Chaucer - Three Short Poems, Introductory Materials

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Truth

Balade de Bon Conseyl

Flee fro the prees, and dwelle with sothfastnesse; 1
Suffyce unto thy thing, though it be smal,
For hord hath hate, and climbing tikelnesse,
Prees hath envye, and wele blent overal.
Savour no more thanne thee bihove shal, 5
Reule wel thyself, that other folk canst rede,
And trouthe thee shal delivere, it is no drede. 7

Tempest thee noght al croked to redresse 8
In trust of hir that turneth as a bal;
Gret reste stant in litel besinesse. 10
Be war therfore to sporne ayeyns an al,
Stryve not, as doth the crokke with the wal.
Daunte thyself, that dauntest otheres dede,
And trouthe thee shal delivere, it is no drede. 14

That thee is sent, receyve in buxumnesse; 15
The wrastling for this world axeth a fal.
Her is non hoom, her nis but wildernesse:
Forth, pilgrim, forth! Forth, beste, out of thy stal!
Know thi contree, look up, thank God of al;
Hold the heye wey and lat thy gost thee lede, 20
And trouthe thee shal delivere, it is no drede.

Envoy

Therfore, thou Vache, leve thyn old wrechednesse; 22
Unto the world leve now to be thral.
Crye him mercy, that of his hy goodnesse
Made thee of noght, and in especial 25
Draw unto him, and pray in general
For thee, and eek for other, hevenlich mede;
And trouthe thee shal delivere, it is no drede. 28

- Riverside edition
http://academics.vmi.edu/english/audio/Truth_Yager.html

Fortune

Balades de Visage sanz Peinture

I. Le Pleintif counter Fortune

This wrecched worldes transmutacioun,
As wele or wo, now povre and now honour,
Withouten ordre or wys discrecioun
Governed is by Fortunes errour.
But natheles, the lak of hir favour
Ne may nat don me singen though I dye,
Jay tout perdu mon temps et mon labour;
For fynally, Fortune, I thee defye.

Yit is me left the light of my resoun
To knowen frend fro fo in thy mirour.
So muchel hath yit thy whirling up and doun
Ytaught me for to knowen in an hour.
But trewely, no force of thy reddour
To him that over himself hath the maystrye.
My suffisaunce shal be my socour,
For fynally Fortune, I thee defye.

O Socrates, thou stidfast champioun,
She never mighte be thy tormentour;
Thou never dreddest hir oppressioun,
Ne in hir chere founde thou no savour.
Thou knewe wel the deceit of hir colour,
And that hir moste worshipe is to lye.
I knowe hir eek a fals dissimulour,
For fynally, Fortune, I thee defye!

II. La respounse de Fortune au Pleintif

No man is wrecched but himself it wene,
And he that hath himself hath suffisaunce.
Why seystow thanne I am to thee so kene,
That hast thyself out of my governaunce?
Sey thus: "Graunt mercy of thyn haboundaunce
That thou hast lent or this.' Why wolt thou stryve?
What wostow yit how I thee wol avaunce?
And eek thou hast thy beste frend alyve.

I have thee taught divisioun bitwene
Frend of effect and frend of countenaunce;

Thee nedeth nat the galle of noon hyene,
That cureth eyen derked for penaunce;
Now seestow cleer that were in ignoraunce.
Yit halt thyn ancre and yit thou mayst arryve
Ther bountee berth the keye of my substaunce,
And eek thou hast thy beste frend alyve.

How many have I refused to sustene
Sin I thee fostred have in thy plesaunce.
Woltow than make a statut on thy quene
That I shal been ay at thyn ordinaunce?
Thou born art in my regne of variaunce,
Aboute the wheel with other most thou dryve.
My lore is bet than wikke is thy grevaunce,
And eek thou hast thy beste frend alyve.

III. La respounse du Pleintif countre Fortune

Thy lore I dampne; it is adversitee.
My frend maystow nat reven, blind goddesse;
That I thy frendes knowe, I thanke it thee.
Tak hem agayn, lat hem go lye on presse.
The negardye in keping hir richesse
Prenostik is thou wolt hir tour assayle;
Wikke appetyt comth ay before syknesse.
In general, this reule may nat fayle.

La respounse de Fortune countre le Pleintif

Thou pinchest at my mutabilitee
For I thee lente a drope of my richesse,
And now me lyketh to withdrawe me.[Riv., p. 653]
Why sholdestow my realtee oppresse?
The see may ebbe and flowen more or lesse;
The welkne hath might to shyne, reyne, or hayle;
Right so mot I kythen my brotelnesse.
In general, this reule may nat fayle.

Lo, th'execucion of the majestee
That al purveyeth of his rightwysnesse,
That same thing "Fortune"' clepen ye,
Ye blinde bestes ful of lewdednesse.
The hevene hath propretee of sikernesse.
This world hath ever resteles travayle;
Thy laste day is ende of myn intresse.
In general, this reule may nat fayle.

Lenvoy de Fortune

Princes, I prey you of your gentilesse
Lat nat this man on me thus crye and pleyne,
And I shal quyte you your bisinesse
At my requeste, as three of you or tweyne,
And but you list releve him of his peyne,
Preyeth his beste frend of his noblesse
That to som beter estat he may atteyne.

(Source: http://oldpoetry.com/poetry/435)

Gentilesse

Moral Balade of Chaucier

The firste stok, fader of gentilesse --
What man that claymeth gentil for to be
Must folowe his trace, and alle his wittes dresse
Vertu to sewe, and vyces for to flee.
For unto vertu longeth dignitee,
And noght the revers, saufly dar I deme,
Al were he mytre, croune, or diademe.

This firste stok was ful of rightwisnesse,
Trewe of his word, sobre, pitous, and free,
Clene of his gost, and loved besinesse,
Ayeinst the vyce of slouthe, in honestee;
And, but his heir love vertu, as dide he,
He is noght gentil, thogh he riche seme,
Al were he mytre, croune, or diademe.

Vyce may wel be heir to old richesse;
But ther may no man, as men may wel see,
Bequethe his heir his vertuous noblesse,
That is appropred unto no degree,
But to the firste fader in magestee,
That maketh his heir him that can him queme,
Al were he mytre, croune, or diademe.

Glosses and Notes

Al: Although
Appropred: Given into the possession of, appropriated to the use of.
Ayeinst: Against.
Clene: Clean, pure, unmixed.
Diademe: A crown or a cloth headband; an imperial crown.
Fader: Father, parent, ancestor.
Gentilesse: Gentilesse of birth or character, nobility, courtesy, high breeding, delicacy, slenderness.
Gost: Spirit, soul.
Longeth: Belongs.
Mytre: Bishop's crown.
Queme: Please, satisfy.
Saufly: With safety.
Stok: Stock, race, origin.
Trace: Path, track.
Vyce: Vice, fault, error, defect.
Were: Wear.

Prepared by Jessica Ramirez Torres
http://english.edgewood.edu/chaucer-poems/gen_text.htm

Selections from Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*, on "Fortune"

-- ***Book II, Prose 8*** (from U. Va. Etext edition, pp. 53-54).

"It is a strange thing that I am trying to say, and for that reason I can scarcely explain myself in words. I think that ill fortune is of greater advantage to men than good fortune. Good fortune is ever lying when she seems to favour by an appearance of happiness. Ill fortune is ever true when by her changes she shews herself inconstant. The one deceives; the other edifies. The one by a deceitful appearance of good things enchains the minds of those who enjoy them: the other frees them by a knowledge that happiness is so fragile. You see, then, that the one is blown about by winds, is ever moving and ever ignorant of its own self ; the other is sober, ever prepared and ever made provident by the undergoing of its very adversities. Lastly, good fortune draws men from the straight path of true good by her fawning: ill fortune draws most men to the true good, and holds them back by her curved staff."

-- ***Book IV, Prose 7***, from the U.VA Etext edition.

"'Do you see now,' she continued,' what follows upon all that we have said? '

'What is it?' I asked.

'That all fortune is plainly good,' she answered.

'How can that be? ' said I.

'Consider this,' she said: 'all fortune, whether pleasant or difficult, is due to this cause; it is for the sake of rewarding the good or exercising their virtue, and of punishing and correcting bad men: therefore it is plain that all this fortune which is allowed to be just or expedient, must be good.'

'Yes,' I said,' that is a true argument, and when I think of the Providence or Fate about which you have taught me, the conclusion rests upon strong foundations. But if it please you, let us count it among those conclusions which you a little while ago set down as inconceivable.'

'Why?' she asked.

'Because it is a commonplace saying among men -- indeed an especially frequent one -- that some people have bad fortune.'

'Would you then have us approach more nearly the common conversation of men, lest we should seem to withdraw too far from human ways?'

'If you will,' I said.

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'Do you not think that that, which is advantageous, is good?'

'Yes.'

'And that fortune, which exercises or corrects, is advantageous? '

'I agree,' said I.

'Then it is good, is it not? '

'It must be so.'

'This is the fortune of those who are either firmly set in virtue and struggling against their difficulties, or of those who would leave their vices and take the path of virtue? '

'That is true,' I said.

'But what of that pleasant fortune which is granted as a reward to good men? Do most people perceive that it is bad? No; but, as is true, they esteem it the best. And what of the last kind of fortune, which is hard and which restrains bad men by just punishment? Is that commonly held to be good? '

'No,' said I,' it is held to be the most miserable of all that can be imagined.'

'Beware lest in following the common conception, we come to some truly inconceivable conclusion.'

'What do you mean? '

'From what we have allowed,' she said,' it results that the fortune of those who are in possession of virtue, or are gaining it, or advancing therein, is entirely good, whatever it be, while for those who remain in wickedness, their fortune is the worst.'

'That is true, but who would dare confess it? '

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'For this reason a wise man should never complain, whenever he is brought into strife with fortune; just as a brave man cannot properly be disgusted whenever the noise of battle is heard, since for both of them their very difficulty is their opportunity, for the brave man of increasing his

glory, for the wise man of confirming and strengthening his wisdom. From this is virtue itself so named,1 because it is so supported by its strength that it is not overcome by adversity. And you who were set in the advance of virtue have not come to this pass of being dissipated by delights, or enervated by pleasure; but you fight too bitterly against all fortune. Keep the middle path of strength and virtue, lest you be overwhelmed by misfortune or corrupted by pleasant fortune. All that falls short or goes too far ahead, has contempt for happiness, and gains not the reward for labour done. It rests in your own hands what shall be the nature of the fortune which you choose to form for yourself. For all fortune which seems difficult, either exercises virtue, or corrects or punishes vice. "

The University of Virginia E-Text Library Home Page is:

http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/

Selections from Augustine, ***On Christian Doctrine***, on-line at Wheaton College, "The Christian Classics Ethereal Library,

2. All instruction is either about things or about signs; but things are learnt by means of signs. I now use the word "thing" in a strict sense, to signify that which is never employed as a sign of anything else: for example, wood, stone, cattle, and other things of that kind. Not, however, the wood which we read Moses cast into the bitter waters to make them sweet, nor the stone which Jacob used as a pillow, nor the ram which Abraham offered up instead of his son; for these, though they are things, are also signs of other things. There are signs of another kind, those which are never employed except as signs: for example, words. No one uses words except as signs of something else…

. There are some things, then, which are to be enjoyed, others which are to be used, others still which enjoy and use. Those things which are objects of enjoyment make us happy. Those things which are objects of use assist, and (so to speak) support us in our efforts after happiness, so that we can attain the things that make us happy and rest in them. We ourselves, again, who enjoy and use these things, being placed among both kinds of objects, if we set ourselves to enjoy those which we ought to use, are hindered in our course, and sometimes even led away from it; so that, getting entangled in the love of lower gratifications, we lag behind in, or even altogether turn back from, the pursuit of the real and proper objects of enjoyment.

4. For to enjoy a thing is to rest with satisfaction in it for its own sake. To use, on the other hand, is to employ whatever means are at one's disposal to obtain what one desires, if it is a proper object of desire; for an unlawful use ought rather to be called an abuse. Suppose, then, we were wanderers in a strange country, and could not live happily away from our fatherland, and that we felt wretched in our wandering, and wishing to put an end to our misery, determined to return home. We find, however, that we must make use of some mode of conveyance, either by land or water, in order to reach that fatherland where our enjoyment is to commence. But the beauty of the country through which we pass, and the very pleasure of the motion, charm our hearts, and turning these things which we ought to use into objects of enjoyment, we become unwilling to hasten the end of our journey; and becoming engrossed in a factitious delight, our thoughts are diverted from that home whose delights would make us truly happy. Such is a picture of our condition in this life of mortality. We have wandered far from God; and if we wish to return to our Father's home, this world must be used, not enjoyed, that so the invisible things of God may be clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made,--that is, that by means of what is material and temporary we may lay hold upon that which is spiritual and eternal.

20. Among all these things, then, those only are the true objects of enjoyment which we have spoken of as eternal and unchangeable. The rest are for use, that we may be able to arrive at the full enjoyment of the former. We, however, who enjoy and use other things are things ourselves. For a great thing truly is man, made after the image and similitude of God, not as respects the mortal body in which he is clothed, but as respects the rational soul by which he is exalted in honour above the beasts. And so it becomes an important question, whether men ought to enjoy, or to use, themselves, or to do both. For we are commanded to love one another: but it is a

question whether man is to be loved by man for his own sake, or for the sake of something else. If it is for his own sake, we enjoy him; if it is for the sake of something else, we use him. It seems to me, then, that he is to be loved for the sake of something else. For if a thing is to be loved for its own sake, then in the enjoyment of it consists a happy life, the hope of which at least, if not yet the reality, is our comfort in the present time. But a curse is pronounced on him who places his hope in man. (Jer.17:5)

22. Those things which are objects of use are not all, however, to be loved, but those only which are either united with us in a common relation to God, such as a man or an angel, or are so related to us as to need the goodness of God through our instrumentality, such as the body. For assuredly the martyrs did not love the wickedness of their persecutors, although they used it to attain the favour of God. As, then, there are four kinds of things that are to be loved,--first, that which is above us; second, ourselves; third, that which is on a level with us; fourth, that which is beneath us…

26. Man, therefore, ought to be taught the due measure of loving, that is, in what measure he may love himself so as to be of service to himself…

28. Now he is a man of just and holy life who forms an unprejudiced estimate of things, and keeps his affections also under strict control, so that he neither loves what he ought not to love, nor fails to love what he ought to love, nor loves that more which ought to be loved less, nor loves that equally which ought to be loved either less or more, nor loves that less or more which ought to be loved equally. No sinner is to be loved as a sinner; and every man is to be loved as a man for God's sake; but God is to be loved for His own sake…

37. …For when the thing that we love is near us, it is a matter of course that it should bring delight with it. And if you pass beyond this delight, and make it a means to that which you are permanently to rest in, you are using it, and it is an abuse of language to say that you enjoy it. But if you cling to it, and rest in it, finding your happiness complete in it, then you may be truly and properly said to enjoy it. And this we must never do except in the case of the Blessed Trinity, who is the Supreme and Unchangeable God.

39. … The whole temporal dispensation for our salvation, therefore, was framed by the providence of God that we might know this truth and be able to act upon it; and we ought to use that dispensation, not with such love and delight as if it were a good to rest in, but with a transient feeling rather, such as we have towards the road, or carriages, or other things that are merely means…

40. Whoever, then, thinks that he understands the Holy Scriptures, or any part of them, but puts such an interpretation upon them as does not tend to build up this twofold love of God and our neighbour, does not yet understand them as he ought. If, on the other hand, a man draws a meaning from them that may be used for the building up of love, even though he does not happen upon the precise meaning which the author whom he reads intended to express in that place, his error is not pernicious, and he is wholly clear from the charge of deception…

from D.W. Robertson, Jr., *The Literature of Medieval England* (1970).

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

I. Medieval Life and Ideals

The period of European history extending from the last days of classical antiquity to the Renaissance of the fifteenth century is known as "the Middle Ages"—the ages in between—as though these ages constituted a kind of interregnum between the classical world and what is thought of as a revival of classical traditions in modern times. Thus the philosopher Hegel characterized the period as one of "infinite falsehood" marked by the isolation and subservience of the individual and by the gradual "secularization" of the Church. In a more popular sense, the word *medieval* is still used frequently to describe harsh, oppressive, or superstitious practices. Most of us are therefore prepared to assume offhand that the Middle Ages marked an unproductive period

Facing page: Très riches heures du Duc de Berry. *A warm hearth in February.*

from which humanity is fortunate to have escaped. However, recent historians have begun to discover that the break between antiquity and the Middle Ages, especially in intellectual and cultural development, was not so sharp as was once thought and that, moreover, the decisive beginnings of the modern world are to be found, not in the Renaissance, but in the mid-eighteenth century. With these newer perspectives there has come a revival of interest in medieval culture, an interest inspired not so much by the romantic nostalgia that made knights and their ladies favorite subjects of nineteenth-century romance, but by a genuine desire for understanding.

However we may characterize them, the thousand years of the Middle Ages form a rich and varied chapter in human history. The unsettled social conditions of the early years of the period, marked by the gradual economic and political collapse of the Roman Empire and by the success of barbarian invasions, left the task of maintaining cultural traditions to the Church. Monastic centers were islands of civilization in a chaotic world of economic collapse and warfare. As time passed, a new form of social organization, known as feudalism, gradually developed to replace the family, tribal, and warrior groups of the barbarians. During the eleventh and twelfth centuries feudal society rapidly developed its own ideals, consistent with the hierarchical patterns of Patristic theology and reinforced by the ethical doctrines of late classical philosophy, especially as those doctrines were found explicitly in the writings of Cicero and Seneca and implicitly in the writings of Virgil, Horace, and Ovid. Among philosophical writings, *The Consolation of Philosophy* of Boethius exerted a profound and continuous influence. The Church gradually spread its civilizing disciplines beyond the monasteries, which began to be replaced as centers of learning by cathedral schools. Some of these schools became universities, and one of them, at Paris, became the center of European culture. Toward the close of the period, feudal ideals came to be supplemented by a more nationalistic spirit, trade and commerce contributed to the rapid growth and relative prosperity of cities, and, by the fifteenth century, the merchant classes were beginning to assert a culture of their own, still basically religious in outlook, but nevertheless different in taste and attitude from the more aristocratic culture of the past. The break with the aristocratic traditions of the past was not completed, however, until the French Revolution, and we should not seek modern attitudes toward the individual or toward society in medieval writings. There is some truth in the assertion that the rococo style marks the last flowering of a tradition that extends from antiquity without fundamental upheaval throughout the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. In any event, the Middle Ages can hardly be called a period of stagnation, a mere lapse between Athens and Washington.

From a sociological point of view, medieval men tended to bond themselves together in small, tightly knit groups, most of which preserved the hierarchical structure of the patriarchal family. To a certain extent, this development may be said to have begun in late antiquity, when the country villas of wealthy Romans throughout the empire, having been cut off by inflation and heavy taxation from the cities, frequently became independent and self-supporting. The Germanic barbarians, meanwhile, formed themselves into small military units somewhat resembling the *comitatus* described by Tacitus in the *Germania*. These groups were originally bound by blood relationships, but in the course of time military leaders began to acquire followers from alien families bound to them by personal contractual obligations designed to perpetuate the kind of integrity that rested originally on family ties. Later on, feudal holdings supported groups bound by ties of homage and fidelity to a noble overlord. When merchants began to flourish in urban centers, they formed guilds or confraternities, which were not trade unions in the modern sense, but groups of men, some poor and some wealthy, banded together in a restricted area by virtue of a common interest in a trade or craft. Typically, such guilds originally developed from parish fraternities centered in local parish churches. Meanwhile, there were fraternities of other kinds, not associated with any special trade, and in the country the parish church frequently served as a center for community life. The prosperous craftsman in the city might have living in his house a number of servants, journeymen, or apprentices, who, like his own wife and children, formed a part of his *familia* or household, and to whom he acted as a father as well as a master. For the most part, industrial work was carried on in households of this kind. The master's house was his shop; his workers sat at his table and slept under his roof.

This fragmentation of society into small units, largely familial in structure, constitutes what Hegel called

"isolation"; but, as modern sociologists inform us, although small groups may be isolated to a certain extent from one another and may come into conflict at times, they serve to prevent the isolation of the individual who belongs to them. During the Middle Ages, most men, except during dislocations arising from war or pestilence, enjoyed a more or less natural place in their communities. Young boys could readily see their elders at work, knew what they did, and were not puzzled about their own identity as members of the community. In this situation a man's interests were naturally centered on the welfare of his group, which was, in effect, a part of his own identity. The behavior of the other members of the group to which he belonged was a matter of vital interest to him, since the effects of that behavior on his own welfare were immediately apparent. Group behavior, however, is a moral rather than a psychological problem. It was natural, therefore, that medieval men should think in moral terms, whereas we today, as members of large amorphous groups not based on close personal relationships, are likely to think of our problems as being personal or psychological.

However isolated medieval social groups may have been from one another, and however frequently they may have come in conflict with each other, in feudal warfare, in clashes among guilds, or in other ways, they were united by a common set of Christian beliefs and by a common interest in the larger community of the Church. Here they shared not only a mutual respect for the Word of God, but also, especially after the end of the twelfth century, a mutual participation in the sacraments. The fact that men were professed Christians, however, did not mean that they were necessarily moral in their behavior, nor that they were hypocrites or pagans if they were not moral. Medieval Christian doctrine readily acknowledged that Christ came for the benefit of sinners, not for the sake of the virtuous. No man was thought to be free from the stain of sin. One of the decrees of the great Lateran Council of 1215 stipulated that every individual among the adult faithful should go to confession before his parish priest at least once a year, the assumption being that he would have need to reveal a considerable number of "deadly" sins accumulated during a year's time, no matter how virtuous he might be. The whole point of the New Law, or the message of the New Testament, was felt to be that mercy is available through Christ to all those who are truly penitent. The Old Law, it was said, told men what not to do, but offered no relief from the almost impossible task of obeying all its admonitions. The New Law provided an opportunity to love God and one's fellow man in such a way that contrition might follow violation of the moral law. Medieval Christianity was a religion of love, not of righteousness.

At the same time, however, the "love of one's neighbor" had nothing in common with "the brotherhood of man," an ideal popularized both by Christian thinkers and by secular philosophers during the nineteenth century. The fact of humanity was not regarded as an excuse for errant behavior, nor as a predicament beset by ambiguity and potential irrationality. It implied, on the contrary, an obligation to act reasonably. Medieval society, as it developed, became hierarchical in structure, and it was widely recognized that some men were more lovable, or more reasonable, than others. Vicious men were not thought of as being merely bestial, but as worse than bestial, since a beast has no reason to corrupt. We should not, therefore, expect democratic or humanitarian sentiments among medieval authors. Such sentiments were not promulgated by medieval theologians and would certainly have found small sympathy among the medieval nobility.

It cannot be emphasized too strongly, however, that the New Law, frequently expressed as "justice tempered with mercy," or as the love of "common profit," as contrasted with self-love or malice, was a social and political as well as a theological ideal. King Alfred introduced his laws with the Ten Commandments followed by the two Precepts of Charity, feudal lords of all ranks were urged to temper justice with mercy in the treatment of their subjects, vassals were admonished to love their overlords, university colleges were theoretically unified in charity, and even Italian cities were described as communities held together by a bond of charity. The problem of whether or not this ideal was observed, as in the nature of things it frequently was not, was of urgent practical importance to men in all walks of life. Tyranny and oppression in any medieval community, from the hierarchy of the kingdom to the domestic hierarchy of the family, were associated with the Old Law, the malice of which was considered natural to fallen man. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that contrasts between the Old Law and the New should have been one of the most characteristic

Figure 1a *The Church. Strassbourg Cathedral.*

themes of medieval art and literature. The theme is by no means theoretical or academic in the context of medieval life. If a man's neighbors in his community were selfish and malicious, the day-to-day consequences of that fact might be very distressing to him; on the other hand, if he acted out of malice himself, the result would be an uncomfortable isolation from the group that furnished his identity and made his own achievements meaningful.

The two laws or loves were not opposites; the New Law was thought of as a fulfillment of the Old, and charitable love was simply love directed toward "the invisible things of God" that lay beyond, but implicit in, the visible things of creation. When we see figures of the Church and the Synagogue on Gothic portals (Figure 1); we should recall that these figures do not represent a contrast between Christianity and Judaism literally; they exemplify, from a medieval point of view, determining factors in the behavior of any individual and in the structure of any community. The Synagogue stands with the broken staff of worldly dominion or tyranny in one hand and the tables of the Mosaic law drooping toward the earth in the other. Her blindfold indicates her inability to see spiritual realities beneath the surfaces of the visible and tangible. On the other side, the Church holds the Cross, the symbol of victory through penance, in one hand and the chalice of the grace of the New Law in the other. Among the throngs who enter the church between these two figures, there are those still bound in the spirit of the Synagogue by desire for self-satisfaction through things that may be seen or touched. Their hearts are set on wealth, power, fame, or the pleasures of the flesh. These are men who seek to dominate and exploit the communities to which they belong for their own selfish purposes, driven by that worst ingredient of what were called vices, or evil habits of the soul, malice. Beside them walk the more charitable, penitent for their transgressions, their hearts set on God, the supreme exemplar of justice, wisdom, and mercy. Perhaps some walked in one way on one day and in another on the next, but the charitable were those capable of the civilized restraints and daily sacrifices that make life in a community possible. At the same time, there was thought to be something of the Church and something of the Synagogue in every man. No one extricates himself completely from worldly concern, no matter how hard he may try to do so.

It should be emphasized that the attitudes of men of all kinds in this congregation are basically practical and not at all sentimental. It was felt that devotion to God was extremely reasonable and that those who pursued selfish ends were foolish and that their actions were self-defeating. The transitory world of the tangible was said to produce merely transient satisfactions leading to inevitable frustration. Creation was thought of as a grand hierarchy, but beyond the hierarchy of nature was a hierarchy of values that alone could satisfy a reasonable

creature. The two statues thus stand as exemplifications of what we should call political, social, and psychological realities—realities that confront everyone daily in the ordinary conduct of life.

Until the last years of the Middle Ages men did not ordinarily think in what we would call political, social, and psychological terms. They easily identified their own interests with those of their communities, so that we should not be surprised to find, in medieval texts, problems of these three types all discussed in terms of morality. With reference to the last especially, it is significant that the word *personality*, used to mean the peculiar qualities of a given individual, did not come into current use until the eighteenth century, and that ideas like "the force of personality," or "the depths of personality," are peculiar to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Some recent theologians have, indeed, sought to locate God in the depths of the personality, and human personality has become a primary concern of modern literature and art. But such ideas, and the profound interest in psychology that accompanies them, are the products of an industrial civilization in which individuals find themselves more or less isolated in their efforts to achieve meaningful life as members of large, loosely formed groups. Medieval men were likely to think of their problems as community problems and of their own behavior in moral rather than in psychological terms. It is a mistake, therefore, to seek psychological profundity in medieval art or to expect characters in medieval literature to display personality in the modern sense of the word. There is no reason why this fact should be disappointing. The same shortcoming, if we wish to call it that, characterizes most classical literature and art as well. The better able we are to refrain from reading our own conventions into earlier literature and art, the better we shall be able to understand and, actually, to appreciate that literature and art and to understand the peculiar appeal of the literature and art of our own time.

During the Middle Ages human behavior was most often analyzed in terms of virtues and vices (Figure 2). We have been taught by the nineteenth century to think of morality as being a dull subject, the concern of stuffy and hypocritical persons who are likely to seek to oppress our innocent natural inclinations so that we become even more unhappy than we already are. Concerning nineteenth-century morality all this may be true, for the Christianity of the period is characteristically a religion of literal-minded righteousness rather than of love, frequently much closer in spirit to what medieval men called the Synagogue than to what they called the Church. Medieval morality was a different sort of thing entirely, embracing, as it did, much of the best ethical content of late classical thought. It was founded squarely on the principle that human behavior is ultimately a matter of love. The Christian conception of grace developed from the conviction that if men could be led to love properly, that is, to love intelligible

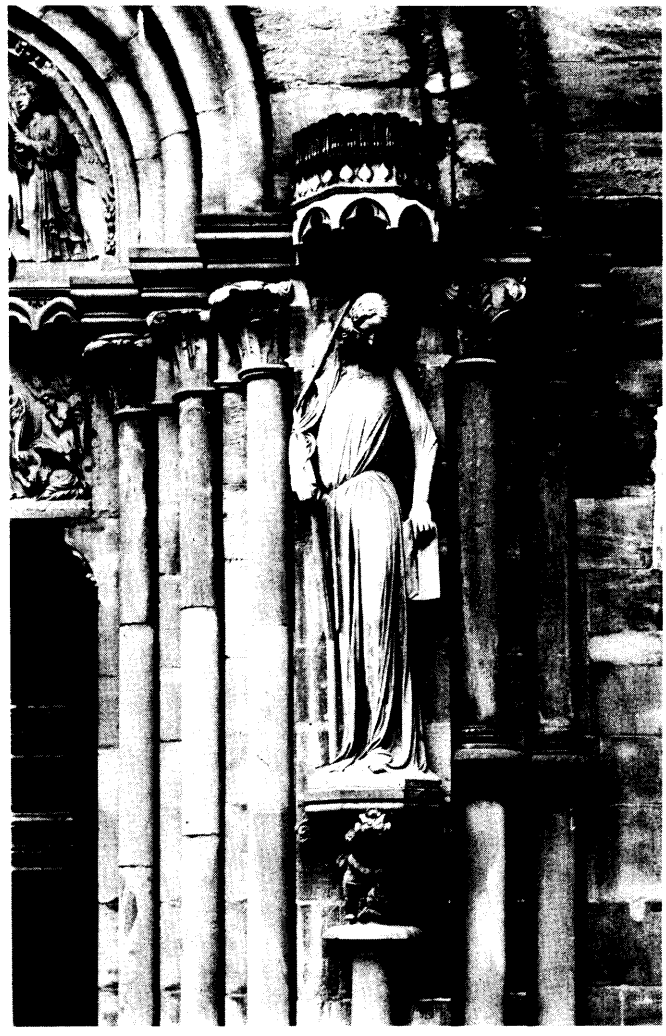

Figure 1b *The Synagogue. Strassbourg Cathedral.*

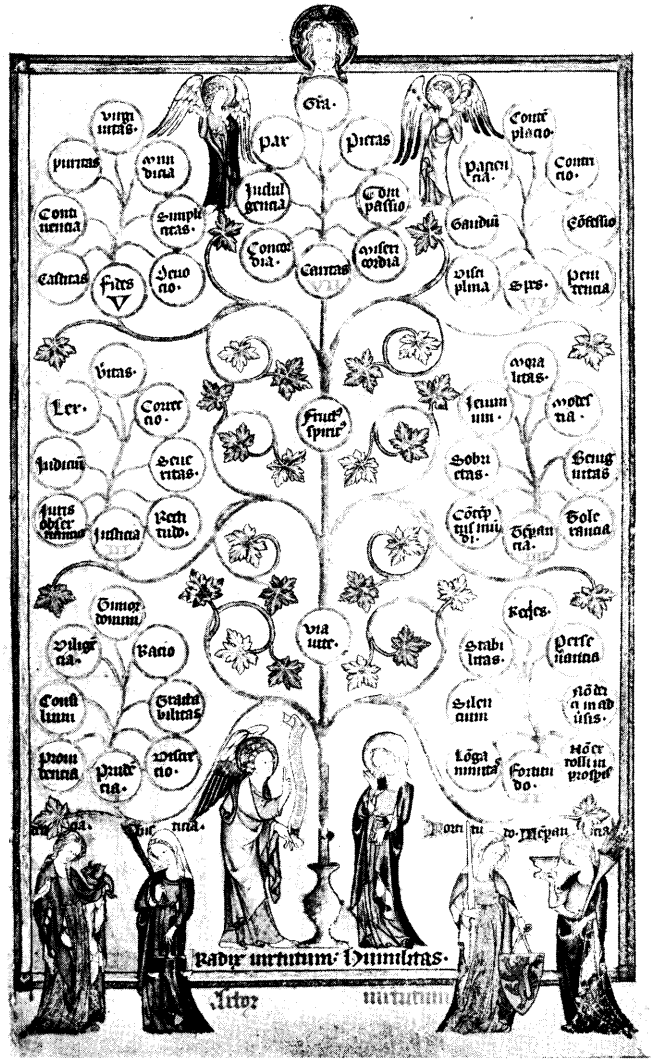

Figure 2 *Tree of the Virtues (14C). The tree is here rooted in Humility, typified by the Blessed Virgin Mary at the Annunciation. Its fruits are the Cardinal Virtues numbered I through IV, each with seven attendant virtues, and the Theological Virtues, numbered V through VII, each also with seven attendant virtues. The figures at the bottom represent the Cardinal Virtues once more. From left to right they are Prudence, Justice, Fortitude, and Temperance.*

rather than tangible realities, they could live together in harmony and be freed from the burdens of social oppression and personal frustration. Fluctuations between prosperity and adversity, or changes in Fortune, as they were called, would not affect them deeply. A virtuous man could, to paraphrase St. Augustine, love and do what he wished to do, satisfying his own desires and at the same time contributing to the welfare of his fellow men.

The vices that men were taught to avoid were described as essentially selfish habits of the soul springing from misdirected love. Such habits led to actions called sins, or actions contrary to reason. In accordance with the most popular classification developed during the Middle Ages, especially relevant to confession and penance, there were said to be seven such vices: pride (or vainglory), covetousness (or avarice), wrath, envy, sloth, gluttony, and lechery. The first five of these were usually thought of as being spiritual, and the last two as being physical, although the fifth, sloth, might have both physical and spiritual manifestations. Since the physical vices could manifest themselves without any very great element of malice, they were somewhat less serious than the first five. A man habitually inclined toward any one of them was said to be "vicious," his actions in manifesting them were called "sins," or, if they were especially grave, "crimes." Sins were said to be of two kinds: "venial" and "mortal." Venial sins, inadvertent rather than deliberate manifestations of the vices, were thought to be characteristic of ordinary human behavior. A sincere daily recitation of the Paternoster was considered a sufficient remedy for them, and no one was required to mention them at confession. But deliberate manifestations of the vices involving the full consent of the reason were "deadly" sins. Under the Old Law they incurred almost automatic damnation, but under the New Law the stains they left on the soul could be at least partially removed through contrition of heart, confession to a priest, and satisfaction, or the performance of acts of charity and self-denial.

From a practical point of view, a vicious person in these terms would be a disruptive element in his community, and the more elevated his station in the community hierarchy, the more dangerous his actions would become to its welfare. At the same time, it is not difficult to see that any of the vices might lead to what we would call alienation and frustration. Medieval men expressed a similar idea by saying that the vicious man was a slave to his own desires. The problem of sin was thus a very practical matter in daily life and not simply

a manifestation of what is sometimes mistakenly assumed to be a characteristic medieval concentration on the afterlife.

The virtues commended by the medieval Church were subject to a variety of classifications, depending on the context in which they were being discussed. A virtue, like a vice, was described as a habit of the soul having its origin in love. That is, love directed toward creatures for their own sakes, or cupidity, led to vices. Love directed toward God, who was frequently described as the epitome of power, wisdom, and love, or toward the intelligible, led to virtue. Using a distinction found in Cicero, medieval writers insisted that a virtue has two parts: an "office," or form of behavior, and an "end," or goal toward which the virtuous action is directed. A kind of behavior usually considered to be virtuous but motivated by selfish interests had the office of a virtue, but not its end. Such action was said to represent "false virtue," or "vice masquerading as virtue." For example, chastity had long been considered a virtue under certain circumstances in antiquity, and it was still regarded as a virtue in the Middle Ages. But chastity for a selfish end, like worldly reputation, was actually the manifestation of a vice. St. Gregory, for example, called such chastity "fornication of the spirit." It is obvious that persons who, either because they are misguided or because they are deliberately malicious, disguise their vices as virtues may be even more dangerous to their communities than overtly vicious persons. It was often said that when Antichrist came, he would come not as a pagan but as a hypocrite.

Among the virtues most frequently mentioned are the "theological" virtues and the "cardinal" virtues. The theological virtues—faith, hope, and charity—are perhaps the most difficult to describe in modern terms. Today we have a great deal of what might be called scientific faith. That is, the scientist who performs certain operations in his laboratory has faith that similar materials under similarly controlled conditions will always behave in the same way. Even when he confesses that the laws he discovers are merely descriptions based on arbitrary classifications, he maintains his faith in their validity. Laymen are readily led to place even greater confidence in them, since they may result in better communications systems, foods, medicines, weapons, and so on. Medieval men, frequently to the disgust of modern historians of science, placed far less faith in "knowledge by experiment upon things seen." Their technology, although it grew considerably during the later Middle Ages, was comparatively underdeveloped. However, we should remember that technology depends for its development on the general structure of society; it grows to meet needs largely created by itself. Medieval men were more concerned with the values used to make human relationships meaningful, and to them the first requisite of such meaningful relationships was faith, not in the validity of natural law, but in God.

God has meant a great many different things to different people in the course of history, and the general concept of God has undergone changes over the centuries concomitant with changes in society. Medieval men tended to think in terms of hierarchies, and to them God represented the apex in the hierarchy of being. God was not, strictly speaking, the apex of the hierarchy of physical being, but the apex of the hierarchy of intelligible being. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries these two hierarchies became confused, so that the intelligible became a kind of upper extension of the visible. Once placed there, it became more and more remote, since it was clearly not subject to the same sort of analysis as was the visible hierarchy. The romantics still looked for it in the visible world, seeking God in nature, or transformed it into a transcendent infinite. Today, it has become increasingly difficult to comprehend the idea of an external reality of the intelligible, so that we seek various kinds of subjective reality to replace it. But we shall have difficulty understanding medieval art and literature unless we can imagine that men once believed firmly in an external realm of the intelligible readily accessible to the reason. To medieval men, God was something that existed outside of the world of space and time, except, that is, in His Incarnation. However, He permeated the physical world, through which He might be understood partly as in a mirror. He was also the source of the virtues. To believe in God was, among other things, to believe in the reality and efficacy of virtue. Faith was conventionally described as "belief in things unseen," and those things unseen supplied the necessary motivation for the kind of conduct that was thought to make life on earth satisfying and bearable. It was often said that God is love, and love was, as we have seen, the binding force of community life.

To the medieval mind, if a man had no faith, he could not be expected to be virtuous except when an appear-

ance of virtue suited his selfish interests. A faithless man was therefore regarded as an untrustworthy man. In medieval society, at least in the northern parts of Europe, contracts between lord and vassal were verbal rather than written. Their terms depended upon remembered custom, and their efficacy was a function of the integrity of the parties. In a feudal kingdom a bond of fidelity extended by degrees from the serf on the manor to the king, and the king, theoretically at least, owed fealty to God for his holdings. The faith a man owed his fellows was felt to be an aspect of his faith in God. Faith placed in a temporal object for its own sake—in a man, in a woman, or in wealth or position—was regarded as false faith, in the nature of things inevitably frustrating and disappointing. Men, women, possessions, and worldly acquisitions of all kinds are subject to the whims of Fortune. He who has faith in them subjects himself to those whims also.

Hope, the second of the theological virtues, is first of all the hope that men of goodwill may have for an eternal reward. But hope is not always a virtue, and whether it is virtuous or not, it is a matter of daily concern. The covetous man hopes that new wealth may be his, the lecherous man hopes for the favors of many ladies, and so on. The virtuous man hopes for a certain inner peace that comes with spontaneously virtuous inclinations, for fortitude to bear his afflictions, and for the peace and goodwill of his fellow men. Hope for temporal satisfaction was thought of as false hope dependent on Fortune. This does not mean that men could not hope to improve their lot. So long as such hope was consistent with common profit rather than centered on immediate personal satisfactions, it was thought to be virtuous.

The last of the theological virtues, often called the greatest of them, was charity, or love. All men, it was said, love, for without love a man would die, since he would have no interest in preserving himself or in perpetuating his species. Love, that is, was regarded as the source of all human motivation. Theologians explained that before the Fall Adam and Eve loved as they should, without concupiscence. After the Fall, in which both reason and love were impaired, man acquired the concupiscence that had formerly been proper only to the beasts, for without it he would not have protected himself and would have had no inclination to perpetuate his species. Human beings are said to inherit this concupiscence, so that all who are born in the world naturally love first of all those things that can be seen and touched. Through grace, however, provided by the example and teachings of Christ and by the Holy Spirit (or that aspect of the Trinity whose function is love), men may be contented with a sufficiency appropriate to their station and may direct their love toward the intelligible. That is, charity, combined with a reason restored at least partially to its original condition, removed malice from the heart and allowed men to function pleasurably as useful members of their communities. The idea that man should love God and his neighbors for the sake of God had profound social and political as well as psychological implications.

The cardinal virtues, actually an inheritance from antiquity, were justice, prudence, temperance, and fortitude. Allied with them were a host of other virtues, some gleaned from classical and Patristic authorities, and some, like courtesy and chivalry, derived from peculiarly medieval social needs. A special set of virtues, seven in number, was associated with the Gifts of the Holy Spirit and together these virtues were regarded as remedies for the seven principal vices.[1] Thus the gift of the fear of God is effective against pride and conducive to the virtue of humility. The gift of piety is effective against envy and produces the virtue of benignity or friendship. Similarly, through the gift of knowledge, temperance replaces wrath; through the gift of fortitude, prowess replaces sloth; through the gift of counsel, mercy replaces avarice; through the gift of understanding, sobriety replaces gluttony; and through the gift of wisdom, chastity replaces lechery. The vices here have somewhat different connotations from those with the same names in the ordinary lists made for confessional purposes. It is clear, for example, that lechery, which here requires the highest gift of wisdom for its eradication, is not simply a matter of casual physical lapses and that gluttony is something more than a peasant's occasional drunkenness. The fear of God was, on scriptural authority, regarded as the "beginning of wisdom," and the various steps beginning with humility and ending in wisdom represent an upward progress. If we look at the list as a whole, it becomes clear that virtue not only involves some sort of self-denial; it also entails positive and forceful effort for the sake of others. No man was expected to be altogether virtuous, but all men were encouraged to love virtue, which was, as Cicero had long ago pointed out in his treatise on friendship, the only satisfying source of amicable

human relationships. One was urged to love his fellow man, not because he was accidentally human, but because he was either virtuous or potentially virtuous. The saints, the philosophers of antiquity, and the heroes of both ancient and medieval times were revered for their virtues.

Without virtue, it was felt, the communities of medieval society would have become stale, dull, and conducive to perpetual fear and suspicion. Ruskin regarded sin as a terrible and perpetual burden, and Cardinal Newman did not wish to encumber liberal education with the burden of virtue. But to the medieval mind, sin ceased to become a necessary burden with the New Law, and although all men were thought to be sinners, most could find some virtues suited to their station that they could regard with genuine reverence and even enthusiasm.

Whatever we may think of the Church today, or of Christianity generally, we should be careful not to confuse modern conditions with medieval conditions. During the Middle Ages the Church was responsible for the establishment and maintenance of civilized life in Western Europe. The literary monuments of Latin antiquity are for the most part available to us today only by virtue of the fact that they were copied by medieval scribes, typically in monasteries. We may say that the Church controlled medieval education, but the only reason it did so was that it established and maintained educational institutions. Until the late Middle Ages no one was especially anxious to relieve the Church of this responsibility, and very few thought that the Church was oppressive or blindly authoritarian in doctrine. Members of the ecclesiastical hierarchy were, like everyone else, human. Some of them were notorious sinners, and some were ignorant, selfish, and locally oppressive. Churchmen participated freely in the life of the times. A bishop might be a great feudal lord, an abbot might profit considerably in the wool trade, and high ecclesiastics frequently held major positions in royal governments. In country parishes, the parson or vicar shared in the agricultural pursuits of his community. In a given country the ecclesiastical hierarchy was affected by the general health of the realm. Thus during the last quarter of the fourteenth century in England, the decay of political institutions was accompanied by a decay in ecclesiastical institutions. In general, when reform movements arose, their aim was not the establishment of a new secular morality, but the restoration of what were regarded as good ancient and traditional customs, based on a thoroughly Christian ideology. We should bear in mind that the revolt against Christianity that permeated much nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century thought was a revolt against Christianity as it was conceived at the time, not as it was conceived in earlier times. Medieval authors lacked the avid pursuit of the new and different and the general rebelliousness that characterize modern authors. Their interests were still, generally, centered on their communities rather than on personal feelings and private problems.

Note

1 For an excellent account of these virtues and their significance, see Rosemond Tuve, *Allegorical Imagery*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J., 1966, chap. 2.

X

III. The Medieval Bible

Since the Bible was the central text of the medieval educational system and is frequently reflected in literature, there are many references to it in this book. Unless there is some indication to the contrary, these references are to the Douay-Reims translation, which is much closer to the Latin texts familiar during the Middle Ages than either the King James Bible or any of the newer translations. The Douay Bible differs from the usual modern editions of the King James Bible, which omit some material in the original King James Version, in a number of significant respects. In the first place, the Old Testament contains seven books not included in the current King James standard editions:

1 Tobias
2 Judith
3 Wisdom
4 Ecclesiasticus
5 Baruch
6 1 Machabees
7 2 Machabees

Among these, Wisdom and Ecclesiasticus were highly regarded during the Middle Ages for their moral content. The books of Machabees were favored by the feudal nobility, who found in them an inspiration to chivalric enterprise. There are a number of minor differences as well. Thus 1 and 2 Samuel in the King James Bible are 1 and 2 Kings in the Douay. The third and fourth books of Kings in the latter correspond with the first and second books of Kings in the King James text.

There are also specific differences in translation, some of which are of considerable theological significance. For example, Luke 2:14 appears in the Vulgate, in the Douay Bible, and in the King James Version in the following forms:

Vulgate: *Gloria in altissimis Deo*
et in terra pax hominibus bonae
voluntatis.

Douay: Glory to God in the highest;
and on earth peace to men of good will.

King James: Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace, good will toward men.

It will be observed that the Vulgate and the Douay distribute peace somewhat more restrictively than the King James. Again, Psalm 14:1–2 (King James: Ps. 15:1–2) appears as follows in the three texts:

Vulgate: *Domine, quis habitabit in tabernaculo tuo,*
aut quis requiescat in monte sancto tuo?
Qui ingreditur sine macula et operatur
iustitiam.

Douay: Lord, who shall dwell in thy tabernacle?
or who shall rest in thy holy hill?
He that walketh without blemish, and worketh justice.

King James: Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle?
who shall dwell in thy holy hill?
He that walketh uprightly and worketh righteousness. . . .

The Vulgate phrase *sine macula* ("without blemish") appears elsewhere and was regarded during the Middle Ages as an equivalent for the virtue of innocence (or freedom from the stain of sin), but this idea is hardly conveyed by the King James phrase "walketh uprightly." Readers of the Middle English poem "Pearl" who are familiar only with the King James Bible are likely to miss some of the connotations of the poet's insistence that the pearl was "without spot." One further illustration will serve to emphasize the fact that the figurative language of the Vulgate, frequently reflected both in the medieval visual arts and in literary texts, is often altered beyond recognition in the King James Version. The text here is Proverbs 23:33–34:

Vulgate: *Oculi tui videbunt extraneas*
et cor tuum loquetur perversa,
et eris sicut dormiens in medio mari
et quasi sopitus gubernator, amisso clavo.

Douay: Thy eyes shall behold strange women,
and thy heart shall utter perverse things.

And thou shalt be as one sleeping in the midst of the sea,
and as a pilot fast asleep, when the stern is lost.

King James: Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things.
Yea, thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea,
or as he that lieth upon the top of a mast.

Those familiar only with the somewhat puzzling situation described in the King James Bible will recognize with difficulty the echo of these verses that appears in Chaucer's *Troilus*, where Troilus laments, after seeing Criseyde for the first time,

Al steerles withinne a boot am I
Amydde the see. . . .

Many similar examples could be cited. Although it is true that the biblical texts quoted by St. Augustine sometimes differ slightly from the Vulgate and that there were textual differences among Latin Bibles in use during the Middle Ages, the Vulgate text is far more useful to students of medieval literature than any other text now in print. A convenient and inexpensive edition is published by La Editorial Catolica of Madrid.

To return, however, to the differences between the King James Version and the Douay. There is some variation in nomenclature, some of which is of minor importance:

King James	*Douay*
1 and 2 Chronicles	1 and 2 Paralipomenon
Song of Solomon	Canticle of Canticles
Isaiah	Isaias
Jeremiah	Jeremias
Ezekiel	Ezechiel
Hosea	Osee
Obadiah	Abdias
Jonah	Jonas
Micah	Micheas
Habakkuk	Habacuc
Zephaniah	Sophonias
Haggai	Aggeus
Zechariah	Zacharias
Malachi	Malachias
Revelation	Apocalypse

The two versions also display considerable variation in the spelling of proper names in the text. It is especially important to notice that the Psalms in the Douay text are not numbered as they are in the King James text, and that individual psalms are not divided into verses in the same way in the two versions. There are other differences in addition to those indicated above, but these should be sufficient to alert the reader, so that he will not be confused at the outset.

Modern writers often allege that during the Middle Ages the Church kept the Bible away from laymen, imposing the authority of its doctrine on the unsuspecting public without reference to the text. Several considerations should be kept in mind, however, when we weigh this allegation. In the first place, the Bible appeared as a very large and expensive manuscript that few persons could afford to own. Again, less well-educated persons were not generally inclined to question traditional interpretations of the text, which were largely based on Patristic authority. Finally, educated men rightly thought that the Old Testament, which is not Christian on the surface, could be very misleading to the unlearned; and, as Chaucer's Wife of Bath demonstrates, even the New Testament could be readily misunderstood by the unwary. Much that proved offensive and self-destructive in nineteenth-century Christianity arose from literal-minded, Old Testament-oriented attitudes that led to profound misunderstandings of the New Testament as well, especially of the Epistles of St. Paul. These considerations aside, medieval sermons were usually devoted to explanations of the Scriptures, which were liberally quoted in them, so that even illiterate persons might in the course of time acquire a considerable knowledge of the Bible. We should not forget that persons who do not read, or who read only a little, are likely to have extremely good verbal memories.

During the later Middle Ages, Latin manuscript texts of the Bible often appeared with glosses. These were of various types, but the two most important were the interlinear gloss and the ordinary gloss. The former, as its name indicates, was a gloss between the lines containing explanations of difficult words in the text. The ordinary gloss surrounded the text in the margins of the page. It was made up largely of explanations and interpretations derived from the Fathers of the Church. These explanations were used both by students of the Bible in schools and by preachers in the composition of

sermons. Whether one learned about the Bible in sermons, therefore, or by studying it in school, or by reading it alone, it was almost always accompanied by some kind of interpretation. Some knowledge of the ordinary gloss, therefore, and of the more influential Patristic and medieval exegetical writings is essential if we are to understand the significance of scriptural texts as they are quoted, paraphrased, or echoed in literary works. The exegetes also introduce us to a conceptual world or "universe of discourse" familiar to literate persons throughout the Middle Ages but very different from our habitual modes of thought today.[1]

Patristic exegesis emphasized what was called the "spirit" beneath the "letter" of the text. The Old Testament especially was thought to be confusing, contradictory, and misleading on the surface. It could be understood only in the light of the teachings of Christ in the New Testament. The basic theory and some examples of this kind of interpretation were furnished by St. Paul, whose exegetical principles were elaborated and applied to the Bible as a whole by the Fathers of the Church. An excellent brief introduction to the theory of Patristic exegesis may be found in St. Augustine's *On Christian Doctrine*, now available in several English translations. Medieval exegesis generally carried on and elaborated the techniques described in this work.

A simplified conception of the nature of the medieval approach to the Scriptures is furnished by the twelfth-century *Didascalicon* of Hugh of St. Victor, a book widely used in the universities during the later Middle Ages.[2] Hugh tells us that the scriptural text should be approached first with reference to the "letter," or, that is, as it may be analyzed with such tools as grammar and lexicography. Next the "sense," or obvious meaning, of the text is considered. If the sense is clear and unambiguous, no further analysis is required, and further exposition is not necessary. However, the sense often leaves the philosophical or doctrinal implication of the text unexplained, and then one must look for its "sentence," or full implication. Where the Bible was concerned, the sentence frequently involved the spiritual meaning. Since St. Paul had used the word *allegory* in this connection (Gal. 4:22ff.) and since the spiritual meaning was often implied rather than stated, it was often called the allegorical meaning. The word *allegory* here does not mean "extended metaphor" or metaphor of any kind; it means that the text says one thing but implies something else.

The allegory of the text was said to arise first of all because the words used in it might be "signs" of something else. Thus, for example, the word *Jerusalem* was the name of a city, but it was also said to mean "vision of peace." This sort of verbal allegory is common to writings of many kinds, sacred or profane, and it appears (in forms like significant proper names) in works that are not otherwise allegorical in any way. However, the scriptural text specifically, which was thought to have been inspired throughout by the Holy Spirit, was said to mention "things" or "things done" in such a way that they also were signs of other things. This does not mean that the things done were not considered to be literally true. A fable or parable describes things that exist only in imagination and things done that never took place, and a fable or parable is an allegory. But the things and things done in the Bible were thought of as being literally true and signs of something else at the same time. For example, the Ark was said to have been built by Noah (Douay: "Noe"), and no one denied the literal truth of this action; but the Ark was also thought of as a sign of the Church.

The sentence of the Biblical text was thus frequently based on the idea that its spiritual meaning was also an allegorical meaning. It had long been obvious that spiritual understanding involves various kinds of application. Either the state of the Church generally, or that of the individual, or the character of the afterlife and the implications of actions with regard to it, may be involved. In the thirteenth century, applications of these kinds came to be described with a more or less conventional terminology. That is, spiritual meanings that refer to the Church are called "allegorical," those that refer to the individual are called "tropological," and those that refer to the afterlife are called "anagogical." Since the Church, the individual, and the abodes of the afterlife were all thought of as hierarchies operating on similar principles, analogies among them were very easy to construct. The city of Jerusalem, for example, as distinct from the word *Jerusalem*, was said to imply *allegorically* the Church of the faithful praising God; *tropologically* the heart of the faithful Christian praising God; and *anagogically* the celestial city of heaven. Insofar as things and things done were concerned generally, they were sometimes said to have significance in one of these ways, sometimes in two, and sometimes in all three. Since the tropological application affected the life of the individual, it was frequently

considered to be the most important of these kinds of relevance. Ideas about the nature of the Church or of the afterlife were useful and instructive, but ideas about the individual were immediately practical and had a direct bearing on the conduct of life.

It should be emphasized that the spiritual interpretation of the Bible was thought to be eminently reasonable. Spiritual exposition had as its goal "wisdom," or the knowledge of things human and divine; and wisdom was the fruit of the higher part of the reason that distinguishes human beings from animals. Accuracy in the literal interpretation of the Bible was insisted upon, even though medieval men lacked modern philological and historical techniques. However, once the literal meaning was established, it was considered a Christian duty to discover spiritual significance wherever that significance was not evident in the sense of the text. To adhere to the sense, or the letter, when it did imply spiritual understanding was thought to indicate a fleshly, or bestial, attitude toward the text. The letter read without understanding, as St. Paul says, "kills." In order for the Scriptures to give life, the veil must be removed. During the thirteenth century, rationalistic tendencies began to appear in medieval thought. As they developed, those who fostered them found spiritual understanding more and more mystical in nature, so that in academic circles especially a conflict began to arise between faith on the one hand and reason on the other. However, late medieval humanistic thought, as contrasted with academic or scholastic thought, maintained the ancient concept of wisdom more or less intact.

From a modern point of view, the specific results of spiritual interpretation are sometimes rather startling. It is true that no single spiritual meaning for any scriptural text was thought of as being definitive. That is, a given text might suggest a large number of equally valid spiritual meanings. However, a great many interpretations, especially those of Patristic origin, tended to become more or less standard and were very widely known. The modern student who wishes to familiarize himself with the traditions of medieval exegesis has no real alternative to a study of the texts themselves, many of which remain untranslated. A good beginning can be made by reading the commentaries of the Fathers, especially those of Augustine, Gregory, and Bede. In no instance is it wise to assume that ideas appearing in modern sermons or commentaries resemble medieval ideas about the scriptural text. The medieval Bible was not our Bible, and the assumption that we know what a quotation, citation, or echo from the Bible means simply because we can read it will often lead us astray.

Notes

1 The only reliable work devoted specifically to this subject is not at present available in English: Henri de Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale*, Paris, 1961–1964.

2 There is a translation by Jerome Taylor, Columbia University Press, New York, 1961.

IV. The Character of Medieval Literature

The arts in the Middle Ages were essentially different from those of modern times. Art as a thing in itself, with its own laws and its own independent development, is largely a product of the general fragmentation of culture into separate and self-conscious disciplines that began to take place in a decisive way during the eighteenth century. No one during the Middle Ages would have pursued art for its own sake, or regarded art as a kind of religion permitting one to achieve fulfillment in escape from the frustrations of daily life. Medieval men tended, as we have seen, to organize themselves into tightly knit groups. Their artistic

expression was typically a functional part of community life, ordinarily the product of deliberate patronage by members in the upper scale of the group hierarchy and frequently promoted for the purpose of having a salutary effect on the group as a whole. Among the kinds of groups engaged in literary patronage throughout the Middle Ages are the court and the monastery. To these may be added, during the latter part of the period, the cathedral, the friary, and the fraternity, or guild.

This situation implies, first of all, that medieval literature does not often reflect the peculiar personal feeling of the author. It reflects instead the attitudes of the group for which it is written, or an idealization of those attitudes, or a criticism, frequently humorous, of the group itself or of rival groups in society as a whole. Further, the characters in medieval narrative are not fashioned as free personalities inviting us to share vicariously their experiences. They are, rather, representative of ideas or attitudes designed to serve either as good or bad examples for the literary audience. Even where the lyric is concerned, the feelings expressed are usually those that may be attributed to an individual in a given situation—a lover, a worshiper, or a warrior—and not the personal feelings of the author. Unlike modern literature, medieval literature is seldom either directly or indirectly autobiographical. The artist was not a man isolated from his social group. He was, instead, a craftsman working in fairly close harmony with his immediate associates. If he wished to criticize his patrons or the members of his group, he did so not from a feeling of rebelliousness, but from a desire to restore lost or decayed ideals. Medieval art and literature are, in this sense, typically conservative. None of this implies any special restrictions on the freedom of the artist. Some artists were much better than other artists, either because they were talented or because they understood the conceptions with which they dealt in a more profound way than their fellows. They did not refrain from being revolutionaries and social outcasts because they lacked freedom; for the most part they were genuinely interested in the welfare of the groups of which they were a part. The artist as a social outcast, more aware than the masses whom he transcended in sensitivity and understanding, was unknown in the Middle Ages. There were no masses to transcend, and no one assumed that artists had special privileges by virtue of the sanctity of art.

Since the groups that made up medieval society were, as we have seen, united by a common religious interest, no matter how much they might conflict with one another in other ways, the basic philosophy that dominates medieval literature is Christian. In this connection, however, we should remember that there were urgent practical reasons in the conduct of daily affairs that made a Christian attitude desirable and, moreover, that Christian attitudes then might differ radically from Christian attitudes today. Severe and outspoken criticism of the ecclesiastical hierarchy or facetious treatment of the conventional rituals of Christian worship did not then imply a lack of Christian belief. As we have seen, Antichrist was associated with hypocrisy; and religious organizations, like the orders of friars or the papal Curia, might suffer extremely severe criticism from persons of unquestionable piety when there was reason for suspecting hypocrisy in the conduct of their affairs. Again, no one felt that Christianity incurred any obligation to be solemn and serious, except, that is, for certain reformers and for a number of friars during the later Middle Ages who wished to convey a public image of intense piety. Religious or semireligious festivities might be very jovial and convivial, even shocking (or psychologically revealing) to modern taste, without detriment to what we would call their sincerity. The last-mentioned quality, incidentally, did not become a literary virtue until the eighteenth century. Finally, medieval men generally did not consider reticence about ordinary physiological functions—sexual intercourse, urination, or defecation—to be an aspect of the Christian outlook. The Bible itself is quite outspoken about these matters, and in any event, medieval life did not afford sufficient privacy to make them obscene. Women and children were not sheltered from direct social contact with them, either in fact or in conversation. The medieval arts, therefore, should not be considered pagan or anti-Christian because they may be humorous or because they may contain references to what we characterize as the facts of life.

Courtly literature especially is likely to be witty and humorous. Early Irish prose literature is sometimes marked by that outrageous humorous exaggeration that still typifies the Celtic temperament. After the middle of the twelfth century, an interest in the poetry of Ovid not only enriched considerably the vocabulary of medieval iconography but also contributed markedly to its humor. It is true that a great deal of literature was

written for courtly audiences that is hardly distinguishable in surface piety from monastic literature. On the other hand, court poets might produce political propaganda or invective against feudal opponents that is hardly very pious. And troubadours could produce popular songs not much different in theme from popular songs at any other time. William IX of Aquitaine, the earliest of the troubadours whose work has survived, had an enormous reputation for being able to entertain his followers on crusade. His military subordinates clearly displayed the same kind of interests that military men isolated from the company of women may be expected to have at any time. But these interests imply neither a lack of religious integrity nor an inclination toward paganism. More serious courtly literature might be entertaining and instructive at the same time, more or less in the fashion recommended by Horace in the *Ars poetica*. Poets like Chrétien de Troyes, who wrote the earliest Arthurian romances, or Jean de Meun, or Chaucer used narrative materials from a wide variety of sources to produce poems that were at once entertaining and instructive.

The instructive or philosophical content of medieval poetry with an entertaining surface was frequently achieved by what was called allegory (i.e., by saying one thing to mean another). In late antiquity it became an established conviction among educated persons that poetic fables, as distinct from histories, descriptions, or philosophical expositions in verse, concealed an inner philosophical truth. This conventional attitude persisted throughout the Middle Ages, so that we find writers from Patristic times to the age of Boccaccio and Salutati insisting that poetry is by nature allegorical; for example, a fable in which animals talk, show human desires and attitudes, and so on, is not actually about animals. It says one thing and implies something else, so that it is, in medieval terms, allegorical. Generally, the figurative materials in medieval literature are not designed to convey nondiscursive emotional attitudes; instead, they convey ideas.

Allegorical poetic effects could be achieved in two ways: either by the use of exemplary narrative or by the use of specific allegorical devices like irony, personified abstraction, or signs of various kinds. These methods were frequently combined. That is, a poem might contain personified abstractions, exemplary narrative, and signs, or words, things, and actions, signifying something else. The personified abstraction was capable of great variation in that it could be presented as a more or less bare abstract quality, clothed in attributes or conventionalized significant characteristics, or finally, given human attributes with a considerable degree of verisimilitude. The difference between a personified abstraction and a character that exemplifies some abstract quality is thus a difference in verisimilitude rather than in kind. Among the signs ordinarily used in medieval poetry, the pagan deities of antiquity appear very frequently. That is, Venus may indicate either sexual pleasure or sexual love. Most signs could appear "in a good sense" or "in an evil sense." Thus Venus could also indicate celestial love or legitimate love. These alternatives, incidentally, are classical as well as medieval, as readers of Lucretius are aware. The deities are not essentially different from personified abstractions. They may be used in a very abstract way, clothed in attributes (e.g., roses, rabbits, doves, where Venus is concerned), or made to look human. Where mythology and astrology overlap, astrological materials could be mingled with mythological materials, and astrological configurations generally might be used as signs. Such use did not, as we have seen, imply belief in astrology any more than the use of the pagan gods and goddesses implied belief in paganism.

Medieval poets, especially during the latter half of the Middle Ages, had a wide variety of conventional signs at their disposal. In the first place, Gothic art developed a highly sophisticated language of signs and attributes,[1] much of which could be used by poets. As a matter of fact, some of the materials of this kind that appear in art had a literary origin, so that it is sometimes difficult to determine whether a poet derived a given convention from something he had read or from something he had seen. Again, conventionally significant imagery derived from the Scriptures or from the traditions of scriptural exegesis, as well as significant action derived from the same sources, was frequently used by poets. As we have seen, the spiritual interpretation of Scripture implied a kind of "sacramental universe," so that a great many things not mentioned in the Scriptures came to have conventional significations that might be utilized by poets.

In view of the functional and practical nature of most medieval poetry, its association with group interests, and its lack of any specific concern for psychology, we should endeavor as best we can to discover its implications for its immediate audience if we wish to under-

stand it; that is, the interpretation of its allegory is essential to any real appreciation for it. The nineteenth century developed a taste for fantasy, for fictional realms that were "worlds in themselves" apart from everyday reality. Readers were urged to approach poetic fictions with "a willing suspension of disbelief." During the twentieth century a further taste has developed for "inner realities" and highly intense emotional stimuli in poetry. Medieval literary audiences of any sophistication did not ordinarily enjoy fantasy for its own sake, and they were more interested in the external reality of the intelligible as it was applicable to practical affairs than they were in either golden realms of imagined experiences or in intense emotional excitement. It follows that we should seek to translate what happens in sophisticated medieval poetry in conceptual and practical terms. In this respect, medieval literature is, from an anthropological point of view, more primitive than modern literature. That is, it is the product of a highly integrated culture in which the arts have an immediate functional relevance to the culture as a whole.

Note

1 An excellent introduction to this subject, only partially outdated, is E. Mâle, *The Gothic Image*, Harper & Row, Publishers, Incorporated, New York, 1958.

Z

V. *The Literature of Medieval England*

During the Middle Ages literature was produced in the British Isles in a number of languages, the most important of which are English, Latin, Irish, Welsh, French, and Provençal. These languages all belong to what is called the Indo-European family, consisting of a large number of related languages that may be classified in ten groups:

1 Indo-Iranian
2 Armenian
3 Greek
4 Albanian
5 Italic (Latin and related dialects)
6 Celtic
7 Germanic
8 Balto-Slavic
9 Tocharian
10 Hittite (?)

English is a member of the Germanic group, which may be divided as follows:

1 East Germanic (Gothic)
2 North Germanic (Icelandic, Norwegian, Swedish, Danish)
3 West Germanic (English, Frisian, Saxon, Dutch, German)

The English language as it was spoken in the British Isles from the seventh century to around 1100 is called Old English (or Anglo-Saxon). During the eleventh and early twelfth centuries the gradual changes in the language gave it a recognizably new character, so that we call English spoken between 1100 and 1500 Middle English. In the course of its history medieval English was subjected to strong influences from Latin, from the North Germanic languages, and from French.

Latin was the learned language of England throughout the medieval period. It was employed in the liturgy of the Church, in official documents, and in the keeping of accounts. It has been estimated that about 40 percent of the male lay population of London during the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries could read some Latin. Medieval Latin was a functional (rather than an artificial) language, and it frequently differs from classical Latin. The vocabulary was adapted to the needs of the clergy and of the merchants, and the syntax sometimes shows strong vernacular influences. A few writers throughout the period, like John of Salisbury in the twelfth century, could write excellent Latin in the

classical manner. Medieval Latin, however, should not be judged by classical standards, any more than Modern (New) English should be judged by Old English standards. The Latin of St. Bernard is very different from that of Cicero, but it could produce kinds of eloquence of which Cicero would have been incapable. Latin exerted its strongest influence on the English language during the early Renaissance, when it ceased to be a living language and writers began to use the vernacular for subjects that had formerly been treated in Latin.

When Julius Caesar invaded Britain in 54 B.C., he was resisted by a Celtic population with a distinctive culture of its own. After the Roman settlement in England under Claudius, a Romano-British culture was established. This culture gradually decayed with the breakup of the empire, and England was overrun by Germanic tribesmen in the course of the fifth century. However, the Celtic population maintained its language in Ireland, Scotland, Cornwall, and the Isle of Man. In all these areas except Cornwall there are Celtic-speaking peoples today. The Celtic languages are divided into two major groups: Continental Celtic and Insular Celtic. Continental Celtic survives only in a few inscriptions and in some reflections in Classical authors. Insular Celtic may be divided into two major families:

1 Gaelic (Irish, Scottish Gaelic, and Manx)
2 Britannic (Welsh, Cornish, Breton, and Pictish)

During the Middle Ages, Irish and Welsh were important literary languages. Irish spoken before A.D. 900 is called Old Irish, and that spoken between 900 and the beginning of the seventeenth century is called Middle Irish. Welsh spoken before the end of the eighth century is called Early Welsh, that spoken between A.D. 800 and about 1100 is called Old Welsh, and that spoken from about 1100 to about 1400 is called Medieval Welsh. The Welsh consider Dafydd ap Gwilym, a fourteenth-century poet, to be the father of Modern Welsh.

Between A.D. 700 and 1100 the Latin spoken by uneducated people in Europe gradually developed in the direction of the various romance languages. In the general area of France, Vulgar Latin, or common spoken Latin, became identifiable as Old French around 1100. Changes in Old French were great enough so that we call the language spoken between around 1300 to about 1515 Middle French. Meanwhile, the Norman conquerors of England in 1066 made French the language of the English aristocracy. A special dialect, called Anglo-Norman, became the language of the court and of the law, as well as a literary language of some importance.[1] It was the official language of Parliament until 1363. At about the time Anglo-Norman ceased to be spoken naturally, an interest developed in the artificial cultivation of French, and Englishmen became conscious of a distinction between the decaying native dialect and the more elegant French of Paris. Chaucer's contemporary, John Gower, produced literary works in English, French, and Latin. Meanwhile, in the twelfth century the English court occasionally patronized poets who wrote in Provençal, a dialect that developed in the south of France and became for a time an international literary language.

Since this anthology contains selections from the literature of the British Isles during the Middle Ages, it includes translations from Latin, French, Provençal, Irish, and Welsh, as well as selections from literature written in Old and Middle English. Each of these literatures has its peculiar traditions and characteristics and thoroughly merits study. The earliest literary monuments produced in the British Isles are in Irish. Early Irish culture remains largely mysterious. The mythological backgrounds of Irish literature are obscure, and Irish Christianity, introduced by St. Patrick, has special peculiarities of its own. The prose narratives that contain clear evidence of an Old Irish origin survive in late manuscripts, so that they are difficult to date precisely. However, the most famous of these, the *Táin Bó Cúalnge* ("Cattle Raid of Cooley"), seems to reflect a late Iron Age culture modified somewhat by Christian and learned elements.[2] It may have been written down in the seventh century. Early Irish poetry frequently displays a high degree of technical competence. It is notable for its interest in nature. Welsh literature as it survives is much more distinctly provincial than Irish literature. The prose narratives of the *Mabinogion* that are not clear imitations of French sources demonstrate the Celtic love for exaggeration and color. They also reveal an obscure mythological background to which Welsh scholars have recently devoted a great deal of attention. Both Irish and Welsh traditions contributed narrative motifs to the Arthurian romances that developed in France during the second half of the twelfth century. It is doubtful, however, that the more sophisticated authors of French romances had any interest at all in the transmission of Celtic traditions

for themselves. Celtic narrative materials were used rather as vehicles for the expression of ideas that were immediately relevant to courtly audiences. Irish and Welsh poetry, meanwhile, seem to have had little influence on poetic traditions in other languages, with some exceptions in Latin.

Much more literature was produced in Latin during the Middle Ages than had been produced in antiquity. Meanwhile, classical literature itself continued to be read in the schools and imitated by medieval writers, who regarded it as a natural part of their cultural heritage and not as something from a remote past to be artificially cultivated. In other words, the world of the Latin classics was not set off from the medieval world by a sense of historical distance of a kind that developed during the Renaissance. Classical literature was thought of as a source of eloquence on the one hand and of wisdom on the other, so that medieval interest in it was practical rather than purely aesthetic. The British Isles produced influential writings in Latin of a wide variety of types, extending from theological and historical works by authors like Pelagius, Bede, John the Scot, St. Ethelred, or Bishop Grosseteste, to humanistic writings by men like John of Salisbury or Richard de Bury. Meanwhile, British or English writers also produced a considerable body of Latin poetry.[3]

As we have seen, after the Norman Conquest, French became the language of the English aristocracy. Literary works in French were produced for the English nobility both by writers in England proper and by those in areas on the Continent under English domination.[4] Writers seem to have been especially concerned during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries to produce works in French for the benefit of noblemen who could not read Latin with ease. These works ranged from adaptations of standard theological texts to purely literary productions like the *Lais* of Marie de France. The new rulers of England were especially interested in histories, both of their own traditions and of the traditions of the English and British peoples they had conquered. Under Henry II some troubadour poetry was written at the English court, a fact that has some influence on the subsequent development of the English lyric.

The major periods of literary activity in English are, first of all, the period from the seventh century to the Norman Conquest, when literature was produced in Old English, and second, the fourteenth century, when English again became the natural language of the English aristocracy. However, it should not be assumed that English died out altogether as a literary language during the intervening years. English prose has a fairly continuous history throughout the Middle Ages, and some of the finest lyrics in Middle English survive from the thirteenth century. Native poetic traditions were kept alive, especially in provincial areas isolated from the more sophisticated French tastes of the royal court. With these facts in mind, it is safe to say that Old English literature is characteristically Germanic in its outward form. The verse form of *Beowulf*, for example, as well as much of its poetic diction, reflects the traditions of popular Germanic heroic poetry. Middle English literature, on the other hand, tends to show a strong French influence superimposed to a greater or lesser extent on native Germanic conventions. Insofar as the content of both Old and Middle English literature is concerned, however, the dominant influence is clearly that of Christian-Latin culture. It is this underlying content that gives Old and Middle English literature a fundamental unity. The impression frequently encountered that Old English is essentially Germanic and hence outside the mainstream of English literature generally arises from too great a concentration on its form, language, and diction and insufficient attention to its content and to its immediate cultural environment.

Notes

1 See M. Dominica Legge, *Anglo-Norman Literature and Its Background*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1963.

2 See Kenneth Hurlstone Jackson, *The Oldest Irish Tradition: A Window on the Iron Age*, Cambridge University Press, London, 1964. For a general account with summaries of the more important prose works and some translations from the poetry, see Myles Dillon, *Early Irish Literature*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1948.

3 For Latin literature in England before the Norman Conquest, see W. F. Bolton, *A History of Anglo-Latin Literature*, vol. I, Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J., 1967. Vol. II of this work is now in preparation. It contains an excellent bibliography.

4 For an interesting account of one of these, the poet Wace, see Urban T. Holmes, "Norman Literature and Wace," in William Matthews, *Medieval Secular Literature*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1965, pp. 46–47.

Chaucer, fm Robertson, D. W. Jr., *Literature of Medieval England* (1970)

XI

MIDDLE ENGLISH LITERATURE: CHAUCER

Geoffrey Chaucer (ca. 1345–1400) was the son of a prosperous London wine merchant. We know nothing of his boyhood, but he may well have gone to school at St. Paul's, which was not far from his father's house in Thames Street, next to Walbrook. Our first record of Geoffrey indicates that in 1357 he was in the household of Lionel, Duke of Clarence, probably as a page. In 1359 and 1360 young Chaucer was among Lionel's men in the siege of Reims. He was taken prisoner but ransomed by King Edward for £16.[1] A year later Prince Lionel was appointed Lieutenant of Ireland, and Chaucer must have left his service, although we do not know exactly how he occupied himself. It is possible that he studied for a time at the Inner Temple.

Whatever he may have been doing in the intervening years, in 1366 Chaucer married

Facing page: Très riches heures de Jean de France. *The sun entering Taurus in April.*

Philippa (d. 1387), a daughter of Sir Payne Roet.[2] A record for the following year shows that Chaucer was a valet in the royal household with an annual salary of twenty marks. Two years later, in 1369, we find him again in military service, campaigning in France as a squire. But he was back in England in August when he and Philippa were granted an allowance for clothing to wear in mourning for the Queen, who died of the plague. On September 12, Blanche, Duchess of Lancaster, died of the same malady.

The year 1369 proved to be an important one for both political and literary history. If England may be said to have had a court poet in that year, it was Jean Froissart, secretary to Queen Philippa. Both the Queen and King Edward spoke French as the language of their childhood, and Froissart wrote in French. If the death of the Queen meant that England lost Froissart, the death of Blanche a month later provided the subject for the first important poem by Chaucer, an English elegy. Perhaps this poem, "The Book of the Duchess," was read at one of the annual memorial services for Blanche maintained by John of Gaunt at St. Paul's Cathedral. In any event, from this time forward England's most eminent poet wrote in English under the patronage of the King and of the country's most powerful nobleman, John of Gaunt.

If Froissart was the poet and chronicler of the late flowering of English chivalry, Chaucer was the poet of its decline. In the sixties England was the center of European chivalry. Edward's spectacular victory at Crécy (1346), his taking of Calais (1347), and his successes in the consolidation of Gascony were crowned by the victory of the Black Prince at Poitiers (1356), where King John of France was taken prisoner. For the next ten years knights from all over Europe went to England to attend a court unequalled anywhere for splendor and pageantry. It was in this atmosphere that young Chaucer grew to maturity, in close association with the royal household. But when the war with France reopened in 1369, England had a new enemy, the astute and crafty Charles V. For the remainder of the century English prestige abroad declined steadily, while at home dissension, political intrigue, and even open revolt replaced the vigorous confidence of Edward's best days. Edward fell under the domination of an unscrupulous mistress, Alice Perrers, and John of Gaunt was never able to equal the military prowess of his brother, Prince Edward. Although young King Richard showed courage and dignity when he faced the peasants at Mile End and Smithfield in 1381, his reign became a history of failure and disintegration.

During the years from 1370 to 1380 Chaucer was employed on a number of diplomatic missions for the King. These included visits to Italy in 1373 and 1378, where he may have come to know the work of the great Italian poets, Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio. In 1374 he was granted a daily pitcher of wine by the King, a house above Aldgate by the corporation of London (which he held until 1386), an annuity of £10 by John of Gaunt, and he was made Comptroller of the Customs and Subsidy of Wools, Skins, and Hides in the Port of London. The further post of Comptroller of the Petty Customs for the Port of London, with the privilege of appointing a deputy, was granted him in 1382. Three years later he was allowed to exercise his duties at the Wool Quay by deputy, and we find him acting as Knight of the Shire from Kent, in which capacity he attended the "Wonderful Parliament" of 1386.

The proceedings of the Parliament, which were directed toward reform, were dominated by John of Gaunt's most powerful enemy, the Duke of Gloucester. The fear of invasion from France was acute, unemployed mercenary soldiers were plundering the countryside, and there was widespread uneasiness. A council was set up, with Gloucester at its head, to control the extravagance of the King. John of Gaunt, who might have been able to exercise a moderating influence, had departed for Spain. Probably as a result of action by Gloucester's faction, Chaucer was deprived of his comptrollerships and left with no income other than that from his annuities. He took up residence in Greenwich. Philippa died in 1387, and Chaucer, now deprived of her income, did nothing of an official nature until after 1389, when King Richard reasserted his powers. Meanwhile the "Merciless Parliament" of 1388 achieved, among its judicial murders, the execution of Chaucer's old associate at the Customs House, Nicholas Brembre, and that of his literary admirer, Thomas Usk.

Although Chaucer probably had small sympathy for Richard's personal weaknesses, there is every reason to suppose that he was on principle loyal to the Crown, and that his attitude toward political affairs and toward society in general resembled, with somewhat more sophistication, that of John of Gaunt. The Duke of

Lancaster had for a time been a staunch supporter of Wyclif, not because he shared any of Wyclif's extreme theological views, but because Wyclif had vigorously and courageously attacked abuses in the Church. There was in England during the 1370s and 1380s a kind of "Lollardy" that had little to do either with theological speculation or with the inspiration of semiliterate preaching. It was, on the contrary, frequently orthodox, looking to the past for its inspiration. It sought to infuse new spirit into the existing hierarchies of Church and society, which were, in many ways glaringly corrupt. Some of Chaucer's closest associates at court were, in this sense, Lollards, not to mention a number of prominent bishops. The same desire for spiritual reform inspired new chivalric orders throughout Europe, the most important of which was the Order of the Passion of Our Lord. Its founder was Philippe de Mézières, for a time Chancellor to Pierre de Lusignan, tutor to Charles VI, and a distinguished crusader and poet, whose "apostle" in England was Oton de Grandson, a courtier and poet whom Chaucer admired greatly. Those who had seen the glories of Edward's best days naturally looked with misgivings at the society around them. The devastating attacks on exemplars of English social groups, both lay and ecclesiastical, in *The Canterbury Tales*, although they are usually glossed over by modern sentimental criticism, represent a biting comment on the society of Chaucer's later years.

On May 3, 1389, King Richard declared himself of age, dismissed Gloucester and his council, and hastened to recall John of Gaunt. In July Chaucer was given his most important office, that of Clerk of the King's Works. He held this office until June 17, 1391, with the then substantial salary of 2s. a day. In the fourteenth century this was not an unusually short term for this position, which was usually a stepping-stone to preferment if the clerk were an ecclesiastic or to a pension if he were a layman. The clerk had an office at Westminster near the Hall. He was responsible for the impressment of workmen, the purchase of stone, timber, and other materials, and the requisition of horses and carts, all used in the maintenance of the royal buildings and estates. A pension of £20 was granted Chaucer in 1394. For the next few years he was apparently in somewhat straitened circumstances and not always in good health. But Henry was crowned in October, 1399, and shortly thereafter, perhaps in response to Chaucer's "Complaint to His Empty Purse," granted the poet a renewal of his old pension and a new one of 40 marks as well. Having achieved financial security, Chaucer leased a house in the garden of the Chapel of St. Mary, Westminster, where he remained until his death in 1400.

The most useful edition of Chaucer's works is still W. W. Skeat, *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1894–1897. The text here included is reprinted by permission from this edition. A convenient and more modern edition with textual improvements is F. N. Robinson, *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, second edition, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1961. There are numerous editions of separate works, among which the edition of *Troilus* by R. K. Root, Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J., 1945, is especially noteworthy. The standard bibliographies are Eleanor P. Hammond, *Chaucer: A Bibliographical Manual*, The Macmillan Company, New York, 1908; D. D. Griffiths, *Bibliography of Chaucer 1908–1953*, University of Washington Press, Seattle, 1953; and William R. Crawford, *Bibliography of Chaucer 1954–1963*, University of Washington Press, Seattle, 1967. The surviving documents concerning Chaucer's life have been edited by Martin M. Crow and Clair C. Olson, *Chaucer Life-Records*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1966. Documents illustrating fourteenth-century daily life are collected in Edith Rickert, *Chaucer's World*, revised edition, Columbia University Press, New York, 1948. Early references to Chaucer have been collected by C. F. E. Spurgeon, *Five Hundred Years of Chaucer Criticism and Allusion*, Cambridge University Press, London, 1925.

There have been many books about Chaucer or about special aspects of his work, only a few of which can be mentioned here. A good anthology of articles reviewing recent criticism and bibliography is provided by Beryl Rowland, *Companion to Chaucer Studies*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1968. Among collections of essays on Chaucer two deserve special mention: R. J. Schoeck and Jerome Taylor, *Chaucer Criticism*, 2 vols., Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Ind., 1960, 1961; and Derek Brewer, *Chaucer and Chaucerians*, University of Alabama Press, University, 1966. Useful factual information concerning the Canterbury pilgrims and their background is provided in Muriel Bowden, *A Commentary on the General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales*, The Macmillan Company, New York, 1949. Stimulating new perspectives

are brought to bear on Chaucer's work by Charles Muscatine, *Chaucer and the French Tradition*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1957. More controversial attitudes are developed in D. W. Robertson, Jr., *A Preface to Chaucer*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J., 1962, and in the same author's *Chaucer's London*, John Wiley and Sons, Inc., New York, 1968.

Notes

1 It is difficult to estimate the value of fourteenth-century money in modern times, especially since all modern currencies have been enormously inflated. However, it was possible to have a substantial house built in the latter fourteenth century for £14. The ordinary workman earned about sixpence or sevenpence a day. There are twelve pence to the shilling, and twenty shillings to the pound. In 1378 one could purchase ten eggs for a penny in London.

2 At the time of her marriage Philippa was a lady in waiting to the Queen; she later entered the service of the second Duchess of Lancaster. There is no evidence to support the allegation that relations between John and Philippa were improper, and the likelihood that they were is very slight. However, in 1372 Philippa's sister Katherine became John of Gaunt's mistress. She had been the wife of Sir Hugh Swynford, who died in Aquitaine in 1372, and the guardian of the children of Blanche of Lancaster. John of Gaunt married Katherine in 1396.

A

Chaucer's Language

Chaucer wrote in the London dialect of late Middle English, somewhat modified, perhaps, by the fact that he was addressing a court audience strongly influenced by French fashions. His poetry, which was intended for oral presentation, is generally informal and conversational, with much of the raciness and vigor once characteristic of ordinary speech. Those who wish to enjoy it should learn to read it aloud, although for this purpose a strict attention to accuracy is not necessary. When Chaucer's verse is read aloud, sentence rhythm should be respected and every effort made to avoid literary airs.

The following simplified guide to pronunciation may be helpful. The problems are not so formidable as this summary may make them appear, and it is no substitute for an opportunity to listen to someone who reads with ease and assurance.

a (long); spelled *a*, *aa*; pronounced like *a* in *father*.

a (short); spelled *a*; pronounced the same, but shorter (not like *a* in *hat*, which is almost *e*).

e (long); spelled *e*, *ee*; may be pronounced either as an open sound approaching the *a* in *hat* or as a close sound like *a* in *date* (really *e* plus *i* in Modern English. To get the Middle English sound, try to omit the *i* glide after the *e*). The open sound appears frequently in words now spelled *ea*: *heeth*, now *heath*; *breeth*, now *breath*.

e (short); spelled *e*; pronounced like *e* in *let*.

e (final); spelled *e*. The pronunciation of final *e* in Chaucer's work is now in dispute, some authorities maintaining that it was silent. In accordance with the traditional view, final *e* should be pronounced except where the next word following immediately without pause begins with a vowel. The sound recommended is a neutral vowel somewhat like final *a* in *papa*.

i (long); spelled *i*, *y*; pronounced like *i* in *machine*.

i (short); spelled *i*, *y*; pronounced the same, but shorter.

o (long); spelled *o*, *oo*; may be pronounced either as an open sound like *oa* in *broad* or as a close sound like German long *o* (i.e., like *o* in *note* without the *u* glide which usually follows long *o* in Modern English).

u (long); spelled *ow*, *ou*, *o* before *gh*; pronounced like *oo* in *loot*.

u (short); spelled *u* and frequently *o*, especially before *n* or *m*; pronounced the same, but shorter. The spelling *o* is due to the peculiar character of Gothic script, in which *u* and *n* are frequently indistinguishable, and *m* looks like a *u* or *n* with an extra stroke. Thus the combination *num* spelled "properly" consists of seven very similar vertical strokes in a row. If *o* is substituted for the third and fourth of these strokes, the situation becomes much clearer.

iu; spelled *u*, *eu*, *ew*; pronounced like *u* in *mute*.

ei; spelled *ai*, *ay*, *ei*, *ey*; pronounced either like the exaggerated long *i* in *die* with the two parts (*a* plus *i*) distinct or like the exaggerated long *a* in *day* with the two parts (*e* plus *i*) distinct.

au; spelled *au*, *aw*; pronounced like *ou* in *mouse*.

eu (long); spelled *eu*, *ew*; may be pronounced either as a long, open *e* or as a long, close *e* plus *u* (*w*).

oi; spelled *oi*, *oy*; pronounced like *oy* in *boy*.

ou (long); spelled *ou*, *ow*; may be pronounced either as a long, close *o* or as a long, open *o* plus *u* (*w*).

ch; spelled *ch*; pronounced like *ch* in *church*, not *chemise*.

gg; may be pronounced either like *dg* in *judge* or like *gg* in *bigger*.

gh; represents a sound like German *ch* in *ich* or *ach*.

kn; was pronounced with the *k* retained.

l; was retained in combinations like *half*, *folk*.

Words were sometimes accented as in French. Here the meter should be used as a guide.

A more complete account of these matters with strict attention to philological accuracy may be found in H. Kökeritz, *A Guide to Chaucer's Pronunciation*, Stockholm and New Haven, 1954. Those interested in Chaucer's grammar should consult the editions of Skeat and Robinson mentioned in the Introduction to Chaucer.

Chaucer's poetry is oral poetry—a musical score for the human voice. The versification in these selections is fairly simple: the verse usually consists of roughly decasyllabic lines rhyming in couplets. Whether one retains the final *e* or not, the lines should not be scanned so as to make them sound as though they were written in iambic pentameter with "felicitous variation." In fact, the student will do more justice to Chaucer's line if he thinks of it as having four major stresses. But a systematic pursuit of a four-stress pattern will interfere with a proper appreciation of Chaucer's rhythms.

In the oral rendition of poetry a number of types of variation are involved: variation in stress, pitch, vowel length, sonority, and speed, not to mention variation in tonal quality, which can express cheerfulness, politeness, sarcasm, bitterness, sorrow, and so on. In other words, such things as aspiration, nasalization, the muscle tone of the throat and lips, and the positioning of the voice in the mouth can and do affect both the meaning and the affective quality of what is being said. Variation in speed affects pauses, or intervals of silence, which are just as much a part of the verse as are the sounds. With reference to pitch (the only kind of variation indicated by punctuation in medieval manuscripts) and vowel length, Modern American English is a relatively colorless language, in which short vowels have degenerated into neutral sounds pronounced near the center of the vowel ellipse, and long vowels are distinguished not so much by their length as by the fact that they have become diphthongs or glides. A few minutes in conversation with a group of uneducated men from the south of England will convince the most skeptical of the poverty of American English in pitch variation. Semantic distinctions once conveyed by such variation are now achieved by circumlocution. In reading Chaucer's verse aloud, therefore, the modern student will do well to exaggerate variation in pitch and vowel length.

Latin rhetoric—the kind of rhetoric taught in medieval schools and heard in medieval churches—was largely concerned with sentence rhythm. Such rhythms may be either formal, like that in the opening lines of the General Prologue, which form an elaborate "period," or informal, like that in colloquial speech. Chaucer usually maintains a colloquial tone, although this tone is sometimes achieved through the use of colloquial diction rather deceptively ensconced in fairly sophisticated rhythmic patterns. It should not be forgotten that Chaucer's audience was aristocratic, a fact that implied a taste for a certain disciplined grace and elegance combined with a strong distaste for false airs.

The simple facts of versification mentioned above are of far less importance to the student than is a proper appreciation for the rhythms of Chaucer's sentences.

The lines of verse themselves will maintain a fairly even length (1) if the student pronounces final *e* as suggested in the guide to pronunciation or (2) if he abandons final *e* altogether (except in words ending with *ee*) but pays attention to vowel length, exaggerating it slightly in words bearing a heavy stress. Usually, but not always, there is a natural pause somewhere within the line; and usually, but not always, there is another at the end of the line. The latter pause should not be exaggerated for its own sake.

Since variations in pitch, stress, and so on within a sentence cannot be determined except on the basis of an understanding of what the sentence means, it follows that except for the roughly decasyllabic line and the rhyme Chaucer's poetry has no real versification independent of its meaning. It is therefore of utmost importance to determine as closely as possible the meaning of each sentence, its tonal variations, and the manner in which what is said is conveyed. It is impossible to consider all the possible variations of stress, pitch, speed, vowel length, and so on separately and to produce on the basis of calculation a satisfactory result. It is possible, on the other hand, to exploit the possibilities for emphasis provided by Chaucer's sentences, to be alert for ironic intonation, humorous anticlimax, mock solemnity, and other similar devices so frequently suggested by both meaning and rhythm, and finally, through experiment and practice to achieve a vigorous and effective delivery. Chaucer has provided an excellent score. The goal is a lively music produced by what is potentially the most versatile and beautiful of all instruments.

B

The Canterbury Tales

THE GENERAL PROLOGUE TO THE CANTERBURY TALES

The General Prologue to The Canterbury Tales *can be read most profitably if we seek to understand first the way in which Chaucer wished to mirror the society around him. Medieval society was much more thoroughly organized into tightly knit small groups than is modern society. People thought of themselves and their problems more or less spontaneously in terms of these groups rather than in terms of individual psychology or personality. A man's identity was not so much an identity in isolation, with the whole world of men forming the "others," as it was an identity with relation to a group in which each member had a more or less natural place. Efforts to move from one group to another had been regarded with suspicion ever since antiquity, and efforts to establish a false place within the hierarchy of any single group were resented and frequently satirized. Finally, it was felt that the integrity of each of the small groups was essential to the welfare of the community of the realm as a whole. One further fact is of supreme importance. The groups we have mentioned, whether they were trade guilds or orders of chivalry, had a religious basis. Their integrity was essentially a spiritual integrity, and deviations from it were described in terms of morality. Thus medieval man was occupied with moral problems in situations that we should regard as being psychological or personal.*

What Chaucer has done in the Prologue is to present a few figures who exemplify the ideals he thought proper to the groups to which they belong—the Knight, the Clerk, and the Parson (together with his brother, the Plowman)—and a further series of characters, much more numerous, who, through pride, avarice, or the lusts of the flesh, exemplify deviations from the ideals of their various groups. The resultant characters are thus neither typical nor realistic. And they do not represent personalities, a concept for which Chaucer had no word, for the simple reason that in his society there was no need for it.

For example, Chaucer tells us, several times in fact, that the Knight was worthy; that he loved the abstract virtues of chivalry (fidelity, honor, generosity, and courtesy); that, as evidence of this worth and love, he had fought in many great enterprises; that he was wise; and finally, that he was humble and, by implication, penitent. The resultant figure is not a typical knight of the latter fourteenth century, and he has, moreover, none of the complexities we have come to

think of as making up a personality. Instead, he exemplifies the ideals of chivalry which Chaucer held in veneration and which he thought were being improperly fulfilled by many of the armed knights of his time. The battles in which the Knight had fought recall the chivalric splendor of England in the days of Chaucer's youth and suggest, by implication, the shortcomings of chivalric enterprise in the later fourteenth century, shortcomings made explicit in the portrait of the Knight's son, the Squire.

Similarly, the portraits of the Prioress, the Monk, and the Friar reveal various abuses characteristic of those who devote themselves to the contemplative life. The Prioress, who wishes to be thought of as a noble lady rather than as a prioress, puts on courtly airs with amusingly small success and, in this endeavor, substitutes sentimental tenderness for conscience. The Monk is flagrantly inconstant in his profession and seeks to become a prosperous man of the world. In studying these portraits we should remember that nuns and monks were voluntarily widowed from worldly concern, that their chief duty was attendance at the daily services (matins, lauds, prime, tierce, mass, sext, none, vespers, and compline), and that they were bound by vows to a life of contemplation and abstinence. Friars also lived by a rule, but in addition they were allowed to preach and to administer the sacraments. The Friar in the Prologue is an arrant hypocrite who abuses his office for the sake of his own gluttony, vainglory, and avarice. The shortcomings of these characters were probably common enough, but the implication is not that they were typical. Their various weaknesses were typical of the groups to which they belonged, but not necessarily combined all together in the extreme forms represented in any particular individuals. Just as the Knight exemplifies certain group ideals, in the same way the less noble characters in the Prologue exemplify various forms of neglect of the ideals proper to their stations.

Although Chaucer's audience must have been amused and delighted by the verisimilitude of some of his more elaborate sketches, they are not realistic. As an artistic movement, realism developed during the nineteenth century in France, partly as a result of a kind of romantic disillusionment with the middle-class society that had triumphed in the French Revolution. It sought social reforms, not in the name of traditional morality, which realists deliberately if not altogether successfully avoided, but on the basis of a sentimental, humanitarian outlook that sometimes manifested itself in specific social or political philosophies. Realistic literature is characteristically serious-minded, sentimentally appealing, and absorbed with the problems of human isolation, and in consequence, with psychology. Chaucer, on the other hand, is thoroughly and conventionally moral in his criticisms, and his chief weapons are irony, sarcasm, and humor. If he sometimes names his characters, makes them resemble to a certain extent actual historical personages, and sometimes specifies their geographic origins, he is merely giving to "airy nothings," which are, in this instance, ideas, a "local habitation and a name." His prevailingly humorous tone, moreover, is consistent with an intellectual rather than an emotional appeal. Chaucer probably witnessed riot and bloodshed of the Peasant's Revolt in London in 1381; but his only reference to it is a jocular allusion in the Nun's Priest's Tale. A realistic writer would have dwelt on the plight of the peasants and supplied shocking details of the uprising, either stating or implying some kind of social doctrine. Chaucer's criticism of society is moral and has nothing in common with the social criticism of modern realists.

Much of the material in Chaucer's descriptions is conventional either in substance or in detail. Thus the friars were widely accused of seducing women, of giving easy penances for their own profit, and of being generally vain and hypocritical. Chaucer makes these accusations vivid by exemplifying their validity in a single person, recognizable because many unworthy friars shared one or more of his characteristics and given a certain life and vigor by the lively wit and humorous indirection used to describe him. The Friar's "daliaunce and fair langage" become purposeful with the revelation that he had

maad ful many a mariage
Of yonge women, at his owene cost.

This means, of course, that he charged nothing for performing the marriage ceremony when the brides had become urgently marriageable through his ministrations. The observation is followed by the tongue-in-cheek (and somewhat obscene) remark,

Unto his ordre he was a noble post.

The humorous indirection of these lines is far more biting than a simple accusation of lechery could be, and it makes the Friar seem to come alive before our eyes. But we should not be misled into thinking that the basic accusation is any less serious because the surface effect is amusing and productive of the illusion of verisimilitude. Chaucer had no sentimental regard for vice on the ground that it is typically human.

More specific material is also frequently conventional in one way or another. Details like the Miller's wart or the Pardoner's hair are used with their conventional significations in medieval physiognomy. The Wife's deafness and the Pardoner's eunuchry both carry connotations derived from the Bible and its commentaries. Generally, the details function in much the same way that attributes function in the medieval visual arts. And the actions described, like the table manners of the Prioress, which are derived from the worldly wise advice of the unscrupulous Old Woman in the Roman de la rose, *have a symbolic rather than a literal force. Thus Chaucer can mingle general description of character, details of costume and appearance, and traits of behavior in-*

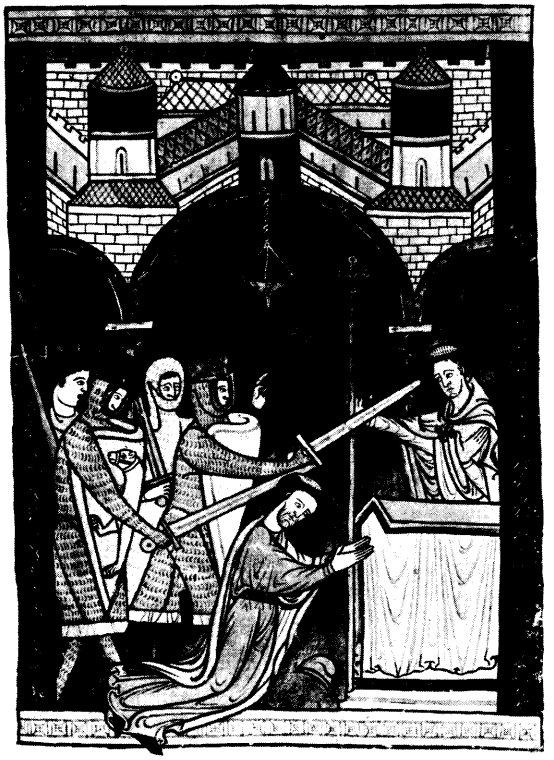

Figure 35 *The murder of Thomas Becket.*

discriminately without destroying the coherence of his discourse. For the coherence arises from the significance of the concrete materials, not from their superficial appearances.

It should be emphasized that to Chaucer abstractions like "fidelity, honor, generosity," on the one hand, or "gluttony, vainglory, and avarice" (which typify all of the sins), on the other, were very real indeed. Medieval Christianity generally, in spite of the arguments of a few scholastics, carried with it a considerable platonic emphasis on the reality of the intelligible. Where we should use the techniques of psychology for the analysis of character, Chaucer used the moral philosophy of his day, which described conduct in terms of virtues and vices regarded as manifestations of love. Love, whether for some ideal virtue or for some sort of physical satisfaction, was thought of as the wellspring of conduct, without which life could not exist. Love, although it cannot be touched with the hand nor recorded, except by implication, on a photographic plate, has its own reality. The vividness of Chaucer's characters is in part a tribute to his understanding of the ways in which this reality operates. We shall not go far astray if we seek to evaluate these characters by considering how and what they love.

Here biginneth the Book of the Tales of Caunterbury.

Whan that Aprille with his shoures sote
The droghte of Marche hath perced to the rote,
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 halfe cours y-ronne,
And smale fowles maken melodye,
That slepen al the night with open yë,
(So priketh hem nature in hir corages):
Than longen folk to goon on pilgrimages
(And palmers for to seken straunge strondes)
To ferne halwes, couthe in sondry londes;
And specially, from every shires ende
Of Engelond, to Caunterbury they wende,
The holy blisful martir for to seke,
That hem hath holpen, whan that they were seke.
Bifel 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 night was come in-to that hostelrye
Wel nyne and twenty in a companye,
Of sondry folk, by aventure y-falle
In felawshipe, and pilgrims were they alle,
That toward Caunterbury wolden ryde;
The chambres and the stables weren wyde,
And wel we weren esed atte beste.
And shortly, whan the sonne was to reste,
So hadde I spoken with hem everichon,
That I was of hir felawshipe anon,
And made forward erly for to ryse,
To take our wey, ther as I yow devyse.
But natheles, whyl I have tyme and space,
Er that I ferther in this tale pace,
Me thinketh it acordaunt to resoun,
To telle yow al the condicioun
Of ech of hem, so as it semed me,
And whiche they weren, and of what degree;
And eek in what array that they were inne:

Giovanni Boccaccio, on allegory and poetry in **The Genealogies of the Pagan Gods (Genealogie Deorum)**, Book 14.

From ***Genealogie Deorum*** XIV, 7:

This poetry, which ignorant triflers cast aside, is a sort of fervid and exquisite invention, with fervid expression, in speech or writing, of that which the mind has invented. It proceeds from the bosom of God, and few, I find, are the souls in whom this gift is born; indeed so wonderful a gift it is that true poets have always been the rarest of men. This fervor of poesy is sublime in its effects: it impels the soul to a longing for utterance; it brings forth strange and unheard-of creations of the mind; it arranges these meditations in a fixed order, adorns the whole composition with unusual interweaving of words and thoughts; and **thus it veils truth in a fair and fitting garment of fiction**. Further, if in any case the invention so requires, it can arm kings, marshal them for war, launch whole fleets from their docks, nay, counterfeit sky, land, sea, adorn young maidens with flowery garlands, portray human character in its various phases, awake the idle, stimulate the dull, restrain the rash, subdue the criminal, and distinguish excellent men with their proper meed of praise: these, and many other such, are the effects of poetry. Yet if any man who has received the gift of poetic fervor shall imperfectly fulfil its function here described, he is not, in my opinion, a laudable poet. For, however deeply the poetic impulse stirs the mind to which it is granted, it very rarely accomplishes anything commendable if the instruments by which its concepts are to be wrought out are wanting -- I mean, for example, the precepts of grammar and rhetoric, an abundant knowledge of which is opportune. I grant that many a man already writes his mother tongue admirably, and indeed has performed each of the various duties of poetry as such; yet over and above this, it is necessary to know at least the principles of the other Liberal Arts, both moral and natural, to possess a strong and abundant vocabulary, to behold the monuments and relics of the Ancients, to have in one's memory the histories of the nations, and to be familiar with the geography of various lands, of seas, rivers and mountains.

Furthermore, places of retirement, the lovely handiwork of Nature Herself, are favorable to poetry, as well as peace of mind and desire for worldly glory; the ardent period of life also has very often been of great advantage. If these conditions fail, the power of creative genius frequently grows dull and sluggish.

Now since nothing proceeds from this poetic fervor, which sharpens and illumines the powers of the mind, except what is wrought out by art, poetry is generally called an art. Indeed the word poetry has not the origin that many carelessly suppose, namely *poio, pois*, which is but Latin *fingo*, *fingis*; rather it is derived from a very ancient Greek word *poetes*, which means in Latin exquisite discourse (*exquisita locutio*). For the first men who, thus inspired, began to employ an exquisite style of speech, such, for example, as song in an age hitherto unpolished, to render this unheard-of discourse sonorous to their hearers, let it fall in measured periods; and

lest by its brevity it fail to please, or on the other hand, become prolix and tedious, they applied to it the standard of fixed rules, and restrained it within a definite number of feet and syllables. Now the product of this studied method of speech they no longer called by the more general term poesy, but poem. Thus as I said above, the name of the art, as well as its artificial product, is derived from its effect.

Now though I allege that this science of poetry has ever streamed forth from the bosom of God upon souls while even yet in their tenderest years, these enlightened cavilers will perhaps say that they cannot trust my words. To any fair-minded man the fact is valid enough from its constant recurrence. Rut for these dullards I must cite witnesses to it. If, then, they will read what Cicero, a philosopher rather than a poet, says in his oration delivered before the senate in behalf of Aulus Licinius Archias, perhaps they will come more easily to believe me. He says: "And yet we have it on the highest and most learned authority, that while other arts are matters of science and formula and technique, poetry depends solely upon an inborn faculty, is evoked by a purely mental activity, and is infused with a strange supernal inspiration."

But not to protract this argument, it is now sufficiently clear to reverent men, that poetry is a practical art, springing from God's bosom and deriving its name from its effect, and that it has to do with many high and noble matters that constantly occupy even those who deny its existence. If my opponentss ask when and in what circumstances, tile answer is plain: the poets would declare with their own lips under whose help and guidance they compose their inventions when, for example, they raise flights of symbolic steps to heaven, or make thick-branching trees spring aloft to the very stars, or go winding about mountains to their summits. Haply, to disparage this art of poetry now unrecognized by them, these men will say that it is rhetoric which the poets employ. Indeed, I will not deny it in part, for rhetoric has its own inventions. Yet, in truth, **among the disguises of fiction rhetoric has no part, for whatever is composed as under a veil, and thus exquisitely wrought, is poetry and poetry alone.**

From ***Genealogie Deorum*** XIV, 14:

They would cease to wonder that the poets call Jove, now god of heaven, now lightning, now an eagle, or a man, or whatever, if they had only reminded themselves that Holy Write itself from time to time represents the one true God as sun, fire, lion, serpent, lamb, worm, or even a stone. Likewise our most venerable mother the Church is prefigured in the sacred books, sometimes as a woman clothed with the sun, or arrayed in varied garb, sometimes as a chariot or a ship, or an ark, a house, a temple, and the like. No less is this true of the Virgin Mother, or of the Great Enemy of mankind, as I remember to have read, time and again. I can say the same also of the multiplicity of sacred epithets; these applied to God alone are indeed innumerable at present, as are those of the Virgin Mary and the Church. Such forms and epithets are not devoid of mystic meaning; no more are those employed by poets.

Dante Alighieri, from Book Two of **The Convivio**, on "The Allegory of the Poets"

[2] I say ... that the interpretation should be both literal and allegorical. For the understanding of this, it should be realized that texts can be understood and should be explicated primarily on four levels. [3] The first of these is called the literal level, the level which does not extend beyond the letter of the fictive discourse, which is what the fables of the poets are. The second is called allegorical, and is hidden under the cloak of these fables, a truth disguised under a beautiful lie; as for example when Ovid says that Orpheus with his lyre made the wild beasts tame, and caused the trees and the stones to move, this means that the wise man with the instrument of his voice makes cruel hearts tame and humble, and causes the wills of those who do not have a life of learning and art to be moved (for those who do not possess the life of reason are like stones). [41 . . . Of course, the theologian understand this sense in another way than do the poets. But because my purpose is to follow the mode of the poets, I understand the allegorical sense as it is used by poets.

[5] The third sense is called the moral, and it is this one which teachers should seek out with most diligence when going through texts, because of its usefulness to them and to their pupils. One may discover, for example, from the Gospel, that when Christ went up to the mountain to be transfigured, he took only three of the twelve disciples with him. This may be interpreted morally to mean that in the most secret affairs we should have few companions.

[6] The fourth sense is called the anagogical, or the "sense beyond." This sense occurs when a spiritual interpretation is to be given a test which, even though it is true on the literal level, represents the supreme things belonging to eternal glory by means of the things it represents. It may be perceived in that song of the Prophet which says that, in the departure of the people of Israel from Egypt, Judea was made holy and free. [7] For even though the literal truth of this passage is clear, what it means spiritually is no less true, that in the departure of the soul from sin, it is made holy and free in its power. [8] In bringing out this meaning, the literal sense should always come first, it being the meaning in which the others are contained and without which it would be impossible and irrational to come to an understanding of the others, particularly the allegorical. [9[It would be impossible because, in the case of anything which has an outside and an inside, it is impossible to come to the inside without first coming to the outside. Thus, since in a text the literal meaning is always the outside, it is impossible to come to the others, particularly the allegorical, without first coming to the literal.

Dante Alighieri: from Letter X: to Can Grande della Scala

(emphasis added -- GF)

For the clarification of what I am going to say, then, it should he understood that there is not just a single sense in this work: it might rather be called *polysemous*, that is, **having several senses. For the first sense is that which is contained in the letter, while there is another which is contained in what is signified by the letter. The first is called literal, while the second is called allegorical. or moral or anagogical.** And in order to make this manner of treatment clear, it can be applied to the following verses: "When Israel went out of Egypt, the house of Jacob from a barbarous people, Judea was made his sanctuary, Israel his dominion." [*Psalm 93:1-2*] Now if we look at the letter alone what is signified to us is the departure of the sons of Israel from Egypt during the time of Moses; if at the allegory, what is signified to us is our redemption through Christ; if at the moral sense, what is signified to us is the conversion of the soul from the sorrow and misery of sin to the state of grace; if at the anagogical, what is signified to us is the departure of the sanctified soul from bondage to the corruption of this world into the freedom of eternal glory. And although these mystical senses are called by various names, they may all be called allegorical, since they are all different from the literal or historical. For allegory is derived from the Greek *alleon* which means in Latin a*lienus* ("belonging to another") or *diversus* ("different").

Richard de Bury, from **Philobiblon** ("The Book-Lover"), on Allegory and Poetry.

CHAPTER XIII

All the varieties of attack directed against the poets by the lovers of naked truth may be repelled by a two-fold defense: either that even in an unseemly subject-matter we may learn a charming fashion of speech, or that where a fictitious but becoming subject is handled, natural or historical truth is pursued under the guise of allegorical fiction.

Although it is true that all men naturally desire knowledge, yet they do not all take the same pleasure in learning. On the contrary, when they have experienced the labor of study and find their senses wearied most men inconsiderately fling away the nut, before they have broken the shell and reached the kernel.' For man is naturally fond of two things, namely, freedom from control and some pleasure in his activity; for which reason no one without reason submits himself to the control of others, or willingly engages in any tedious task. For pleasure crowns activity, as beauty is a crown to youth, as Aristotle truly asserts in the tenth book of the Ethics.' Accordingly the wisdom of the ancients devised a remedy by which to entice the wanton minds of men by a kind of pious fraud, the delicate Minerva secretly lurking beneath the mask of pleasure. We are wont to allure children by rewards, that they may cheerfully learn what we force them to study even though they are unwilling. For our fallen nature does not tend to virtue with the same enthusiasm with which it rushes into vice. Horace has expressed this for us in a brief verse of the *Ars Poetica*, where he says:

All poets sing to profit or delight. (l. 333)

And he has plainly intimated the same thing in another verse of the same book, where he says:

He hits the mark, who mingles joy with use. (l. 343)

So much we have alleged in defense of the poets; and now we proceed to show that those who study them with proper intent are not to be condemned in regard to them. For our ignorance of one single word prevents the understanding of a whole long sentence. As now the sayings of the saints frequently allude to the inventions of the poets, it must needs happen that through our not knowing the poem referred to, the whole meaning of the author is completely obscured, and assuredly as Cassiodorus says in his book of the Institutes of Sacred Literature: "Those things are not to be considered trifles without which great things cannot come to pass." It follows therefore that through ignorance of poetry we do not understand Jerome, Augustine, Boethius, Lactantius, Sidonius, and very many others, a catalogue of whom would more than fill a long chapter...

Taking this salutary instruction to heart, let the detractors of those who study the poets henceforth hold their peace, and let not those who are ignorant of these things require that others should be as ignorant as themselves, for this is the consolation of the wretched. And therefore let every man see that his own intentions are upright, and he may thus make of any subject, observing the limitations of virtue, a study acceptable to God. And if he have found profit in poetry, as the great Virgil

relates that he had done in Ennius, he will not have done amiss.