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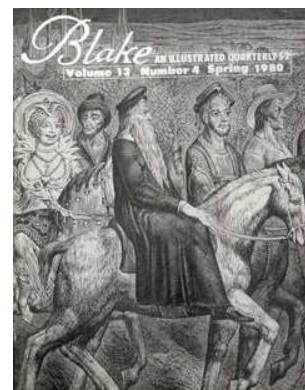
# BLAKE

A R T I C L E

## The Artistic and Interpretive Context of Blake's "Canterbury Pilgrims"

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# THE ARTISTIC AND INTERPRETIVE CONTEXT OF BLAKE'S "CANTERBURY PILGRIMS"

BETSY BOWDEN



In the past decade, three critics have discussed the painting itself of "Chaucers Canterbury Pilgrims," along with Blake's commentary on it in the *Descriptive Catalogue* to his 1809 Exhibition.<sup>1</sup> But Blake, though timeless as ever, was working not in a vacuum but in a historical context of commentary on and illustrations to Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*.

A look at the artistic tradition Blake could have known will show that he fit the Canterbury pilgrims into his own cosmology with only slight changes from earlier artists' representations. Although he tells in words the Blakean meanings of many of the pilgrims, he portrays only two of them as unmistakable symbols or types: he renders the Wife of Bath as Whore of Babylon; and he shows the Parson as the Good Old Man, like the one dying in his illustrations to Robert Blair's *Grave*. Otherwise, to picture the pilgrims as "physiognomies or lineaments of universal human life,"<sup>2</sup> Blake principally does what artists before him had done: he goes straight to Chaucer's poem.

Because Chaucer's General Prologue pictures the pilgrims so minutely, artist-to-artist influences are hard to pin down. The Merchant sports a tall hat and forked beard in the fifteenth-century Ellesmere manuscript, in the woodcut of Thynne's 1532 edition, in the engraving of Urry's 1721 edition, in Blake's painting. Blake must have seen one of these prototypes? No--"A Marchant was ther with a forked berd / . . . And on his hed a Flaundrish

bever hat."<sup>3</sup> And neither can Blake's portrait of Chaucer indicate a source, despite its similarity to earlier portraits. Chaucer's image had been passed on as if through a four-century Xerox machine, thanks mostly to a life portrait in the margin of his pupil Thomas Hoccleve's *De Regimine Principum*, now Harl. MS 4866. Blake could have examined this manuscript itself in the British Museum at Montagu House, or worked from one of the scores of paintings and engravings that evolved from it.

Clearly, however, Blake goes beyond any of his sources. He portrays the pilgrims all together on horseback, as no one before him had; and he positions them to show particular relationships in his own Blakean cosmos. Even a glance at his picture (illus. 1) suggests Blake's interest in binary symmetry and the pairing of characters.<sup>4</sup> For example, the Parson and Pardoner stand in defiant contrast, face to face, like Good and Evil, with the cruciform Host midway between. The Wife of Bath and Prioress also form a symmetrical pair, though not such a direct contrast, as they ride midway in back and front halves of the procession. Blake also pairs the Knight and Squire who head the procession and the Poet and Philosopher who end it. The picture is balanced artistically, both in structure and in details. And the *Descriptive Catalogue* suggests how such visual symmetry often indicates Blake's spiritual interpretation of each pilgrim. But, how often? Can a boundary be drawn between Blake's visual unity as an artist and his symbolic unity as a poet-philosopher?



To interpret Blake's interpretation, I will look at precisely how he has changed each pilgrim away from artistic tradition and, in several cases, away from the details of Chaucer's poem. Blake's *Descriptive Catalogue* commentary, too, differs in small but significant ways from previous Chaucer criticism. His does seem to share one problem with the other, though: a continual use of vague, abstract terms like "grand" and "first rate" and "powerful," non-descriptive non-individualized words applied to general classes of mankind by the man who said, "To Generalize is to be an Idiot." Blake, I will suggest, is purposely teasing the reader with the inaccuracy and ambiguity inherent in such abstract language, and thus forcing his audience to look instead at the picture.

To analyze the picture, to generalize will sometimes be necessary. I will discuss in general earlier literary interpretations of *Canterbury Tales*, and in general the group portraits of Canterbury pilgrims which Blake could have seen in London or Felpham before 1809. Then I will discuss in particular each figure in Blake's procession and its relationship to Blake's text, to Chaucer's poem, to earlier artists' portrayals of that character, and to other figures in the procession. (I will mention only in passing the picture's background--the rising sun, Gothic arches, and so on--so as to keep bounds on this article.<sup>5</sup>) And I will suggest, also, how Blake uses the binary symmetry of the picture to convey a spiritual meaning like that he illuminates elsewhere. In "Canterbury Pilgrims," the types of mankind do not stand in static one-to-one binary relationships. Within the frozen time and space of this picture, a constant cell-like bisection and re-bisection of types goes on, such that a given figure may be the spectre of one character, the complementary completing half of another, and the contrary of a third.

No literary critic before Blake had seen the pilgrims in complicated binary relationships. But what at first seems very Blakean about his *Descriptive Catalogue* commentary--that the pilgrims represent eternal types that exist in all ages--was a standard interpretation in the eighteenth century. The earliest and most eloquent expression came from John Dryden. Blake says:

Of Chaucer's characters, as described in his *Canterbury Tales*, some of the names or titles are altered by time, but the characters themselves for ever remain unaltered, and consequently they are the physiognomies or lineaments of universal human life, beyond which Nature never steps. Names alter, things never alter. I have known multitudes of those who would have been monks in the age of monkery, who in this deistical age are deists. As Newton numbered the stars, and as Linneus numbered the plants, so Chaucer numbered the classes of men. (E 523-24)

A century earlier, in the preface to his *Fable Ancient and Modern* (London: J. Tonson, 1700), Dryden says,

Chaucer follow'd Nature every where; but was never so bold to go beyond her. . . . he has taken into the Compass of his *Canterbury Tales* the various Manners and Humours (as we now call them) of the whole *English Nation*, in his Age. Not a single Character has escap'd him. All his Pilgrims are severally distinguish'd from each other; and not only in their Inclinations, but in their very Physiognomies and Persons. . . . Some of his Persons are Vicious, and some Vertuous; some are unlearn'd, or (as Chaucer calls them) Lewd, and some are Learn'd. Even the Ribaldry of the Low Characters is different: The *Reeve*, the *Miller*, and the *Cook*, are several Men, and distinguish'd from each other, as much as the mincing Lady Prioress, and the broad-speaking gap-tooth'd Wife of *Bathe*. . . . We have our Fore-fathers and Great Grand-dames all before us, as they were in Chaucer's Days; their general Characters are still remaining in Mankind, and even in *England*, though they are call'd by other Names than those of *Monks*, and *Fryars*, and *Chanons*, and *Lady Abbesses*, and *Nuns*: For Mankind is ever the same, and nothing lost out of Nature, though every thing is alter'd.

Dryden's essay would have suggested to Blake not only the constancy of the types of mankind but also several binary contrasts among Chaucer's pilgrims: vice and virtue, lewd and learned, Wife of Bath and Prioress.

Other eighteenth-century commentators also saw the *Canterbury* pilgrims as enduring types of mankind. As a sampling, George Ogle in 1739 paraphrases Dryden at great length, suggesting

an Examination of the various Tempers and Manners of Mankind, as We find them more expressly delineated in the ampler Designs of the *Tales* these Persons are made to relate. . . . I shall venture . . . to rank our Chaucer with . . . the best Drawers of Characters.<sup>6</sup>

Sir John Hawkins in 1776 says that Chaucer

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"Chaucers *Canterbury Pilgrims*," engraved by William Blake in 1810. Reproduced by permission of the Huntington Library, San Marino, Ca. Actual size, 37-1/2" x 12".

"Pilgrimage to *Canterbury*," drawn by Thomas Stothard and engraved by Delattre, frontispiece to vol. 14 of John Bell's edition of *British Poets* (Edinburgh, 1782-83). Reproduced by permission of Robert N. Essick. Actual size, 2-5/8" x 4-1/4".

"Sampson yhad experience," drawn by Thomas Stothard and engraved by William Blake, frontispiece to vol. 13 of John Bell's edition of *British Poets* (Edinburgh, 1782-83). Reproduced by permission of Robert N. Essick. Actual size, 2-1/2" x 4".

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CHAUCERS CANTERBURY PILGRIMS

*Painted in France by William Blake & by him Engraved*



He gon to Canterbury God mote you speke.





London Printed for John Bell British Library May 29<sup>th</sup> 1783.



BELL'S EDITION  
The POETS of GREAT BRITAIN  
COMPLETE FROM  
CHAUCER to CHURCHILL.



CHAUCER VOL. XII.  
Samplon yhad experience  
That women were ful trew ifound

IN ALPHABETIC ORDER.

Richard del

London Printed for John Bell British Library Strand May 24<sup>th</sup> 1783.

Blake sculp.



has feigned an assemblage of persons of different ranks, the most various and artful that can be imagined, and with an amazing propriety has made each of them the type of a peculiar character.<sup>7</sup>

In 1789, Philip Neve says of the General Prologue,

Nor is it wonderful that a mind, possessing much native humour, and enriched by long experience and extensive information, should exhibit characters such as are there to be found, with striking resemblance to nature and living manners.<sup>8</sup>

Blake further declares that "Visions of these eternal principles or characters of human life appear to poets, in all ages" (E 527). Neither Dryden nor these minor writers specifically suggests, as does Blake, that "nature and living manners" extend backward as well as forward in time. In the eighteenth century, only Blake compares Chaucer's characters to Antique Statues and Grecian gods and the Cherubim of Phoenicia (E 527). But Blake's twist is not dramatically original. Chaucer himself, like many medieval writers, thought in terms of typology--of classical parallels to Christian ideas, of Old Testament parallels to New Testament scenes, of symbolic similarities that transcend historical rationality. For instance, Chaucer calls the Franklin "Epicures owen sone" (v. 338), and adds "Seint Julian he was in his contree" (v. 342). To associations generated by mention of the supposedly luxury-loving pagan philosopher and of the patron saint of hospitality, Blake adds that the Franklin is "the genius of eating and drinking, the Bacchus" (E 527).

In his *Descriptive Catalogue* pages, then, Blake combines Dryden's precedent with the common medieval literary technique of regarding one character or incident as the type of another. To these ideas Blake adds his own style of moralizing, particularly familiar from *All Religions are One* and from plate 11 of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*: "Thus men forgot that All deities reside in the human breast" (E 37). Blake vehemently believes that the pilgrims represent "eternal attributes, or divine names, which . . . ought to be the servants, and not the masters of man, or of society" (E 527). These moralizing passages tell what Blake and Chaucer did not do. Another negative tangent takes up the last third of the commentary (E 529-31), as Blake venomously sets out to "shew the stupidity of this class of men" (E 529)--of Cromeck and Stothard, mostly, who stole his idea for the painting. Blake attacks them to again exclaim what he and Chaucer did not do.

Blake's anger at Robert Cromeck and Thomas Stothard seems justified, historically. Blake was the first artist to conceive of painting the pilgrims all together on horseback, and Blake showed Cromeck the sketch of his idea, and Stothard's painting of the pilgrimage was first to be finished.<sup>9</sup> That painting cannot be considered a prototype for Blake's, either chronologically or emotionally. But an earlier picture of Stothard's, from the days of the

two men's friendship, does have its place in the tradition of Chaucerian illustration that Blake could have known.

In 1782-83, Edinburgh printer John Bell put out 109 pocket-sized volumes of *British Poets*, including fourteen volumes of Chaucer. An engraved portrait of Chaucer prefaces the first volume; each of the first thirteen volumes features as frontispiece a scene from a Tale or a poem; the fourteenth frontispiece shows the "Pilgrimage to Canterbury," in which the Wife of Bath, Monk, Friar, and Squire ride straight toward the observer (illus. 2). Thomas Stothard designed all these frontispieces, and the young Blake engraved the thirteenth one, "Sampson yhad experience" (illus. 3).<sup>10</sup>

In Stothard's "Pilgrimage to Canterbury" (illus. 2), which Blake must have seen, the Wife flirts blatantly with all three men. Stothard toned down his conception of the Wife during the next quarter century, for in his painting she flirts only with the two clergymen, and keeps her hands to herself. Blake, in contrast, ignores Chaucer's hints at such a grouping.<sup>11</sup> His Wife/Whore of Bath/Babylon lifts her chalice, laughs, and spreads her legs toward the observer of the picture, with a sideways glance toward the back of the Parson, the one man she cannot seduce.

Stothard's conceptions of these four characters --a particular detail being the Wife's pointed hat-- seem derived from the engravings in Urry's 1721 edition of Chaucer. Before discussing that key edition in the artistic tradition, let me describe the other instances of group pictures of Canterbury pilgrims: in Royal MS 18 D 2, in Caxton's fifteenth-century Chaucer edition, and in a drawing by J. H. Mortimer. There is no certainty, as there is for Bell's and Urry's editions, that Blake saw these three works. The first two are not important because the pilgrims in them are not individualized; but the Mortimer drawing, if Blake saw it, might well have influenced his conception.

In a fifteenth-century manuscript of John Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes*, a sequel to his master Chaucer's work wherein Lydgate tells a tale on the return trip from Canterbury, a half-page illustration shows Lydgate and five other pilgrims.<sup>12</sup> The riders talk and gesture; one smacks his horse as it reaches for a mouthful of grass. The walls, cathedral, and hills of Canterbury fill the background.

Could Blake have examined this Lydgate manuscript, had he wished to do research outside his imagination before painting the pilgrimage? Yes. As Royal MS 18 D 2, it came to the British Museum

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"Departure of the Canterbury Pilgrimes," drawn by J. H. Mortimer and engraved by J. Hogg, on p. 22 of *Mortimer's Works*, by Thomas Palser (London, 1816). Reproduced by permission of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Actual size, 7-3/4" x 10-1/4".

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*Drawn by Martin.*  
 DEPARTURE of the CANTERBURY PILGRIMES • *Percey's Canterbury Tale* • *Chaucer*  
*London Published by J. B. Smith, 17, Strand, near St. Dunstons Church*



in 1757, when George II handed over to the new institution the entire royal library. Stothard and Blake could have examined this and other manuscripts --including Harl. MS 4866, with Chaucer's oft-copied life portrait, which had come as part of the original bequests by which the British Museum was founded. Authorized by Act of Parliament in 1753, the British Museum opened to the public on 15 January 1759, at Montagu House, Bloomsbury. Until 1808, for most people, visiting the Museum meant applying several weeks in advance, returning to pick up a ticket for a certain time, and again returning to be ushered through in a group. Then the policy was changed to allow immediate admission to "any person of decent appearance." But all along, artists had preferential treatment. In 1808, for example, the general public could tour the collections only four days a week; Fridays were reserved for artists.<sup>13</sup>

A later picture of the pilgrims shows them around a table, not on horseback. William Caxton produced the first printed edition of *Canterbury Tales*. His second edition, in 1483(?), includes twenty-four illustrations: twenty-three pilgrims, each beside his Tale, plus a group portrayal as frontispiece. "Several [woodcuts] are made to do duty twice over, a common custom with early printers. Thus the 'poor parson' and the 'doctor of physick,' the 'sumnour' and the 'Franklin,' are represented by the same cuts; while the large illustration depicting the pilgrims sitting at supper at a round table does duty in some later publications for the Assembly of the Gods."<sup>14</sup> Caxton's edition, never numerous, was rare by Blake's time. Only one full copy survives today, at St. John's College, Oxford.<sup>15</sup>

Another group picture is Mortimer's. Some time before his death in 1779, for a projected edition of the *Tales*,<sup>16</sup> J. H. Mortimer made eight drawings not of the pilgrims but of characters in the tales--January and May, the Three Gamblers and Time, and so on. The ninth in the series might well have inspired Blake, for its subject is "Departure of the Canterbury Pilgrimes" (illus. 4). On 12 February 1787, J. R. Smith published the drawings, engraved by J. K. Sherwin, E. Williams, William Sharp, and Jacob Hogg.<sup>17</sup> They were reproduced in some but not all copies of Tyrwhitt's 1798 edition of Chaucer, and then in *Mortimer's Works: A Collection of Fifty Historical Designs* (London: Thos. Palser, 1816).<sup>18</sup>

Although Mortimer's "Departure" portrays only seven pilgrims in the courtyard of the inn, rather than all of them on the road, his conception shares several attributes with Blake's. Mortimer's Prioress and Wife of Bath are focal points in the picture: at the left, the Prioress has just been helped to mount by a fat Squire; toward the right, the Wife has just mounted with the aid of the Friar or Monk. This Wife resembles a witch, an old hag, like the one in the Tale she tells--her nose and chin are pointed like her hat, as she smiles into sunken cheeks. Between the two women, also, are two mounted pilgrims--the full-bearded Miller, smiling and fingering his bagpipe, and the Merchant with forked beard. To the right of the Wife rides the Knight, dressed with an Elizabethan elaborateness that belies Chaucer's description of him, in a

wide-brimmed plumed hat, ruff, cape, medallion, puffed sleeves, codpiece, rosette at his knee, gloves, boots, spurs.

Blake perhaps saw Mortimer's overdressed Knight, his pairing of the two principal women, his grouping of Wife with Miller and Merchant--perhaps, but not certainly. Only one group picture preceding Blake's was definitely available to him, that in Urry's 1721 edition of Chaucer. To portray Chaucer among the "Heads of the Poets" for Hayley's library at Felpham, Blake "could have used the plate Vertue engraved for Urry's edition of Chaucer's works (1721) which appears in the sale catalogue of Hayley's library. . . . Blake must have consulted Urry's edition of Chaucer, for the two subsidiary figures of the Merchant and Wife of Bath are faithful copies of the engraved headpieces on pages 66 and 76."<sup>19</sup>

In this folio edition of Urry's, a half-page engraving (illus. 5) before the General Prologue shows some of the pilgrims setting out from the Tabard Inn while others mount up in the courtyard. The houses of Southwark dominate the picture, each pilgrim standing perhaps half an inch high. But because a half-page medallion of each pilgrim precedes his Tale, most figures in the departure scene can be identified as exact miniatures. The Miller leads the procession, as in Stothard's later painting--"A baggepipe wel coude he blowe and sounne, / And therewithall he brought us out of tounne" (vv. 567-68). Then follow the Squire, the robed Knight, the Squire's Yeoman, the Parson, the Monk, the rail-thin Clerk, and probably the Nun's Priest. Side by side then, set apart from the others, ride the Prioress and the Wife of Bath. Behind them, inexplicably but unmistakably, gallops Sir Thopas, his lance half-lowered to charge. The rest of the figures are too small to identify, even compared with the medallions.

That charmingly absurd insertion of Sir Thopas among the pilgrims can symbolize the total irresponsibility with which John Urry put together this 1721 edition. He includes all spurious works ever attributed to Chaucer, and alters for the worse all real ones. Urry apparently had the editing task thrust upon him and went at it without enthusiasm, for he himself apologizes for the badness of the text: "Thou wilt, may be, not thank me for what I have done, and complain of me for having left so much undone. . . . if thou art not yet an Editor, I beg truce of thee till thou art one, before thou censurest my Endeavours." This apology is quoted by Timothy Thomas, who helped finish the edition after Urry's sudden death in 1714/15. Thomas specifies one major task left undone: Urry had set out to regularize Chaucer's grammar and meter after an idiosyncratic scheme of his own, and had intended to bracket his frequent interpolations, but never did. Thomas says in this same Preface that Urry was "perswaded that Chaucer made [his verses] exact Metre, and therefore he proposed in this Edition to restore him (to use his own Expression) to his feet again."

"The strange licence, in which Mr. Urry appears to have indulged himself . . . has made the text of Chaucer in his Edition by far the worst that was



ever published," says Thomas Tyrwhitt, Chaucer's next editor (I, xiii). Modern scholars agree that Urry's text is "quite the worst ever issued" (Spurgeon, I, cxx). But at least three threads tie it to Blake: he certainly used the book, at least in Hayley's library; Blake the artist might have appreciated the illustrator's exact delineation and character-by-character discrimination, though not his romanticized drawing style; and Blake [the, as it were, starving artist] might have appreciated this edition's easy availability and low price in second-hand bookstalls, especially after Tyrwhitt's 1775 edition superseded its text.

We have no records from second-hand bookstalls, of course. But Urry's edition is still plentiful today, even in American libraries. Back in 1721, the publishers issued such a numerous first edition that twelve years later Urry's executor was complaining that he still had copies "upon hand." Urry's estate, and therefore the proceeds of the edition, had been divided three ways, among that executor, and a bookseller, and the college of Christ Church, Oxford. "The College authorities had adopted a simple and effective method of disposing of theirs, which was to oblige all scholars upon entrance to buy a copy. The picture of the young fox-hunting squires of Christ Church being forced willy-nilly to carry off their Chaucer folios is a delightful one; and it may perhaps account for the number of copies of Urry's Chaucer to be found in the old country houses of England" (Spurgeon, I, cxx-cxxi).

Did Blake own or use a copy of Urry's elaborately illustrated edition, while he painted the "Canterbury Pilgrims"? Kiralis rejects the possibility, largely on the grounds that Blake would not have owned a corrupt text (p. 169). But Blake was not a well-to-do, modern, conscientious literary scholar. And Blake's use of Urry's text would help explain one of the *Descriptive Catalogue*'s minor mysteries: where does Blake find his Chaucer quotations? They match up with no known edition of Chaucer. Blake mentions "Thynne in his Glossary" (E 523), but Thynne's 1532 edition has no glossary. A later editor, Speght, in his preface credits Thynne's son Francis with proposing that this 1602 edition include a glossary, and for helping prepare it. The information about the Tabard, which Blake credits to Thynne, is printed in Speght's glossary with no mention of father or son Thynne. The same information is quoted and credited to Speght by both Urry's glossary and by Tyrwhitt, the responsible editor of 1775 (I, 76, n. 6). Bell's edition reprints Tyrwhitt's.<sup>20</sup>

Kiralis shows in detail (pp. 169-74) that Blake's quotations in the *Descriptive Catalogue* come from no known edition of Chaucer. As a sampling, compare a few phrases from the Squire's description:

Thynne, 1532: syt on an horse . . . portray .  
 . . lowly and servysable  
 Stowe, 1561: sit on an horse . . . portraie .  
 . . lowlie and servisable  
 Speght, 1602: sitte on a horse . . . portray .  
 lowly, and servisable

Urry, 1721: sit an hors . . . portraie . . .  
 . . lowly, and servisable  
 Tyrwhitt, 1775: sitte on hors . . . pourtraie  
 . . . lowly, and servisable  
 Blake, 1809: sit a horse . . . pourtray . . .  
 and meek, and serviceable

Meek?? Clearly Blake feels no responsibility to reproduce exactly whichever text of Chaucer he is quoting from (as, in his Job illustrations, he quotes from no known edition of the Bible). Kiralis settles on Tyrwhitt's as Blake's most likely text. He disagrees with Nurmi and Bentley that Blake probably owned Speght.<sup>21</sup> I would propose in turn that Urry's corrupt but illustrated and presumably inexpensive text is just as likely. Blake then even has a motive for reworking the text: knowing he has before him the sense but not the exact words of Chaucer, he feels free to delineate that sense more clearly.

Judging from these phrases about the Squire chosen at random, though, Blake seems not to care about Chaucer's exact sense so much as about making the words tell his own Blakean meaning. Why substitute "and meek" for "lowly"? So the reader will not confuse social rank with personality, presumably. But why "meek"? Why not "humble" or another term that fits the meter? "Meek" suggests a lamb. A lamb suggests the Christ of Revelation. The Squire is the son of the Knight. So . . . meek as a lamb, Lamb of God. Father, Son, and Holy Ghost--the first three characters in Blake's procession. The Knight's sullen black dog, present neither in poem nor tradition, as the repressive Holy Spirit of institutionalized Christianity. The front half of the procession as repressed Heaven; the back half as the Hell of energy, both creative and destructive. Thus the last three characters must be the Unholy Trinity of unrepressed energy--Chaucer as Poet, Clerk as Philosopher . . . and that shifty-eyed Reeve? Rich, by mismanaging the estate of his adolescent lord? A Haldeman, rather than a Hitler, of destructive energy? How can he fit into the symbolism? Intuitive leaps to interpretation have their limits, unfortunately. Despite what Blake would have preferred, let me amass some cold hard facts as ballast, before jumping to conclusions.

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Departure scene, from p. 1 of John Urry's edition of the *Works* of G. Chaucer (London, 1721). Reproduced by permission of the Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley. Actual size, 6-1/4" x 3".

Equestrian portrait of Chaucer, from p. 147 of John Urry's edition of the *Works* of G. Chaucer (London, 1721). Reproduced by permission of the Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley. Actual size, 4" x 5-1/2".

The Pardoner, from the Ellesmere manuscript (late fifteenth century). Reproduced by permission of the Huntington Library, San Marino, Ca. Actual size, 52mm x 65mm.

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The bulk of the artistic tradition that Blake could have known can be traced within the textual history of Chaucer's works. In all but one instance, each artist who undertook individual portraits of the pilgrims had illustrated the *Canterbury Tales* by picturing each pilgrim next to either his verses in the General Prologue or his Tale. That one exception is a series of pilgrim portraits by James Jefferys, who was born in 1751, at age 23 won a Royal Academy gold medal for one of his drawings styled after Mortimer and Barry, and died of a cold at age 33. He executed "A series of 24 sepia and wash drawings [ea. 14-1/2" x 11"] illustrating Chaucer's Pilgrims" (Spurgeon, I, 458-59). Since Jefferys did eleven public exhibitions in London, 1773-83, Blake might perhaps have examined these portraits a quarter century before he began his own.<sup>22</sup>

Besides these unpublished and now-lost drawings, and besides Caxton's edition whose woodcuts were re-used to illustrate Thynne's edition, three printed editions and the Ellesmere manuscript make up the whole rest of the artistic tradition that Blake might have known as he painted "Canterbury Pilgrims." Thus, a brief orientation in "Chauceriana."

Of the sixty-six manuscripts of *Canterbury Tales* now extant, only two picture the pilgrims: Cambridge MS Gg 4 27,<sup>23</sup> and the Ellesmere. Then, William Caxton in about 1477 first put Chaucer into print. His second edition (1483?) adds works other than the *Tales*, and the first set of woodblock prints. His same woodblocks, noticeably worn, are re-used for the next major edition of Chaucer, William Thynne's in 1532. In 1561, John Stowe's new edition is illustrated with a different set of woodblocks. Thomas Spaght in 1598 produced the last edition of Chaucer to be set in black-letter type, its only illustrations a half-page engraving of a knight and a full-page frontispiece, the "first engraved portrait of Chaucer,"<sup>24</sup> framed by his arms and "Progenie." Over a century passed; the next edition was Urry's in 1721, and finally Tyrwhitt's in 1775, without illustrations except in those fancy few that included plates by Mortimer.

Spurgeon gives a brief chatty account (I, cxv-cxxiii) and Hammond a factual survey (pp. 114-30 and 202-11) of these pre-Victorian editions. Each major editor's work was rearranged, re-edited, reprinted, plagiarized--but such details are not vital to the history of illustration. The following four items, all but the last now available in facsimile, constitute nearly the whole artistic tradition of *Canterbury pilgrims* before Blake: Ellesmere manuscript (late fifteenth century), Thynne's edition (1532), Stowe's edition (1561), and Urry's edition (1721).

In London, the two sixteenth-century editions were presumably obtainable, had Blake wished to examine their illustrations. He certainly examined Urry's. And, only a few years before Blake began his painting, the Ellesmere itself had arrived in London. The Duke of Bridgewater owned the manuscript then. In 1802, supervised by Rev. Henry John Todd, the work traveled from Ashridge House to Bridgewater House, London, for rebinding. It stayed in London

with the Duke and his heirs until the Huntington Library bought it in 1917.<sup>25</sup> The equestrian portrait of Chaucer was first reproduced in 1809,<sup>26</sup> the pilgrims years later. But it seems safe to assume that the Duke would permit artists, besides the one in 1809, to examine his famous manuscript, and that Blake might have done so.

The Ellesmere positions each pilgrim next to his Tale--all twenty-three tale-telling pilgrims, including Chaucer. Thynne's 1532 edition uses fifteen woodcuts to portray twenty of those pilgrims, excluding Chaucer. Stowe in 1561 follows a different plan, placing each pilgrim beside his description in the General Prologue. Thus he eliminates Chaucer and the Canon's Yeoman (who tell tales but do not appear in the General Prologue) and adds Squire's Yeoman, Haberdasher, and Plowman (who tell no tales) for a total of twenty-two pilgrims from nineteen woodblocks.

The artist for Urry's edition--perhaps George Vertue, whose name is on Chaucer's portrait--has engraved twenty-six half-page medallions of the pilgrims, including Chaucer (illus. 6). Urry prints all twenty-three Tales, plus the spurious Plowman's Tale; and he assigns the spurious "Coke's Tale of Gamelyn" to the Squire's Yeoman.<sup>27</sup> The twenty-sixth medallion shows a knight in armor, jousting, somewhat resembling the one engraved illustration to Spaght's 1598 edition. "N.B. The followinig [sic] Cut should have been placed before the Rhime of Sir *Thopas*," explains its caption, from its final resting-place on the Contents page.

Urry's artist tends to portray each pilgrim in realistic detail, usually in accord with Chaucer's text. But all, even the slovenly Cook, are consistently pleasant-faced, prettified, inoffensive. The two sixteenth-century editions, using more awkward woodblocks, discriminate less among characters. For instance, Stowe makes a woodcut do double duty as Doctor of Physick and Parson. Such haphazard indistinguishability would presumably have displeased Blake, who in picture and commentary and cosmology makes the two types quite different.

Blake, however, would probably have appreciated all but a few of the Ellesmere portraits, which were executed by three or four different artists. Each of the more spirited Ellesmere pilgrims exactly illustrates the vivid details in Chaucer's description of him, and thereby conveys the character traits Chaucer saw. For instance, all five portrayed Pardoners do have long, stringy, blond hair, as Chaucer describes. But only the Ellesmere Pardoner (illus. 7) wears also a "vernicle . . . sewed upon his cappe" (v. 686), so that its face eerily echoes

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The Squire, from fo. 29 of William Thynne's edition of the *Works* of G. Chaucer (London, 1532). Reproduced by permission of Pattee Library, Pennsylvania State University. Actual size, 2-3/4" x 3-3/4".

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his. And only the Ellesmere Pardoner and Blake's carry the "crois of laton ful of stones" (v. 701), which Blake uses as artistic focal point and symbol of religious repression, poised over the horse's arched straining neck in the center of the front-rank cluster of clergy. But, there is no proof that Blake ever examined the Ellesmere. And I see no details in the "Canterbury Pilgrims" that must have come from the Ellesmere or from anyplace else but the combination of Chaucer's poem and Urry's illustrations and Blake's imagination.

Nevertheless, a comparison of each of Blake's pilgrims with all four prototypes will help define what of each characterization is idiosyncratic to Blake and what of it has occurred to other artists interpreting the same Chaucerian passage. To start, the Squire leads the procession on the rearing steed with which Blake and the Urry and Ellesmere artists all interpret "Wel coude he sitte on hors" (v. 94). All three artists also reproduce the curly locks and wide-sleeved flowered tunic that Chaucer describes. Blake adds the round baby face, the fuzz of a mustache, and the plumed hat.

The two woodcut Squires wear plumes also, however, and wear plenty of gewgaws besides. They are, in a word, fops. Thynne's Squire particularly seems a caricature, resembling perhaps Tweedledum, or the Duchess in drag (illus. 8). Thus, when Blake in the *Descriptive Catalogue* snaps, "Was this a fop?" (E 529), he is attacking not only Cromek's prospectus to Stothard's rival painting,<sup>28</sup> but also an interpretation long established in picture and in word.<sup>29</sup> To deny the Squire's foppishness, Blake quotes the same lines that could just as validly have proven that the Squire is a mindless, subservient clotheshorse (he can sing, dance, joust, and he "carf before his fader at the table," v. 100). And Blake conveniently ignores other lines, such as Chaucer's satiric jabs at the Squire as a "hoote" lover. He replaces Chaucer's picturable details with verbal abstractions: "greater perfection," "first rate," "true grandeur," "unaffected simplicity" (E 524). A reader familiar with Chaucerian interpretation of the time would wonder at Blake's abstracted one-sided praise for Chaucer's ironically portrayed complex character, and would thereby look to the picture to see what Blake means.

There, he would notice symmetrical pairs--Knight and Squire at the front of the procession, Chaucer and Clerk at the rear--and the facial similarity of Squire and Clerk. But the Clerk's inappropriately chubby face is framed in long straight hair and square hat, while the Squire's curly locks are topped by awkwardly perched plumes that echo the shapes of birds, particularly of those two nuzzling beak-to-beak on the Tabard archway. And just above them, above the Gothic spires and the Wife's elaborate headpiece, swoops a bird that Erdman would see as "an ironic negation of its own hopeful potential, not simply an evil force"--*Illuminated Blake* (Anchor Doubleday, 1974), pp. 19-20. This bird also visually evokes the dove of the Holy Spirit in the standard medieval representation of Christ's baptism, as in Blake's rendering of that scene in his later *Paradise Regained* series: down through opening clouds plunges just such a bird, along with rays of

light (like those above the Squire's head here) and God's booming voice of approval. God is pleased with his beloved son, who has now ceased to follow his own inspiration and has submitted to his father's authority. I would suggest that the Biblical scene evoked by Blake's Squire, as visually linked to background details, would be a spiritually ambivalent one for Blake: a moment of second-hand enlightenment. And Blake offers the reader no easy resolution to this visual ambivalence: in the *Catalogue* he describes the Squire only with abstractions and then with the term "Apollo" (E. 527), the beautiful unconquerable sun-god who is shown being overthrown in Blake's fourth illustration to Milton's "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity" (ca. 1808). Modern mythologists regard Apollo and Christ as two variants of the dying-and-resurrected fertility deity; Blake here interprets Chaucer to suggest a similar connection.<sup>30</sup>

Neither the appearance nor the description of the Squire makes him a negative force, nor a purely positive one. His role as obedient son in a repressive Trinity becomes clearer in comparison to the other figures in the procession--though never so clear as to lack the ambiguity inherent in all but a few of these "eternal principles or characters of human life" (E 527). The discrepancy between visually suggested spiritual ambivalence and abstract verbal praise becomes greater in regard to the Squire's father, the Knight.

Chaucer carefully describes the Knight's appearance and "arraie":

His hors was good, but he ne was nat gaie.  
Of fustian he wered a gipon,  
Alle besmotred with his habergeon

(vv. 74-76)

From the glossary in any edition available to him, Blake could have learned that Chaucer's Knight wore a short doublet of cotton cloth, and a partial coat of mail.<sup>31</sup> No previous illustrator had exactly followed Chaucer either, though. Mortimer's elegantly attired Knight wears no chain mail (illus. 4). The Ellesmere Knight's robe, long droopy shoes, high-piled turban, and rich but practical tack are so similar to those on Urry's Knight that it seems possible that Urry's artist in 1721 worked from the Ellesmere. If either robed Knight wears chain mail, it remains hidden under his gipon. But Blake was not the first to give the Knight armor plating. The two woodcut Knights, as well as the only illustration to Speght's 1598 edition, all go contrary to Chaucer's insistence that "he ne was nat gaie." All three sixteenth-century Knights and their horses wear full armor plating and helmets with flamboyant plumage, as does the unprecedented Sir Thopas in Urry's edition. Rather than Chaucer's Knight in particular, these artists rendered the popular notion of a knight. But compared to Blake's armored figures elsewhere--the Ghost of a Flea, the soldiers around the Whore of Babylon in the Bible series, the Satanic "Fire" in *Gates of Paradise*, the Warrior in *The Grave*, and so on--Blake's Knight with his segmented armor plating seems not merely unparticularized, but also sinister.



Also, like Mortimer's Knight, he wears many layers of clothing: a chain-mail headpiece (which resembles, for instance, the scaley Rintrah of *Europe*, pl. 5), a neckpiece and medallion (with cross and equestrian figure), a uselessly swishing cape, a sash with another medallion, a chain-mail jacket, a gathered shirt, and plate-armor trousers. By outfitting his Knight so elaborately, Blake goes contrary to Chaucer's description, to the one prototype he saw for sure (Urry's), and to his own commentary--"without ostentation," "unaffected simplicity" (E 524). And if Blake is so tricky about clothing, is he straightforward when he praises the Knight as a "true Hero, a good, great, and wise man . . . that species of character which in every age stands as the guardian of man against the oppressor" (E 524)? I would suggest that the Knight, as an eternal type, takes it upon himself to define man's oppressor. And with the rules and trappings of chivalry, he guards against forces that man--if left to his own inspiration--might embrace rather than fear. Like his son, then, the Knight in the picture is spiritually ambivalent, neither clearly good nor clearly evil.

The Host "directs them to the Knight as the person who would be likely to commence their task of each telling a tale" (E 523). He gestures toward the Knight, whose backward-gesturing hand mirrors the Host's--their fingertips at a level, as if strung together. The procession, in fact, features a series of prominent hands. The Knight and Chaucer, at beginning and end, clutch reins to breasts with left hands. But the Poet holds in his right hand a rosary, as tradition dictates for Chaucer portraits, whereas the Knight makes the open-palmed gesture that seems to pull the Host toward him. Next in line, the Prioress' tiny and spidery right hand is writ large as the Pardoner's huge, jewelled, writhing, clutching hand. The Host's armspread bisects the picture. His left hand presents the Knight; his right hand presents the Parson, who will be the last pilgrim to tell a tale. The Parson's hand rests placidly on his knee. The Wife of Bath, with two fingers extended, delicately clutches her chalice of evil. The Cook's rubbery right hand steadies his mug. And the positioning of Chaucer's hands, as I will show, are an iconographic attribute of the poet in a long artistic tradition.

The third pilgrim in line is the Squire's Yeoman. Chaucer lists the implements he carries: a "mighty bowe," sheaf of arrows, arm-guard, sword and buckler, dagger, St. Christopher medal, horn, and green belt to match his coat and hood (vv. 103-16). He tells no tale, so is not pictured in the Ellesmere nor in Thynne's edition. In Urry's edition, the tight-lipped Yeoman carries every weapon specified. In Stowe's 1561 edition he carries only bow and arrows, and wears a strapped cap. Both prototypes are beardless. Blake has added the whiskers, the huge soft hypnotic eyes (he is the only pilgrim who looks directly out of the picture at the observer), and the dark "broune visage" (v. 109). The Squire's Yeoman in Blake's conception seems seductively Satanic. But the face in the procession very similar to his is Chaucer's, the Poet's; again, spiritual ambivalence remains unresolved.

Next in line come the three priests. Only the one Nun's Priest had been portrayed before, in the Ellesmere and in Urry. Both those are young and beardless; whereas Blake portrays a middle-aged, fat, smug priest, a glaring dark-bearded one, and an old tired hooknose with white beard. They appear as three variations on a theme, perhaps hypocrisy.

The Second Nun tells a tale but is not described in the General Prologue, which says only that she is chaplain to the Prioress. One might assume, then, that their habits would be of the same order of nuns. In the Ellesmere, both wear plain black robes and veils, and close-fitting white covers over forehead and neck. Thynne uses the same woodcut for both; Stowe omits the Second Nun. Urry's artist reproduces the Ellesmere habit for both, altering the high collar into a ruff.

But it seems that Blake's two clergywomen would not be caught dead wearing identical outfits on a pilgrimage. Compared to the Prioress, Blake's Second Nun wears white rather than dark sleeves, a clasped rather than a thrown-back veil, a high neckline, no tiara, and dark curls rather than long straight blond hair--whereas nuns did not show their hair at all.

The Second Nun's round face, angle of profile, and wreathlike curls pair her off visually with that "Devil of the first magnitude" (E 526), the Summoner. And the Prioress resembles the Summoner's cohort, the Pardoner. Each wears pointed headgear and long blond hair, and each holds a cross by a writhing spidery right hand. (Notice too the other crosses in the procession: between the breasts of the Wife of Bath, among the Knight's decorations, atop the Prioress' head, on the forehead of the Pardoner's horse, and on his own back and satchel. Chaucer's rosary consists of beads, without the usual cross. And the Host's body forms a cross that bisects the group, for better or for worse.)

Besides visual details, Blake uses similar words in the *Descriptive Catalogue* to link Prioress and Pardoner. The Pardoner is a scourge and a blight (E 526), and also "grand, terrific, rich and honoured in the rank of which he holds the destiny" (E 526). The Prioress is "of the first rank; rich and honoured . . . truly grand and really polite" (E 524), and is equated with the Wife of Bath as "also a scourge and a blight" (E 528). Kiralis explains why the "also" in this sentence must mean "likewise" rather than "in addition," syntactically (pp. 160-61). But I believe that Blake here intended an unresolved syntactic ambivalence, intended that the Urizenic mind reading the passage dichotomize, and try to choose logically, and fail, and thereby look at the picture to find out whether or not the Prioress is visually paired with the Wife as being also, likewise, a scourge and a blight. And indeed, she is.

Kiralis brings outside evidence to bear on his extensive analysis of the Wife and Prioress as Rahab and Tirzah, as grasping and repressed female sexuality.<sup>32</sup> He documents descriptions of female beauty from medieval sources (none certainly available to Blake), Blake's use of nets as symbols of repression elsewhere, and opinions of modern Chaucerians on the



Prioress' behavior. Interpreters of *Canterbury Tales* before Blake had also paired the two women described therein. In the passage quoted above, for example, Dryden speaks of the "mincing Prioress and the broad-speaking gap-tooth'd Wife of *Bathe*"--thus suggesting the contrast between repressed propriety and outgoing promiscuity that *Canterbury Tales* might easily convey to anybody except to the Victorian scholars who were trying to interpret Chaucer without mentioning sex. The visual and verbal details shared by Blake's Prioress and Pardoner further clarify her Tirzah nature. Thus, one should question the moral nature not only of the Prioress but also of other characters who are termed grand, rich, honored, first-rank, polite--characters like the Knight, at whom the Prioress gazes seductively.

The Prioress is paired in one way with the Second Nun, in another way with the Pardoner, and in yet another with the Wife of Bath. The two vain nuns, out of pictorial context, would display rather innocent female folly. But as an observer simultaneously sees what the pair of nuns shares with the Pardoner/Summoner pair, who in Chaucer's poem and Blake's painting represent the corrupted and clearly evil elements of organized religion, the innocence of vanity is called into question. Furthermore, the flirtatious Prioress seeks to pull the Knight into her corrupted society. As Kiralis points out (pp. 158-59), the Knight discreetly returns her gaze. In this he differs from the incorruptible Parson, whose back is solidly turned from the Wife of Bath.

The pairing of Wife and Prioress also occurs in other artists' interpretations. Stowe's 1561 edition simply uses the same nunlike woodcut for both. But Thynne's artist carefully distinguishes the Wife from the Prioress, and they particularly seem two variants on one theme because of their identical spraddle-legged nags. Each sits toward the off (i. e., improper, right-hand) side of her horse. The Prioress faces three-quarters sideways; the Wife turns full face toward the observer. Thynne's Prioress, high-collared and properly veiled, peers toward her horse's front hooves with an expression of severity or nausea. The Wife wears a scarved sunhat "as brode as is a bokeler, or a targe" (v. 473). Her eyes are blurred in the woodcut, but certainly her mouth smiles directly at the observer. Each woman reins with her left hand. The Prioress' right hand points forward, and over her right elbow she loops her heavy-looking "pair of bedes [and] broche of gold" (vv. 159-60). The Wife carries a rosary, and places her right hand somewhat suggestively in her lap. Her pointed shoe peeks from beneath the skirt of her tight-bodiced gown. Thus, Thynne's artist does seem to intend a contrast between smiling outgoing sexuality and stern repressed propriety, in these two different women on identical horses.

The horses of the Ellesmere Wife (illus. 9) and Prioress likewise resemble one another in head and feet positions, color, and tack. The women ride in opposite directions, such that the Prioress faces toward the off (improper) and the Wife toward the near (proper) side of her horse.<sup>33</sup> Each woman, in three-quarter profile, reins with her left hand and raises her right--the Prioress apparently in blessing,

the Wife apparently ready to strike with a stiff quirt her horse's tender neck. But, especially because the two portrayals may be by different artists, I would not emphasize an intentional artistic contrast. More importantly, each Ellesmere portrait exactly depicts details in Chaucer's text. The matronly Wife's costume is precise to the last wimple and coverchief--to the details that Blake manipulates to make the Wife into a bejewelled Whore of Babylon figure. The Ellesmere Prioress has the "fayre forehed . . . a spanne brode" (vv. 154-55) with which Chaucer suggests her vanity; and unlike Blake's Prioress, she keeps her forehead, hair, and bodice properly covered.

The artist of Urry's edition pairs the two women, especially by placing them side by side, set apart, in his engraving of the departure scene (illus. 5). His minatures are so exact that one can be sure it is the Prioress' back, not the Second Nun's, because their horses and riding styles differ.

In her medallion portrait, with a stern, purse-lipped gaze directly at the observer, Urry's Prioress seems neither flirtatious nor particularly pious, but mainly disapproving. Neither does the unsmiling Wife, also gazing directly outward, seem harmlessly flirtatious. She instead seems an embodiment of evil, with her high-peaked witches' hat and her stiff quirt. She ignores her double stirrup to spread her legs and display her ankles. Blake transfers this last detail to his "Canterbury Pilgrims," along with her overall witchlike aura as a symbol of openly dangerous female evil. And in the picture's composition, as Kiralis shows extensively, Blake balances the Wife with the less obvious and thereby possibly more dangerous evil of the Prioress' repressed sexuality.

Behind the Prioress rides the Tapiser, or Tapestry Weaver (E 523 and 528). His particular skill accentuates the link between the two women, for Blake's Rahab and Tirzah are elsewhere forever weaving falsehoods, nets, veils, the Natural Body, the web of Religion, and other unpleasantness. The net over the Prioress' horse also suggests weaving; and of course Chaucer's Wife of Bath earns her living by "cloth making" (v. 449) as well as by outliving rich husbands.

Next follow the Monk and Friar. The two female clergy, from the same order of nuns, wore different clothing; these two principal male clergy, of altogether different organizations, wear identical clothing. Every previous illustrator had discriminated, had given each man the proper robes of his order. Chaucer likewise discriminates. Chaucer's Monk trims his robe with expensive fur, and fastens his hood with an elaborate gold pin (vv. 193-97). The Friar wears a short flared cape of double worsted

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The Wife of Bath, from the Ellesmere manuscript (late fifteenth century). Reproduced by permission of the Huntington Library, San Marino, Ca. Actual size, 52mm x 72mm.

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King Arthur  
 is speken greet Bonour  
 of ffayre  
 his wylly compaignye  
 mede

es mo  
 yeres  
 yeres  
 ffreem  
 dem  
 es boures  
 es  
 es





(vv. 264-65) in which he carries "knives / And pinnes, for to given fayre wives" (vv. 233-34). Blake ignores Chaucer's rich details, to show the two clutching at identical thrown-back hoods. In earnest argument or conversation, the Monk looks stern; the Friar points, apparently asking advice or admonishing him.

In his text, Blake attacks those who consider the Monk and Friar to be burlesque characters (E 525). Presumably he attacks Cromek's prospectus for Stothard's painting. But the prospectus included in the 1808 edition of Blair's *The Grave*, the prospectus Blake likeliest saw, does not use the term "burlesque" or "buffoon." Blake may be interpolating from Cromek's overall understanding of *Canterbury Tales* as "a pleasurable Tour, sanctified by the name of Pilgrimage." The covert ridicule on these eccentric excursions, which Chaucer intended, is very happily preserved in his Face." Further, Cromek was not alone in his interpretation. Spurgeon notes that during the eighteenth century, the quality most frequently attributed to Chaucer was jocosity: "'Joking,' 'jocound,' 'sprightly,' 'gleeful,' 'blithe,' 'merry,' 'gay,' 'frolic,' 'facetious,' are among the adjectives used quite constantly in speaking of Chaucer or his work at this time" (I, xcix). When Blake declares that he must "set certain mistaken critics right in their conception of the humour and fun that occurs on the journey" (E 525), then, the plural "critics" is probably literal, not sarcastic, for he attacks others along with Cromek.

The Monk and Friar, Blake insists, are characters of "a mixed kind" (E 525), not wholly comic. He points out the Monk's knowledge of the tragic, as an example of how Chaucer complicates a reader's interpretive response to the cleric. Blake, while seeming to praise the Monk, also warns not to trust surface appearances: "Though a man of luxury, pride and pleasure, he is a master of art and learning, though affecting to despise it" (E 525). This doubly-masked Monk pretends education matters and further pretends he doesn't care. From Chaucer's description, Blake points out details that specify the Monk's ambiguity --that show him neither good nor evil, neither comic nor tragic, neither lewd nor learned. Again, one must look at the picture to interpret the character, and there see him as the twin of the Friar.

Of the Friar, Blake points out, Chaucer likewise uses two apparently contradictory concepts to complicate a reader's response to the character--he is "a wanton and a merry," but also "full solemn" in his office. Blake describes the Monk and Friar with many of the same adjectives of apparent praise that he uses for others in the front half of the procession: "of the first rank in society, noble, rich . . . a leader of the age . . . young, handsome, and rich . . . a master of art and learning" (E 524-25). But further on, Blake condemns the Friar outright. In praise of the Good Parson, he says, "Search O ye rich and powerful, for these men and obey their counsel . . . But alas! you will not easily distinguish him from the Friar or the Pardoner, they also are 'full solemn men,' and their counsel, you will continue to follow" (E 526).

Whenever Blake seems to be using wealth or social power as positive attributes of a character, certainly, he intends some degree of irony. The "rich and powerful," addressed here, clearly rank far below the Parson on Blake's scale of values. The overtly evil Summoner is "rich and honoured" (E 526); the brutal Miller "exists . . . to get rich and powerful to curb the pride of Man" (E 527).

Previous artists' conceptions of the Monk and Friar do little to either support or deny the moral ambivalence that Chaucer's poem and Blake's picture and commentary suggest. Most earlier portrayals lack energy and appropriateness--one exception being, surprisingly, Stowe's woodcut Friar.

Even Urry's usually accurate artist fails to follow Chaucer's details for the Monk and Friar, who simply wear proper robes of their brotherhoods. An Ellesmere artist who painted small and unspirited pilgrims did the Friar and also the Parson. They merely display their identities--the Friar by his tonsure, the Parson by folding his arms in blessing. A more inspired Ellesmere artist portrayed the Monk, however. With his hood thrown over a wide-brimmed hat, he rides accompanied by his greyhounds (eliminated by Blake) and his bells "gingeling . . . as loude, as doth the chapell belle" (vv. 170-71). Stowe's Monk is a hooded robed figure; Thynne's edition includes no Monk. But a reader with some imagination could see a self-satisfied inertia in the heavy-lidded eyes of Thynne's Friar, and see also what might be a bottle in his hand. And the woodcut in Stowe's edition picks up on that hint. His wanton and merry Friar does carry a bottle, and in addition he smiles a small smile and closes one eye in an unmistakable wink.

What is the significance, in Blake's symbolism, of the identical robes and serious tête-à-tête conversation of Monk and Friar? Their pose is mirrored by the next pair, the Summoner and Pardoner. But we know well why these two gaze lovingly at one another: they indulge in "that abominable sinne, of which abominable sinne no man uneth ought to speke ne write" (says the Parson, II, 369). The Pardoner and Summoner, also, gleefully cheat the poor and helpless. They are evil in anyone's judgment in any age; but still the Christian church provides their livelihoods. Blake's description of them is full: "the Pardoner . . . commands and domineers over the high and low vulgar. This man is sent in every age for a rod and scourge, and for a blight . . . and he is suffered by Providence for wise ends, and has also his great use, and his grand leading destiny. His companion the Sompnour, is also a Devil of the first magnitude, grand, terrific, rich and honoured" (E 526). The same as the Monk and Friar and Prioress and Knight and Squire, then, the satanic Pardoner and Summoner are grand, rich, and honored leaders of the first rank.

Earlier portrayals of the Pardoner and Summoner show effectively that an artist who reproduces the details of Chaucer's text can thereby create a character who suggests the spiritual nature that is elaborated by Blake. The two woodcut editions tend to ignore potentially picturable details; Urry's engraver, likewise, gives the Pardoner long blond



hair but little else from Chaucer's account, so that this prettified Pardoner seems not very sinister. In contrast, the Ellesmere Pardoner's flowing yellow hair combines with his scarlet robe, his vernicle, and his huge bejewelled cross, to portray a character not to be trusted (illus. 7). Two-faced, as it were. The Summoner's acne and "gerlond . . . upon his hede" (v. 668) appear only in the Ellesmere, Urry, and Blake. His pitted face and headwreath do, in all three, create the supernatural aura that Blake would expect of a Devil. In Thynne's edition, the same woodcut portrays indiscriminately Summoner, Merchant, Franklin, and Manciple; in Stowe, the Summoner arbitrarily carries a spear and rides a rearing horse.

The sixteenth-century editions' use of the same woodcut to portray several pilgrims highlights an artistic problem. Neither Urry's careful engraver nor Blake follows the Ellesmere's example of carefully distinguishing each business and professional man by costume and other attributes. Urry's artist does show each bourgeois pilgrim differently. But if you shuffled his engravings like a pack of cards, you would have a lot of trouble sorting out which was the Reeve, which the Man of Law, and so on. Blake tucks the bourgeois pilgrims into the background and, I think, is less interested in an artistic balance of their spiritual attributes.

Nonetheless, Blake's Manciple--looking as if he wishes he had been tucked anywhere but in between these two loathly lovers--does form a pair with the Reeve. Blake places the Manciple at the end of the first half, and emphatically places the Reeve "hinderest of the rout" (E 523). Blake's *Descriptive Catalogue*, like Chaucer's General Prologue, pairs the Manciple and Reeve. The "worldly wisdom" Blake attributes to them both (E 527) is a term from morality plays and John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* ("Mr. Worldly Wiseman"), suggesting the delusive nature of such wisdom. Chaucer makes it clear that Manciple and Reeve both get rich by cheating in business--to either Blake or Chaucer, presumably, less severe an evil than using religion to cheat the helpless poor, but nevertheless a distinctly negative moral trait.

The genial Host, his face not so jolly as Chaucer's poem might suggest,<sup>34</sup> divides both the picture space and the cavalcade itself in half: fifteen pilgrims follow him, fourteen people and three dogs come before. Many details of the Host's appearance echo visual details of other pilgrims. For instance, the two spiky feathers in his cap link him to the Franklin--and both men are variants on the Bacchus type, the genius of hospitality. But spiky upward protrusions, like the feathers, also appear as the Yeoman's bow, the Prioress' tiara, the Pardoner's cap, the Parson's cap that slants exactly opposite the Pardoner's, the Wife's peak, the Miller's pipe, the Gothic spires of Southwark, and most of the horses' ears except for the flaccid ones on the Parson's nag. Or again, the Host's low-cut ruff is echoed in the Knight's sashes and the Wife's bodice. His horse's front legs are placed as awkwardly as those of the Pardoner's horse. Without counting and assigning each visual detail to the company fore and aft, one can see that the Host both bisects and unifies the procession, artistically. He likewise

serves a centering role in Blake's moral schema: he is a sort of presiding spirit over this pilgrimage through life, representing neither good nor evil, neither expression nor repression, neither heaven nor hell but both together, in the unresolvable world of Experience. No earlier artist had portrayed the Host.

Of the earlier portrayals of the Shipman, only the Ellesmere artist uses his "hewe al broun" (v. 396) to give him a sinister appearance, as does Blake. "The Shipman, or Sailor, is a similar genius of Ulyssean art"--similar to Reeve and Manciple--"but with the highest courage superadded" (E 527). Ulysses sailed, of course, but he is also a type of the trickster. Thus the Shipman fits with the two shady money-managers, as variants on one type of "consummate worldly wisdom."

He is placed just behind the Host, paired with the gruesome Summoner just before. The Shipman's furry cap echoes the Summoner's headwreath, and the dark faces of the two are intensified by thick eyebrows and by the Shipman's beard, the Summoner's acne. The Shipman does not look longingly at a lover, though; instead he faces directly backward, to glare at the Plowman. The slanted caps of Parson and Pardoner frame the less prominent angles of Plowman and Shipman, their profiles in direct confrontation. Chaucer's poem offers no hint of hostility between Plowman and Shipman, of earth and sea. Blake, I would suggest, intends a confrontation--framed by the purely good Parson and the evil Pardoner--of two types of courage: the Plowman's simple selfless courage, as opposed to the Shipman's tricky self-serving courage.

All four bourgeoisie who ride behind the Shipman watch him anxiously. The Franklin seems particularly worried that a fight is about to flare. Among these men, Blake terms the Franklin the Bacchus of the company, and the Physician the Esculapius (E 527). Such references to classical tradition clarify Blake's interpretation of Chaucer. Blake has elsewhere invented his own names but he describes the same characters, the same eternal Principles, as does classical or Norse or Christian or any other mythology. Any true poet does the same, says Blake; any poet creates his own imaginative mythology. "Canterbury Pilgrims" shows in artistic detail how Chaucer's mythology parallels Blake's and others'.

To skip the Plowman for a moment, the Physician and Man of Law form a professional pair, one that balances the Monk and Friar. Blake uses the term "master" only to describe these four: the Monk is "master of art and learning" (E 525); the Friar, "master of all the pleasures of the world" (E 525); the Lawyer, "master of the jurisprudence of his age" (E 526); the Physician, "Master and Doctor in his art" (E 527). Chaucer does not directly link the two professionals, but he does use a distinctive technique in their General Prologue descriptions. Chaucer appears to praise each man unreservedly, until a final, neat, balloon-pricking couplet. The Lawyer: "Nowher so besy a man as he ther n'as, / And yet he semed besier than he was" (vv. 323-24). The Doctor: "For gold in phisike is a cordial; / Therefore he loved gold in special" (vv. 445-46). I have suggested that Blake's pairings of bourgeois pilgrims are less striking, visually, than are those



of the characters he portrays full-length. But a Doctor/Lawyer pairing does contribute to the picture's visual and symbolic symmetry. In front of the Host's left hand ride two purely evil clergy and two smooth-surfaced, hypocritical, educated clergy--each pair introverted, Monk and Friar linking eye contact as do Pardoner and Summoner. Behind the Host's right hand ride two purely good pilgrims, eyes straight ahead, and two educated and mildly hypocritical professional men, their faces at three-quarter profile. Blake hopes that they will continue to ride and keep counsel with the Parson and Plowman (E 526).

Blake's *Descriptive Catalogue* becomes less misleading concerning the characters in the second half of the procession. He usually says in words what he means in the picture; and he explains precisely what he is doing with binary symmetry. He describes the Plowman as "Hercules in his supreme eternal state, divested of his spectrous shadow; which is the Miller . . . . Chaucer has divided the ancient character of Hercules between his Miller and his Plowman" (E 527). Here is perhaps Blake's clearest statement of just how he sees different mythologies interrelate: not as one-to-one relabelings of one another's deities, but as once-inspired attempts to divide the continuous spectrum of the human psyche into discrete but interacting bundles of characteristics.

The Plowman and Miller both display physical strength and stamina. But the Miller uses his strength to terrify people, whereas the Plowman uses his to help. He is "simplicity itself, with wisdom and strength for its stamina" (E 527). Kiralis suggests that Blake intends his portrait of the Plowman to be his own idealized self-image (p. 147). The Plowman also evokes the apocalyptic imagery in Revelation, the most poetically inspired book of the Bible, and in Langland's *Piers Plowman* as well. Further, Blake emphatically portrays the Plowman as young, and his brother the Parson as very old. The physical wisdom and strength of the good young man must complement the spiritual wisdom and strength of the good old man, even if such symbolism makes them look more like father and son than brothers.

For these two, Blake creates no conflict between text and picture. For the Parson, he resurrects from his *Grave* illustrations the Counsellor and the Good Old Man. He ignores artistic tradition to do so: in the Ellesmere, Thynne, and particularly Urry, the Parson is young and beardless. Chaucer gives no hint of the Parson's age. In the book of *Fables Ancient and Modern* that I have suggested Blake knew, however, Dryden expands Chaucer's General Prologue paragraph into a seven-page "Character of A Good Parson," in couplets, and there describes the Parson as a "good old Man" (p. 534).

Because the Plowman tells no tale, only Stowe and Urry had portrayed him earlier. The nobility of Blake's rendering suggests that he would be displeased at Stowe's Plowman, a nondescript fellow who seems a misplaced cleric. Urry's Plowman at least looks proud, reining his draft horse with a thick rope.

Urry's Wife of Bath, similarly, is characterized with a hint of the symbolism that Blake renders full-blown. Blake copied Urry's Wife exactly, for Hayley's

library at Felpham. He certainly also saw the openly flirtatious Wife in Bell's 1782-83 edition of *British Poets* (illus. 2). And whether Blake saw them or not, Mortimer's Wife is a sinister witchlike hag (illus. 4), and the Ellesmere Wife (illus. 9) shows how she looks when an artist exactly follows the details of Chaucer's text. Kiralis (pp. 148-53) summarizes the visual details that support an intuitive response to Blake's Wife of Bath as Rahab, the Whore of Babylon.

The Wife's thronelike headpiece is framed by Miller and Merchant. Blake in his text barely mentions the Merchant, who wears a forked beard and tall hat, as specified by Chaucer and shown by earlier artists. He looks somewhat sinister, especially in comparison to the kindlier-looking Physician (who also wears forked beard and tall hat), and to his prototypes, including the one that Blake copied from Urry's edition to accompany the "Head of Chaucer" in Hayley's library. Why does Blake pick the Merchant to escort the Wife, both for the library and here? From Chaucer's poem come tenuous connections: the Merchant is newly wed to a shrewish wife (vv. 9089-9115); he perhaps cheats at business (vv. 276-84); his Tale of *senex amans* and young lust makes sexuality disgusting and, like the Wife's Tale, it suggests female dominance; a character within the Merchant's Tale mentions the Wife of Bath, in one of those fine Chaucerian inconsistencies that keep *Notes and Queries* chugging along for decades. But none of these threads seems quite substantial enough to pair him spiritually with the Whore of Babylon and with Hercules' discarded spectrous shadow, the Miller, as his position in Blake's composition (and in Mortimer's, illus. 4) would suggest.

Concerning the Plowman's spectrous counterpart, Blake's text is again a straightforward explication of his painting, with the negative connotations of abstract words made explicit: "the Miller, a terrible fellow, such as exists in all times and places, for the trial of men, to astonish every neighbourhood with brutal strength and courage, to get rich and powerful to curb the pride of Man" (E 527). Like the Pardoner, he exists "for a trial of men" (E 526); like many of the front-rank pilgrims, and unlike millers in the real world, he is "rich and powerful."

The Ellesmere artist, following Chaucer's details except for the red beard, has painted a hunched, loutish, very sinister-looking Miller. Each of the woodcut Millers rides a mule, plays a clarinet-like pipe, lacks the beard that Chaucer specifies, and looks rather frail to break a door "at a renning with his hede" (v. 553). But at least they are unmistakably millers; a windmill in the background assures the identity, in Stowe. Urry's bagpipe-bearing Miller seems too genteel for the part, as the artist follows his tendency to soften into detailed realism rather than harden into characterization. And Blake's seems not particularly sinister, either, although Blake incorporates the same details as does the Ellesmere--big bones and brawn, thick neck, bagpipe. Brutal strength and courage pose a "trial of men" that terrifies them openly, in contrast to the insidious moral terror, of hellfire and summonses, with which systematized religion scourges and divides the classes of men.



Behind the Miller, and oblivious even to the Wife's charms, rides the most vulgar pilgrim. The Cook falls lolling drunk off his horse, in the prologue to the Manciple's Tale. And Chaucer gives him no professional ethics whatsoever. He serves stale pastry disguised as fresh, and old tough goose disguised in sauces; his customers fall ill because "in thy shop goth many a flie loos" (v. 4350). Blake says only that the Cook is the leader of a class of men (E 527). He mentions leadership also as an attribute of the Knight, Monk, Host, Three Citizens, Prioress, and Wife of Bath. Thus Blake uses leadership, like wealth and power, as an intentionally ambiguous abstract term. Like perfection as an attribute, leadership describes without necessarily praising: "every one of his characters [is] perfect in his kind, every one is an Antique Statue; the image of a class, and not of an imperfect individual" (E 527). (Analogously, Chaucer's narrator describes, for example, the gold-loving Physician as "a veray parfite practisour"--v. 424.)

Blake's Cook looks more animal-like than do any of his prototypes--in particular more than Urry's Cook, who resembles Urry's Knight. The Ellesmere Cook looks slovenly and mean; he incorporates all the details of Chaucer's text, even to the bandage over his running sore. But the Cook's ape-like forehead, pig-like nose and lips, and spidery right hand are all original to Blake's conception. The Cook represents brutality divested even of strength and courage--the spectrous shadow in his turn of the already spectrous Miller.

Blake's intention to pair off eternal Principles is again shown in his description of "two classes of learned sages, the poetical and the philosophical . . . side by side, as if the youthful clerk had put himself under the tuition of the mature poet" (E 528). Visually, then, the two might have presented a third age/youth pair, with Knight/Squire and Parson/Plowman. But, I will suggest that Chaucer here is a noticeably younger man than he is in any prototype available to Blake. Thus Blake sacrifices to his spiritual symbolism the visual impact that a third clearly-defined age/youth pair would produce. And he sacrifices to his binary symmetry the Clerk's carefully-described preference for books over food.

The Clerk's round face and tiny mustache are original to Blake. Chaucer specifies that he was "not right fat . . . But loked holwe" (vv. 290-91). The Ellesmere and Urry Clerks have thin faces; and none of the previous four Clerks wore whiskers. The adolescent visage of Blake's Clerk mirrors the face of the Squire. The two youths, balanced in the picture's composition, also share spiritual attributes, for each student learns from a mature teacher. The Clerk is "servant and scholar of inspiration" (E 528). The Squire is servant and scholar instead of an armored, overdressed Knight who teaches the invioluted rules and strictures of the chivalric code.

The Clerk's teacher, Blake's Poet, is only the third equestrian Chaucer portrayed, perhaps excluding those lost drawings by James Jefferys. Blake could have examined the Ellesmere equestrian Chaucer, at Bridgewater House, and he certainly examined the

portrait in Urry's edition. Urry's book includes three engraved portraits of Chaucer: miniature full-length on a small picture of his monument, full-page half-length as frontispiece, and a half-page equestrian medallion before the Tale of Melibeus, which reproduces the pose and facial features of the frontispiece (illus. 6). The edition includes also a typical description of the poet, pieced together from tradition, hints in Chaucer's poetry, remarks by his contemporaries, portraits genuine and not, and much interpolation: "He was . . . of a middle stature, the latter part of his Life inclinable to be fat and corpulent. . . . His face was fleshy, his features just and regular, his complexion fair, and somewhat pale, his hair of a dusky yellow, short and thin; the hair of his beard in two forked tufts, of a wheat colour; his forehead broad and smooth; his eyes inclining usually to the ground, which is intimated by the Host's words [vv. 13626-27]; his whole face full of liveliness, a calm easy sweetness, and a studious venerable aspect."<sup>35</sup>

Lively, sweet, and venerable certainly describe Vertue's portrait of Chaucer, which Blake probably copied for Hayley's library. The caption to this frontispiece attributes the drawing to Thomas Hoccleve, whose fifteenth-century *De Regimine Principum* has a verse beside which an artist can insert Chaucer's "lyknesse." But Vertue's engraving little resembles the marginal Chaucer in what was by Blake's time Harleian MS 4866 in the British Museum.<sup>36</sup> Without intending deception, Vertue had engraved not a copy from the Hoccleve manuscript but instead one in a long line of pleasant-faced and firm-fleshed Chaucers, all facing three-quarter profile, smiling wisely, and fingering dangling pencecases with their right hands and rosaries with their left. Most were sixteenth- or seventeenth-century paintings on panel, owned by various lords or the two universities.<sup>37</sup> Blake's portrait for Hayley's library is one more in the line. But his equestrian Chaucer in "Canterbury Pilgrims" shows significant alterations.

And neither does Blake's Poet-pilgrim much resemble the earliest manuscript Chaucers, in the Ellesmere and in Harl. MS 4866. Both fifteenth-century portraits show Chaucer as a noticeably old man, with white hair and sharp facial lines and contours. Both have downturned mouths and stern, almost suspicious gazes. From each one's neck button dangles a pencecase; each points to the text with one hand and holds a rosary in the other.

The Ellesmere equestrian Chaucer holds reins and rosary in the same hand; Blake's Poet-pilgrim holds them separately. Other nearly obligatory, iconographic details--the forked beard, downcast eyes, and positioning of hands--remain constant with the tradition. But, Blake's Poet wears a white robe; the others, to a man, wear dark. His headcovering somewhat resembles earlier versions; but the cut of his gown differs from all, with its low-cut neckline, embroidery, and billowing folds. His heretofore ubiquitous pencecase is gone, or hidden (perhaps signifying that poetic inspiration need not be in writing). His is a pensive expression, not one of wisdom like the tradition nor of severity like the earliest manuscripts. He is thinner and younger than any previous Chaucer. His mouth and goatee are



smaller than tradition suggests, and his eyes and forehead larger.

Here Blake is continuing the tradition represented by Vertue's portrait, but with variations that make Chaucer look younger and saintlier than ever before. To some degree his youthful appearance suggests the poetic genius of Los; he also appears Christlike, with eyes and whiskers that particularly resemble those of the Christ in Blake's *Paradise Regained* series (ca. 1816-18). Chaucer's awkward riding posture also draws attention to itself: the Host forms a living cross, and the Pardoner a contorted swastika, while the Poet's body forms a hunched, soon-to-be-saddle-sore counterpoint to the Knight's professionally balanced seat.

Blake pairs the Poet with the Knight because each of these two types teaches a different, contrasting, way of life to his young follower. Also, Chaucer and the Clerk form a complementary pair, a yin/yang pair, encompassing the dual aspects of the eternal Sage, "the poetical and the philosophical" (E 528). Chaucer forms a visual pair with the Pardoner, as well. Each has a similar style of headpiece, a clinging and flowing light-colored robe, a dark horse, and awkward anatomy. The Parson and Knight form a similarly balanced pair of dark-clothed figures on light-colored horses. The Pardoner and Parson confront in direct profile; the Poet faces three-quarters forward and the Knight three-quarters backward.

The symmetry of these major figures in the foreground shows varying degrees of spiritual opposition. The Knight, unlike the Pardoner, can avoid a direct confrontation with the Parson--perhaps because the moral code of chivalry has some eternal validity. And the Poet, to the same degree, can avoid a direct confrontation with the Pardoner's corrupt and worldly evil--perhaps because eternal poetic inspiration can make a heaven of hell and a hell of heaven. The Poet and the Knight, who frame the procession, confront even less directly. Their lines of sight would intersect even with the Host, midway, at 45° outward. Outward, toward the observer of the picture. The observer must make up his own mind which way to go. For the dichotomy of poetic inspiration vs. chivalric structure, there is no such simple choice as between Parson and Pardoner.

The spiritual dichotomy represented by the Knight and the Poet extends to the front and rear halves of the procession. With the two female figures as keystones, many of the figures in the front half--those "above the common rank in life or attendants on those who were so" (E 524)--repress their energies into static systems, into set structures. Visual details suggest introversion and repression: the net over the Prioress' horse, the Knight's multilayered clothing, the eye contact within each pair of principal clergy. Blake's text likewise suggests the static nature of language. Most of his tricky wording, his seeming praise in abstractions called into question by visual portraits, refers to these front-rank characters. When he refers to figures in the rear half of the procession, Blake usually makes words and picture agree. And these lower-rank characters include more whose

energies are extroverted--whether they turn those energies toward constructive ends, like the Poet, or destructive ends, like the spraddle-legged Wife of Bath.

The procession is a universe made up of active and passive halves, of characters who express or who repress energies. Blake does not pass moral judgment on either half. Although his Poet and Parson are outer-directed forces for "good," they share their expressive half of the universe with the most dangerously seductive force for "evil," the Wife of Bath. The repressive half of the procession does not include such extremities of moral blacks and whites. Except for Pardoner/Summoner, the pilgrims who follow set structures appear ambivalent, as moral shades of grey. But as if a newsprint photograph, the picture from a distance shows black-and-white as also grey. Even the sheer moral blackness of Pardoner/Summoner is balanced at a far enough distance by the bright white light of Parson/Plowman. Blake preaches the value of the expressive half. But both halves are always there, in every person's mind, even Blake's. "Man or humanity" *is* the characters, all together.

And no individual ought to pattern himself after any one ideal, after Plowman or Parson or Poet, or Jerusalem or Jesus Christ, without realizing that they are all manifestations of "man or humanity" (E 527). Blake says that all these pilgrims, both good and evil, both expressive and repressive, that all these "visions of the eternal attributes" (E 527) are happening simultaneously inside each man's head. And if a person follows his poetic inspiration, he will be able to recognize and separate out bundles of characteristics from the forces writhing inside his psyche. He can separate and shape them into symbols, into characters, into dieties. These symbols must keep on interacting, then, because the human mind never stops moving, never accepts a static relationship among forces. Systems and religions, Blake would say, do try to pin down psychological forces into set patterns. But a dynamic bundle of characteristics, say a creation like Hamlet, will never offer final answers--just more and more questions as the play goes on.

It is beyond my scope in this paper to try to label the dynamic binary relationship of every figure to every other one in "Canterbury Pilgrims." For an example, though, let me begin with the Plowman, define his binary relationships to other figures, and show how in this particular picture Blake overcomes the limitations of time and space by means of a cell-like growth involving bisection and re-bisection of his symbols, his types.

Blake states clearly that "the Plowman of Chaucer is Hercules in his supreme eternal state, divested of his spectrous shadow; which is the Miller" (E 527). Thus no single pilgrim is Hercules, the type of physical strength and courage; the Plowman and Miller together make up Hercules' eternal type. The Plowman aspect of this pair can simply discard and ignore his spectre of brute strength and animal courage, the Miller--which spectre in turn, but simultaneously within this picture, sloughs off his own animal spectre, the Cook. But the Plowman must confront and keep at bay, ready to



fight, another spectre: the type of sly self-serving courage rather than selfless benevolent courage, the Shipman. To call the Miller the spectre of "bad" strength and the Shipman the spectre of "bad" courage, and to say that the strong-and-courageous-and-good man must rid himself of both spectres, misleadingly sounds like a moral plan that an individual human being might follow, in linear time, whereas the types are eternal. But "the strong-and-courageous-and-good man" is perhaps as close as one can come, in words, to saying what Blake's portrait of the Plowman shows to the eye.

The Plowman also forms half of the complementary pair, Parson and Plowman. Like yin and yang, they together make up a larger whole, which could be termed benevolence (E 527). To emphasize this unification of dualities--dualities that might be labelled spiritual and physical benevolence--Blake portrays the brothers as old and young, encompassing in one pair two terms that in a logical system would be mutually exclusive (A and not-A, old and young). The Plowman and Parson together make up a symbol that keeps the mind in motion as does, say, the symbol Virgin Mother, likewise A and not-A. One's knowledge of pregnancy makes the two halves mutually contradictory, like old and young in Blake's picture. By poetic faith, however, one can understand such a symbol as one *and* as two, at the same time.

This dual symbol of benevolence, Parson and Plowman, cannot remain static either. It balances visually with the Pardoner/Summoner pair, whose evil appearance makes them symbolize some quality that is mutually exclusive of benevolence, and whose position--especially the opposition between Pardoner and Parson--indicates a direct conflict between binary oppositions. What do they represent, as the opposite of benevolence? Perhaps avarice, the topic of the Pardoner's Tale? It is with good reason that Blake turns away from the limitations of verbal abstraction, to communicate visually. His portrayals of Pardoner and Summoner call up a richer and exacter reproduction of Blake's intentions than such words as "avarice" or "absence of benevolence" or "pure evil" ever could.

The cell bisects and doubles itself once again, but all within the same space and time of this picture. The Pardoner/Summoner combines with Monk/Friar, such that Pardoner/Summoner seems the discarded spectrous shadow of the whole bundle Pardoner/Summoner/Monk/Friar. What verbal label could cover the visual group of avaricious clergymen, two of them hypocritical and two overt? Simultaneously, in the rear half of the procession, the Parson/Plowman joins forces with Doctor/Lawyer, to balance with the four churchmen ahead. The Doctor and Lawyer are somewhat benevolent in that their professions are outward-directed, but unlike Parson and Plowman they do not help people for selfless reasons.

The symbolism cannot keep bisecting neatly. That last eightsome was already getting blurry--getting out of microscope range, so to speak. I started with the Plowman and bisected his symbolism both inward (to the Hercules he "was" before he eliminated his spectre) and outward (to what he "becomes" in the procession). Could one do the

same, starting with any pilgrim chosen at random? No, because the pilgrimage would then represent a universe without chaos. The mind of "man or humanity" pairs many, but not all, sets of stimuli in order to understand them. Sometimes, misled, the mind believes it must choose logically between the opposite poles it perceives, and eliminate Urizenically one or the other. "Chaucers Canterbury Pilgrims" shows that even though some pairs may temporarily appear to cancel out each other, that still all the oppositions and all the other binary relationships and even all the odds and ends of perception keep on happening. All possibilities remain. All possibilities remain in motion. Nothing was delivered. And the Reeve and the bristling black dog go their snarling ways.

<sup>1</sup> The critics, cited hereafter by authors' names, are Karl Kiralis, "William Blake as an Intellectual and Spiritual Guide to Chaucer's *Canterbury Pilgrims*," *Blake Studies*, 1 (Spring 1969), 139-90; Warren Stevenson, "Interpreting Blake's *Canterbury Pilgrims*," *Colby Library Quarterly*, 13 (June 1977), 115-26; and Orphia Jane Allen, "Blake's Archetypal Criticism: *The Canterbury Pilgrims*," *Genre*, 2 (Summer 1978), 173-89.

<sup>2</sup> *The Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman (Garden City: Doubleday, 1965), pp. 523-24. Page references for Blake quotations are to this edition, abbreviated "E."

<sup>3</sup> Geoffrey Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*, ed. Thomas Tyrwhitt, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1798), vv. 272, 274. References for Chaucer quotations are to this, the most accurate edition of Blake's time. Poetry references are line numbers, continuous through the two volumes; prose references include volume and page.

<sup>4</sup> I am discussing not the painting itself, but the engraving Blake made from it in 1810--precisely, the fourth state of that engraving, as displayed in and reproduced by the Huntington Library. The painting itself hangs in Pollock House, Glasgow, and differs in details--facial expressions, most noticeably--from the later engraving. Reproductions of this painting should not be trusted indiscriminately, especially as to color. For some account of the states of the engraving, see Kiralis' Appendix B, pp. 174-77.

<sup>5</sup> Kiralis, throughout his cited article, discusses fairly thoroughly the background of the picture.

<sup>6</sup> "A Letter to a Friend," *Gualtherus and Griselda* (London: R. Dodsley, 1739), pp. viii-ix. This letter as reprinted two years later was definitely available to Blake, as described in n. 29.

<sup>7</sup> *A General History of the science and practice of Music* (London, 1776), II, 101. Quoted by Caroline F. E. Spurgeon in her *Five Hundred Years of Chaucer Criticism and Allusion, 1357-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press, 1925), I, 446-47; cited hereafter by author's name.

<sup>8</sup> *Cureory Remarks on some of the Ancient English Poets* (London, 1789), pp. 2-3; quoted by Spurgeon, I, 488.

<sup>9</sup> For accounts of the incident, see Mona Wilson, *The Life of William Blake*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford U. Press, 1971), pp. 232-41; and Alexander Gilchrist, *Life of William Blake*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1880), I, 250-55.

<sup>10</sup> See G. E. Bentley, Jr., *Blake Books* (Oxford: Oxford U. Press, 1977), p. 539, cited hereafter by author's name. "Sampson had experience" was re-engraved by Cooke in 1787; in later editions of Bell, Blake's plate was replaced by Cooke's.

<sup>11</sup> For example, the Wife's dialogue with the Friar, vv. 6411-38.

<sup>12</sup> Reproduced in Richard Garnett and Edmund Gosse, *English Literature: An Illustrated Record* (New York: Macmillan, 1923). This useful book reproduces several other pictures I will refer to, such as the manuscript portraits of Chaucer.

<sup>13</sup> History from J. Mordaunt Crook, *The British Museum* (New York: Praeger, 1972), pp. 39-71; and from Henry C. Shelley, *The British Museum: Its History and Treasures* (Boston: L. C. Page, 1911), pp. 48-70.



<sup>14</sup> E. Gordon Duff, *William Caxton* (Chicago: The Caxton Club, 1905), p. 58.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* The edition is available on film.

<sup>16</sup> F. J. Furnivall comments on this unknown edition in *Notes and Queries*, 6th ser., 2 (1880), 325-26.

<sup>17</sup> Eleanor P. Hammond, *Chaucer: A Bibliographical Manual* (1908; rpt. New York: Peter Smith, 1933), p. 324, cited hereafter by author's name. Hogg engraved the Departure scene. See also Spurgeon, I, 447.

<sup>18</sup> Plates from both these books are at the Victoria and Albert, along with the original drawings of four of the nine scenes, excluding the Departure. I have located neither book in the U. S.; Tyrwhitt's 1798 edition is common here, but each library I have contacted owns a copy illustrated only by a frontispiece portrait of the editor. According to Henry G. Bohn, ed., *The Bibliographer's Manual*, by William Lowndes (London: George Bell and Sons, 1890), I, 427, the Mortimer plates were in copies sold at Roxburghe auction (catalogue no. 3253), at White Knight's (no. 954), and at Edward's (no. 125).

<sup>19</sup> [William Wells,] *William Blake's "Heads of the Poets"* (Manchester: City of Manchester Art Gallery, 1969), pp. 18-19. An exhibition pamphlet.

<sup>20</sup> In a letter to *Gentlemen's Magazine*, 53 (1783), 461, Tyrwhitt rather good-naturedly reports that Bell had lifted his name, text, and entire scholarly apparatus without even consulting him. See Spurgeon, I, 474.

<sup>21</sup> In *A Blake Bibliography* (Minneapolis: U. of Minnesota Press, 1964), pp. 201-02, G. E. Bentley, Jr. and Martin K. Nurmí include Speght's edition of Chaucer among "Books Owned by Blake." In the 1977 *Blake Books*, however, Bentley has eliminated any suggestion for a Chaucer edition owned by Blake.

<sup>22</sup> According to the *Dictionary of Artists who have Exhibited Works in the Principal London Exhibitions from 1760 to 1893*, comp. Algernon Graves, 3rd ed. (1901; rpt. New York: B. Franklin, 1970), Jefferys exhibited eight times with the Society of Artists (a London group which lasted 1760-91, not to be confused with the Free Society of Artists, 1761-83), and three times with the Royal Academy. The Canterbury pilgrims were not in the two of those three exhibits accounted for in *The Royal Academy of Arts [Exhibitors 1769-1894]*, comp. Algernon Graves (1905-06; rpt. New York: B. Franklin, 1972). Neither were they included in the recent Victoria and Albert exhibition of Jeffereys' works, described by Martin Butlin in "The Rediscovery of an Artist: James Jeffereys 1751-84," *Blake Newsletter*, 10 (1977), 123-24. In "James Jeffereys, Historical Draughtsman (1751-84)," *Burlington Magazine*, 118 (March 1976), 148-57, Timothy Clifford and Susan Legoux include among "Lost Works by James Jeffereys" two items that apparently align with Spurgeon's description of the 24 Chaucer drawings: "Designs from Chaucer's Pilgrimage to Canterbury, made during his stay with Mr Davy of One House, Suffolk, later in collection of Sir George Beaumont" (ref. Clement Taylor Smythe coll., Maidstone Museum, IV, f. 318); and "JAMES JEFFREYS / Lot 72, THE PARDONNIER; HARRY BAILLEY and FRIAR--from Chaucer--three pictures," in sale of late John Newington Hughes, Esq., of Winchester, Christie and Manson, 14th-15th April 1848. According to annotated catalogue at Maidstone Museum bought "Manger." Apparently the set of drawings was broken up for sale.

<sup>23</sup> This manuscript was in the Cambridge library at Blake's time, according to John M. Manly and Edith Rickert, *The Text of the Canterbury Tales* (Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 1940), I, 182. It shows "Drawings of 6 Tellers of 6 Canterbury Tales and 6 Allegorical Figures for the Parson's Tale (being all that were not cut out of the ms. by some scoundrel)"--as reproduced in *Cambridge MS Appendix*, ed. F. J. Furnivall, Chaucer Soc. Pubs., Ser. 1, No. 66, part B (London: N. Trübner, 1884). These long-bodied turbaned pilgrims are considered the work of a Dutch or Flemish artist employed by some English lord; the manuscript is "entirely outside the main stream of development in 15 C English illumination" (Manly and Rickert, I, 564).

<sup>24</sup> According to the Grolier Club, *An Exhibition of Original and Other Editions, Portraits and Prints, Commemorative of the Five Hundredth Anniversary of the Death of Geoffrey Chaucer, the Father of English Poetry* (New York: DeVinne Press, 1900), p. 19. Speght's frontispiece is reproduced in Spurgeon's work cited.

<sup>25</sup> History from Manly and Rickert, cited in n. 23, I, 149; and from Alix Egerton, preface to *The Ellesmere Manuscript, Repro-*

*duced in Facsimile* (Manchester: University Press, 1911), I, 7.

<sup>26</sup> By F. C. and J. Rivington, St. Paul's, 1 Aug. 1809; then as frontispiece to Henry J. Todd, *Illustrations of the Lives and Writings of Gower and Chaucer* (London: Rivingtons et al., 1810).

<sup>27</sup> For airy reasons typical of Urry: "because I think there is not any one [tale] that would fit him so well as this, I have ventur'd to place his Picture before this Tale, tho' I leave the Cook in Possession of the Title" (p. 36).

<sup>28</sup> The prospectus and advertisement for Stothard's "Canterbury Pilgrims" were first published in the 1808 edition of Robert Blair's *The Grave*, which features the very plates that Cromek had commissioned Blake to both design and engrave, but then--treacherously, as Blake believed--handed over to Schiavonetti to engrave.

<sup>29</sup> As an example, George Ogle in "Letter to a Friend," *The Canterbury Tales of Chaucer, Modernis'd by several Hands*, by John Dryden and others (London: J. & R. Tonson, 1741), III, xvi-xvii, lists some of Chaucer's "most singularly happy. . . Touches taken from his Descriptions of the Pilgrims," among them, "The Squire; with Locks curl'd, just fresh from the Press!" Blake certainly had access to Ogle, for in the later pamphlet that publicizes his engraving, *The Prologue and Characters of Chaucer's Pilgrims*, "The original reading is copied from the edition of Thomas Speight, printed Anno. 1687; and the Translation from Mr. Ogle's edition, 1741," as quoted by Bentley, p. 540.

<sup>30</sup> For more on Blake's place in the development of ideas about mythology, see Burton Feldman and Robert D. Richardson, *The Rise of Modern Mythology 1680-1860* (Bloomington: Indiana U. Press, 1972).

<sup>31</sup> For example, from Urry's Glossary: "Gipon, Gippon: A short doublet, or light coat" (p. 32) and "Habergeon . . . A little Coat of Mail, or only Sleeves and Gorget of Mail" (p. 34).

<sup>32</sup> Kiralis, pp. 148 and 151-59. He thereby supports S. Foster Damon's suggestions in *A Blake Dictionary* (1965; rpt. New York: Dutton, 1971), p. 79.

<sup>33</sup> Actually, the Ellesmere Wife's seating is obscured by the sacklike "fote-mantel about hire hippes large" (v. 474)--this drawing being "the only known authority for what a foot-mantle was," according to John Saunders, ed., *Chaucer's Canterbury Tales*, rev. ed. (London: J. M. Dent, 1889), p. 168, n. 3. Kiralis (p. 148) uses the Wife's improperly-directed seating as a point of contrast between her and the Prioress. Particularly because these supposed proprieties are reversed in the Ellesmere, however, I would state the contrast not in terms of the direction of the seating, but in terms of the Prioress' hidden legs vs. the Wife's spread legs.

<sup>34</sup> In the second prospectus (composite draft) to the engraving of the painting, Blake deleted "(the Fun afterwards exhibited on the road may be seen depicted in his [the Host's] jolly face"--E 557..

<sup>35</sup> John Dart, "Life of Chaucer," in Urry's edition, no p.

<sup>36</sup> Text available in *The Regimine of Princes and 14 Minor Poems*, Vol. 3 of *Hoccleve's Works*, ed. F. J. Furnivall, E. E. T. S., Ser. 2, No. 72 (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner, & Co., 1897), p. 180, ll. 4992-98. One might expect to find Chaucer's portrait also beside the appropriate verse in every manuscript of Hoccleve's *De Regimine Principum*; but only Harl. MS 4866, Royal MS 17 D 6, and Philipps MS 1099 do preserve such a picture, and the latter seem copies of the former by less skillful artists. See Spurgeon, I, 21-23 and 82-83; Reginald Call, "The Plimpton Chaucer and Other Problems of Chaucerian Portraiture," *Speculum*, 22 (1947), 135-44; George L. Lam and Warren H. Smith, "George Vertue's Contributions to Chaucerian Iconography," *MLQ*, 5 (1944), 303-22; Donald R. Howard, *The Idea of the Canterbury Tales* (Berkeley: U. of Calif. Press, 1976), pp. 7-13; and James H. McGregor, "The Iconography of Chaucer in Hoccleve's *De Regimine Principum* and in the *Troilus* Frontispiece," *Chaucer Review*, 11 (1977), 338-50.

<sup>37</sup> Five of these portraits, all eerily resembling Vertue's in expression and position, are reproduced in Marian Harry Spielmann's *Portraits of Geoffrey Chaucer* (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner, & Co., 1900), pp. 12-14 and 18-19. Vertue himself engraved at least three other portraits of Chaucer, including one first published in his own *Heads of the Poets* series in 1730. Wells, as cited in n. 19, says that Blake more probably worked from this latter engraving than from the frontispiece in Urry's edition, for Hayley's library, because Vertue's 1730 Chaucer shows three buttons (not two) as does Blake's (pp. 18-19).