When the Monk reappears he is substantially the same. The Host having earlier hocus-pocused the lots to secure the Knight first, highest among the laity, drops the mask in the Miller's Prolog, and calls next directly on the Monk, highest among the clergy...He figures most, of course, in the links before and after his tale. Here as before he is "my lord" (3114, 3117, 3119, 3153), prudent and able (3130). But there is one addition...The most conspicuous patron saint of his own abbey would be sure to be thought of by any monk when called upon to narrate in circumstances which made him acutely conscious of his profession. And circumstances had just done this -- put the Monk on his dignity. Here I most wholly dissent from Mr. Manly: "Chaucer completely threw over the (Monk) described in the Prologue and substituted for him a gloomy and uninteresting person, who retains nothing of the original brilliant figure except the horse with its jingling bells." To others, on the contrary, the Monk's

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 350-351

Prolog has seemed one of the most vivid and consistent passages in the whole poem. A vigorous and expansive man like him, if of eminent position, will freeze into austerity, if a tactless upstart goes too far in familiarity... Chaucer's Host, always in his element while managing the commoner sort, is ill at ease with his betters, uneasily obsequious with the Prioress, and now with the Monk presumptuous -- full of personal questions, and with peculiarly free speech chaffing him on the waste of his masculinity in the state of celibacy.<sup>26</sup>

After this little brush with the Host, it was not strange that the Monk offered to tell just the sort of tale the Host would find unpleasant. After the freedom of speech which the Host had used, the Monk would naturally remind him of propriety by suggesting that he should himself tell only such a tale as would accord with his holy profession:

"This worthy Monk took all in patience"...  
but pungently rebukes him by meeting his demand for a tale with an offer to "tell a tale, or two, or three -- so far as makes for decency" (3157-8).<sup>27</sup>

These tales, which were to be in keeping with the profession of the Monk, were a series of short exempla on the fickleness of fortune; the fall from power, illustrated by the lives of famous men, some in love with their greatness and some bearing their power meekly, was the theme.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 351-353

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 353

<sup>28</sup> F. H. Robinson, The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, Houghton Mifflin and Co., New York, 1933, 226-236

But Mr. Manly had intimated that it was in those very tales that the Monk had shown a characteristic wholly inconsonant with the character described in the Prologue; namely, gloom. To this Mr. Tatlock replied that the tales were not as gloomy as Mr. Manly supposed. In their day the tales had been so popular that they helped set a literary fashion:

The tale has its impressiveness, was admired in later generations, and indeed helped set a literary fashion, but Chaucer probably felt, and shows, a touch of our feeling.<sup>29</sup>

Furthermore, in these sedate tales, told in a grave manner, the Monk was not indicating a habit of the present. Rather he was not above a little deception in his attempt to put the Host in his place. Therefore, he recalled a little of his former education and posed as a scholar: "The Monk in his revived dignity even recalls his by-gone education, defines tragedy, and discourses on its literary form."<sup>30</sup> And again, when the Knight stopped the Monk before he had told twenty of his hundred tales, the Monk calmly received the interruption reflecting none of the gloom that Mr. Manly had seen in his action. So Mr. Tatlock explained:

The Monk receives this double check with the same dignity as before, but more laconically. In this combination of force, cultivation and high self-respect I do not perceive Mr. Manly's

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 353

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 353

"sad-faced pedant," "gloomy and uninteresting person." <sup>31</sup>

By way of conclusion to his remarks, Mr. Tatlock returned to the treatise of Miss Bressie, commenting that all her numerous parallels between the Monk and William of Cloune showed was that the habits and tastes of the Monk were very normal and lifelike. There must have been many such monks. <sup>32</sup>

This was Mr. Tatlock's defense of Chaucer's consistency in his portrayal of the Monk in the Canterbury Tales. A brief survey of the opinions of Mr. Manly and Miss Bressie, in juxtaposition to the tenets of Mr. Manly, will show the relative strength of the two theories.

First Mr. Manly offered the suggestion that the picture of the worldly Monk of the Prologue might have been too real, and therefore offensive to some living dignitary, whom he thought he could identify by his monastery. Miss Bressie offered the Abbot of Leicester as the living model, because she was able to trace many parallels between him and the Monk of the Prologue. Mr. Tatlock showed that the Monk of the Prologue was, like the rest of the Pilgrims, merely a type for which there could have been found many living models.

Secondly, Mr. Manly declared that the pictures of the two Monks had nothing in common but the horse with his jingling bells. Mr. Tatlock

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 353

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 353-354

answered by drawing his picture of the Monk. Where Mr. Manly found the Monk of the Monk's Tale inconsistent with the Monk of the Prologue, Mr. Tatlock found him consistent. To Mr. Manly the Monk of the Prologue was worldly, scorned study, was bright and attractive; the Monk of the Monk's Tale, on the contrary, was dull, gloomy, a student, conventional. To Mr. Tatlock the Monk of the Prologue and the Monk of the Monk's Tale were the same, lord, prelate, young, handsome, well dressed, a gourmet, a worldling who scorned study, but who, when put on his dignity by circumstances, would easily recall his earlier education and make a fine show of propriety and studiousness. No, Mr. Manly could not be correct; these two pictures had so much in common that they must be pictures of one and the same Monk.

Mr. Tatlock asserted, in differing with Mr. Manly, that other critics agreed with him on Chaucer's consistency in portraying the Monk. Mr. Kittredge and Mr. Patch were two of those to whom Mr. Tatlock probably referred, for Mr. Kittredge saw the drama in the situation caused by the Host's bumptiousness,<sup>33</sup> and Mr. Patch considered the Monk a very sentimental man whose sentimentality soured when he was affronted by the Host.<sup>34</sup>

But not all the critics agreed with Mr. Tatlock. Miss Bressie very learnedly tried to defend Mr. Manly's theory, and Mr. Shelley, conceding that the Monk was worldly, in the Prologue, also agreed with Mr. Manly that

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<sup>33</sup> G. L. Kittredge, Chaucer and His Poetry, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1933, 164-165

<sup>34</sup> H. R. Patch, On Rereading Chaucer, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1939, 159



the Monk was patient and sedate, learned and studious in the Monk's Tale.<sup>35</sup>

This lineup of three scholars on either side of the question would seem to indicate that neither position has been satisfactorily proved. However, Mr. Tatlock answered all Mr. Manly's arguments with one exception, the idea that the Monk of the Monk's Tale was basically a conventional man, whereas the Monk of the Prologue was worldly. Although Mr. Tatlock offered the explanation that the Monk of the Monk's Tale was reacting normally to the impudence of the Host, he did not support this interpretation with any evidence. Furthermore, Mr. Patch who agreed with him on the Monk's consistency, disagreed with him on the basic character of the Monk which showed that consistency. Mr. Patch tried to show that the picture was consistent because the Monk of the Prologue was "sentimental," and the Monk of the Monk's Tale was a picture of "sentimentality soured."<sup>36</sup>

The conclusion to be drawn from all these differences and arguments is that Mr. Tatlock has brought forward stronger arguments for the consistency of the picture of the Monk than Mr. Manly has offered for its inconsistency. Still, Mr. Manly's picture of the Monk of the Monk's Tale has not been shown to be false, nor was Mr. Tatlock's demonstration of the consistent features, the physical, social, and temperamental marks common to both pictures as thorough as it might have been. Finally, the difference of opinion among

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<sup>35</sup> P. Shelley, The Living Chaucer, U. of Penn. Press, Phil., 1940, 225

<sup>36</sup> H. Patch, On Rereading Chaucer, 159-160

the scholars about the basic character of the Monk, which would be the conclusive proof of Chaucer's consistency, could it be shown, must be determined and settled.

Therefore, it remains for this thesis to demonstrate more completely the consistency between the two pictures, to show what the basic character of the Monk is, to show the physical and social marks that the pictures have in common, and to show that the explanation given in the thesis satisfies both the difficulty of Mr. Manly and the explanation of Mr. Tatlock.

### CHAPTER III

#### CONFIRMATION OF CHAUCER'S CONSISTENCY

Mr. Tatleek's arguments cast grave doubt on the validity of Mr. Manly's theory that Chaucer was inconsistent in his portrayal of the Monk. However, Mr. Tatleek did not argue so completely that his own theory was indisputable. Therefore, this chapter will strive to demonstrate that Mr. Tatleek was correct in his conclusion that Chaucer was consistent in the whole picture of the Monk.

If Chaucer was consistent in his picture of the Monk, then the details of that picture would be the same throughout and the Monk would be physically, temperamentally and socially the same in the Prologue and in the Monk's Tale. An examination of these two sections of the Canterbury Tales will show that all the details of the Prologue are matched by the details of the Monk's Tale.

What are the indications that the Monk of the Monk's Tale was the same physically as the Monk of the Prologue? In the third line describing the Monk in the Prologue, Chaucer stated that the Monk was a "manly man."<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, this Monk was: "a lerd ful fat, and in good poynt."<sup>2</sup> When the

<sup>1</sup> F. N. Robinson, The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, Houghton Mifflin Co., New York, 1933, 21, l. 167

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 21, l. 200

Host called upon the Monk to tell his tale, the Monk he addressed was also manly and in good condition, so much so that the Host commented upon these points:

And therewithal of brawnes and of bones,  
 A wel farynge persone for the nones.  
 I pray to God, yeve hym confusioun  
 That first thee broghte unto religioun!  
 Thou woldest han been a tredefowel aright.  
 Haddestow as greet a leeve, as thou hast myght,  
 To parfourne al thy lust in engendrure,  
 Thou haddest bigeten ful many a creature.  
 Allas, why werestow so wyd a cope?  
 God yeve me sorwe, but and I were a pope,  
 Not oonly thou, but every myghty man,  
 Though he were shorn ful hye upon his pan,  
 Sholde have a wyf; for al the world is lorn!  
 Religioun hath take up al the corn  
 Of tredyng, and we borel men been shrympes.<sup>3</sup>

This left-handed compliment to the Monk's manliness the Host meant with all his heart, and though it was offensively personal, it was still a compliment. Furthermore, it shows that the Monk of the Monk's Tale was manly.

Nor was this the only similarity the Monk of the Monk's Tale had with the Monk of the Prologue. There were other identical details in the two pictures; one was the fair face of the Monk. In the Prologue, Chaucer took joy in the beaming, ruddy contenance of the Monk,<sup>4</sup> and in the Monk's Tale,

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 225, ll. 3131-3145

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 21., ll. 198-205

the Host exclaimed equally joyfully:

I vowe to God, thou hast a ful fair skyn;  
It is a gentil pasture ther thow goost  
Thou art nat lyk a penant or a goost:<sup>5</sup>

Chaucer, indeed, had used the same expression, "a forpynded goost,"<sup>6</sup> in describing the Monk in the Prologue, denying any such aspect in the appearance of the Monk. Thus there is ample indication in the Prologue and in the Monk's Tale that the two pictures are of a monk who has the same physical appearance.

In addition to this, the two pictures show a Monk of the same station in the order to which he belonged. Twice in the Prologue Chaucer indicated his station, first saying that he was capable of being an abbot,<sup>8</sup> and later stating more definitely that "this lord was kepere of the celle."<sup>9</sup> Commenting upon this line, Mr. Manly declared that:

A celle was a subordinate monastery, not necessarily a small one. Some of the richest priories in England were cells of abbeys in France, notably of the abbeys of Cluny and Fecamp. The head of any subordinate house would be called a prior. Whether the Monk was a prior or not, he was at least fit to be a prior or even abbot,...<sup>10</sup>

After this Mr. Manly pointed out that the Monk's monastery had many horses in its stables, an indication that it was one of the greater monasteries,

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 225, ll. 3122-3124

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 21, l. 205

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 21, l. 167

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 21, l. 172

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., Manly, Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, 509, Note 172

whose heads were either abbots or priors. Thus it was safe to assume that the Monk was either an abbot or a prior.<sup>11</sup>

And in the Monk's Tale, when the Host eyed the Monk whom he was asking to tell a tale, he came to the conclusion, much like that of Mr. Manly, that:

Upon my feith, thou art some officer,  
Som worthy sexteyn, or som celerer,  
For by my fader soule, as to my doom,  
Thou art a maister whan thou art at hoom;  
No povre cloysterer, ne no novys,  
But a governour, wily and wys,...<sup>12</sup>

In addition to this estimate of the Monk's position, the Host had called the Monk "my lord" twice,<sup>13</sup> "my owene lord" once,<sup>14</sup> and finally he indicated that the Monk was a nobleman by birth, when he said, "Of what hous be ye, by youre fader kyn?"<sup>15</sup>

Later, when the Monk had progressed a short way into his narration of his hundred tragedies, the company sought to be relieved from the sorrowful tales. And here was shown another mark of Chaucer's Monk's dignity of position. It was not one of the clerics who interrupted him. In fact they probably would not have desired to stop his sermon on the vanity of human

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 509, Note 172

<sup>12</sup> Robinson, Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, 225, ll 3125-3130

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., l. 3114, l. 3153

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., l. 3117

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 225, l. 3121

pride. Even so, when the Host found need to stop the Monk, but did not dare do it himself, it was not the Nun's Priest, nor the Friar, nor the proud Summoner, nor even the Prioress, who could do the trick without offence; it was the highest personage of the laity, the Knight. Because of his high worldly position, the tales would naturally have more significance for him. The warning they gave was all too direct. If these great men fell, could not he? This was a good excuse for him to break in on the Monk without offending him. Thus this man of high position interrupted, but very meekly and respectfully, saying that the sermon had had its effect in making him realize his own danger of falling from favor of fortune, and he did not want to think any more of it:

"Hoo!" quod the Knyght, "good sire, namore of this!  
 That ye han seyde is right ynough, ywis,  
 And muchel moore; for litel hevynesse  
 Is right ynough to muche folk, I gesse.  
 I seye for me, it is a greet disese,  
 Whereas men han been in greet welthe and ese,  
 To heeren of hire sodeyn fal, alas!  
 And the contrarie is joye and greet solas,  
 As whan a man hath been in povre estaat,  
 And clymbeth up and wexeth fortunat,  
 And there abideth in prosperitee.  
 Swich thyng is gladsom, as it thynketh me  
 And of swich thyng were goodly for to telle."<sup>16</sup>

Thus did Chaucer indicate the high position of the Monk of the Monk's Tale

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 237, ll. 3957-3969

by the remarks of Harry Bailly and by the presentation of the Knight as the only one of the Pilgrims of sufficiently high station to interrupt the Monk. These things Mr. Tatlock might have demonstrated, if the brevity of his article had not precluded such a long discussion.

Another point of similarity between the pictures of the "two" Monks was not considered by Mr. Tatlock. If the Monk of the Prologue were to be considered worldly in character, then the picture of the Monk in the Monk's Tale would not appear to be the same, as Mr. Manly tried to show. However, since it seems highly unlikely that a poet of Chaucer's ability would make a character consistent in all details except one, there must be some solution of the difficulty which will save Chaucer's consistency in drawing the character of the Monk. One way would be to show that the two pictures are of worldly Monks, as Mr. Tatlock maintained, and, therefore, really pictures of the same Monk. The other way would be to question the assertion that the Monk of the Prologue was worldly, as Mr. Patch did, substituting the notion that the Monk was "sentimental" like the Monk of the Monk's Tale.<sup>17</sup> But the idea that the Monk was effeminate is contradictory to Chaucer's statement and Mr. Bailly's comment that the Monk was manly.

Furthermore, it does not seem possible to demonstrate that the Monk

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<sup>17</sup> Patch, On Rereading Chaucer, 159 ff.



of the Prologue was worldly, An examination of the lines in the Prologue describing the Monk shows that, though the interpretation of a worldly character is possible, there is another possible explanation which is more probable. It can be shown that Mr. Tatlock's and Mr. Manly's assumption that the Monk of the Prologue was worldly, on the slender basis which they gave, was too great an assumption.

For one thing, Mr. Tatlock and Mr. Manly both excused the Monk's hunting, as did Miss Bressie, intimating that the hunting done by clerics was a task not inconsistent with the better performance of their duties, when they were the heads of monasteries. This was true of the monks, because of the unique circumstances which had arisen in mid-fourteenth century England.<sup>18</sup>

The Black Death, the Great Schism, the Peasants' Revolt, the legal conflict between Church and state, the feudal character of the Church since the time of William the Conqueror, all contributed to changing the life of monks in a way that St. Augustine never dreamed when he wrote the precepts on work back in the year 529.<sup>18</sup>

After excusing this more gross thing, the critics went on to enumerate as the marks of the Monk's worldliness, his fine dress, his scorn of labor, and

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<sup>18</sup> Robinson, 21 11.184-188

his love of food. Strangely enough, one of these, his scorn for work, was explained away by Chaucer. Speaking of the Monk's scorn for working with his hands, Chaucer asked,

What shoulde he studie and make hymselfen wood,  
 Upon a book in cloystre alway to poure,  
 Or swynken with his handes, and laboure,  
 As Austyn bit? How shal the world be served?  
 Lat Austyn have his swynk to hym reserved!<sup>19</sup>

But someone might argue that the Monk would best serve the world by being a cloistered monk. This would be a very shallow argument, for there are, and were in Chaucer's day, many ways of being a good monk without being a cloistered monk. There were novices, student-monks, lay brothers, choir monks, and superiors. Not all would be called upon to fulfil the same duties, but each would be true to his religious vocation by fulfilling the offices peculiar to his rank, thus serving God and the world best. Now the Monk was a superior and accordingly progressed beyond the duties of a novice, a choir monk, a lay monk, or any other grade in his order. Study and labor were no longer incumbent upon him, but he served God in the world as a religious dignitary:

Therefore he was a prikasour aright:  
 Greyhoundes he hadde as swift as fowel in flight;  
 Of prikyng and of huntynge for the hare  
 Was al his lust, for no cost wolde he spare.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Robinson, 21, ll. 184-188

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 21, ll. 188-192

This was indeed a strange service for a Monk to render to the world. But it was the one thing in the Monk which both Mr. Manly and Mr. Tatlock excused. It was a thing which Mr. Manly showed by his example in the life of the Abbot Samson was a real service to the lords, and to the monastery and religion.<sup>21</sup> Still, it might be difficult to see how hunting could be a service to the world and God. Yet this social apostolate of hunting was as much a service of God and the world, and as innocent in itself, as the endeavors of present day priests who form bowling leagues and youth clubs. Thus Miss Bressie explained it:

But the abbot often declared in private that it was not these "frivolities" that he enjoyed so much as paying deference to the wishes of his noble patrons and having the benefits of their patronage.<sup>22</sup>

In the course of this paper it has been seen that there were three great abbots, Samson, Cloune, and Skirlawe, living during the lifetime of Chaucer, who served the world with this peculiar office. Now, since they were honored by kings, lords, and people alike, the Catholic conscience of the day did not find it an unbecoming occupation for an abbot. That is precisely what Miss Bressie said:

Chaucer reports the Monk's own version of this doctrine in the lines,

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<sup>21</sup> Page 6 of this thesis, Note 9

<sup>22</sup> Bressie, 478

He yaf nat of that text a pulled hen  
 That seith that hunters beth nat hooly men  
 Ne that a Monk whan he is recchelees  
 Is likned til a fissh that is waterlees;  
 That is to seyn, a Monk out of his cloystre.  
 But thilke text heeld he nat worth an oystre;  
 But I seyde his opinioun was good.  
 Everybody, rich and poor, humble and  
 powerful, his patrons and his convent  
 "seyde" the abbot's "opinioun was good."<sup>23</sup>

Thus the question of the Monk's hunting has been ruled out as an indication of worldliness by outstanding Chaucerian scholars of the present day. It has been ruled out mainly because such action on the part of a distinguished cleric was readily accepted by the medieval folk as an innocent action being used for the cause of religion. This critical evaluation of the Monk's apostolate of hunting by the people of Chaucer's day is an important consideration. Although Mr. Manly and Mr. Tatlock realized the importance of contemporary opinion when they formed their estimate of the Monk's hunting, nevertheless they seem to have overlooked such opinion in their estimate of the Monk's fine dress and love of fancy foods. For that reason, they thought that the Monk was worldly; that is, on the slight evidence of the remarks in the Prologue where the Monk was shown as a well-dressed man who liked roast swan, they based their conclusion that the Monk was not as religious as he professed to be. Thus they ignored the estimate which the people of Chaucer's day put upon those details.

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<sup>23</sup> Bressie, 484-485

But Miss Bressie, in her article supporting the claim of Mr. Manly that he could identify the monastery of the Monk of the Prologue, showed that the Monk's dress was not a mark of worldliness. She showed that the Monk's dress was the accepted thing in dignitaries, that elegance of dress was not eccentric or the exception, but was generally accepted as the accoutrements of men in high position in the Church.

What were the worldly affectations that Mr. Manly and Mr. Tatlock saw in the Monk's dress? They were that he wore boots rather than sandals, that he wore rich fur, not cheap fur, that he wore a curiously wrought pin to fasten his hood in front. In regard to the first, Miss Bressie cited a papal bull of dispensation allowing English Monks to wear boots not for any worldly consideration, but merely as an adjustment to the northern climate.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, in answer to the assertion that the Monk's rich fur was a worldly affectation, she pointed out that grys, or fine fur, was prohibited for all ordinary monks and priests, but that dignitaries were allowed to use it, as becoming to their high office.<sup>25</sup> Considering the pin with the love-knot in the lower end, she went to some length showing that it was interpreted as a symbol for the summum bonum,<sup>26</sup> and was so accepted by people of Chaucer's day. Should anyone deny this argument, she offered an alternate; namely, that the love-knot pin was worn as a badge by the members

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 488

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 487

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 488. Miss Bressie showed that love-knot symbolized the tying of men's hearts to one another, shutting out rancor.

of the Corpus Christi Guild of Leicester, and that the Monk may have worn it to show an official or personal connection with that organization.<sup>27</sup> This at least is certain; the Monk had to have something to hold his cowl in place.

Thus Miss Bressie has demonstrated that the first two details of the Monk's dress were not worldly and were permitted him by a papal dispensation, and that the third was not necessarily a worldly affectation, but could well have been a mark of devotion to either God or the Corpus Christi Guild of Leicester. Having done that, she left Mr. Manly and Mr. Tatlock with only one detail that indicated worldliness in their estimation, the Monk's alleged proficiency in judging good foods, or his love of them.

The basis for concluding that the Monk was a gourmet or a glutton is very slight. Chaucer mentioned in his description of the Monk of the Prologue that "A fat swan loved he best of any roost."<sup>28</sup> And in the Monk's Tale, he had the Host declare: "It is a gentil pasture wher thow goost."<sup>29</sup> To conclude from these two lines that the Monk was a gourmet and a glutton is quite a flight of fancy. It is as though one would conclude from the remark of a poor man who said that he liked champagne better than any other drink that he was a connoisseur of fine drinks, or (what would be even worse) basing the judgment solely upon his remark, to conclude that he was a drunkard.

A better argument against the conclusion that the Monk was a gourmet,

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 487-488

<sup>28</sup> Robinson, 21, l. 206

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 225, l. 3123

made merely upon the basis of Chaucer's meager remarks, is Miss Bressie's demonstration of the fact that the roast swan was a very rare and expensive dish, even for kings. William of Cloume tasted it only once, as far as the records show, at a Christmas dinner in the palace of the Earl of Leicester,<sup>30</sup> thus showing that the Monk of the Canterbury Tales, who had probably tasted such a dish, had been to a lordly dinner at one time or another. It does not show that he frequently had roast swan, but it does show that he was important enough to be invited to a great dinner. Or it might indicate, since the Host showed that the Monk came from a noble family<sup>31</sup> that the Monk had eaten this roast in his own home before he became a monk. At any rate there are other possible interpretations of the statements on the Monk's love of food, and they are not so extreme as the interpretations of Mr. Manly and Mr. Tatlock, but seem more likely.

Perhaps it would be better to heed Mr. Tatlock's own warning in the interpretation of these details. After presenting his thesis that the Monk was worldly, he cautioned:

In sketching out the dramatis personae there is not the smallest reason to assume that Chaucer had any other detail in mind than appears here. Further implications later in the Tales may well have been later thought

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<sup>30</sup> Bressie, 488

<sup>31</sup> Robinson, 225, l. 3121

up. To infer facts for which there is no sound evidence in a man created by the imagination is to be blind to the fundamental difference between interpreting him and a man who has really lived; a subject discussed elsewhere, and by many critics surprisingly ignored.<sup>32</sup>

Mr. Tatlock's remark, "and by many critics surprisingly ignored" is so apt a comment upon his own interpretation that one wonders how he could have slipped into the same fault he criticized in others. Perhaps the best explanation would be a parallel situation, in which Mr. Kittredge confessed to reading his own "New England conscience" into the character of Harry Bailly.<sup>33</sup> This the critic did in direct contradiction of his own warning not to see facts in Chaucer's creations of the imagination when those facts have no sound basis.

That these "facts" alleged by Mr. Tatlock and Mr. Manly have no sound basis can be demonstrated by an examination into the nature of Chaucer's conscience. First of all, Mr. Tatlock once showed that Chaucer was a "practicing Catholic."<sup>34</sup> And Chaucer had a Catholic conscience which could distinguish between indifferent acts and bad acts. Indeed, Mr. Manly and Mr. Tatlock ruled out hunting on the basis of its general acceptance by the Catholics of Chaucer's day and by the "duly worldly Chaucer himself":

Chaucer...really esteemed the man, and surveyed the great economic institution

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<sup>32</sup> J. S. P. Tatlock, 351

<sup>33</sup> Kittredge, 164

<sup>34</sup> J. S. P. Tatlock, "Chaucer and Wyclif," Modern Philology 14, 1916, 76



of monasticism as it actually was in his day, and not with our own superficially historical and bird's-eye view.<sup>35</sup>

Kittredge supported this view, saying:

Chaucer had an immense enthusiasm for life in this world; for society of his fellow-creatures, high and low, good and bad; for real men and women --- knights and sumners, millers and parsons, monks and merchants, delicate cloistered ladies and boisterous wives of Bath. Whatever was good of its kind was a delight to him. And he had such stupendous luck in always meeting nonpareils!...Let us not make the mistake of thinking that Chaucer liked his scallawags better than the respectable members of the company, or the still grosser error of supposing that he satirized the Church. He shows every bit as much power and personal interest in describing the worldly (sic) monk or the merry friar. Chaucer took his religion seriously, and gives no hint of unsteadiness in his thorological views. He was neither an ascetic nor a devotee: He was a man of the world, "of little abstinence." But he certainly regarded himself as a Christian, and I suspect he knew, for I have a high opinion of his intelligence.<sup>36</sup>

And Mr. Coulton put the thing very neatly when he declared:

Where Gower sees an England more hopelessly given over to the Devil than ever in Carlyle's most dyspeptic nightmares--when the robust Langland sees an impending religious Armageddon...there Chaucer, with incurable optimism, sees chiefly a merry England...<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Tatlock, "Chaucer's Monk", 351

<sup>36</sup> Kittredge, 32-33

<sup>37</sup> Patch, 187, (quoting Mr. Coulton)

The truth is that Chaucer's description of his character had no moral implications at all. He was studying fine personalities and was not commenting on their morality. He left that for the Sunday preacher or the Victorian poet. Thus Mr. Patch explained Chaucer's pictures of his "scallawags":

While the basis for human action is moral, Chaucer sees his characters as beings with passions and tastes, and weaknesses and aspirations, all of which enormously draw his interest and stir his imagination...<sup>38</sup>

With this host of arguments given by Miss Bressie and by the other outstanding Chaucerian critics, it is possible to say that the fundamental trait of the character of the Monk of the Prologue is not worldliness. Although there may be a trace of worldliness in the Monk, it was not such as would call itself to the attention of a man of Chaucer's time.

All these arguments, however, did not touch one point in the picture of the Monk of the Prologue; namely the statement of Chaucer that the Monk was out of his cloister and saw nothing wrong in being abroad.

He yaf nat of that text a pulled hen,  
That seith that hunters been nat hooly men,  
He that a monk, when he is recchelees,  
This is to seyn, a monk out of his cloystre.<sup>39</sup>

The Monk's contempt for these sayings<sup>40</sup> would seem to indicate a

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 183

<sup>39</sup> Robinson, 21, 177-181

<sup>40</sup> These sayings were really references to statements made by Popes. Mr. Manly showed that the first was a comment of St. Jerome on the words of the bible, stating that Esau was a hunter; "Esau was a hunter, therefore he was a sinner, and indeed we do not find in the Holy Scripture a single pious hunter." The second was from the decretals of Pope Eugenius. Manly, Chaucer's Complete Works, 509-510.

gross worldliness, but truly any such accusation has already been foiled by the statements of Mr. Manly and Miss Bressie about the need the world had of the service of monks. And so Chaucer explained it: "How shal the world be served?"<sup>41</sup>

But what service was the Monk rendering the world by making this pilgrimage to Canterbury, or God either, for was it not a rather gay pilgrimage, if one is to judge by the stories that were told during the course of the journey?

Many authors have indicated that there was no sign of worldliness in the fact that the Monk was on this particular pilgrimage. For one thing, the assembling of this company was quite by accident:

Bil that in that seson on a day, in  
Southwerk at the Tabard as I lay redy to  
Wenden on my pilgrimage to Caunterbury  
With ful devout corage at nyght was come  
Into that hostelrye wel nyne and twenty  
In a compaignye, of sondry folk, by  
Aventure yfalle in felawshipe, and Pil-  
Grimes where they alle, that toward Caunter-  
Bury welden ryde.<sup>42</sup>

Thus it was just by accident that the Monk was in this particular company. That the Monk chose to travel in company at all, was a matter of necessity, as much to stave off boredom as robbers.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, that so many of Chaucer's pilgrims betray a gay spirit on the road did not mean that they, or anyone who entrusted himself to their

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 21, 187

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 19, 11. 19-27

<sup>43</sup> A. W. Pollard, Chaucer, Macmillan and Co., London, 1895, 103

company, had a lively or unholy character. A call of the roll would reveal as many pious persons on the pilgrimage as it would frivolous ones: the Parson, the Prioress, the Knight, the Yeoman, the Merchant, and the Lawyer, to name but a few. So Mr. Pollard commented:

His Shrine [St. Thomas a Becket's] because one of the sights of Europe; the precincts of the cathedral were filled with booths as for a perpetual fair, and a pilgrimage in his honor was soon a pleasant holiday, in which the devotional element depended entirely on the character of the pilgrim.<sup>44</sup>

And so there were some who were striving to make their pilgrimage as holily as possible, and some who were not. But the influence of the first did not dampen the gaiety of the vacationers. Once again, this can be taken on the authority of Mr. Pollard:

In every company, we may be sure, there were a few simple-hearted men and women whose religious enthusiasm at such times would be contagious, though it could not check the merriment and ribaldry with which the journey was enlivened.<sup>45</sup>

That such a journey should be lively and sportive should not surprise anyone who is familiar with life in Chaucer's day. The winter was cruel, bitterly cold and long; the houses were so poorly heated that the people had to throw straw on the floors to increase the heat. Everyone was cramped into his house for the long months when King Winter ruled the land. The air became foul in the house, and this together with cold and wet caused much sickness. Indeed the winters in England in Chaucer's day

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 102

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 103

were difficult. But with the coming of spring,

When that Aprille with his shoures soote  
 The droghte of March hath perced to the roote,  
 And bathed every veyne in swich licour of  
 Which vertu engendred is the flour; whan  
 Zephirus eek with his swete breeth inspired  
 Hath in every holt and heeth the tendre  
 Croppes, and the yonge sonne hath in the Ram  
 His halwe cours yronne, and smale foweles maken  
 Melodye, that slepen al the nyght with open eye  
 (So priketh hem nature in hir corages),<sup>46</sup>

all the people desired to go out and meet their friends and new faces and personalities, a relief from their prison and the few people whom they had seen for so long:

Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages,  
 And palmeres for to seken straunge strondes,  
 To ferne halwes, kowthe in sondry londes;  
 And specially from every shires ende  
 Of Engelond to Caunterbury they wende,  
 The hooly blissful martyr for to seke,  
 That hem hath holpen what that they were seeke.<sup>47</sup>

So they would be in a really festive mood, bubbling over with the new life bursting out all about them. They had risen from the death of winter to a newer and more glorious life in the budding spring.

That the Monk was one of those who had a serious intention in his

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46 Robinson, 19, 11. 1-11

47 Ibid., 19, 12-18

pilgrimage is shown from three different statements, two by Chaucer and one by Mr. Kittredge. Chaucer's first statement has already been cited; in it he declared that all the pilgrims were on their way to the shrine of the martyr. Just before stating this he said:

And specially from every shires ende  
Of Engelond to Caunterbury they wende,  
The hooly blisful martyr for to seke,  
That hem hath holpen whan that they were seeke.<sup>48</sup>

So these pilgrims were going to fulfil the promises that they had made in sickness. That this is a fair interpretation of these lines may be seen in the comment which Mr. Kittredge made on them:

Now an organized company of Pilgrims... were brought together in a similar intimacy, which was made especially close by the religious impulse that actuated them all in common. We must not be skeptical about the genuineness of this impulse, merely because some of the Pilgrims were loose fish, or because they do not always act and speak with propriety. If we let this consideration much affect us, it must be either because we are uninstructed in mediaeval manners, or because we apply our own religion to life in a deplorably wooden fashion. This score and a half of miscellaneous Englishmen and Englishwomen were fulfilling the vow they had made to St. Thomas in sickness, or danger, or misfortune. However diverse their stations in life, their moral codes, or sincerity of their religion in general,-- and in all these points there is variety so

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<sup>48</sup> Robinson, 19, ll. 15-18

rich as almost to bewilder,--  
 here they are at one. The saint had  
 helped them, and they were gratefully doing  
 their duty in return.<sup>49</sup>

So the Monk was doing a religious duty and could not be accused of worldliness, merely because he was on the pilgrimage. But to seal the matter that he was one of the serious-minded ones on the pilgrimage, the Monk's own words in the Monk's Tale can be offered. He declared that he was not in the mood for any frivolity: "'Nay," quod this Monk, "I have no lust to pleye."<sup>50</sup> And thus it has been seen that the main trait of the Monk was not worldliness.

Lest there should be any confusion as to the argument here, a brief review can be made. First it was shown that the Monk of the Prologue had the same physical characteristics, the same facial appearance, the same dress, the same manly build, as the Monk of the Monk's Tale. Next the fact that the "two" Monks were of the same standing in their order was shown. After that, an examination was made of the reasons Mr. Manly and Mr. Tatlock had for assuming that the Monk of the Prologue was worldly. It was seen that they both rejected the notion that the Monk's hunting was a sign of his worldliness. But both men claimed that he was a gourmet, worldly in his dress, and a scorner of study and labor. In answer to the first of these

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<sup>49</sup> Kittredge, 158-159

<sup>50</sup> J. L. Lowes, Geoffrey Chaucer, Houghton Mifflin and Co., New York, 1933, 202-203

reasons, Miss Bressie offered the knowledge that his love of fine food was really an indication of his position. It was also argued against this point, that his love of good foods could have been acquired before he entered religion. In all, it was shown that too much was concluded from a very slight suggestion. As to the Monk's clothing, Miss Bressie cited papal dispensations and much historical lore that removed any question of the worldliness of the Monk's attire. After this, different authors were quoted to show the Catholic conscience and literary attitude of Chaucer in his dealings with his creations and to show that Chaucer was not conscious of any worldliness in the picture of the Monk he had drawn. Not the least significant of the quotations cited was that of Mr. Tatlock, warning interpreters of Chaucer's works not to see more in the portraits than Chaucer had put there. Finally a possible objection that the Monk was worldly because he was out of his monastery was averted, mainly by the arguments of Mr. Pollard, greatly assisted by Mr. Kittredge and Chaucer himself.

If, then, the main trait of the Monk's character as portrayed in the Prologue was not worldliness, what was it? There is one sure sign that revealed the dominant trait of each of the Pilgrims Chaucer drew, and that was the first lines, the beginnings of the pictures in the Prologue. In these he gave the keynote of the whole picture. After an exhaustive study of all the characters, Mr. Lowes expressed the rule very clearly:



The beginning of Chaucer's portraits is always significant: the Knight is worthy, the Monk is "fair for the maistrie", the Friar is wanton and merry, the clerk has recourse to logic, the Lawyer is "war and wys", the Wife of Bath is deaf, the Parson rich in holy thought and work, the Reeve slender and choleric. These are not casual touches; the note is struck at once.<sup>51</sup>

If the Monk's portrait in the Prologue is examined, it will be seen to correspond with the statement of Mr. Lowes, for it opens with the words:

A Monk there was, a fair for the maistrie  
An outridere, that lovede venerie.  
A manly man, to been an abbot able.<sup>52</sup>

This was the first sentence Chaucer wrote describing the Monk. But what does it mean? According to Mr. Manly, the expression, "a fair", means "a good person."<sup>53</sup> The same authority defined "for the maistrie" as "extremely"; the whole prepositional phrase is used adverbially, modifying "a fair."<sup>54</sup> And Mr. Manly's definition is the same as that of the Oxford English Dictionary. The word "fair," when used as a substantive, means "clean or unblemished as to reputation," or "a person having such a reputation."<sup>55</sup> Therefore, it means a good person, as Mr. Manly said. For the

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51 Robinson, 237, l 3996

52 Robinson, 21, ll. 165-167

53 Manly, Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, 672

54 Ibid., 509, Note 165

55 Oxford English Dictionary, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1933, IV, 43

mastery means "as if aiming at mastery; hence extremely or in the highest degree."<sup>56</sup> Thus the whole first sentence describing the Monk would read in modern English, "There was a Monk, an exceedingly good man." If the first sentence ended there, it would be rather general, too general for forming a judgment upon the character of the Monk. But Chaucer did not end it there. He added four more bits of information which showed precisely how that Monk was good.

First, the Monk was an outrider. This term could only mean that he had charge of monastic properties; it did not mean that the Monk was on extended leave from his monastery. Secondly, the Monk loved venerie, or hunting. There was no indication that the Monk actually took part in hunts; he merely loved that sport, whether to take part in it or to watch it is not stated. As far as the statement goes, he may well have been like the Abbot Samson who loved to watch the hunt and appreciated the hunt for the goods it brought his monastery. Thirdly, the Monk was a manly man, which could be interpreted as meaning he was handsome or that he was mature and strong of character, or it could mean both of these things. Finally, Chaucer summarized the whole character of the Monk and closed the sentence with the statement that the Monk was "to been an abbot able;" that is, all things, considered, he was the type of man who would make an excellent abbot.<sup>57</sup> So, paraphrasing the whole sentence, the keynote of the Monk's character

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., VI, 218

<sup>57</sup> G. Heberlein, "Chaucer's Men," Indiana University, Master of Arts Thesis, 1940, 131, As keeper of the cell, this Monk must have had prudence--for that was a requisite

would run thus: He was an excellently good Monk; his superiors had entrusted to him the grave responsibility of caring for the monastery properties. Incidentally, he was a very human and likeable fellow, not at all straight-laced, for he was a lover of hunting. He was a fine man, a real man, so fine-looking, so well endowed with spiritual and intellectual gifts, that he would make a good abbot. According to Miss Heberlein, he would have prudence and tact, since he was an outrider or keeper of a subordinate monastery. He was also dependable and trustworthy, since he was allowed to go out of his monastery frequently on business for his house.

Now it is seen, in accordance with Mr. Shelley's statement, that Chaucer described in the Prologue not only the Monk's good points but also those peccadillos which brought him down out of the ideal or typical order into the real order, making him a man of flesh and blood:

Chaucer's sketches in the Prologue are largely typical, it is true...The portraits are descriptive, and, if we examine them closely, we find that each consists in the skillful building up, in greater or smaller number, of a series of details, as to the dress and equipment, the physical appearance, the accomplishments, and sometimes the opinions and ideas, the peccadillos and even the crimes of the several pilgrims... The facts are of the very stuff of life, and they illustrate Chaucer's genius of selection, his instinct for selecting, from all the available facts, precisely the right sort of facts to give us the sense of life in all its color and fascinating variety. The portraits of the

Prioress, the Monk, the Friar, the Parson, the Summoner, the Pardoner, to mention only a few, are so many miracles of telling details fresh and vivid, lively and colorful, beyond words.<sup>58</sup>

Thus, Chaucer gave a series of details which made the character seem to be a real person. But what was the nature of these details? Is this enumeration merely the result of a fussy old man's pride in his ability to note and set down clearly little apt details? Hardly! Chaucer was a literary artist at the height of his career, at the height of his creative ability and technical skill. This was Mr. Kittredge's opinion; after studying the orderliness and skill exhibited in the Legend of Cupid's Saints and the Tragedies told by the Monk, he concluded that it all proved Chaucer's docility to the rules of the school of schematism and of rhetoric.

From these considerations there emerges a rule of judgment that is of some value for our guidance in interpreting Chaucer's final masterpiece, the Canterbury Tales. It may be stated in the simplest language: Chaucer always knew what he was about. When, therefore, he seems to be violating dramatic fitness,--as in the ironical tribute of the Clerk to the Wife of Bath, or the monstrous cynicism of the Pardoner's Confessions,--we must look to our steps. Headlong inferences are dangerous. We are dealing with a great literary artist who had been through the schools. The chances are that such details are not casual flourishes. Somehow, in all likelihood, they fall into decorous subordination to his main design.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> P. Van D. Shelley, The Living Chaucer, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1940, 194-198

<sup>59</sup> Kittredge, 150-51

In his very fine article in the "character" in medieval literature, Mr. Patch showed what Chaucer's design or plan was in giving the details of the characters:

The characters are so varied as to unite in representing the whole character of English life in Chaucer's day, and they are written upon one plan, each with suggestion of the outward body and its dress as well as of the mind within.<sup>60</sup>

However, this only reveals that Chaucer not only made the person real in body but also in mind. That is a significant addition. But it does not show that the whole set of details fits into Chaucer's plan for the character. We have seen that Chaucer set a theme in his first sentence; that this theme was the keynote to the whole character. Mr. Kittredge warned against interpreting those details when they seem to be out of harmony with this theme of the character. Mr. Kittredge gave the lead in his statement that Chaucer was a student in the schools. And what did the schools teach on this particular point of consistency? There is a principle concerning characterization, which the poet Horace expressed very clearly, when he was discussing character delineation:

That you may never give a youth the part that belongs to the old nor a boy that of manhood, remember that our attention will always be kept by traits that are attached and fitted to the age.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Patch, "Characters in Medieval Literature," M.L.N., 40, 1925, 1-2

<sup>61</sup> E.C. Wickham, Horace for English Readers, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1903, 349

And so the details which Chaucer enumerated about the Monk's physical appearance, social standing, and mental abilities and patterns, were such as would reveal or suggest the type of Monk he was. Furthermore, these details had to be consistent with the first remark about the Monk; for, once again, a classic principle governed this consistence. As Horace said:

In a word, let your work be what you will,  
provided only it be uniform and a whole...  
If you thrust a new venture on the stage,  
and have the boldness to frame fresh character,  
see that it is kept to the end  
such as it starts at the beginning and is  
self-consistent.<sup>62</sup>

That Chaucer would heed such a rule of composition is evident from the remark of Mr. Kittredge, stating that Chaucer was taught in the school of schematism<sup>63</sup> and showed no signs of wanting to rebel against the rules of that school.<sup>64</sup> Therefore, the details he used were consistent with his first statement about the Monk and were expected to create an illusion of the reality of the Monk. Not only that, but the clearness of the details went far towards making the Monk a specific person, albeit an imaginary one. For, if the author had not drawn his picture clearly enough, he could not have had the Monk as an actor in the scenes of the Pilgrimage.

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 342 and 347

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., "Schematism held undisputed sway in the schools. Rules were accepted as if they came from heaven." Schematism was a set of rules and principles of composition aiming at regularity, consistency, conciseness, and restraint of unbridled emotion and imagination, 11-15

<sup>64</sup> Kittredge, 204

Therefore, in examining the details of the picture of the Monk it should be kept in mind that they clarify and make concrete the general picture of the Monk given in the first sentence of the description.

The first detail given of the Monk was something that could only be learned from questioning him or listening to his conversation, for it pertained to his home or monastery. There "Ful many a deyntee hors hadde he in stable."<sup>65</sup> This statement could indicate his love of hunting, for a man who would keep many good horses would be in a position to do that and would not keep them merely for the pleasure of looking at them. However, it need not be concluded that all the horses belonged to the Monk personally. It will be remembered that the office he held was that of curator of all the properties of the monastery, and furthermore, it was a custom of great lords to stable their horses at the monasteries on whose granges they did much hunting.<sup>66</sup>

A delicate touch in the description of the Monk is the often quoted comment:

And whan he rood, men myghte his brydel heere  
Gynglen in a whistlynge wynd als cleere  
And eek as loude as dooth the chapel belle.<sup>67</sup>

But what does this description indicate? Should any deeper meaning be read into it; or should one be bareful of interpreting it, heeding Mr.

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<sup>65</sup> Robinson, 21, 168

<sup>66</sup> Bressie, 483

<sup>67</sup> Robinson, 21, 11. 169-171

Tatlock's warning about seeing more than Chaucer saw?<sup>68</sup> Actually there is no need to interpret it. It speaks definitely enough. The Monk had merely taken one of the good bridles with which he harnessed those "dainty" horses for his noble and stylish patrons, thus displaying his own dignity and the wealth of his abbey. This merely emphasizes the suggestion of dignity made in the first sentence.

Next Chaucer made a comment upon the spirit or mental quality of the Monk:

Ther as this lord was kepere of the celle,  
The reule of seint Maure or of seint Beneit,  
By cause that it was old and somdel streit  
This ilke Monk leet olde thynges pace,  
And heeld after the newe world the space.<sup>69</sup>

Here, more or less by way of explanation for his mental attitude and his freedom to hold that attitude, Chaucer said the Monk was the head of a monastery, "kepere of the celle." As the above statement stands, it is fairly contradictory of all that Chaucer, in his first lines, said the Monk was. A good monk, who was manly and capable, would hardly have let his rule go because it was old. In his mind, it would have been sanctified by time. A manly monk would not complain that his rule was strict nor adopt such a weak excuse as a basis for rejecting it. Obviously, this Monk did not reject the whole rule, but only those parts of it which seemed to be impossible or inadvisable, due to the conditions which had arisen since the rule was written

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<sup>68</sup> Tatlock, 351

<sup>69</sup> Robinson, 21, 11. 172-176



in 529 A.D.<sup>70</sup> And that is the way that Chaucer meant it to be taken, for he mentioned two of the things which the Monk "let pass." The first:

He yaf nat of that text a pulled hen,  
That seith that hunters been nat hooly men.<sup>71</sup>

It has already been shown how the hunting of the Monk was a service of the new world of Chaucer's day and how it was accepted by everyone. At any rate, this was a national necessity in England, where the monasteries owned a great portion of the land which could be used for hunting. And therefore the statements mean only that the Monk had a great love for "venerie." All that matter has been treated earlier. But what is very important for the insight it gives into the spirit of the Monk is his resentment of the saying that hunters are not holy men.

A man who had no desire to be holy would not be troubled if he learned that his favorite occupation precluded holiness. But the Monk was troubled; he thought of the saying and figured out answers, the main one being that the saying was nonsense. A man could be a hunter and a holy man. Hunting was innocent in itself. Furthermore, by hunting he drew many rich gifts to his monastery; he financed the cause of religion. It was not as if he were going out poaching another's game. Nor did the hunting on occasion prevent him from praying or doing any of the other religious exercises that were incumbent upon him. Furthermore, there was nothing intrinsically bad in hunting. One might just as well say that there never has been a holy bricklayer; therefore all brick-

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<sup>70</sup> Manly, Chaucer's Complete Works, 509

<sup>71</sup> Robinson, 21, ll. 177-178

layers are bad. Then who would build the world's houses. No, the saying was nonsense, and he didn't give a plucked chicken for it. He could be a hunter and still be a holy man.

Therefore, the Monk's argument that he could hunt and still be a holy man was not an indication that he was not a good man but was a sign that he really loved hunting, as Chaucer said in the beginning.

The second way in which he, as keeper of the subordinate monastery, "let old things pass" was by going out of his monastery. Here again he paid no heed to an old saying. He didn't give an oyster for the saying:

Ne that a monk, whan he is recchelees,  
Is likned til a fissh that is waterlees,—  
This is to seyn, a monk out of his cloystre.  
But thilke text heeld he nat worth an oystre;<sup>72</sup>

According to Mr. Manly, the text alluded to was that of Pope Eugenius: "sicut piscis sine aqua caret vita, ita sine monasterio monachus;"<sup>73</sup> that is, just as a fish out of water will lose its life, so a monk out of his monastery will lose his religious life, or vocation. Chaucer did not record the Monk's reason for this contempt of the holy admonition. However, Chaucer did indicate it previously. This Monk was an outrider whose office required him to go and inspect outlying properties of the monastery. And furthermore, in the England of that day, after the Black Death had visited so many monasteries and parish houses taking away a large

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<sup>72</sup> Robinson, 21, ll. 179-182

<sup>73</sup> Manly, Chaucer's Complete Works, 510, Note 175 ff.

number of clerics, there was a great demand for priests. The living had to adapt themselves to the needs of the times.

Consequently Chaucer heartily backed the Monk:

And I seyde his opinion was good.  
 What sholde he studie and make hymselfen wood,  
 Upon a book in cloystre alwey to poure,  
 Or swynken with his handes, and laboure,  
 As Austyn bit? How shal the world be served?  
 Lat Austyn have his swynk to hym reserved!<sup>74</sup>

These are Chaucer's opinions on the conduct and ideas of the Monk, and should not be attributed to the Monk. There is no sarcasm in them but a good sense of judgment. The world needed priests to help it save souls. Then why should monks stay at home studying Cicero or copying ancient manuscripts? All that would keep until the press of tragedy had vanished from the land. Why should a Monk stay home and cultivate roses for the altars when he could be out cultivating souls for the thrones of heaven? So Chaucer seemed to say with his, "How shal the world be served?" Mr. Manly revealed the fact that the prescription of St. Augustine on work, in his De Opere Monachorum, was made because monks were avoiding labor and the cultivation of the apostolate under the pretext that they wished to engage in contemplation.<sup>75</sup> If the Monk's hunting was only a pretext by which he avoided labor and got out of his monastery, then he was as bad as those old monks who used a much more deceitful excuse, pleading time for prayer. But

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<sup>74</sup> Robinson, 21, 11. 183-188

<sup>75</sup> Manly, Chaucer's Complete Works, 510, Note 187

there is nothing to indicate that such was the case, and it was the Monk's duty to ride out; he was a superior whose office made demands on him that St. Augustine never dreamed would be made of a monk.

Chaucer's "I seyde his opinion was good" gives the underlying significance of these remarks in relation to his initial description of the Monk. As far as Chaucer was concerned, this Monk was a man of sound judgment, one who would make a good abbot for that reason.

Having finished this little digression on the opinions of the Monk and what he himself thought of the Monk's judgment, Chaucer returned to a description of the external details of the Monk. The Monk had greyhounds of matchless quality. Surely, the implications seem to be that only a rich monastery could afford to buy and keep such dogs. And this is what Chaucer declared, saying that it was a sign of the Monk's great love of hunting, when he would not avoid buying hounds or putting himself to even greater expense, for the sport.<sup>76</sup>

Next Chaucer described the Monk's personal appearance. It will be noticed that all the details are of a monk of high position in a wealthy monastery, and of a strong, well-built man:

I seigh his sleeves purfild at the hond  
 With grys, and that the fyneste of a lond;  
 And, for to fastne his hood under his chyn,  
 He hadde of gold ywrought a ful curious pyn;  
 A love-knotte in the gretter ende ther was.

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<sup>76</sup> Robinson, 21, 189-192

His heed was balled, that shoon as any glas,  
 And eek his face, as he hadde been encynt.  
 He was a lord ful fat and in good poynt;  
 His eyen stepe, and rollynge in his heed,  
 That stemed as a forneys of a leed;  
 His bootes souple, his hors in greet estaat,  
 Now certainly he was a fair prelaat;  
 He was nat pale as a forpynd goost.  
 His palfrey was a broun as is a berye.<sup>77</sup>

It would seem that Chaucer himself has made the only comment that should be made on that picture. That the Monk was a hunter, that he was handsome and well-dressed, that he had a fine horse which was richly caparisoned were additional signs of his dignity. Indeed he was a fine monk, an exceedingly fine one, as Chaucer had said in the beginning.

This is the whole picture of the Monk of the Prologue. What Chaucer said at the beginning, he repeated at the end. In all the details he intended to paint a picture of the "fair" prelate,

Now it remains to be seen whether the picture of the Monk in the Monk's Tale bears out the portrait of the Prologue. It has been seen that as far as the physical details are concerned the two pictures are the same.<sup>78</sup> Also, in the two pictures, the Monk has the same high station and dignity, a thing that has been seen above.<sup>79</sup> Therefore, the only questionable part of the Monk's Tale is the character of the Monk.

All the recent critics of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales are in agree-

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 21, 193-207

<sup>78</sup> Page 23-25 - Last paragraph p. 23 to second paragraph p. 25

<sup>79</sup> Page 25-28 - Second paragraph p. 25 to first paragraph p. 28

ment on one point, the relation of the Prologue to the links and Tales.

Mr. Lowes made the clearest and most academic definition of this relationship:

The Prologue gives us the tellers--statically, in their potentialities. But as the cavalcade moves on, the static becomes dynamic. And in the links between the tales Chaucer has made the most original of all his contributions. The tales are not isolated entities. They stand in intimate relation to all that Chaucer in the Prologue has revealed about their tellers...The Prologue gives us the Pilgrims in statu quo ante; their own actions along the road reveal their characters.<sup>80</sup>

Another way of looking at the relation of tales to the Prologue is to consider the Prologue the dramatis personae, and the links and tales the play itself. It was in this light that Mr. Kittredge looked at it, and explained the two parts:

Thus tales and links are woven together to make a unified and living drama, the tales growing out of the links, and the links out of the tales, and both springing from the characters of the various pilgrims... In the links Chaucer is the dramatist putting the characters upon the stage and making them act and speak before our eyes.<sup>81</sup>

All this may seem somewhat confusing, but Mr. Kittredge made clear his meaning when he said:

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<sup>80</sup> Lowes, 202-204

<sup>81</sup> Kittredge, 205-and 212

Thus the story of any Pilgrim may be affected or determined,--in its contents, or in the manner of telling, or in both,--not only by his character in general, but also by the circumstances, by the situation, by his momentary relations to the others in the company, or even by something in a tale that has come before.<sup>82</sup>

Thus it may be seen how important is the action which is narrated in the links, the prologues to tales, and the epilogues. It is also plain that the stories reveal very much about the character of their tellers. The description of the character in the links and tales must be consistent with the character of the pilgrim described in the Prologue, or else Chaucer is inconsistent. Now, that is exactly what Chaucer declared that he would do; namely, keep the characters consistent even in the links and tales:

And therefore every gentle wight I praye,  
For Goddes love, demeth nat that I seye  
Of yvel entente, but for I moot reherce  
Hir tales alle, be they bettre or werse,  
Or elles falsen som of my mateere.<sup>83</sup>

And thus Mr. Lounsbury commented upon these lines:

He must, he says, tell his tale  
'after his man;' that is, he must  
tell the kind of tale the particular  
person introduced was sure to tell,  
and must tell it in the way it was  
told.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 156

<sup>83</sup> Robinson, 57, ll. 3171-3175

<sup>84</sup> T. R. Lounsbury, Studies in Chaucer, Harper and Brothers, New York, 1892, III, 350

Therefore, when the Monk was introduced for the first time, in deference to his dignity, immediately after the Knight had finished his tale, he was asked to tell a tale like the Knight's. Thus Chaucer was paving the way for him to tell a tale that was becoming to his profession and station. But the drunken Miller insisted on telling his tale first. Because he was drunk and could not be subdued even by the all-powerful Bailly, he had his wish. The Monk meekly listened to the Host trying to save the place for him but did not offer a word to support his claim to the chance to tell a story. No one would contest the fact that such action was quite in harmony with Chaucer's declaration that he was an extremely good Monk, or in harmony with the Monk's contention that a man could hunt and still be holy.<sup>85</sup>

This incident is as full of comic episode as it is of real character portrayal. Mr. Shelley made this observation and went on to make a generalization about all the prologues and epilogues:

We are granted some comic relief after the long and grave story told by the Knight. And we are prepared for what is to come in the tales told by the Miller and the Reeve...Most of the links are devoted to comedy, and to comedy of a realistic kind.<sup>86</sup>

Therefore, it is not surprising that there was some comic relief in the next prologue that introduced the Monk to tell a tale. This happened in the Monk's prologue. The Prioress had opened the proceedings of the day, as far as dull tales were concerned. Actually the Shipman had told

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<sup>85</sup> Robinson, 56-57, 11. 3109-3135

<sup>86</sup> Shelley, 206-208



the first tale of the day, but it was a racy fabliau calculated to cast reflection on not a few of the Pilgrims. Then came the Prioress with her doleful tale of the poor little clergeon. She was succeeded by Chaucer, who told his tale of Sir Thopas in a very annoying fashion until he was stopped by the Host. To make matters worse, he followed it with the dull-est of all tales in the Canterbury Tales, the story of Melibee and his patient wife. After all that heaviness, it would not be surprising to find something of comic relief in the Prologue to the Monk's Tale. And that is exactly what one finds there. The Host, realizing that the company must be very bored with the long hours filled with dull tales, turned to the Monk and began to josh him on his wasted manliness. This might have been offensively personal to the Monk. Indication, however, of the Monk's character does not come until he responds to the Host's remarks. The vulgarity with which the Host addressed the Monk could not be, on the one hand, anything but an indication of the Host's own character, and on the other hand, the temper of the times. With regard to the first, Mr. Kittredge said:

But Harry Bailly was not only a fair and seemly burgess, bold of his speech. He was "wise and well ytaught": that is in modern parlance, a discreet man, with plenty of tact, one who "knew his way about"; he had some education and was thoroughly versed in the usages of society. His hearty and sometimes boisterous manner must not deceive us. It is partly temperament, partly professional technique, and he forces it a little now and then, for a very special purpose-- to see if he cannot

irritate some pilgrim or other into revolt;  
for whoever gainsays his judgment must pay  
an enormous forfeit, no less than the total  
travelling expenses of the company.

Whoso wal my juggement withseye  
Shall paye al that we spenden by the weye.<sup>87</sup>

That it was the temper of the times to take such plain speaking without a blush can be more clearly seen from the incident that Chaucer narrated in the link after the Miller's Tale. But from what Chaucer said there, it is plain that the over frankness could not have been noticed by the Monk, or any of the other religious on the Pilgrimage. Chaucer commented:

Whan folke hadde laughen at this nyce oas  
Of Absolon and hende Nicolas,  
Diverse folk diversely they seyde,  
But for the moore part they loughe and pleyde.  
Ne at this tale saugh no man hym greve,  
But it were oonly Osewald the Reve.<sup>88</sup>

Therefore, after the Host had joked broadly with the Monk, there would be no false shame. He had complimented the Monk on his manliness very frankly, in an age when frankness was not misunderstood. Even so, the Host took no chance. Before asking the Monk to tell his tale, he respectfully and carefully apologized:

But be nat wrooth, my lord, though that I pleye.  
Ful ofte in game a sooth I have heard seye!<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Kittredge, 162

<sup>88</sup> Robinson, 66, ll. 3855-3860

<sup>89</sup> Robinson, 225, ll. 3153-3154

And so the Monk showed his character, was very understanding, and took the Host's apology. Without a word of complaint he began his tale. That the Monk was not offended by the Host's banter and playfulness after the long series of sorry tales can be taken on no less an authority than Chaucer: "This worthy Monk took al in pacience."<sup>90</sup> Furthermore, since the situation warranted some play, since the Host had apologized, the Monk had no reason for taking offence, and it seems highly unlikely that he was, in consequence of the supposedly wounded pride, telling his tales merely to annoy the Host who wanted a gay tale. Nor is there any reason, for the same basis was given for the assertion, to conclude that the Monk was showing his "soured sentimentality." The word of Chaucer stands against his critics, and the situation did not allow any such show of hurt feelings. Furthermore, the patience the Monk showed here was of a piece with the meekness he showed when the Miller shouldered him out of his turn to tell a tale earlier. And certainly patience is consonant with the character of the good Monk who was described in the Prologue.

Before going on to examine the character of the Monk in the tales he told, it would be well to comment on some of the remarks which the Host made in his joking with the Monk. Earlier in this paper, it was seen that Bailly referred to characteristics in the Monk who was about to tell his tale, which traits were matched with traits of character in the Monk of the Prologue. Thus it was seen that the two pictures were the same in physical traits and in the station which the Monk held. So too, the implica-

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 225, I. 3155

tions with regard to the Monk's character to be found in the remarks of the Host are the same, since they are drawn from the same type of facts. He is still a dignified, lordly Monk, a superior in his order, a "gouverneur wily and wys."<sup>91</sup> In the Prologue there was much about the Monk's hunting; here there is nothing about hunting. It may be supposed that Chaucer had given more time to the subject in the Prologue, then, in order that he might round out the picture of the Monk, without too much emphasis on any one theme, he treated the finer characteristics of the Monk, almost without exception, thus emphasizing this time his statement that the man was a "fair Prelaat" in character.

That this Monk was a fine prelate and a good monk, just as the Monk of the Prologue, Chaucer further indicated by the remarks with which he had the Monk preface his tale. First he showed that he had a good religious spirit and would not tell a story that would scandalize anyone on the pilgrimage:

This worth Monk took al in pacience,  
And seyde, "I wol doon al my diligence,  
As fer as sowneth into honestee..."<sup>92</sup>

It has been seen that the Host may have had a secondary reason for joshing the Monk, namely, the desire to get him to rebel against his leadership of the game and thus be liable to pay the forfeit agreed upon. That forfeit was the expense for the whole pilgrimage of all the pilgrims.

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 225, l. 3130

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 225, ll 3155-3157

But if such was the Host's desire, he failed miserably in realizing it, for the Monk took all in patience. Although the Monk may have been moved to patience by the threat of paying the expense of the pilgrimage for all the pilgrims, still he acted as became a prudent religious, and promised to tell a "tale or two or three" that would be becoming to his profession. Thus, once again Chaucer laid the scene for a natural introduction of a tale in keeping with the character of the Monk.

Before beginning his tale, the Monk gave a further proof of Chaucer's statement that he was a good Monk. First he defined tragedy in a very scholarly manner, mentioning by the way that he had a hundred in his cell:

This worthy Monk took al in pacience,  
 And seyde, "I wol doon al my diligence,  
 As fer as sowneth into honestee,  
 To telle yow a tale, or two, or three.  
 And if yow list to herkne hyderward,  
 I wol yow seyn the lyf of Seint Edward;  
 Or wllis, first, tragedies wol I telle,  
 Of whiche I have an hundred in my celle.  
 Tragedie is to seyn a certeyn storie,  
 As olde bookes maken us memorie,  
 Of hym that stood in greet prosperitee,  
 And is yfallen out of heigh degree  
 Into myserie, and endeth wrecchedly.  
 And they ben versified communely  
 Of six feet, which men cleppen exametron.  
 In prose eek been endited many oon,  
 And eek in meetre, in many a sondry wyse.  
 Lo this declaryng oghte ynogh suffice.<sup>93</sup>

Then he apologized for not telling the stories in chronological order, for

his memory was not as good as it should have been. Thus he showed no sign of pretending to be a student at that time, confessing that it was some time since he had read the stories. But as the tales unfolded, he showed a very good memory of the facts. Therefore, though his office excused him from study at that time, he had been a student, a thorough student, who remembered his learning long after he had acquired it.

But that his learning was pointed toward his priestly calling is clear from the use he made of it; for each story he told was a little exemplum illustrating the vanity of worldly honor and wealth. In the stories, as critics have pointed out,<sup>94</sup> much is revealed of the teller's character. And this is true of the Monk's stories. It is remarkable that no author commented on the fact that the great, dignified, rich Monk who had a slight leaning toward worldliness, should have told stories, exemplifying the vanity of honor and wealth in this world. In the stories, the Monk showed sound ascetical theology in this regard. Furthermore, he showed that, like the good Monk Chaucer said he was, he had a right estimate of his own position and wealth; he saw and used things in their proper relationship to God.

To introduce a fuller comment upon the stories of the Monk, which treat of the loss of honor and wealth, a brief comment on ascetical doctrine in regard to worldliness would be in order. A theologian, Father Joseph McDonnell, S.J., gives a very succinct and thorough explanation of

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<sup>94</sup> Kittredge, 154-155

the Catholic Church's doctrine on this question. It speaks for itself:

The spirit of the world and the spirit of Christ are diametrically opposed.

The spirit of the world is the spirit of covetousness, which makes its highest aim to accumulate riches; the spirit of ambition, which at all costs seeks exaltation, and loves to be honored and respected by men; the spirit of pride, which is essentially selfish, full of self-esteem and arrogance, and looks with scorn and contempt on the lowly.

The spirit of Christ is the spirit of detachment from the goods of earth, using these things as though it used them not, remembering that they are creatures subservient to a nobler and a higher end; and useful only in so far as they promote that end; it is the spirit of humility, self-sacrifice, and self-forgetfulness that toils and prays and suffers in secret, and is willing to be hid and ignored on earth.<sup>95</sup>

The marks of worldliness, which Tatlock and Manly saw in the Monk of the Prologue, are covetousness, ambition, and pride; the opposite of them is detachment. However, the Monk had wealth, had a high position, had dignity and respect. If he were attached to these things and demanded them as his personal right, then he would be worldly. But it has been seen that he used his position and his wealth to further the cause of religion, for a right and good end. In the episodes of the Miller's prologue and the Monk's prologue he showed his meekness and humility. Thus he showed that he had the spirit of Christ, that he used the things he had with detach-

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95 Joseph McDonnell, S. J., Meditations on the Sacred Heart, R. & T. Washbourne, Ltd., London, 1918, 39-40

ment.

Then in his tales he showed that he understood the doctrine of proper use of creatures. Each tale is a little sermon on the vanity of human goods and honors. The principle characters of each story are shown to have become attached to the good things God had given to them. And their fall from power, honor, and wealth follows quickly upon their attachment. A good example of this is in the short story of Adam:

Loo Adam, in the feeld of Damysseene,  
 With Goddes owene fynger wroght was he,  
 And nat bigeten of mannes sperme unclene,  
 And welte al paradys savyng o tree.  
 Hadde nevere worldly man so heigh degree  
 As Adam, til he for mysgovernaunce  
 Was driven out of hys hye prosperitee  
 To laboure, and to helle, and to meschaunce.<sup>96</sup>

But not all the principal characters fell because of their attachment to their goods and glory. Some were brought low, even though they were good men, thus showing the folly of trusting in earthly goods under any circumstances. One such tale is that of Peter, King of Cyprus:

O worthy Petro, kyng of Cipre, also,  
 That Alisandre wan by heigh maistrie,  
 Ful many a hethen wroghtestow ful wo,  
 Of which thyne owene liges hadde envie,  
 And for no thyng but for thy chivalrie  
 They in thy bed han slayn thee by the morwe.  
 Thus kan Fortune hir wheel governe and gye,  
 And out of joye bryng men to sorwe.<sup>97</sup>

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96 Robinson, 226, ll. 3197-3204

97 Ibid., 231, ll. 3581-3588



That this was the Monk's theme, and that he remained true to it throughout his tales could be amply demonstrated by quoting many passages from the tale. However, it will suffice now to quote only his admonition at the beginning of the tale, one of the warnings at the end of a tale, and his concluding remarks. First he cautioned:

Lat no man truste en blynd prosperitee;  
Be war by thise ensamples trewe and olde.<sup>98</sup>

Then after the tale of King Antiechus, showing the reason for his awful fate, the Monk commented:

Thus hath this roggour and this homycide,  
That many a man made wepe and pleyne,  
Swich gerdoun as bilongeth unte pryde.<sup>99</sup>

Most of the other stories end with must the same comment, with the exception of those in which good people fell from power merely because someone else was jealous of their position, glory, or wealth. Then the whole series of tales ends with the observation and caution:

Tragedies noon oother maner thyng  
Ne kan in syngyng orie ne biwaille  
But that Fortuen alwey wole assaille  
With unwar strook the regnes that been preude;  
For whan men trusteth hire, thanne wole she faille,  
And covere hire brighte face with a clowde.<sup>100</sup>

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98 *Ibid.*, 226, ll. 3188-3189

99 *Ibid.*, 234, ll. 3818-3820

100 *Ibid.*, 236, ll. 3951-3957

That one of high position, power, and wealth should speak so forcefully of the vanity of all those things gives great insight into his character. That Chaucer gave these tales to the Monk, whether he wrote them for him, or whether they were an earlier literary creation of his which he found apt for the character, shows his care in completing the picture of the Monk. In the Prologue, Chaucer gave most of his time to the details of the Monk's power, position, wealth, and dignity. He seemingly realized that the picture as it stood was lop-sided. So the links and the tales give the other side of the picture, showing his meekness, patience, right esteem of honor and position, and his learning. This "Monk...a fair for the maistrie," is still a "fair prelaat", a "worthy Monk."<sup>101</sup>

There remains very little to say of the Monk. Having gone so far in his Tales, he was interrupted by the Knight, who was pained by these tales of kings and nobles who fell from wealth and position. Here again the Monk took the situation with meekness and humility, thus illustrating his tales by his own example. He was to the very end what Chaucer had said in the beginning, an extremely good Monk.

From the demonstrations of Mr. Tatlock, and the observations made in this chapter, it is plain that Chaucer was consistent in his portrayal of the Monk. The steps by which this was shown were as follows: First the opposite theories of Mr. Manly and Mr. Tatlock were presented. Mr. Manly believed Chaucer was inconsistent because: a) The Monk of the Prologue

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 21, l. 165; 21, l. 204; 225, l. 3155

seemed worldly, but the Monk of the Monk's Tale was a good monk. b) Chaucer might have desired to avoid the unfavorable appearance that the Monk would have in contrast to the Nun's Priest, who was a more religious-seeming man than he. c) Mr. Manly thought he could identify the monastery to which the Monk belonged, and a dignified cleric of that monastery may have objected to the picture of the worldly Monk in the Prologue as directly aimed at himself.

In answering these views, Mr. Tatlock showed: a) The picture of the Monk consistently was that of a worldly man, more typical than individual, and therefore, unlikely to arouse any dignitary's displeasure. b) The two pictures of the Monk bore the same features as to physical appearance and as to status in his order.

Secondly, we fortified the statement of Mr. Tatlock that the "two" monks were the same physical traits and in social standing. It was shown, moreover, that as far as the Monk's character was concerned the main trait was not worldliness. Mr. Patch's demonstration of the truth that the first line of each portrait set the keynote for each character led to the demonstration, in the thesis, that the main characteristics of the Monk were his goodness, dignity, and ability. However, there was evident in the Monk a slight trace of worldliness, which removed any severity clinging to the other traits of the Monk and rendered the man believably human and life-like, and therefore likeable.

Finally, an examination of the Prologue, the prologue to the

Monk's Tale, the Monk's Tale, and the epilogue to the Monk's Tale revealed that Chaucer consistently portrayed a good Monk, a lordly man, handsome, well-dressed, a lover of hunting; these investigations also revealed a meek, patient, humble man, who realized the true worth and meaning of his position, power and wealth.

Therefore, Chaucer drew a picture of a good Monk, and was consistent in the portrait of the Monk of the Canterbury Tales. The thesis has re-enforced Mr. Tatlock's contention that Chaucer was consistent in his picture of the Monk and at the same time it showed the soundness of Mr. Manly's observation that the Monk of the Monk's Tale was a good monk. Thus, taking an element of truth from each of the critics, consistency from Mr. Tatlock and the picture of a good Monk from Mr. Manly, the thesis showed that the Monk was consistently good, in the Prologue as well as in the Tale, showed that he was a good Monk, "a fair for the maistrie, a fair prelaat, a worthy Monk."

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APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by David F. McCarthy, S.J. has been read and approved by three members of the Department of English.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Jan. 31, 1949

Date

Rev. John B. Conneath, S.J.  
Signature of Adviser