THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

CHAUCER'S HOST IN *THE CANTERBURY TALES*

by

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A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

OF MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

WINNIPEG, MANITOBA

February, 1976

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A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of the University of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

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ABBREVIATIONS

"Clerk's P." ("Clerk's Prologue")

"E. to Man of Law's T." ("Epilogue to Man of Law's Tale")

"G.P." ("General Prologue")

"I. to Man of Law's T." ("Introduction to Man of Law's Tale")

"Knight's T." ("Knight's Tale")

"Man of Law's T." ("Man of Law's Tale")

"Monk's P." ("Monk's Prologue")

"Monk's T." ("Monk's Tale")

"Pardoner's T." ("Pardoner's Tale")

"Parson's P." ("Parson's Prologue")

"Parson's T." ("Parson's Tale")

"P. of Monk's T." ("Prologue of Monk's Tale")

"P. of Nun's Priest's T." ("Prologue of Nun's Priest's Tale")

"P. of Prioress's T." ("Prologue of Prioress's Tale")

CHAUCER'S HOST IN THE CANTERBURY TALES

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There has been a considerable effort on the part of some twentieth century critics of Chaucer to find a satisfying element of unity in the fragments which constitute The Canterbury Tales. In the main, this effort has taken two approaches: that of attempting to find unity in the dramatic element of the work, and that of seeking to establish unity in an allegorical reading of the Tales. R. M. Lumiansky and Ralph Baldwin, respectively, illustrate the approaches indicated. The mutual exclusiveness of their approaches raises a question, a question which suggests a third approach: Why can not the dramatic and allegorical elements of The Canterbury Tales be united in their movement toward a common goal -- the presentation of man in the context of a reality both physical and spiritual?

The dramatic element of the Tales, the "game" of tales presided over by the Host, must be seen as an integral part of a higher spiritual drama presented in the allegory, a drama more properly presided over by the Parson to whom the Host gives place when the Pilgrimage nears its end. Harry Bailly, key figure in the dramatic structure of the Tales, and spokesman for secularity, must be seen as the counterpart to the Parson, key figure in the allegorical structure of the Tales, and spokesman for spirituality. The unity of The Canterbury Tales, then, lies in Chaucer's portrayal of the tension between the profane and the sacred, a tension dramatized in the conflict (largely latent through most of the Tales) between the Host and the Parson.

A consideration of the "General Prologue" and "The Parson's Prologue" and "Tale," two portions of The Canterbury Tales which are complete and which indicate an overall plan for the work, bears out the argument that the tension between the sacred and the profane lies at the heart of Chaucer's vision. It is in the "General Prologue" that the dramatic (and profane) framework for the Pilgrimage is established by the Host. Chaucer hints at the spiritual aspect of the ritual in the imagery of the opening lines, and strongly indicates a conflict between sacred and profane values in his ironic portrayal of several Pilgrims. However, Harry Bailly is temporarily given authority over the Pilgrims, and it is not until we reach "The Parson's Prologue" and "Tale" that Chaucer explicitly turns the drama of the Pilgrimage inward to consider the universal pilgrimage toward "Jerusalem celestial." At the end of the journey, the Parson finally emerges as the proper host and guide of the company.

In addition to his rôle of secular foil to the spiritual purposes of pilgrimage, the Host has other functions. In one sense, he is seen as natural man, neither grossly sinful nor excessively spiritual, possessing the potential to move in either direction. More importantly, in his rôle as governor and judge, Harry Bailly both parodies and prefigures the Parson's more proper hostship. Ultimately, the Host is seen as having been the unconscious agent of Providence throughout, the means by which the Pilgrims have been moved through a series of self-revelatory tales toward the Parson's judgement at the end of the Pilgrimage.

CHAPTER I: TOWARD A CRITICAL POINT OF VIEW

While the individual tales or sometimes groups of tales which constitute the bulk of Chaucer's The Canterbury Tales continue to be of great interest to scholars and are, therefore, much written about, the Tales taken as a whole, despite the fragmented nature of the work, continue to attract the attention of at least a few critics in search of unity. This is not to say that those who seek a larger meaning in the Tales are departing radically from an orthodox or universally accepted 'right' reading of Chaucer's work, but rather to indicate that such scholars are giving their attention to an aspect of the Tales so universally assumed as to have been grossly oversimplified or ignored. It is often too easy or convenient, especially for those interested in only a part or perhaps a particular aspect of The Canterbury Tales, to explain the larger structure with, at best, vague or general references to the allegorical nature of the Pilgrimage to Canterbury, or with, at worst, suggestions that the Pilgrimage provides a convenient framework for a series of tales, loosely related but full of 'realism'.

It is obvious, of course, that there are numerous facets of interest in a literary masterpiece like The Canterbury Tales and that no single analysis can include them all in a comprehensible way. Nevertheless, the aim of proper criticism, be it of a part of the work or the work as a whole, should be, in Northrop Frye's phrase, "the recovery of function, not of course the restoration of an original function, which is out of the question, but the recreation of function in a new context."[1] This new context, for

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[1]Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism, College ed. (1957; rpt. New York: Antheneum, 1967), p. 345.

the twentieth century critic, is primarily an aesthetic one, hence the effort by some to find a satisfying unity in the various elements presented in *The Canterbury Tales*. Insofar as medieval writing is rooted in the theocentricity of the age and the fourfold approach to the Scriptures, ascending from the literal or historical level of comprehension at the beginning, through the allegorical and tropological levels of interpretation and application in the middle, to the anagogical level of understanding at the end, the twentieth century critic of *The Canterbury Tales* is well advised to bear in mind at all times the last of these categories. At the level of anagogy we are presented with what Frye calls the "self-contained literary universe," the unifying container for all else in the work.

> "When we pass into anagogy, nature becomes, not the container, but the thing contained, and the archetypal universal symbols, the city, the garden, the quest, the marriage, are no longer the desirable forms that man constructs inside nature, but are themselves the forms of nature."[1]

For the Middle Ages anagogy represented not merely poetic truth, as it does in Frye's context, but also reality, the Logos of the universe, the universal Word or highest Truth.

Any discussion of the literal or allegorical elements in *The Canterbury Tales*, therefore, must take place within Chaucer's vision of Reality or Truth. The approach thus becomes inclusive rather than exclusive. For example, no one will dispute the fact that Chaucer presents an array of characters realistically drawn and admirably set down. Nor can there be serious doubts where the broader allegorical significance of the *Tales* is

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 119.

concerned. These are not mutually exclusive aspects of the work, but rather, different facets of an entirety. Our real concern, ultimately, must be the relationship between the two within the context of a meaning larger than either.

In a completed work of art all parts work together to further the central vision or conception of the artist. In the case of The Canterbury Tales, though incomplete, we are given the framework, literal and metaphoric, within which Chaucer's vision is clearly indicated. What is lacking is the proper co-ordination of various tales and groups of tales with each other and to some extent with the framework by which they were to be bound together. As such, the fragmented body of Chaucer's Tales, despite the remarkable degree to which it does make clear a central vision, will continue to provide enough questions to allow for all manner of speculation concerning the tales and their tellers. But Chaucer himself proceeds to "knytte up wel a greet mateere" with his final spokesman, the Parson, who tells us that the broader allegorical purpose of "al this feeste" is

> To shewe ... the wey, in this viage,
> Of thilke parfit glorious pilgrimage
> That hight Jerusalem celestial.
> ("Parson's P.", ll. 49-51)[1]

And in the "General Prologue" Chaucer gives us a complete and detailed outline of the dramatic framework which is intended to provide unity and coherence on the literal level. Here the purpose is more mundane, and it is suitably proposed by the worldly Host, who at the beginning of the Pilgrimage stands as much apart from the Pilgrims as the Parson seems separate from them

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[1] References throughout are to The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, F. N. Robinson, ed., 2nd ed. (1957; rpt. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1961).

at the end. The Host will ride the "round-trip" with the Pilgrims as "governour" in a contest of tales. The winner, by the Host's decree,

> Shal have a soper at oure aller cost
> Heere in this place, sittynge by this post,
> Whan that we come agayn fro Caunterbury.
> ("G.P.," ll. 799-801)

However, these statements of purpose immediately raise questions concerning unity: How does the dramatic element serve the allegorical as it undoubtedly should and would had the Tales been completed? And how did Chaucer intend to unify the diverse "middle" of his work with the metaphorical framework established by the "General Prologue" and "The Parson's Tale?"

The answer to these queries may well lie in the rôle of Harry Bailly, key figure in the dramatice framework, particularly as seen in relation to the rôle of the Parson, key figure in the metaphorical structure. It is in the relationship between these two figures, one an obviously secular figure and the other just as obviously a spiritual one, that Chaucer portrays the duality of human experience as well as the conflict for human allegiance between the spirit and the flesh, heaven and hell, God and the devil. Furthermore, it is in the relationship between the secular Host and the spiritual Parson that we begin to see how Chaucer intended the dramatic and metaphoric elements of his work to move toward a common goal -- the presentation of man subject to the corruptions of the flesh yet subject to grace as well if he will only understand

> ... that God hath creat alle thynges in right ordre, and no thyng withouten ordre, but alle thynges been ordeyned and nombred; yet, natheless they that been dampned been nothyng in ordre, ne holden noon ordre.
> ("Parson's T.," 1. 218)

The rôle of Harry Bailly has not escaped the attention of the critics thus far. After all, he is a prominent figure in Chaucer's cast of characters and any critic concerned with the Tales as a whole cannot

escape paying him some attention. Too frequently, however, the Host is relegated to the status of unifying device in the dramatic structure, or, where the allegory is concerned, to the rôle of motivating force upon others on the Pilgrimage, yet himself somehow outside the field of metaphoric consideration. Two well-known critics, R.M. Lumiansky (in Of Sondry Folk[1]) and Ralph Baldwin (in The Unity of the Canterbury Tales[2]) are representative of these tendencies.

Lumiansky feels the powerful thrust of Chaucer's poetry in the "General Prologue". He cannot ignore the obvious suggestion of spiritual purpose in Chaucer's imagery of Spring. Nevertheless, he argues for a "broadened point of view" in Chaucer's opening lines and subordinates the spiritual significance of pilgrimage to the more immediate natural and social attractions of journey and vacation:

> ... behind this broadened point of view from which Chaucer examines a pilgrimage there lies the whole question of man's relationship to religion (the after-life) and to nature (this life). The implication is that most people perhaps cannot successfully deal with religion, represented here by pilgrimage, unless the spiritual aspects of religion are modified by natural earthly considerations, represented here by the coming of spring.[3]

Thus Lumiansky chooses to ignore the functions of allegory, tropology, and anagogy in the medieval concept of literature and focuses instead on the literal or historical level, on character in his search for unity in The Canterbury Tales.

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[1] R.M. Lumiansky, Of Sondry Folk (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1955).

[2] Ralph Baldwin, "The Unity of the Canterbury Tales," Anglistica, 5 (1955).

[3] Lumiansky, p. 17.

In choosing to see Chaucer's Pilgrim's as "actors in a drama," Lumiansky follows in the tradition of G.L. Kittredge. Kittredge, too, was seeking a unifying principle. His approach must be regarded as similarly one-sided:

> Structurally regarded, the Canterbury Tales is a kind of Human Comedy. From this point of view, the Pilgrims are the dramatis personae, and their stories are only speeches that are somewhat longer than common, entertaining in and for themselves (to be sure), but primarily significant, in each case, because they illustrate the speaker's character and opinions, or show the relations of the travelers to one another in the progressive action of the Pilgrimage.[1]

Lumiansky, in similar fashion, makes character his "steady center of focus" and hence argues for the dramatic principle as the unifying element in The Canterbury Tales.

Harry Bailly, being the first speaker other than the narrator, is seen as starting the drama with his novel plan for entertainment. While recognizing the Host as a character in his own right and "... no mechanical master of ceremonies, to be used only as background ...," Lumiansky, nevertheless, identifies his major function in mechanical terms: "There can be no doubt that the drama of the Canterbury Pilgrims is made possible in large part by Chaucer's use of the Host as unifying device."[2] Lumiansky recognizes little potential for larger meaning in Harry Bailly's rôle, and this despite the outrageously secular interest the Host champions throughout the "drama." Rather than elevating the Host to the higher level of debate between the secular and the spiritual in his exchanges with the

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[1] G.L. Kittredge, "Chaucer's Discussion of Marriage," MP, 9(1911-1912), 435.

[2] Lumiansky, p. 26.

Parson, Lumiansky chooses to reduce the Parson to the level of petty strife with the Host. In this context the merry-making and irreverent Harry Bailly is seen as finally receiving his just deserts in a long, dull sermon from the Parson. Lumiansky writes:

> Although all readers may not be convinced that there is 'solas' as well a 'sentence' in the Parson's 'merry tale in prose,' we can hardly avoid granting him our admiration for the skill with which he repays the Host for ill-mannered behaviour."[1]

Lumiansky gives us a very narrow view, not only of the Host, but also of The Canterbury Tales.

Ralph Baldwin takes a much broader approach to the Tales, attempting to define unity in terms of the allegory. He recognizes the dual nature of the journey to Canterbury but from the outset subordinates the dramatic element almost entirely to a metaphorical reading. Where others like Lumiansky pay too much heed to the reality of nature and the corresponding fact of human instinct and emotion, Baldwin leans heavily toward the opposite approach, choosing to see all of Chaucer's imagery as indicative almost exclusively of moral and religious order:

> The life of the mediaeval Christian ... was framed by Creation and Doomsday, the covers for the liber vitae of mediaeval man. It should be no surprise to find The Canterbury Tales is bound, metaphorically, in just that way. It is April, it is spring-time, it is beginning; ... with the inchoative seasonal-religious metaphor, where the mirror of Nature could not but reflect divine order.[2]

However, just as those who focus on the dramatic aspect of The Canterbury Tales cannot ignore entirely the presence of metaphoric suggestion,

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[1]Lumiansky, p. 245.

[2]Baldwin, p. 27.

so Baldwin, cannot disregard entirely the realistic portrayal of Chaucer's Pilgrims. But he turns away from this element as deliberately as Lumiansky turns from the allegorical.

Where Lumiansky sees Chaucer's primary concern as being the development of character and drama, Baldwin sees Chaucer as merely having to maintain a degree of respect for character if his satire of human foibles is to be made effective:

> For the satirist to remain a judicious exposer and not a mere ranter, there is demanded a measure of respect for the human beings whose foibles he lays bare; for the novelist to realize his characters, to make them more than limnings or caricatures, the pith of compassion and the core of charity must be central to the depiction of his _personae_. This regard for his creatures Chaucer seems to have had to an unusual degree.[1]

Thus, while not denying another side to Chaucer's art, Baldwin nevertheless commits himself to an unyielding focus on Chaucer's allegory.

Our hospitable and voluable Host and his warm and serviceable inn are all but lost in the vacuum of Baldwin's "time-space continuum." As Baldwin describes it,

> The scene of meeting at the inn is a past definite. In introducing his new friends Chaucer suspends time ... and creates a kind of vacuum, a time-space continuum, in which he surveys his companions not as he sees them but as he will have seen them.[2]

Because the company at the Tabard remains fixed in our minds as first we see it, each individual vividly characterized, Baldwin argues that the "circumstances of travel" are but an illusion and that the Pilgrims, in

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[1]_Ibid_., p. 38.

[2]Baldwin, p. 56.

one sense, never leave Southwerk. All this is illuminating and useful but it exhibits a tendency to intellectualize Chaucer's meaning at the expense of the reality which Chaucer and the Middle Ages recognized as more than an "objective correlative," not to mention that such a reading is much too exclusive of Chaucer's natural love for life and character.

In dealing specifically with the Host later in his study, Baldwin comes much closer to striking a proper balance between the dramatic and allegorical elements in The Canterbury Tales. Here he hints at Harry Bailly's function in the larger context of the Tales, as "a pilgrim not by pious intent but through accident," and the only one among the Pilgrims "whose destination is not Canterbury but Southwerk."[1] Here Baldwin recognizes at least one of the Host's rôles to be that of secular counterpart to the pious Parson. "Of all the pilgrims he alone is patently motivated by secular considerations,"[2] Baldwin states, and he goes on to say later that the Parson, who recognizes the Host's position for what it is,

> ... replaces the Host ultimately as docent because this is the function of a priest, not an innkeeper, and all the pilgrims to Canterbury in becoming pilgrims to the Heavenly Jerusalem must take the 'way' or 'via' of Penitence.[3]

A more recent critic, Rodney Delasanta, has considered the rôle of the Host even more seriously, suggesting that his part is instrumental in developing the theme of judgement in The Canterbury Tales.[4] Though

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[1]Baldwin, p. 61.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Ibid., p. 92.

[4]Rodney Delasanta, "The Theme of Judgement in The Canterbury Tales," MLQ, 31(1970).

Delasanta's treatment of the Host is brief, and deals primarily with the manner in which the Host's self-imposed rôle of judge over the Pilgrims provides a parody of the higher judgement toward which the Pilgrimage moves, it also implies that Harry Bailly, in conjunction with the Parson, functions to bring the Canterbury Pilgrimage to its proper destination.

It is precisely in the rôle of a consciously secular opponent to the essentially spiritual concerns of pilgrimage, while at the same time an unconsciously subservient instrument of Providence, that the Host must be seen. It is this function of Harry Bailly which critics like Lumiansky do not appear to recognize and which scholars like Baldwin pass over too lightly. Harry Bailly combines within one character the means whereby not only the drama of The Canterbury Tales is provided with a unifying voice, but also the means whereby the allegory of the work is given focus and direction. Furthermore, in recognizing the centrality of the Host to both the dramatic and allegorical aspects of Chaucer's conception of the Pilgrimage to Canterbury, we also find in him the unifying link between the dramatic and the metaphorical, a fact not often recognized by those who speak of unity in The Canterbury Tales.

CHAPTER II: THE METAPHORICAL FRAME

Before proceeding to a discussion of Chaucer's allegorical purpose and the metaphorical framework of The Canterbury Tales within which this purpose is achieved, it is wise, perhaps, to comment briefly on Chaucer's realism, particularly as it relates to the allegory. One of Chaucer's distinct achievements in The Canterbury Tales is the realistic portrayal of his characters, unforgettable characters such as the Pardoner, the Miller, and the Wife of Bath. So successful is Chaucer in his characterizations of fourteenth century life that many readers and critics choose to see this aspect of his work as his primary concern. "In no other part of his writings was Geoffrey Chaucer more original than in the series of sketches of the pilgrims in the prologue to the Canterbury Tales," begins J.R. Hulbert, going on to remark that what Chaucer gives us "is a conspectus of mediaeval English society; it would be possible to use the prologue as basis for a survey of fourteenth century English life...."[1]

Muriel Bowden goes a step beyond Hulbert and attempts to identify the historical characters upon whom Chaucer's Pilgrims may have been modelled.[2] While such an exercise is interesting and perhaps useful in its own right, Bowden's outright denial, in a later study, of any intentional figurative suggestion on Chaucer's part must be called into question:

> It has been said by some modern critics that Chaucer's basis for the Canterbury Tales may come from the idea that life is a 'pilgrimage'

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[1] J.R. Hulbert, "Chaucer's Pilgrims," PMLA, 65(1949), 823.

[2] Muriel Bowden, A Commentary on the General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales (New York: Macmillan Co., 1956).

> which mankind makes to the shrine of Heaven. Certainly the idea is not one which would have been unfamiliar to Chaucer, but the flesh-and-blood character the poet gives to his pilgrims on their gay and noisy journey to Canterbury seems to nullify any figurative suggestion.[1]

Miss Bowden seems singularly unaware of the historical and literary traditions with respect to figurative thinking in the fourteenth century, or, if aware, chooses to place Chaucer outside these traditions.

J.S.P. Tatlock, too, turns aside the intellectual traditions of the Late Middle Ages and offers the following opinion on the fourteenth century:

> There was a paradox in the spirit of medieval man. Though philosophy as to the whole future of man sunned itself in the optimism of faith, its view of this present life, having a belief in the progress of earthly man onward and upward forever, was always pessimistic, and now an increase of outspoken religious scepticism turned form God's future to man's present.[2]

It is Tatlock's further opinion that while poets like Gower and Langland dwelt on this paradox, "Chaucer has none of this." He assigns to Chaucer a desire to escape from the intellectual and philosophical paradoxes of his time:

> So keen and analytic a man must have been aware of change as change, but his poetry was for him an escape from the hum-drum everyday. He is 'modern' in the sense that he is timeless and deals with the human essence.[3]

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[1]Muriel Bowden, A Reader's Guide to Geoffrey Chaucer (New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 1965), p. 76.

[2]J.S.P. Tatlock, The Mind and Art of Chaucer (1950; rpt. New York: Gordian Press, Inc., 1966), p. 19.

[3]Tatlock, p. 20.

Tatlock thus characterizes Chaucer as a poet who concerned himself almost exclusively with actuality, with human nature largely separate from any intellectual or philosophical context.

The element of realism in Chaucer's art has provoked some forthright claims for its dominance, as seen in the views just cited. The purpose here is not to deny this aspect of The Canterbury Tales, but rather, having accepted it, to suggest that Chaucer's realism, like Langland's, functions to figure forth, without any loss of reality or particularity, a grander scheme of metaphysical truth which includes the physical reality of this world.

The enlarged vision of reality which Chaucer puts forth in The Canterbury Tales is the fruit of intellectual developments rooted in the twelfth century and earlier. By the twelfth century logic had risen to a position of undisputed eminence in the search for truth and the emphasis had shifted from local to universal concerns. This change in emphasis, clearly discernible in the field of literature, reflects there an assessment of human action on a much wider scale. R.W. Southern, in his assessment of the Middle Ages, chooses to term this shift in emphasis the change from Epic to Romance:

> The change of emphasis from localism to universality, the emergence of systematic thought, the rise of logic -- to these we may add a change which in a sense comprehends tham all: the change from Epic to Romance. The contrast is not merely a literary one, though it is in literature that it can be most clearly seen. It is a reflection of a more general change of attitude which found expression in many different ways. Briefly, we find less talk of life as an exercise in endurance, and of death in a hopeless cause; and we hear more of life as a seeking and a journeying. Men begin to think of themselves less as stationary objects

> of attack by spiritual foes, and more as pilgrims and seekers.[1]

Admittedly, Southern is speaking of an earlier century, but the habit of mind he describes is the outlook Chaucer falls heir to, together with all that this new attitude produced and uncovered in the two centuries and more prior to the composition of The Canterbury Tales. His translation of Boethius indicates Chaucer's concern with universals, with philosophy. Boethius' precepts were absorbed as well as translated. The closing lines of the second poem in Book III might almost serve as an epigraph to The Canterbury Tales:

> ... Alle thyngen seken ayen to hir propre course, and alle thynges rejoysen hem of hir retornynge ayen to hir nature. Ne noon ordenaunce is bytaken to thynges, but that that hath joyned the endynge to the bygynny-nge, and hath maked the cours of itself stable (that it chaunge nat from his proper kynde).[2]

Chaucer accepts the reality of his world but he comprehends it as having commerce with a more reasonable and ordered design than is readily apparent in actuality. In all things, and especially in man, there is a pronounced sense of spiritual implication.

The reality of Chaucer's world is bordered by the larger discussion of man's spiritual needs and God's grace. In all the vivid and tumultuous existence of humanity that Chaucer portrays there is something greater, something more real. In the main, Chaucer shares the world view rendered in the Miracle and Morality plays of the Middle Ages. The performances of these plays frequently took place on a three-tiered stage--Heaven above,

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[1] R.W. Southern, The Making of the Middle Ages (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), pp. 221-222.

[2] "Boece", The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, p. 343.

Hell below, and man on the principle playing area between the two. In such starkly visual terms as these the necessity of a relationship between life on earth and eternal reality was not difficult to conceive. The medieval belief in the grand design of the Fall, Redemption through Christ, and the ultimate reality of the Last Judgement was commonplace. Any discussion of human existence before the late 18th century is likely to make implicit or explicit reference to it.

What is indicated in all this is the medieval habit of viewing history typologically. A concise summation of this habit of mind in relation to our own is given by Erich Auerbach:

> Wir sind gewohnt, das Geschehende als eine vielgliedrige, kausal vielverschlungene, niemals abreiszende Kette in der fortlaufenden Zeit zu sehen; die typologische Interpretion hingegen verknüpft zwei zeitlich und kausal weit voneinander entfernte Ereignisse, reiszt jedes von ihnen aus dem Zusammenhang, in dem es geschah, heraus, und verknüpft sie durch einen beiden gemeinsamen Sinn. Sie gibt also nicht eine kontinuierliche Entwicklung der Geschichte, sondern eine Interpretation derselben; und diese wird dadurch ermöglicht, das Struktur, Ziel und Sinn der Geschichte durch die Verkündigung offenbart und also bekannt sind. Die Geschichte ist das Erlösungsdrama: der Sündenfall zu Beginn, Inkarnation und Passion als mittlerer Wendepunkt, und das Jüngste Gericht mit dem erfüllten Gottesreich am Ende. Die Zeiten vor dem Gesetz und unter dem Gesetz bis zur Fleischwerdung Gottes sind Erwartung und Vordeutung, die Zeiten zwischen Inkarnation und Weltende sind Nachahmung und Erwerb der Gnade.[1]

When considered from this point of view, the earthly existence portrayed in The Canterbury Tales is given a reality which extends beyond that which

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[1]Erich Auerbach, Typologische Motive in Der Mittelalterlichen Literatur, Schriften und Vorträge Des Petrarca - Instituts Köln, No. 2 (Krefeld: Scherpe - Verlag, 1953), pp. 13-14.

is attributed to it by those who speak of Chaucer's lusty realism. Chaucer chooses to see everyday reality in the same way as he views history. Indeed, he transforms The Canterbury Tales into a kind of history by framing the hurly-burly of the tales and the circumstances of their telling with the metaphor of pilgrimage. Chaucer's The Canterbury Tales, perhaps less obviously than a work like Langland's Piers Plowman which preceded it, rests on the medieval concept of history, on

> the idea that earthly life is thoroughly real, with the reality of the flesh into which the Logos entered, but that with all its reality it is only *umbra* and *figura* of the authentic, future, ultimate truth, the real reality that will unveil and preserve the *figura*.[1]

Chaucer's characters and the circumstances of pilgrimage are filled with potential for enrichment in spiritual terms. Many of the tales narrated by the Pilgrims, like "The Prioress's Tale" and "The Clerk's Tale," are in themselves both moral exempla and *figura*. Nor does Chaucer overlook the potential for figuring forth the conflict between the sacred and the profane by creating discrepancies between teller and tale. "The Pardoner's Tale", for example, demonstrates Chaucer's skill in matching teller to tale in such a way as to reveal the gulf that can separate the sacred and the profane; and if we compare the Pardoner's misuse of pulpit matters to the sermon properly delivered by the Parson, the conflict between sacred and profane is lifted to the level of allegory.

"The Parson's Tale", coming where it does after the self-revelation of the tales, is the ultimate shifting from the outer to the inner, from

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[1] Erich Auerbach, "Figura", trans. Ralph Manheim from 1944 original, Scenes from the Drama of European Literature (New York: Meridian Books, 1959), p. 72.

the secular actuality to the spiritual reality that "unveils and preserves the figura." The relationship between realism and metaphor in Chaucer's art must be appreciated as a functional aspect of Chaucer's concern with the relationship between the physical and metaphysical aspects of human existence. The movement toward spiritual reality metaphorically put forth, within the context of a story-telling company of pilgrims realistically put forth, reflects the real possibility of movement from the secular to the sacred. The Pilgrimage to Canterbury is such a journey, a journey toward understanding of the self as a divine creation despite the depth to which the self is fallen in reality. From the full-blown and healthful vigor of Nature's Spring in the opening lines of the "General Prologue". Chaucer guides his readers through the tales of various vividly limned characters to the Parson's sermon, an exegesis of the Divine plan of Creation.

The vivid description of Spring with which The Canterbury Tales opens points to beginnings, physical and spiritual. While this opening is rich with symbolic suggestion, the physical or real is not to be overlooked.

> In the opening lines of the Prologue springtime is characterized in terms of procreation, and a pilgrimage of people to Canterbury is just one of the many manifestations of the life thereby produced. The phallicism of the opening lines presents the impregnating of female March by a male April, and a marriage of water and earth. The marriage is repeated and varied immediately as a fructifying of 'holt and heath' by Zephirus, a marriage of air and earth.... Out of this context of the quickening of the earth presented naturally and symbolically in the broadest terms, the Prologue comes to pilgrimage and treats pilgrimage first as an event in the calendar of nature, one aspect of the general springtime surge of human energy

and longing.[1]

Chauncer recognizes and accepts the conception of religion which includes the real and the natural as a basic part of God's universal revelation. Man moves in a concrete world filled with the thoughts of God. He must learn to read the visible signs in order to pass on to the invisible truth, for the physical and spiritual worlds are one. Emile Mâle has speculated on the extent to which even the thinking peasant moved in a world of natural symbols:

> Of what were the Middle Ages thinking in the winter time when the days were shortening sadly and the darkness seemed to be triumphing for ever over the light? They thought of the long centuries of twilight that preceded the coming of Christ, and they understood that in the divine drama both light and darkness have their place. They gave the name of Advent (Adventus) to those weeks of December, when by means of the liturgy and lessons from Scripture they expressed the long waiting of the Ancient world. It was at the winter solstice, at the time when light begins to reappear and the days to lengthen, that the Son of God was born. Even the round of the year shadows forth man's course upon earth, and recounts the drama of life and death. Spring, which gives new life to the world, is the symbol of baptism which renews the spirit of man at his entrance into life. Summer too is a type, for its burning heat and light are reminders of the light of another world and' of the ardent love of the eternal life. Autumn, season of harvest and vintage, is the dread symbol of the Last Judgement-- that great Day on which men will reap as they have sown. Winter is a shadow of death which awaits mankind and the universe.[2]

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[1]Arthur W. Hoffman, "Chaucer's Prologue to Pilgrimage: The Two Voices," ELH, 21(1954), 2-3.

[2]Emile Mâle, The Gothic Image, trans. Dora Nussey (1913; rpt, New York: Harper & Row, 1958), p. 31.

Chaucer begins The Canterbury Tales in just such a context of divinely charged reality. What is expressed in Chaucer's images of Spring is a universal religion based on the warm reality of Nature as much as a faith based on classical philosophy or the subtleties of theology. Nature itself provides the motivation for spiritual endeavour with the reawakening of Spring, and "Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages."

The opening lines of the "General Prologue", with the introduction of pilgrimage, also point the way to something much more specific than a universal and age-old appreciation of Nature's reawakening:

> What begins as the traditional image of artifice operates on a much deeper and more functional scale than is realized at a cursory reading. Spring not only "melts" vegetative and sentient nature, ... but stirs the heart of man as well. For Chaucer the stimulation is not to pastourelle, nor to meditation, nor the lover's planctus, but to pilgrimage. The germination and wakening of all greenery and animals have their expansive and reparative effects upon man too.[1]

It is with the introduction of pilgrimage that Chaucer directs attention away from the natural context of harmonious religiosity to a specific, spiritual destination for man. The tomb of "the hooly blisful martir," with its implications of self-denial and other-worldliness, represents a specifically spiritual orientation for man within the effusive and burgeoning "now" of Spring. This journey to the tomb of St. Thomas prefigures a larger pilgrimage that promises Spring eternal through the love and grace of God.

The framing theme of Divine love, later to be made explicit in "The

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[1]Ralph Baldwin, "The Unity of The Canterbury Tales," Anglistica, 5(1955), 27-28.

Parson's Tale," is in the "General Prologue" given "variation and enrichment by way of human instances."[1] As Hoffman has already demonstrated, "The note of love is sounded in different keys all through the portraits." Among those who exhibit degrees of profane love, like the Physician ("he lovede gold in special"), the Monk ("that lovede venerie"), or the Summoner and the Pardoner ("Com hider, love, to me!"); there are also those who represent degrees of love more ambiguous, like the Prioress ("Amor vincit omnia"); or love more noble, like the Knight ("... he loved chivalrie,/ Trouthe and honour, fredom and curtesie"). And there too, in the lowly Parson's charitable example, almost obscured by sheer numbers, is Divine love, the all-embracing love which alone gives reality to, or renders meaningless, all other degrees of love:

> He was a shepherde and noght a mercenarie.
> And though he hooly were and vertuous,
> He was to synful men not despitous,
> Ne of his speche daungerous ne digne,
> But in his techyng discreet and benygne.
> To drawen folk to hevene by fairnesse,
> By good ensample, this was his bisynesse.
> ("G.P.," ll. 514-520)

The Parson, together with "his brother" the Plowman, is closely associated with the pastoral imagery of Chaucer's opening lines and, in retrospect, raises the entire opening passage to the level of metaphor. Collectively the Parson and the Plowman are strongly reminiscent of Piers, Langland's Plowman, and the task he must perform in leading the Field of Folk to repentance and the knowledge of salvation. Chaucer's Parson also assumes spiritual leadership when he is finally called upon to do so, and he clearly turns the Canterbury Pilgrims toward "joye perdurable."

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[1]Hoffman, 14.

The spiritual potential of the "General Prologue" is fully realized in "The Parson's Tale," the last tale to be told and Chaucer's conclusion to the Pilgrimage. Here, while the appropriate distination of man's journey, "Jerusalem celestial," and the way to it via penitence are being held before the Pilgrims, Chaucer echoes the opening lines of the "General Prologue." Penitence, the Parson says, can be likened to a tree:

> The roote of this tree is Contricioun, that hideth hym in the herte of hym that is verray repentaunt, right as the roote of a tree hydeth hym in the erthe./ Of the roote of Contricioun spryngeth a stalke that bereth braunches and leves of Confessioun, and fruyt of Satisfaccioun./ For which Crist seith in his gospel: "Dooth digne fruyt of Penitence;" for by this fruyt may men knowe this tree, and nat by the roote that is hyd in the herte of man, ne by the leves of Confessioun./ And therfore oure Lord Jhesu Crist seith thus: "By the fruyt of hem shul ye knowen hem."/ Of this roote eek spryngeth a seed of grace, the which seed is mooder of sikernesse, and this seed is egre and hoot./ The grace of this seed spryngeth of God thurgh remembrance of the day of doom and on the peynes of helle./ Of this matere seith Salomon that in the drede of God man forleteth his synne./ The heete of this seed is the love of God, and the desiryng of the joye perdurable./ This heete draweth the herte of a man to God, and dooth hym haten his synne./
>
> ("Parson's T.", ll. 113-121)

We are now made fully aware that April's "shoures soote" which pierce to the roots every "holt and heeth," engender the flower and cause both man and beast to respond in physical joy, engender also, if read correctly, contrition, penitence, and consequent "joye perdurable" through the realization of God's grace. The tears of the repentant sinner, like "shoures soote," can pierce to the roote of "Contricioun" in the heart of man, dispelling there the "droghte" of the secular and profane and engendering the "tendre" crop of "Confessioun." The penitent pilgrim, with his tears,

nourishes too the "seed of grace," given of God in Christ and providing for man the possibility of life eternal. This "seed," sprung of God but born in man, is "egre and hoot," recalling the procreative imagery of the "General Prologue" and translating it into spiritual terms. The phallicism and procreation of the opening lines are thus validated as part of the Divine plan, figuring forth as they do the Incarnation and God made man.

Chaucer's Tree of Penitence, like Langland's Tree of Charity, is emblematic, representing at once many aspects of the Christian life. The Parson goes on to hold before the Pilgrims the "tree" of Crucifixion by which man is saved from death:

> ... for as muchel thanne as the caytyf body of man is rebel bothe to resoun and to sensualitee, therfore is it worthy the deeth./ And this suffred oure Lord Jhesu Crist for man upon the croys, where as ther was no part of his body free withouten greet peyne and bitter passioun.
>
> ("Parson's T.", 11. 271-272)

The cross of death thus became the Tree of Life foretold by the prophets. It is the Tree of Life to man still if he will practice penitence:

> This tree saugh the prophete Daniel in spirit, upon the avysioun of the kyng Nabugodonosor, whan he conseiled hym to do penitence./ Penaunce is the tree of lyf to hem that it receyven, and he that holdeth hym in verray penitence is blessed, after the sentence of Salomon.
>
> ("Parson's T.", 11. 126-127)

Chaucer also seems to have had this tree in mind when speaking through the Parson of the vices to be avoided and the virtues to be practiced by the penitent sinner who has humbled himself before God. Mâle has described the metaphor Chaucer appears to have had in mind:

> The theologians of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries who studied the connection between

> virtues and vices ..., frequently compared them to two vigorous trees. ... One is the tree of the old Adam and has pride as its root and main stem. From the trunk spring seven great boughs, envy, vainglory, anger, sadness, avarice, intemperance, luxury. In its turn each bough divides into secondary branches. ... The second tree is the tree of the new Adam with humility for its trunk, and the three theological and the four cardinal virtues as its seven main branches. Each virtue is sub-divided in its turn. ... The first of these trees was planted by Adam and the second by Christ, it is for man to choose between them.[1]

This is the organization Chaucer follows implicitly throughout his treatment of the Seven Deadly Sins and their remedial virtues, beginning with an explicit reference to the tree:

> Of the roote of thise sevene synnes, thanne, is Pride the general roote of alle harmes. For of this roote spryngen certein braunches, as Ire, Envye, Accidie or Slewthe, Avarice or Coveitise (to commune understondynge), Glotonye, and Lecherye./ And everich of thise chief synnes hath his braunches and his twigges, as shal be declared in hire chaptires folwynge./
> ("Parson's T.", ll. 388-389)

As we read the Parson's sermon we recall, at one time or another, each one of the various, very real "Pilgrims" whom we have accompanied on their voyage to this point in time and place, each rooting in his heart the pride of the old Adam and thereby nourishing some form or another of the Seven Deadly Sins.

As Spring's flowers in the "General Prologue" represent the potential for Summer's fruit, so Chaucer's Pilgrims at the Tabard represent the spiritual potential for eternal life in Christ, a reward much worth-

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[1] Mâle, pp. 106-107.

ier than the Host's "soper at oure aller cost." This is man's proper direction:

> And hereof seith Seint Peter: "Ther is noon oother name under hevene that is yeve to any man, by which a man may be saved, but oonly Jhesus."/ Nazarenus is as muche for to seye as "florisshynge," in which a man shal hope that he that yeveth hym remissioun of synnes shal yeve hym eek grace wel for to do. For in the flour is hope of fruyt in tyme comynge, and in foryifnesse of synnes hope of grace wel for to do./ "I was atte dore of thyn herte," seith Jhesus, "and cleped for to entre. He that openeth to me shal have foryifnesse of synne./ I wol entre into hym by my grace, and soupe with hym," by the goode werkes that he shal doon, whiche werkes beene the foode of God; "and he shal soupe with me." by the grete joye that I shal yeven hym./
>
> ("Parson's T.", ll. 287-290)

This is the truth toward which the Canterbury Pilgrimage moves and all else that Chaucer has written in the Tales must ultimately be seen in relation to it. This is the point at which the journey terminates. There is no return to the Tabard.

There are two things to be noted in the juxtaposition of the beginning with the ending of The Canterbury Tales. Most obviously, an encompassing allegorical plan is indicated as having had a prominent place in Chaucer's consciousness, and, more important to the purpose here, two facets of "reality" are introduced. In the "General Prologue" physical or concrete reality is given emphasis, whereas in "The Parson's Tale" spiritual or abstract reality is emphasized. Two levels of existence, the temporal and the eternal, are given place in life, the latter growing out of the former and being of infinitely greater importance.

It appears obvious from what we know of his position among the Pilgrims that the Parson is the most understanding of, and able spokesman

for, the spiritual realities of human existence. He must be seen, in one sense, as the proper spiritual host and guide of this company of pilgrims, seeking to provide for his companions spiritual nourishment, not for his own gain but for God's. One may well doubt the success of the Parson in this endeavour, but one cannot doubt the importance of what he attempts to provide for the Pilgrims when all the merry tales have been told and his turn finally comes. Chaucer's presentation of the human pilgrimage through life is carefully planned. The ultimate purpose of the Pilgrimage is never entirely forgotten, despite the Pilgrim's involvement with the immediate and temporal realities of existence. In large part the Pilgrims are engaged in ritual, but it is a ritual which is Providentially guided toward the realization of higher truth.

CHAPTER III: "OURE HOOSTE"

A semely man OURE HOOSTE was withalle
For to han been a marchal in an halle.
A large man he was with eyen stepe--
A fairer burgeys is ther noon in Chepe--
Boold of his speche, and wys, and wel ytaught,
And of manhod hym lakkede right naught.
Eek therto he was right a myrie man,
And after soper pleyen he bigan,
And spak of myrthe amonges othere thynges,
Whan that we hadde maad oure rekenynges,
And seyde thus: "Now, lordynges, trewely,
Ye been to me right welcome, hertely;
For by my trouthe, if that I shal nat lye,
I saugh nat this yeer so myrie a compaignye
Atones in this herberwe as it is now.
Fayn wolde I doon yow myrthe, wiste I how."
("G.P.", ll. 751-766)

With these words, Geoffrey Chaucer introduces the last character in the array of characters portrayed in the "General Prologue". On the surface there is nothing to suggest that Harry Bailly is unique as a character. That he is described as lacking "right naught" of manhood, or as having no superior as an innkeeper in "Chepe" is characteristic of the narrator's exaggerated descriptions. Virtually all the Pilgrims are described in superlative terms. Yet, there are several features concerning the Host, it is discovered on reading a little further, that set him apart and make him worthy of special attention.

Harry Bailly is not, from the outset, a member of the company of Pilgrims. Indeed, it should be emphasized that he never overtly becomes a member of the group as a pilgrim, though he travels the road to Canterbury with them and is, within the frame of the allegory, as much a pilgrim as any. But the Host is to play a rôle at once above and beneath the others in this drama and Chaucer gives him special attention from the beginning. All the Pilgrims presented in the "General Prologue" are introduced "in a

clause." The Host alone is introduced outside the clause, and he alone, aside from the narrator, is given a voice in the proceedings antecedent to the drama. Yet, a certain degree of inferiority is suggested too in having the Host presented initially as a part of the scene or circumstance encountered by the Pilgrims on their journey, like the inn which he keeps. In this sense Harry Bailly is not unlike the Canon and his Yeoman who are encountered later on the Pilgrimage. The Canon literally never becomes a member of the company, while his Yeoman joins the Pilgrims, tells his self-revelatory tale, and renounces his former master. Both are subject to God's judgement, however. The Canon renounces all the Pilgrimage offers, while his Yeoman seeks the spiritual comfort it promises to provide. Ultimately, the choice between living in this world or joining the quest for spiritual truth is Harry Bailly's dilemma too, and the dilemma of each Pilgrim on the journey.

Following the introduction of Harry Bailly as the congenial host of The Tabard, Chaucer provides a detailed account of the conditions upon which the Host agrees to join the company of Pilgrims on their journey. He will travel with the Pilgrims, we are told, as governor and judge in a "game" of tales. This essentially profane and secular attitude toward pilgrimage is given further emphasis by the prize the Host offers to the teller of the best tale. With his offer accepted, the Host is placed in a position from which he can determine the entire nature of the Pilgrimage. It is he who will set the rules of the "game" and act as judge and arbiter while the "game" is being played, or so Harry Bailly believes in his decidedly less than philosophical view of things. Nevertheless, such a figure cannot be ignored. The Host, from the position of authority he is given in the scheme of the Pilgrimage, must, in some way, help to deter-

mine its shape and direction.

That the Host is also the means whereby the formal structure of The Canterbury Tales is introduced and sustained, is, paradoxically, one reason why most critics and readers are apt to overlook him in any consideration of the structure's meaning. It is, perhaps, too easy or convenient to regard Harry Bailly merely as a necessary structural device whereby the author is enabled to tell a series of tales. Even where the relationship of individual tales to one another or to the group of tales as whole is being considered, the Host is seldom seen as having a significant rôle to play, and this despite his appearance in almost every formal link extant. If, however, The Canterbury Tales is viewed allegorically, it is possible that the Host may have a more significant rôle to play than has been thought heretofore. Indeed, when considered within the context of the journey toward "Jerusalem celestial," the Host's rôle becomes essential to an understanding of Chaucer's allegory.

The spiritual thrust of the Canterbury Pilgrimage is given focus in the Parson. Although his rôle as proper guide to the company remains unrealized until very near the end of the journey, Chaucer points to him as the proper host to the Pilgrims at the very outset. By virtue of his Christian humility, the Parson does not foist himself upon his companions. Yet Chaucer's description of him as a shepherd, visiting his flock staff in hand and giving "noble ensample to his sheep," clearly points to the Parson as the individual most suited to offer spiritual guidance. Devout, deligent, charitable, holy, "in adversitee ful pacient," and "in his techyng discreet and benygne," the humble Parson waits "after no pomp and reverence." ("G.P.", 11. 477-525) Hence he never steps forward to contest the leadership of the Pilgrimage. Rather,

> To drawen folk to hevene by fairnesse,
> By good ensample, this was his bisynesse.
> ("G.P.", ll. 519-520)

Over against the Parson, Chaucer places the Host, a man who, in one sense, sums up the general character of the Pilgrims; or, it might better be said, one who represents the lowest common denominator of all and sundry on the Pilgrimage. He is what Trevor Whittock calls "a grand secular figure...;" one who represents "all that is gross and material, though he can change his speech from vulgarity to courtesy; he is all that is concerned with living well in this world."[1] Contrary to the Parson, the Host is characterized as "Boold of his speche, and wys, and wel ytaught" in the ways of the world. Above all, he is a man of mirth. As Barbara Page has pointed out, Chaucer makes eleven references "to 'mirth,' 'pleye,' 'disport,' or being 'myrie'"[2] in his introduction of the Host. As an innkeeper on the road to Canterbury, Harry Bailly ministers to the physical needs of such pilgrims as pass by annually. His service consists of stables, beds, food, and strong wine; for all of which there is a reckoning. The reckoning made, there will also be such mirth as he can provide. To our group of pilgrims he remarks:

> Fayne wolde I doon yow myrthe, wiste I how.
> And of a myrthe I am right now bythought,
> To doon yow ese, and it shal coste noght.
> ("G.P.", ll. 766-768)

It may well be that Harry Bailly, a practical man of affairs, is also seeking to assure himself of a clientele for the future when he proposes

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[1]Trevor Wittock, A Reading of The Canterbury Tales (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1968), pp. 52-53.

[2]Barbara Page, "Concerning the Host," ChauR, 4 (1970), 2.

that the prize in his contest of tales be

> ...a soper at oure aller cost
> Heere in this place, sittynge by this post,
> Whan that we come agayn fro Caunterbury.
> ("G.P.", ll. 799-801)

But this is a relatively small deception, and the Host, from what we learn of him in his exchange with the Cook, always provides good service for the reckoning.

The "game" Harry Bailly superimposes on the Pilgrimage reflects the secular man's limited conception of human destiny. With this bold stroke, Chaucer further distinguishes the Host from the Pilgrims as such (although ensuing tales reveal motives not dissimilar to the Host's on the part of several and motives a good deal worse on the part of some) and from the Parson in particular. Ralph Baldwin observes that "He is separated from the pilgrims...in two ways: first, as the docent for the journey, and second, as the one among them whose destination is not Canterbury but Southwerk."[1] Perhaps this observation should be modified to read that the Host is the only individual in the group "whose <u>declared</u> destination in not Canterbury but Southwerk." There are several on this journey, it would appear, particularly under the Host's prodding, whose destination is certainly not Canterbury either. It is the Host's presence in the company which enables Chaucer to make the falsity of such "Pilgrims" clear long before the Parson pronounces divine judgement on them. The secular Host's "game," whatever its declared or undeclared intention, is nevertheless subject to the higher reality which it appears to negate and serves to promote its truth.

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[1]Ralph Baldwin, "The Unity of the Canterbury Tales," <u>Anglistica</u>, 5(1955), 61.

In one thing at least the Host is honest. He does not pretend to lead the Pilgrims toward "joye perdurable." He explicitly dissociates himself from the spiritual purpose of the Pilgrimage:

> Ye goon to Caunterbury-- God yow speede,
> The blissful martir quite yow youre meede!
> ("G.P.", ll. 769-770)

This quick, passing reference makes it clear that the Host's business is not with pilgrimages as such. The solace he offers has nothing to do with God and St. Thomas who wait at the other end of the journey.[1] All that seems as remote now as the various distresses and promises which have brought this company to the Tabard. How to pass the present time in comfort and merriment is more the Host's concern:

> And wel I woot, as ye goon by the weye,
> Ye shapen yow to talen and to pleye;
> For trewely, confort ne myrthe is noon
> To ride by the weye doumb as a stoon;
> And therefore wol I maken yow disport,
> As I seyde erst, and doon yow som comfort.
> ("G.P.", ll. 771-776)

The secular nature of the Host's proposal to provide comfort and mirth seems designed to undercut the real meaning and purpose of pilgrimage. However, it is not unrelated to Chaucer's purpose, which is to dramatize the conflict between man's secular interests and his spiritual aspirations. What the Host offers the Pilgrims in the form of food, drink, and bodily comfort must be seen in the light of the Parson's words on bodily pain.

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[1]One is tempted here to conjecture that Chaucer's plan for <u>The Canterbury Tales</u>, the work culminating as it does with the Parson's emergence as proper spokesman and guide, precludes completion of the work according to the Host's plan; <u>i.e.</u>, that each Pilgrim tell two tales on the road to Canterbury and another two on the return trip to the Tabard.

> ... thou shalt understonde that bodily peyne
> stant in wakynge; for Jhesu Crist seith,
> "Waketh and preyeth, that ye ne entre in
> wikked temptacioun."/ Ye shul understanden
> also that fastynge stant in thre thynges:
> in forberynge of bodily mete and drynke,
> and in forberynge of worldly jolitee, and
> in forberynge of deedly synne....
> ("Parson's T.", ll. 1048-49)

Similarly, the Hôst's offer to ride with the Pilgrims at his "owene cost" and to guide them in merriment and frivolity must be seen in the context of the Parson's offer of a "myrie tale" pointing the way to eternal joy:

> I wol yow telle a myrie tale in prose
> To knytte up al this feeste, and make an ende.
> And Jhesu, for his grace, wit me sende
> To shewe yow the wey, in this viage,
> Of thilke parfit glorious pilgrymage
> That highte Jerusalem celestial.
> ("Parson's P.", ll. 46-51)

When viewed in contrast to the Parson's offer of "joye perdurable," the Host's proposal of worldly jollity emerges as the antithesis to the real purpose of the Pilgrimage and a fundamental aspect of Harry Bailly's rôle in The Canterbury Tales becomes evident.

The conflict between earthly joy and heavenly bliss represented by the Host-Parson antithesis is not to be confused with a more profound philosophical conflict concerning Providence (also present in the Tales) although it is, in some respects, a part of it. The Providence-Fortune theme is present in The Canterbury Tales from the outset (in "The Knight's Tale") and the idea of Providence, at least, is strongly present as an undercurrent throughout in the unconscious guidance given the Pilgrimage by the Host himself. A brief examination of the Host's response to the tales of the Knight and the Monk, tales which provide opposing views on the subject of Providence and Fortune, reveals the Host's conscious position outside this conflict.

The Knight begins Chaucer's series of tales with an account of Palamon, Arcite, and Emelye, three unhappy victims of love and Fortune. At the end of the tale, Duke Theseus sums up their misfortunes with reference to the divine scheme of things:

> "The Firste Moevere of the cause above,
> Whan he first made the faire cheyne of love,
> Greet was th' effect, and heigh was his entente.
> Wel wiste he why, and what thereof he mente;
> For with that faire cheyne of love he bond
> The fyr, the eyr, the water, and the lond
> In certeyn boundes, that they may nat flee.
> That same Prince and that Moevere," quod he,
> "Hath stablissed in this wreeched world adoun
> Certeyne dayes and duracioun
> To al that is engendred in this place,
> Over the whiche day they may nat pace,
> Al mowe they yet tho dayes wel abregge.
> Ther nedeth noght noon auctoritee t'allegge
> For it is preeved by experience,
> But that me list declaren my sentence.
> Thanne may men by this ordre wel discerne
> That thilke Moevere stable is and eterne."
> ("Knight's T.", ll. 2987-3004)

Here is given the kind of matter which a learned cleric might turn to good purpose. The ordering context of a higher reality, counselling men to bear the misfortunes of this "wrecched world" in patience, could serve to place the Pilgrimage on its proper course at the very beginning. The Host's response, however, is directed to the happy ending of "The Knight's Tale," which leaves Palamon and Emelye in a state of bliss. He, along with the "gentils everichon," quickly forgets or overlooks entirely the philosophical purport of the tale in his enthusiasm over the happy conclusion.

Harry Bailly's lack of philosophical convictions is made clearer still at the conclusion of "The Monk's Tale." Here he responds to the concept of a world governed by Fortune as unphilosophically as he previously responded to the idea of a world governed by Providence. Inter-

estingly, the Host calls for the Monk's tale immediately following the Knight's offering, perhaps expecting a less equivocal story of human prosperity. But here the drunken Miller interrupts, and when the Monk finally does address the company, the "tale" he relates illustrates a "Weltanschauung" diametrically opposed to that of the Knight's tale of Palamon and Arcite. The Monk's "tragedies" all illustrate a world governed by inscrutable Fortune as he indicates they will in his opening remarks:

> I wol biwaille, in manere of tragedie,
> The harm of hem that stood in heigh degree,
> And fillen so that ther was no remedie
> To brynge hem out of hir adversitee.
> For certein, whan that Fortune list to flee,
> Ther may no man the cours of hire withholde.
> Lat no man truste on blynd prosperitee;
> Be war by thise ensamples trewe and olde.
> ("Monk's T.", 11. 1991-1998)

Significantly, it is the Knight and the Host who react, and strongly too, to the Monk's dismal view of life. We learn here that the Knight, as well as the Host, is considerably less than philosophical in his response to life. Despite the instructive tale he has already recited, the Knight simply voices his preference for examples of "joye and greet solas." The Host's response is simpler still. He prefers to avoid consideration of reality altogether and to concentrate instead on the "game" he is attempting to make of the essentially serious business of pilgrimage:

> Sire Monk, namoore of this, so God yow blesse!
> Youre tale anoyeth al this compaignye.
> Swich talkyng is nat worth a boterflye,
> For therinne is ther no desport ne game.
> ("P. of Nun's Priest's T.",
> 11. 2788-2791)

When he swears an oath at the Monk's performance, Harry Bailly's myopia in matters of human destiny is ironically linked to the realization he must ultimately make:

> By hevene Kyng, that for us alle dyde,
> I sholde er this han fallen doun for sleep,
> Althogh the slough had never been so deep;
> Thanne hadde your tale al be toold in veyn.
> ("P. of Nun's Priest's T.", ll. 2796-2800)

The saving grace of Providence alluded to here must await explication by the Parson later, for Harry Bailly will have nothing to do with philosophy or religion.

It is noteworthy that the point of reference represented by the Host should be nothing more nor less than secularity or natural worldliness. It is pointedly not a question of philosophy that we are faced with in Harry Bailly. As long as man is to be hosted in the flesh a certain term, all the subtle temptations to live comfortably, merrily, and unthinkingly distance him from his Maker. This is the reality of the flesh that man must contend with to the salvation or damnation of his eternal soul. It is the "mole of nature" inherited from Adam. The Parson makes reference to sin's subtle beginnings in "fleshly concupiscence" before man becomes a subject of the devil:

> Now shal ye understonde in what manere that synne wexeth or encresseth in man. The firste thyng is thilke norissynge of synne of which I spak biforn, thilke fleshly concupiscence./ And after that comth the subjeccioun of the devel, this is to seyn, the develes bely, with which he bloweth in man the fir of flesshly concupiscence./ And after that, a man bithynketh hym wheither he wol doon, or no, thilke thing to which he is tempted.
> ("Parson's T.", ll. 350-352)

The Host, at worst, stands before us as natural man, subject to corruption and by nature opposed to correction.

The question, when one views the Host's position in relation to the Parson's, is one of priorities. The Pilgrims are confronted by the material reality of the world which hosts them all on their journey, and

drawn by the spiritual reality toward which the journey moves. There is the reality of the flesh; there is the reality of the spirit. To which of these realities will the various pilgrims, creatures free to choose, give their assent?

It is significant that both the Host and the Parson, representatives of the two realities respectively, hold sway at their given times with the assent of the whole company. Of the Host's offer to guide and entertain them, Chaucer, the pilgrim, reports:

> This thyng was graunted, and oure othes swore
> With ful glad herte, and preyden hym also
> That he wolde vouche sauf for to do so,
> And that he wolde been oure governour,
> And of oure tales juge and reportour,
> And sette a soper at a certeyn pris,
> And we wol reuled been at his devys
> In heigh and lough; and thus by oon assent
> We been acorded to his juggement.
> ("G.P.", ll. 810-818)

The Parson, his moment finally come, also makes an offer to guide. However, he refuses to entertain the Pilgrims with a fable, offering instead "Moralitee and vertuous mateere." Again it is reported:

> Upon this word we han assented soone,
> For, as it seemed, it was for to doone,
> To enden in som vertuous sentence,
> And for to yeve hym space and audience;
> And bade oure Hoost he sholde hym seye
> That alle we to telle his tale hym preye.
> ("Parson's P.", ll. 61-66)

What is demonstrated in this juxtaposition is not only that man's priorities may (and must) be altered, but also that the Host's secular authority, correctly regarded, prefigures as well as parodies the spiritual authority of the Parson. In God's ordained reality all things have their place and are made to serve the highest truth. Man, however, must assent to God's supreme authority in order to validate his part in the scheme,

"... sith that alle the goode werkes that men doon whil they been in deedly synne been outrely dede as for to have the lyf perdurable." ("Parson's T.", 1. 247)

To the extent that the Host is unaware of, or consciously opposed to, his part in the larger scheme of things, he is a Lord of Misrule, holding a false, temporal authority over the Pilgrims. His philosophy of life, if a philosophy can be attributed to him at all, is, as Barbara Page observes, a crude version of carpe diem. "The Host has little capacity for high seriousness or for consistent thought. Insofar as he thinks at all his mind runs through scraps of ill-digested 'loore' pasted onto a rough common sense."[1] His preoccupation with the temporal, the here and now, is emphasized by his concern with time and mirth. In his rôle as governor of a pilgrimage, therefore, the Host, though not depraved or malicious, misguides those in his charge.

It is the lowly Parson who, with his references to the universal order of creation, points out the element of misrule in the Host's government:

> ... For it is soothe that God, and resoun, and sensualitee, and the body of man been so ordeyned that everich of thise foure thynges sholde have lordshipe over that oother;/ as thus: God sholde have lordshipe over resoun, and resoun over sensualitee, and sensualitee over the body of man./ But soothly, whan man synneth, al this ordre or ordinaunce is turned up-so-doun.
> ("Parson's T.", 11. 260-262)

The Host is guilty on all counts. He does not recognize the supreme

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[1] Barbara Page, "Concerning the Host," ChauR, 4(1970) 10.

authority of God and refuses to exercise the reason he possesses to gain an awareness of it. Hence he gives authority to the body and employs the senses to minister to it the pleasures and comforts of the world.

Such order, then, as the Host consciously attempts to impose on the Pilgrimage is of a purely secular nature and does not enjoy Divine sanction. It should not be surprising, therefore, that following the Knight's tale, the Miller interrupts the Host's invitation to the Monk to continue, or that the Miller forthwith becomes embroiled in an argument with the Reeve, who later reacts to the Miller's tale with an abusive tale of his own. It is only a semblance of order which is maintained by the Host who is never in complete control of the "game" he has initiated.

The Host's concept of "game" hints at an orderly sequence of tales. This sequence, however, will be maintained only so long as the company maintains a spirit of jest and play, an artificial attitude which breaks down repeatedly, threatening to expose the shabby reality just beneath the surface of the Pilgrimage. Helen Storm Corsa has observed that "... neither the Host nor Chance is to rule the pilgrims; neither will determine the sequence of tales...." In her view:

> ... the Host becomes an umpire, a keeper of peace and good temper, his energies spent more or less successfully in maintaining 'myrthe' and harmony, and in reestablishing the threatened balance and equilibrium of the whole pilgrimage.[1]

What Ms. Corsa fails to recognize, however, is that the success of the Pilgrimage as pilgrimage depends largely on the extent to which reality

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[1]Helen Storm Corsa, Chaucer: Poet of Mirth and Morality (Notre Dame (Ind): Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1964), p. 91.

is allowed to surface and upset the balance and equilibrium of ritual. Paradoxically, then, the success of the Pilgrimage depends to some extent on the Host's inability to govern, a fact, which when recognized by the Pilgrims, results in a general submission to higher authority.

The futility of pilgrimage under the artificial authority of the Host's rules is perhaps best demonstrated in the pilgrim Chaucer's participation in the Host's "game". Having allowed himself to be introduced as a man of "elvyssh" countenance, the narrator launches his mischievous tale of "Sir Thopas." The quixotic hero of this piece is obviously intended to ridicule not only the tales of mirth in which the Host delights, but also the unreality of the Host's entire scheme for mirth and comfort on this voyage. The tale of "Sir Thopas" is a tale about a ridiculous figure engaged in an empty and monotonous ritual -- a game. The Host interrupts the tale, not because of any suspicion concerning the teller's intent, but rather, because he objects to Chaucer's "drasty rymyng." The intent here is not merely to ridicule the Host's lack of real literary taste, as Lumiansky has argued,[1] but to demonstrate to such as will hear the limitations of a man who attends only to the surface of things.

Corsa's analysis of the Host's rôle is accurate only insofar as it reflects Harry Bailly's own superficial view of the Pilgrimage:

> A game, although entered into in a spirit of mirth and play, once begun becomes a matter of serious concern. When the concern becomes too 'ernest' and the order of the game is

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[1]R.M. Lumiansky, Of Sondry Folk: The Dramatic Principle in the Canterbury Tales (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1955), p. 91.

> threatened, there must be someone to right things, someone to separate the contestants, someone to judge the winner. This is, of course the rôle of the Host consciously assumed at the beginning.[1]

But a game can never fully satisfy the participants in it, for they are real and their needs are real. It is in answering to the real needs of the Pilgrims that the Host fails. His unphilosophical nature makes him incapable of any real judgement when things become serious.

"The Tale of Melibee," which the pilgrim Chaucer goes on to relate to the company, is a straightforward tale of edification. As a tale of human interaction, it teaches patience and wisdom in the gaining and giving of advice, virtues sorely lacking in this group of pilgrims. As allegory it holds before the Pilgrims the divine reality which lies beneath the surface of life, thus pointing the way to the Parson's sermon. The Parson will deal explicitly with the world, the flesh, and the devil later. For the Host, "The Tale of Melibee" should serve as an example of God's "ordre or ordinaunce" upon which proper authority must be based. Here, then, is another tale which the Host could turn to good purpose. But the Host reacts in a purely subjective manner, blaming his own wife for lack of patience and revealing his failure to govern even in his own house:

> Al be it that I dar nat hire withstonde,
> For she is byg in armes, by my feith:
> That shal he fynde that hire mysdooth or seith, --
> But lat us passe awey fro this mateere.
> ("P. of Monk's T.", ll. 1920-1923)

In the face of this frank admission to an unhappy marriage, we recall the piecemeal account of the Host's domestic life which has led to this con-

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[1]Corsa, p. 93.

fession: the curious silence before the verbose and aggressive Wife of Bath; the hints of an impatient and unruly wife following the Clerk's tale of Griselda; and the sympathy extended to the foolish January in the Epilogue to the Merchant's tale of May and January. This, in effect, constitutes the Host's Tale, involuntarily brought forth, and reduces Harry Bailly, for the moment at least, to the level of the others on the Pilgrimage. Page has observed:

> In both the Host and the Wife of Bath, the characteristic posture is of bravado; each appears as sexually sophisticated and successful in the world of affairs. Yet each, for a moment, is transformed into an object of pity who appeals for sympathy rather than laughter.[1]

This is certainly true of the Host at the end of Chaucer's "Tale of Melibee." It is an exposure even more telling than Chaucer's first one.

Despite all Harry Bailly's limitations and shortcomings, he serves, as already suggested, in various ways to further the purposes of Providence. He is, as is everything that exists in a universe conceived to have been created by an omnipotent deity, whether he wills it or not, consciously or unconsciously, subservient to Heaven. In view of this, his presence on this voyage is no accident. The Host does lead the Pilgrims to Canterbury, preparing them for what they must hear in the Parson's tale.

As a natural part of God's creation, the Host possesses certain natural virtues. His "vitaille" is of the best, and his wine is not watered down. We are told that he is "wys and wel ytaught" in worldy matters, a fact which hints at a possible shrewdness, but there is nothing to suggest deception or dishonesty in his characterization. The Host himself points

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[1]Page, 8.

to the Cook's "Jakke of Dovere ... twies hoot and twies coold" as an example of the dishonesty in his own profession, a dishonesty which he despises. As a worldly but relatively simple and honest man, Harry Bailly provides the Pilgrims with a natural "ensample" not unlike the Parson's "noble ensample" on a higher level.

Against the Host's natural commitment to life, the other travellers may be judged or evaluated. The Knight, for instance, may be seen to have deviated from a simple, natural life-style by adopting an elaborately ritualized manner of existence, complete with a sterile and formalized code of love and justice based on nothing more than man's presumption and pride. The Man of Law is revealed as carrying with him the intellectual baggage of his profession, all of which blurs his contact with reality as surely as the Knight's chivalric code blurs his. To such as the Man of Law who have lost sight of not only the spiritual realities but also the realities of life, the Host speaks mockingly:

> "Sire Man of Lawe," quod he, "so have ye blis,
> Telle us a tale anon, as forward is.
> Ye been submytted, thurgh youre free assent,
> To stonden in this cas at my juggement.
> Acquiteth yow now of youre biheste;
> Thanne have ye do youre devoir atte leeste."
> ("I. to Man of Law's T.", ll. 33-38)

Others, like the Friar, the Summoner, and the Pardoner appear hopelessly twisted and vicious alongside their congenial Host. They are shown to have perverted their rôles both as natural human beings and as servants of ecclesiastical authority.

As a representative of the secular view, the Host is filled with suspicion and mistrust when confronted by many who profess to serve God and the Church. The Friar, the Summoner, and the Pardoner make the purposes of the "Church" all too clear. Harry Bailly's presence on this

pilgrimage is openly secular, but he experiences competition from the likes of the Pardoner along the way. The Pardoner, possibly suspecting a ploy for financial profit on the part of the Host, determines to go Harry Bailly one better by fingering him as the greatest sinner of the lot and calling upon him to begin the receiving of pardons by kissing his relics:

> I rede that oure Hoost heere shal bigynne,
> For he is moost envoluped in synne.
> Com forth, sire Hoost, and offre first anon,
> And thou shalt kisse the relikes everychon,
> ye for a grote! Unbokele anon thy purs.
> ("Pardoner's T.", ll. 941-945)

With such competition, it is not surprising that the Host regards ecclesiastics with derision.

Furthermore, the Clergy, from the Host's point of view, are a dismal lot who, when not robbing one of money, rob one of joy in life. To the Clerk of Oxenford he says:

> For Goddes sake, as beth of bettre cheere!
> It is no tyme for to studien heere.
> Telle us som myrie tale, by youre fey!
> For what man that is entred in a pley,
> He nedes moot unto the pleye assente.
> But precheth nat, as freres doon in Lente,
> To make us for oure olde synnes wepe,
> Ne that thy tale make us nat to slepe.
> ("Clerk's P.", ll. 7-14)

The Monk's effort at tragedy evokes another reaction characteristic of the natural man who regards life with more optimism than theology or philosophy wish to allow:

> Swich talkyng is nat worth a boterflye,
> For therinne is ther no desport ne game.
> ("P. of Nun's Priest's T.", ll. 2790-91)

An even more damning accusation is made by the Host in his initial remarks to the Monk. Here he ironically suggests that the Clergy enjoy

with impunity what they deny to the ordinary man:

> Religioun hath take up al the corn
> Of tredyng, and we borel men been shrympes.
> Of fieble trees ther comen wrecched ympes.
> This maketh that oure heires been so sklendre
> And feble that they may nat wel engendre.
> This maketh that oure wyves wole assaye
> Religious folk, for ye mowe bettre paye
> Of Venus paiementz than mowe we.
> ("Monk's P.", ll. 1954-1961)

With the abuses of the Clergy everywhere in evidence, it is not surprising that a secular man like Harry Bailly should attack the Parson as well. After dismissing what he regards as the Man of Law's long and dreary story of Constance with, "This was a thrifty tale for the nones!," the Host passes on to the Parson with similar sarcasm:

> "Sir Parisshe Prest," quod he, "for Goddes bones,
> Tell us a tale, as was thi forward yore.
> I se wel that ye lerned men in lore
> Can moche good, by Goddes dignitee."
> ("E. to Man of Law's T.", ll. 1166-69)

The Parson's response to the Host's swearing immediately evokes a tirade on "Lollores" and sermons.

What Chaucer avoids by relating certain characters in the company to the Host in the manner illustrated is the conventional procession of the Seven Deadly Sins. He portrays, instead, varying degrees of commitment and consent to the sins of the flesh. In the midst of this, the Host stands forth as relatively uncommitted, and possessing the potential to move in either direction. It has been said that the Host is on the Pilgrimage but not of it. To this we might add that if he is not a part of it in the best sense, neither is he a part of it in the worst.

Harry Bailly's most significant rôle within the Providential scheme of the Pilgrimage is that of judge. "Juggement" is explicitly mentioned four times in Chaucer's description of the Host's scheme for the journey

to Canterbury. We soon find that not only the tales but also their tellers are being held up to the judgement of the Host. Harry Bailly thus immediately steps beyond the limits even he has assigned to himself.

In most of the instances where he appears, the Host relates directly with the individual addressed, piercing his facade and striking him in his most vulnerable area. This does not always require many words. In the case of the Pardoner, "bel amy" suffices. With the Prioress, Harry Bailly is all courteousness and "gentillesse," revealing in an instant his comprehension of her pretensions:

> My lady Prioress, by youre leve,
> So that I wiste I sholde yow nat greve,
> I wolde demen that ye tellen sholde
> A tale next, if so that ye wolde.
> Now wol ye vouche sauf, my lady deere?
> ("P. of Prioress's T.", ll. 446-450)

The Pardoner, the Prioress, the Man of Law, the Squire, the Franklin, all seem to be fully comprehended by the Host. The question arises: Is this all merely "bartender psychology," or is the Host part of a greater scheme of judgement?

The lengthy though incomplete series of tales over which Harry Bailly presides really constitutes a series of confessions. By closely relating each tale with its teller, Chaucer has each Pilgrim submit himself as well as his tale to judgement by the Host. Since the Host will ultimately turn the Pilgrims over to the Parson and judgement by a higher authority, his rôle as governor and judge becomes even more significant. Whatever he may be in the secular sense, the Host is seen here as an operating agent of a greater plan and a higher reality. Whatever man may think himself to be in secular terms, the allegory seems to suggest, his destiny lies beyond the temporal world. This life is but a portion of man's total existence, a portion in which he must prove his "worthynesse."

Every "pilgrim" submits to the government either of this world or the next, but ultimately secular authority must give place to divine authority. In the right and proper sense, secular authority is subservient to divine authority and functions as a part of the total scheme of existence, but even if it is not rightly and properly conceived by those who exercise it, it is by divine decree subservient nevertheless.

When the Host is viewed in the broader context of Chaucer's allegory, we perceive him as fulfilling a dual function throughout. His rôle as secular judge prefigures the divinely sanctioned judgement of the Parson, whose judgement in turn prefigures the Last Judgement. Harry Bailly's own strict terms both parody and prefigure the higher significance of the Pilgrimage:

> Whoso be rebel to my juggement
> Shal paye for al that by the way is spent.
> ("G.P.", ll. 833-834)

In the light of the Host's later submission to the Parson's judgement, this pronouncement, as does the Host's function generally, takes on a new and even more central position in Chaucer's allegory.

Rodney Delasanta, defending "The Parson's Tale" in its architectonic function of knitting up the matter of the Pilgrimage, points to the Host's rôle as a "decoying strategy of realism" by means of which Christian teaching and the Last Judgement are parodied. Delasanta even goes so far as to see in the Host's "soper at oure aller cost" a parody of the eschatological supper, a staple of biblical imagery

> typologically foreshadowed in the paschal feast of the Old Testament, symbolically fulfilled in the eucharistic meal of the New, and utilized time and again by Jesus in revealing to his disciples the mysterious manner of salvation, the invitation, the preparation, and the comportment of

> the invited determining their destiny inside the Judgement of God.[1]

With an urgency more befitting an ecclesiastical personage than an innkeeper, the Host hurries the Pilgrims along with observations on the progress of the journey and the passage of time. Near the beginning of the journey he observes:

> "Lordynges, the tyme wasteth nyght and day,
> And steleth from us, what pryvely slepynge,
> And what thurgh necligence in oure wakynge,
> As dooth the streem that turneth nevere agayn,
> Descendynge fro the montaigne into playn.
> Wel kan Senec and many a philosophre
> Biwaillen tyme moore than gold in cofre;
> For 'los of catel may recovered be,
> But los of tyme shendeth us," quod he.
> "It wol nat come agayn, withouten drede,
> Namoore than wole Malkynes maydenhede,
> Whan she hath lost it in hir wantownesse.
> Lat us nat mowlen thus in ydelnesse."
> ("Man of Law's T.", ll. 16-32)

As one devoted to the pleasures of this world, the Host is obviously lamenting the shortness of time, but only half seriously. He seems more intent upon mocking the seriousness of those who ride "To Caunterbury with ful devout corage" as well as turning the lament to his own purpose. But the opposite, in fact, takes place. The Host's parody lends overtones of spiritual significance to the proceedings, placing the "game" of tales within the broader spiritual context of life where time has another meaning. When the end of the journey nears and the Host finally invites the Parson to speak his "meditacioun," the twofold meaning of the Host's words on time becomes clearer, perhaps even to him:

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[1] Rodney Delasanta, "The Theme of Judgement in The Canterbury Tales," MLQ, 31(1970), 300.

"Telleth," quod he, "youre meditacioun.
But hasteth yow, the sonne wole adoun;
Beth fructuous, and that in litel space,
And to do wel God sende yow his grace!
Sey what yow list, and we wol gladly heere."
("Parson's P.", ll. 69-73)

There is time for one more tale, the Host seems to be saying, but since it is going to be a sermon, let it be brief. On the other hand, the obvious implication of these words is that a sermon is urgently required, for the time is short and the journey almost done.

"The Parson's Tale," when it comes, is unequivocal in its statement that all must ultimately answer to the authority of God. In preparation for this final judgement, man must confess his unworthiness and begin a life of penitence:

> ... For, as Seint Jerome seith, "At every tyme that me remembreth of the day of doom I quake;/ for whan I ete or drynke, or what so that I do, evere semeth me that the trompe sowneth in myn ere;/ 'Riseth up, ye that been dede, and cometh to the juggement.'"/ O goode God, muchel oghte a man to drede swich a juggement, "ther as we shullen been alle," as Seint Poul seith, "biforn the seete of oure Lorde Jhesu Crist;"/ whereas he shal make a general congregacioun, whereas no man may been absent./
> ("Parson's T.", ll. 158-163)

Through the agency of the Host, all the Canterbury Pilgrims, their sins revealed, are brought, if not to this "drede juggement," then at least to an awareness of it as it applies to each of them individually.

> And the Host too by the end of journey [sic] comes to intuit that earnest has indeed emerged from these games and that his function as ironic judge over humanity in microcosm enjoins him to fulfill his sentence somewhat more seriously.[1]

[1]Delasanta, 302.

Thus he surrenders his authority to the Parson:

> Lordynges everichon,
> Now lakketh us no tales mo than oon.
> Fulfilled is my sentence and my decree;
> I trowe that we han herd of ech degree;
> Almoost fulfild is al myn ordinaunce.
> ("Parson's P.", ll. 15-19)

The Host's former levity has all but vanished in the seriousness of this moment at road's end.

> The japes of his earlier demeanor give way to the recognition of the need for knitting up well 'a greet mateere' and the Parson, whom he had earlier dismissed as a 'Jankin' and Lollard and whose preaching he succeeded in aborting, now becomes the delegate of his 'sentence'[1]

Ultimately, then, the significance of the Host's rôle in the allegory of The Canterbury Tales moves beyond his function as the secular opposite of the Parson and the spiritual aspect of human existence. In that capacity he helps to establish and define the conflict between good and evil in Christian terms. But the Host functions in the resolution of this conflict as well, prefiguring in his rôle as governor and judge the higher authority and judgement to which he and the entire company of Pilgrims must finally submit.

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[1]Delasanta, 302.

CHAPTER IV: FUNCTION AND UNITY

Since the beginning and the ending of The Canterbury Tales are the only parts of Chaucer's over-all scheme which are complete, and since the Host at the beginning and the Parson at the end are made explicit spokesmen for man's secular interests and man's spiritual aspirations respectively, we must view the Host-Parson relationship as the central and organizing tension in the Tales. By means of this tension Chaucer dramatizes the flesh-spirit polarity established in the opening lines of the "General Prologue," where the procreative surge of springtime is seen as giving man impetus in two directions. When seen in this context, the Host-Parson relationship assumes added potential, for it is then not merely an opposition. We begin to see it instead as a tension between divergent interests in, or varying interpretations of, the same fact, the universal fact of God's creation which moves the Host and the Parson toward a point in place and time where both rôles will be validated in their own contexts.

Ralph Baldwin would seem to fall a little short of grasping Chaucer's intent when he quickly dismisses the Host from any meaningful participation in the "...trope central to the fiction." He further states:

> Only one of the group that leaves the Tabard can be said to have a purely worldly reason for making the journey. The Host's emphatic lack of 'ful devout corage,' the typical impetus of the Pilgrim, not only points up his characterization but may account for that secularity of tone which has permitted the Canterbury pilgrimage to be interpreted in a purely literal way.[1]

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[1] Ralph Baldwin, "The Unity of the Canterbury Tales," Anglistica, 5(1955), 48.

What Baldwin fails to recognize here is the essential and necessary rôle the Host does play in the central 'trope' of the fiction. To understand Chaucer's intention in introducing the "secularity of tone" with the Host is to understand the nature and intention of the Tales as a whole. Not only do the secularity and geniality of the Host give a realistic and dramatic impulse to what might otherwise be just a series of tales, but they also characterize for us one pole in the tension between man's secular impulses and his spiritual aspirations.

The tales told by the Pilgrims reflect the presence of the profane and sacred tendencies in the microcosmic society which includes the Parson and is governed by the Host. Paul G. Ruggiers, in his analysis of Chaucer's art, sees the tales told on the road to Canterbury as being divided into two broad categories, the comic and the romantic: "The special opposition of religio-romantic and comic attitudes to each other is the goal upon which much of Chaucer's intelligence finally bears," he observes. "The delicate balance between man as God-created, yet self-asserting, as God-seeking yet self-loving provides him with his essential materials."[1] It is just this tension which is drawn by the Host and the Parson, a tension which helps structure the otherwise largely disparate tales.

Regarded from the point of view of literary genre, The Canterbury Tales, in its broad structure, is clearly romantic comedy, the conflict between the flesh and the spirit resolving itself as it does in the fulfillment or promised fulfillment of man's desire for eternal life. Al-

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[1] Paul G. Ruggiers, The Art of The Canterbury Tales, (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1967), p. 43.

though the Pilgrimage in its details is characterized primarily by quarrels and disharmony-- a disharmony only just kept in check by the Host, the movement in general is toward harmony and integration. Several of the tales told along the way, most notably the Knight's tale and the Pilgrim Chaucer's tale of Melibee, look forward to the resolving of disagreement and strife into order and harmony.

Northrop Frye has observed that comedy is of two species:

> There are two ways of developing the form of comedy: one is to throw the main emphasis on the blocking characters; the other is to throw it forward on the scenes of discovery and reconciliation. One is the general tendency of comic irony, satire, realism, and studies of manners; the other is the tendency of Shakespearean and other types of romantic comedy.[1]

Chaucer combines both forms of comedy in The Canterbury Tales, the individual characters and their tales, indeed, the entire game presided over by the Host providing the objects for comic irony and the obstacles to comic resolution throughout the 'middle' of the work; and the Parson's sermon, prefigured in the content of some tales as well as in some aspects of the Host's rôle, providing the possibility of reconciliation with God at the end.

It is in the "General Prologue" and in the tales themselves that Chaucer's irony and oft lauded realism prevail, but to quote Frye once again:

> The action of comedy in moving from one social center to another is not unlike the action of a lawsuit, in which plaintiff and defendant construct different versions of the same situation, one

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[1]Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism, College ed. (1957; rpt. New York: Antheneum, 1967), pp. 166-167.

> finally being judged as real and the other illusory.[1]

Chaucer maintains the theme of judgement throughout The Canterbury Tales, somewhat ironically perhaps in that Harry Bailly plays the part of judge himself, until finally the Host's explicitly secular position along with the judgement based on his view of reality are submitted to higher judgement and found deficient. The Parson clearly emerges as the moral norm in the resolution of the larger structure of The Canterbury Tales, and by these new standards the Host's assessment of life is judged false and illusory.

Despite Chaucer's relatively clear delineation of the poles between which the dramatic movement of The Canterbury Tales takes place, the positions of the various Pilgrims who participate in the drama are not so readily defineable. One may be tempted to see in the procession of Pilgrims strung out along the road to Canterbury an image projecting varying degrees of commitment or non-commitment to the true purpose of the Pilgrimage, but Chaucer explicitly rejects any such simplistic arrangement of his material from the very outset, denying his alter ego the "wit" to introduce the Pilgrims even by social degree:

> ... I preye yow to foryeve it me,
> Al have I nat set folk in hir degree
> Heere in this tale, as they sholde stonde.
> My wit is short, ye may wel understonde.
> ("G.P.", 11. 742-746)

This deliberate failure to rank the Pilgrims socially, and by implication morally, is a clever stroke, for in this way Chaucer maintains a degree of mystery in the ritual of the Pilgrimage. There exist in every Pilgrim

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[1] Frye, p. 166.

enough subtle shadings of character to make definitive moral judgement difficult. Even the Pardoner, who drops his mask and reveals himself to be an outright villain, delivers a fervent sermon too, leading one to wonder just how villainous or sincere this man can be. Not only does Chaucer portray character more plausibly in this way, but also he suspends our inclination to moralize too quickly, at least until we reach the Parson's sermon. Instead, Chaucer looks forward to the mystery of Divine Judgement when each individual will stand totally exposed.

We may be permitted to make broad classifications such as Ruggiers makes. The extremes among the Pilgrims may emerge quite readily, but it is wise to adopt the objective distance advocated by Ruggiers, who introduces his analysis of Chaucer's technique in presenting character by observing that in *The Canterbury Tales* attention

> ... is focused upon *centers of interest* suspended between two poles: a fictive representation of mankind in all its variety governed simultaneously by the spirit of penance and of festivity; and at the close, a non-fictive examination of the vices to be avoided and the virtues to be pursued as the means of attaining the heavenly city.[1]

Viewed in this way, the broad outlines of Chaucer's structure remain clearly visible and the individual portraits and revelations of character are kept in proper perspective.

The task of morally judging Chaucer's Pilgrims is even less likely to be undertaken when the Pilgrims are viewed in relation to the inherent mystery in the salvation promised in the Parson's sermon. In "The Parson's Tale," though the terms by which man must ultimately be judged

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[1]Ruggiers, xiii. (Italics are mine)

remain firm, we are introduced to another element: the mystery of Divine mercy which tempers judgement and provides us with a new view of each Pilgrim, even the perverted and malicious ones; a view of each as being worthy of infinite love and consideration in the sight of God. All the facts of their sordid existence recede into the background, at least in the first part of the Parson's sermon, and we are aware only of the penitential attitude instilled by the Parson's sincere admonishment. Every Pilgrim, even with what we know of him or deplore in his actions, is invested with new spiritual potential. As God became man, uniting with the corrupt flesh descended from Adam and placing Himself at the mercy of men to suffer death, so man now possesses the privilege of ascending beyond the flesh and uniting himself with the pure Spirit of God if he will place himself in His mercy to gain everlasting life. This is the key to the realization of man's potential and the revelation toward which the Canterbury Pilgrimage is mysteriously moved.

The resolution toward which The Canterbury Tales moves is properly apocalyptic, the brief history of the Pilgrims culminating finally in the narrator's own moment of epiphany in the "Retractions." The movement of the Pilgrimage, then, is not merely lateral as the Host would move it, but finally achieves vertical thrust under the spiritual guidance of the Parson. He directs the Pilgrims toward their proper destination, "Jerusalem celestial", where the physical and the metaphysical become one in Christ, the real Host and Judge of mankind and Lord of Creation. This resolution has been prefigured from the beginning, we realize in retrospect. The imagery of the opening lines in the "General Prologue" already indicates a merging of Heaven and Earth, of the Divine and the Natural. In the body of the work itself, the Host's un-

conscious rôle of divinely appointed guide causes his part in the drama to merge gradually with the part played by the Parson whose proper leadership he prefigures. The Parson's rôle is made to merge with the rôle of the Good Shepherd by the imagery Chaucer employs in introducing the Parson in the "General Prologue," and in his tale he becomes the explicit spokesman for Heaven.

The Parson's sermon abounds with apocalyptic images and symbols. The most notable of these is the Tree of Life. The Tree of Penance, which the Parson elaborates, shows the way to the Cross which is itself another symbol. The Cross is a unifying symbol in that it looks back to the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in Eden by which man fell from innocence, and forward to the Tree of Life by which man is restored to Paradise. By His death upon the Cross, Christ redeemed man, transforming the Tree of Death into the Tree of Life and making possible man's reunion with God. The Parson advises:

> ... God seith in the Apocalipse, "Remembreth yow fro whennes that ye been falle"; for biforn that tyme that ye synned, ye were the children of God, and lymes of the regne of God;/ but for youre synne ye been woxen thral, and foul, and members of the feend, hate of aungels, sclaundre of hooly chirche, and foode of the false serpent; perpetueel matere of the fir of helle;/
> ("Parson's T.", ll. 136-137)

hence the necessity for penance which becomes "the tree of lyf to hem that it receyven."

When considered in the context of the apocalyptic ending of The Canterbury Tales, Harry Bailly's function as unifying device acquires added significance. The Host, being the egoist he is, represents, on the one hand, the demonic counterpart to the purpose of the Pilgrimage.

He governs and unites a worldly society which, as described by Northrop Frye, is "... a society held together by a kind of molecular tension of egos, a loyalty to the group or the leader which diminishes the individual, or, at best, contrasts his pleasure with his duty or honor."[1] On the other hand, however, the Host and the company of Pilgrims also constitute the concrete universal of the Christian metaphor and a figura of a properly harmonious, heavenly society. The Host, as has been observed already, functions in large part to both parody and prefigure the proper joy and unifying Hostship made explicit by the Parson, who likewise fulfills a prefigurative rôle. Harry Bailly's rôle, therefore, must not be discredited or overlooked, for he is as essential in the construction of Chaucer's metaphor as he is in the construction of the drama. Indeed, the Hôst's dramatic and metaphoric functions merge in such a complex way as to become all but inextricable when viewed from the circumference of Chaucer's world view in The Canterbury Tales.

Preposterous as it may seem, Harry Bailly emerges as a kind of Christ-figure when seen in the perspective provided by the apocalyptic conclusion of the Tales, a rôle much easier to comprehend of the Parson. At the very least, the Host like Moses, leads his people to the borders of the Promised Land. This paradoxical portrayal of the Host reflects the paradoxical nature of the company he leads. Such a view of human existence is made possible by the unifying principle at the foundation of Chaucer's conception of a properly ordered world, a Divinely created and controlled world in which everything that exists is an extension of the Divine Reality. In such a world everything is given a validity that extends far beyond historical reality or metaphorical suggestion.

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[1] Frye, p. 147.

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