Chaucer and Social Discontent in the Canterbury Tales.

A Thesis

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by

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I bless the place, the time and hour of the day that my eyes aimed their sights at such a height, and say: 'My soul, you must be very grateful that you were found worthy of such great honour.
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Introduction

Throughout the course of twentieth-century Chaucer criticism, there has been great interest in the framework Chaucer chose for the *Canterbury Tales*. The fact that he decided to have his stories presented through character-narrators who find themselves together on pilgrimage—and a pilgrimage not to Jerusalem but to a less renowned English site, Canterbury—has been a touchstone for a large number of critics, despite other differences between them in method and interpretive results.

George Lyman Kittredge, contrasting what he termed the merely "mechanical" unity of Chaucer's earlier story collections ("The Tragedies," later given to the Monk to recite, and the *Legend of Good Women*) to the superior "organic" unity of the *Canterbury Tales*, concludes that the latter's superiority "... results, in the last analysis, from Chaucer's adopting the scheme of a Canterbury pilgrimage" (Kittredge 152). The pilgrimage frame, Kittredge tells us, allows for the inclusion of characters whose social positions (and, thus, their tales) differ widely:

Travel, as everybody knows, is for the time being a mighty leveller of social distinctions...
These men might live side by side in one row of brickhouses for a hundred years and scarcely know each other’s faces. Break the shaft, keep them at sea for an extra week, and, if they aren’t careful and if the cigars hold out, they will empty their hearts to one another with an indiscretion that may shock them to death when they remember it ashore. (Kittredge 158)

Indeed, in a move which clearly anticipates recent Bakhtinian readings of Chaucer (cf. Grudin and Ashley), Kittredge explains that the dramatic framework of the pilgrimage allows the poet to breathe life into his characters, who "thereafter . . . move by virtue of their inherent vitality, not as tale-telling puppets, but as men and women (155). Additionally, Chaucer, through the inclusion of "himself" in the pilgrimage, is even said to make his characters "as real as he is" (Kittredge 161), producing a situation that sounds a great deal like Bakhtinian polyphony. For Kittredge, then, the journey along the road to Canterbury is inherently socially liberating, and its inclusion as frame in the Canterbury Tales allows Chaucer to liberate his fiction as well.

Later in the century, Lumiansky’s Of Sondry Folk once again takes up the consideration of the relationship between Chaucer’s use of the pilgrimage frame and his artistic achievement, which Lumiansky maintains is Chaucer’s realistic presentation of character. His initial chapter, entitled, aptly enough, "The Moveable Stage," explores Chaucer’s careful construction of a framework and rules of conduct within which the poet will best be able to
set about his task of exploring and exploring his rich characters. Lumiansky does not ignore, as had many of his predecessors, the fact that travel to Canterbury was at least theoretically of great religious significance, but instead reads the opening lines of the *General Prologue* as Chaucer's recasting of the journey in more broadly human terms (Lumiansky 16-18).

Beginning in the fifties, a new movement in Chaucer criticism came into being. For this school (which may be broadly defined as exegetical), as for the "roadside drama" critics discussed above, the pilgrimage framework of the *Tales* was central. However, whereas the roadside critics argued that the pilgrimage to Canterbury was important because it allowed Chaucer to exercise a certain social and stylistic free-play, the allegorical critics insist that the framing of the *Tales* in terms of a journey to Canterbury demands that we it them as a religious allegory.

Ralph Baldwin, the first twentieth-century critic to take an active interest in the impact of the religious nature of the pilgrimage frame on the *Canterbury Tales*, argues that the journey of the pilgrims metaphorically enacts the life of a medieval Christian as he progresses from birth to death, from Creation (the spring of the *General Prologue*) to Doomsday (the finality of the Parson's Tale and Retraction). As Robert Jordan has pointed out, however, Baldwin's argument is based mostly on the
beginning and final pieces of the *Canterbury Tales*; he had to fall back on the "roadside drama" school of thought to account for the middle of the *Canterbury Tales* (Jordan 11-115). In *A Preface to Chaucer*, D.W. Robertson extends Baldwin's approach, claiming that:

> Any pilgrimage during the Middle Ages . . . was ideally a figure for the pilgrimage of the Christian soul through the world's wilderness toward the celestial Jerusalem. The pilgrimage of the soul was not in itself a journey from place to place, but an inner movement between the two cities so vividly described by St. Augustine, one founded on charity, and the other on cupidty. . . . The Tales are set in a frame work which emphasizes this journey and its implications. (Robertson 373)

Having made a connection, via the pilgrimage frame, between the *Canterbury Tales* and Augustine's thought, Robertson goes on to explicate various tales and characters in terms of Christian (primarily Augustinian) theology and iconography.

It is clear that what we see in this account of these critical camps is that both share a desire to explain (or at least find the means for explaining) the *Canterbury Tales* in terms of the frame of the Canterbury pilgrimage. Both camps, however, fall into a similar trap: each side takes one historical element of pilgrimage (for the roadside critics, the social inclusiveness of pilgrimage; for the allegorical camp, pilgrimage's Christian teleology) and uses it as a launching point from which to unify the *Canterbury Tales* by critical force.
Christian Zacher, in his *Curiosity and Pilgrimage*, is more careful in his historicization of the idea of pilgrimage and in his interpretation of Chaucer’s use of the Canterbury journey as a framing device. Zacher, noting that worldly *curiositas* had, by Chaucer’s day, severely eroded the religious, other-worldly ideal of pilgrimage (90), argues that "Chaucer values the pilgrimage, as a framing device, more for its applicability to certain broad social concerns than for its allegorical implications" (91).

In my essay, I will explore Chaucer’s treatment of one of these broad social concerns: the social and political unrest caused by the persistent rebelliousness of those groups at the bottom of both the rural and urban social hierarchies, which found its most powerful expression in the Uprising of 1381. Ironically enough, this violent social unrest is figured in the very frame which most critics have seen as being an enabling factor in Chaucer’s tolerant humanist realism or, alternatively, in his well-ordered, other-worldly piety. Instead of having his pilgrims journey to one of the most prestigious and popular of pilgrimage destinations, such as Rome or Jerusalem, Chaucer chooses instead for them to travel the Kent road from London to Canterbury. What literary scholars have seemed to ignore throughout centuries of Chaucer criticism is the fact that this road was also the one taken by the
Kentish rebels from Canterbury to London in their bid to remake the kingdom, and the one taken back to Kent by these same rebels after the death of their leader, Wat Tyler, at Smithfield (Oman 41-47, 75). It is inconceivable that Chaucer was unaware of this fact: he was a servant of the crown residing in London at the time and later, in 1385, was appointed Justice of the Peace for Kent.¹

The connection between the Uprising of 1381 and the practice of pilgrimage to Canterbury does not end here, however. Pilgrims travelled the road from London to Canterbury in order to visit the shrine of Thomas a Becket, famous Archbishop of Canterbury, who had been martyred at his altar in 1170. In 1381 the chancellor of England was Simon Sudbury, who was also the Archbishop of Canterbury. The rebels, having marched from Canterbury to London, took revenge upon those they held responsible for their plight. The rebels found Sudbury at the altar of the chapel of the Tower, dragged him outside, and beheaded him (Oman 66-67).

While what I have said above makes it clear that the pilgrimage framework of the Canterbury Tales certainly carries connotations of violent social protest, I can claim that my argument has validity and value only if I can show how this pressing social issue was addressed within the Tales itself. And just as the overtones of unrest in the pilgrimage frame have been overlooked, so too the best tale
with which to begin this study has been largely ignored. I speak of the *Cook’s Tale*; a tale that, as we shall see, embodies a great deal of the rebellious impulses which fueled the actions of the rebels, and a great deal of the fear that these rebels caused in people of higher station. Indeed, by examining the *Cook’s Tale* and its relationship to those which precede it, I will show that the social struggle found in the *Canterbury Tales* is also figured as a struggle between the written and the oral, the literate and the illiterate.

Having shown the *Cook’s Tale* to be central to Chaucer’s handling of one of the pressing social problems of his day, I will continue by reading those tales that I think are most tightly interrelated with Roger and his narrative. In addition to tracing how the *Cook’s Tale* fits into the movement of what is traditionally labelled the "first fragment," I will also read the *Man of Law’s Tale* and argue that it is here that Chaucer begins to contain the threat posed by the Cook. Also, I will show how it is through this tale that Chaucer constructs his authority, in an ideologically revealing move made both imperative and difficult by his choice to give such a powerful voice to the rebellious ideology of the Cook.

I realize some readers may find it strange that I turn to the *Man of Law’s Tale* instead of the *Tale of Melibee* to begin uncovering Chaucer’s expression of his political and
poetic beliefs in the *Canterbury Tales*. In addition to reiterating my belief that the most profitable avenue for pursuing my topic is the constellation of tales that are connected most closely with that of the Cook, I would also like to point out that the nature of the critical controversy over *Melibee* concerns not what the tale says, but rather the degree to which we should take the tale's sentence as ironic, given what we can see of Chaucer and his art in the rest of the *Canterbury Tales* (Delong, Notes 923-924; see also Patterson, "What Man"). I believe a collateral benefit of my argument, which focuses on the tales of the Cook and the Man of Law--and the final three of the *Canterbury Tales*, will to establish a context for *Melibee* which makes it clear that this tale is not to be taken ironically.

I choose the *Canon's Yeoman's*, *Manciple's* and *Parson's Tales* because I think the Cook's reappearance in the *Manciple's Prologue* is significant, especially when viewed in terms of the introduction this reappearance is given by the workings of the *Canon's Yeoman's Tale*, which bears a striking resemblance (hand-in-hand with important dissimilarities) to the Cook's Tale. In the *Parson's Tale* (and the Retraction), I will argue, we find both what is meant to be the final, definitive answer to the social protest voiced by the Cook and the clearest indications of
the stresses (poetic and political) caused by Chaucer’s
desire to enact such an answer within his artistic
creation.
CHAPTER I

Chaucer, The Cook, and Popular Discourse in the Canterbury Tales

The Cook's Tale, the last and shortest of the first fragment of the Canterbury Tales, has also been the least studied. Much of the scant scholarship on this tale begins with the assumption that the tale is incomplete, and then attempts to discover the reason for this incompleteness. M.C. Seymour and N.F. Blake posit bibliographical explanations for the tale's lack of completion. V.J. Scattergood and V.A. Kolve are concerned not with why the tale is incomplete, but rather with what sort of tale it might have been given the narrative and literary potentialities we can see in the fragment. E.G. Stanley breaks from the herd, arguing that the Cook is the type of person who reduces everything to bare-bones form and that his tale is his complete version of the motif of "unwise herbergage." Benson hedges his bets; he seems to come down on the Cook's Tale-as-fragment side of the argument, but also sees the tale as "carry[ing] the downward
trajectory of Fragment 1 to its extreme," though the "downward movement" is left undefined (9).

My own aim will be to read the *Cook's Tale* in such a way as to pay attention both to some recent historical study bearing upon the tale and to the narrative dynamics of the tale itself. I will close by offering a brief examination of the function of both the Cook and his tale in the first and last three fragments of the *Canterbury Tales*. I believe by doing so that I can provide some valuable and suggestive insights into both the "tales themselves" and Chaucer's attitudes regarding certain social groups, the uprising of 1381, and orality/literacy issues.

2

By far the most thorough assessment of the *Cook's Tale* is the David Wallace essay, "Chaucer and the Absent City." As his essay is concerned with many of the issues with which I am concerned, and since I will often refer to it, I wish to provide a brief summary of it.

Wallace makes an argument which seems to me to partake both of new historicism and of post-structuralism. He argues from a close textual reading of historical documents that London, as contrasted with a city such as Florence, lacked an ideology which would make it a unified social/political site. Through his reading of sections of
the *Letter Books*, records kept by London's aldermen, Wallace shows us both their desire to create a unifying ideology and their failure to do so. The *Letter Books* are filled with narratives of "crimes" and with judgements of these crimes based on an appeal to a moral code meant to cut across economic and social hierarchies. The problem with attempting to distill a unifying London ideology from these documents arises from the fact that the public laws and proclamations (also recorded in the *Letter Books*) inspired by such crime all too often unintentionally foreground the hierarchical power system of London, as does the fact that privileged information and transactions are recorded not in the vernacular, but in Latin or French.

Wallace contrasts the *Letter Books* with the chronicles of Florence, which he sees as smoothly integrating a detailed representation of events in the city with divine providence, and in doing so making possible the sort of trans-hierarchical, or "associational," ideology which London lacks. He also points out a similar contrast between the beginning of the *Decameron* and the *Canterbury Tales*. The storytellers in the *Decameron* establish the rules for their tale-telling at an important Florentine religious and political site, the church of Santa Maria Novella, and return to the city at the end of the text. The tales they tell are often concerned with urban events,
and the skills they use in telling them are and will be of use to them as members of the ruling strata.

With Chaucer, on the other hand, the narration begins not in London but in Southwark, a town near London with very fragmentary political and legal structures, and in which existed trades illegal or frowned upon in its larger neighbor. Moreover, rules for the tale telling are laid down (almost by fiat) by a local inn-keeper. Thus, says Wallace: "The name of Southwark, in short, identifies governance as a problematic issue, takes this issue out of the city, and yet cannot quite leave the city behind (61)."

As Wallace moves to focus on the Cook’s Tale, he once again sets up a contrast between Boccaccio and Chaucer by juxtaposing the tale of one Cisti the baker with that of the Cook. Wallace sees Boccaccio’s tale as suggesting the ideal of civic unity through an associational ideology. In this tale, papal ambassadors, guided by a wealthy Florentine merchant, move laterally across the city, and in doing so come in contact with the humble figure of Cisti the baker. Cisti establishes contact with his superiors through an appeal to a common human desire, the thirst for cold wine on a hot day. After the envoys leave the city, wine and messages continue to move across the city (and its social strata) between Cisti and Geri, the merchant, thus serving to highlight Florentine unity. The importance of this unity is further stressed by the fact that a year
after the time frame of the narrative, Florence was attacked by the papacy in support of the Black Guelfs.

Wallace reads the *Cook’s Tale*, on the other hand, as another textual representation of London’s lack of unity and identity. He calls to our attention the fact that Roger, the Cook, is characterized as someone who violates various social, economic and moral codes: he knows Flemish, a language associated with prostitutes; he has a mormel, a sore held to be caused by immoral pursuits; he sells unhealthy food; and while named as a Londoner, he refers to himself as being from Ware, a town known as a hotbed of hostility toward economic legislation. In Wallace’s reading of the *Cook’s Tale*, what becomes interesting is the fact that the Cook adopts the ideological stance of his masters, the guildsmen, against a character, Perkyn, who shares many of the Cook’s transgressive traits. Wallace cites such lines as 4397 and 4398, 4 "Revel and trouthe, as in a lowwe degree, / They been ful wrothe al day as men may see," to support this thesis, and comes to the conclusion that the Cook-as-tale-teller is "a dummy character through which his masters ventriloquize the mores of craft masters and would-be aldermen" (79).
Nevertheless, while I think that Wallace's historical work is very thorough and serves to draw our attention to crucial social issues, I also believe he misreads the *Cook's Tale* in relation to what he has deduced from the *Letter Books*. He is correct in pointing out the transgressive activities of Perkyn, and in noting out that they are especially threatening to the power of the guilds when they are portrayed as being the basis for the assembly of the individuals from lower social strata, as they are in Roger's tale. Wallace is incorrect, however, in judging the Cook's stance in regard to Perkyn: while Roger begins his tale by espousing the values of the guild, he progressively undercuts these values. Chaucer, I would argue, grants the Cook a coherent voice, a voice that is opposed to the "mores of craft masters and would-be aldermen." He does this, I will show, in order that he might eventually address and contain the threat to the social order represented by the Cook's discourse.

Let us consider the following lines:

But atte laste his maister hym bithoghte,  
Upon a day, whan he his papir soghte,  
Of a proverbe that seith this same word:  
"Wel be is roten appul out of hoord  
Than that it rotie al the remenaunt."  
So fareth it by a riotous servaunt;  
It is ful lasse harm to lete hym pace,  
Than he shende alle the servantz in the place.  
Therfore his maister yaf hym aquittance (I. 4403-11)."
In these lines, the Cook gives us access to the master’s mind as he recalls a proverb and decides to sign Perkyn’s paper, releasing him from apprenticeship. We then get the Cook’s restatement and affirmation of the master’s position. This would all seem to uphold Wallace’s view of the Cook, except for the fact that by giving Perkyn what Wallace calls his "walking papers" the master is granting him citizenship—a coveted prize not easily obtained. Perkyn loses employment with his master, but leaves, unpunished for his theft, with free-run of the city. One may start to wonder who is the dummy—the churl telling the tale, or the master within it.

If we examine lines 4415-22 the answer becomes clearer:

And for there is no theef withoute a lowke,
That helpeth hym to wasten and to sowke
Of that he bybe kan or borwe may,
Annon he sente his bed and array
Unto a compeer of his owene sort,
That lovede dys, and revel, and disport,
And hadde a wyf that heeld for contenance
A Shoppe, and swyved for hir sustenance (I.).

Benson glosses these lines as merely an indication of Perkyn’s preparation to move in with another thief (9), but I think that there is something both more complicated and more historically significant going on here. If we consider the fact that medieval apprentices usually lived with their masters (Robertson 75-82), and that Perkyn’s master was unlikely to send Perkyn off loaded down with parting gifts, we may question the value, or at least the
completeness, of Benson’s reading. Furthermore, it seems unlikely to me that Perkyn, who is a profligate, would have either the means or the desire to pay for whatever may have been the 14th century’s equivalent of U.P.S. The transfer brought to mind by the term "sente" does not refer to the repositioning of goods, but, at least figuratively, to the repositioning of people.

Consider, to begin with, that both Perkyn and his unnamed accomplice are at this point in the tale not placed in a physical location. We know where the master (and Perkyn’s bed) is, and we know where the accomplice’s wife is. What we have here is a social opposition figured spatially by the master’s residence, containing the officially sanctioned, hierarchical social organization based on the master/apprentice relationship and the prostitute’s residence, which, while appearing to be a shop, is really the place where the lower orders come together for "revel." Consider, too, the nature of the intercourse between these two worlds throughout the Cook’s Tale. Perkyn, who as an apprentice existed at a social level somewhere between the two, provided the connection through his siphoning of resources from one to the other.

This same mode of interaction is again foregrounded at the end of the Cook’s Tale. Both "revel," which brings those of the lower orders together, and theft, by which they interact with the masters of the world, are evoked in
lines 4415-22 (I.). However, it is theft which is made dominant in the introduction of Perkyn’s friend, both by the Cook’s characterization of him as Perkyn’s accomplice and by the end rhyme of "lowke" and "sowke." Perkyn’s friend thus assumes Perkyn’s place as intermediary between the two worlds; what Perkyn is transferring to his accomplice is the position of apprenticeship, represented by his bed and array. This is indeed what the master in the Cook’s Tale and the London aldermen would most fear: that the lower orders, if unified, could place severe demands upon the guild hierarchies.

So once again, while the Cook does adopt the voice, or discourse, of his masters, he subjects it to a subtle but biting irony. It may seem here that I am committing what some might call (were the term not so revealing of their own position) the "Heresy of Idolatry" by attempting to stifle historical/political criticism of the Chaucer’s work through an appeal to a suspect aestheticism of irony. Let me say in my defense that the irony of the Cook’s Tale is not interesting because it grants the tale some sort of aesthetic value, but because it is the device through which the Cook, as mimetic character, is able to extricate himself from a difficult situation and through which Chaucer, as poet, is able to introduce a coherent (if not historically "authentic") London voice into the Canterbury Tales.
To explore this a little further, let us recall lines 4345-62 of the *Cook’s Prologue*. Here, Harry Bailly puts the Cook in a dangerous position by revealing his shady business practices within earshot of the Cook’s employers. Roger tells Harry that he will take revenge later, but first he attends to more important business by presenting this tale. One of the ways the tale functions is as a threat: the Cook suggests that while guildsmen can toss out the bad apple they currently have, they will only draw another from the basket of London. The Cook’s introduction of the discourse of the guildsmen allows him not only to "quite" them before they speak, but, in as much as his irony is subtle, to do so in a safe manner. I do not claim that the guildsmen had the same detailed understanding of the *Cook’s Tale* which I have provided here, but that the tale, given its structure, context, and teller, was likely to produce a vague, though potent, uneasiness in the guildsmen. Moreover, the Cook’s threat is delivered subtly enough so as not to require that the guildsmen respond in order to save face before the other pilgrims.

Indeed, we would do well at this point to recall Chaucer’s treatment of the guildsmen in the *General Prologue* (I. 361-378). In addition to his satire of their (and their wives’) ambitions, it is significant that he describes them not as individuals but *en masse*. Given this lack of individuation, it would be hard to imagine one of
these characters stepping forward to tell a tale. This, I think, lends support to my reading of the Cook’s Tale. It appears here, in the first fragment, that Chaucer sets the guildsmen up to be silenced by the Cook’s performance. We will return to the guildsmen, or they to us, when we examine Chaucer’s three final tales.

Before proceeding to the other tales of the first fragment, I think it is important to note one of the implications of my reading of the Cook’s Tale. If my reading of the context of the tale, the motivation of the Cook, and the effectiveness of his performance is correct, then it seems possible that the tale is indeed finished, at least to the extent of having a recognizable purpose and effect within the mimetic world of the Canterbury Tales. Such an assertion must be tentative, since I based it on only formal factors, ignoring codocological concerns and issues raised by the Hengwrt scribe’s commentary. At the very least, however, I think that we can say the Cook’s Tale is finished enough to merit our examination of its interaction with neighboring tales, an examination which will provide us with some understanding of the tale not only as the performance of a character but as a thematic device of the poet.⁶
The tales of the first fragment raise issues and questions of social order, gender relations, the value and power of different types of discourse, and "class." By briefly and sequentially examining the first four tales in light of these issues, I believe I can achieve some understanding of the thematic work done by the Cook and his tale.

The Knight, the pilgrim with the highest social standing and the one presented first in the General Prologue, is also the first tale teller, "Were it by aventure, or sort, or cas." He, perhaps predictably, tells a highly literate tale which attempts to uphold an aristocratic, hierarchical system of governance and social control. Theseus, "lord and governour" of Athens, mediates and takes action on various types of crisis which threaten order: the war between the Athenians and the Amazons, Creon’s desecration of the dead, and the feud between the brothers Palamon and Arcite over Emelye. These conflicts represent a wide range of social stresses, from the national to the moral/religious to the personal and sexual. By the end of the tale Theseus has seemingly resolved all these threats to order through the device of the tournament and the resulting arranged marriage of Emelye and Palamon.

I believe that Chaucer presents the Knight’s attempt as a failure--a failure caused by specific factors and
carrying with it important implications. The Knight's basic dilemma is to tell a politically conservative tale—one drawn from received, literary sources—to an audience which is socially varied, restless, and engaged in an oral game. We can see the pressures resulting from this rhetorical situation affecting the Knight's discourse in his frequent enjoinders to his audience to listen and in his repeated statements that he is deleting certain parts (usually elements traditional to the romance, such as long descriptions and lists) of the tale for reasons of brevity. It would not be over-reaching to say that the *Knight's Tale* is dialogic: we hear, as Bakhtin does in Dostoevsky's works, resisting voices, though they are never quoted during the tale.

The anxiety we hear in the telling of the *Knight's Tale* is further explored in the *Miller's Prologue*, which serves both to underline the fact that the discourse voiced by the Knight is in conflict with other types of discourse and to present us with Chaucer's view of the implications of that conflict. For instance, when Chaucer-narrator tells us that all of the company found the Knight's story worthy of remembering, but then adds, "And namely the gentils everichon," we may entertain further doubts about the universality of the Knight's appeal (I.3113). The Miller, at least, is not pleased; he is incensed enough to thwart Harry Bailly's attempt to put the Monk forward as
the next tale-teller and to then himself "quite" the Knight's tale.

The Miller, as Benson (8) and David (92-93) point out, attempts to directly refute the Knight and to provide an alternative world-view. In the world of the Miller's Tale, it is not order that is privileged, but rather the transgression of order. Allison and Nicholas are valorized not for maintaining social order by being mindful of their own places but for violating social roles and rules, and for having a good time while doing so. Marriage, courtly love, and traditional views of the role of women are all rejected by the tale.

Still, The Miller's Tale is not simply a mirror opposite of the Knight's Tale delivered by the Knight's social opposite, nor does Chaucer present the Miller's world-view as being unproblematic. First of all, while the Miller, whom most critics seem to accept as a churl, critiques the aristocratic and literate discourse of the Knight, he does so by presenting a fabliau--a form that, while it in some fashion represents a version of "common life," is nonetheless a literate genre popular with the members of the upper social strata. The Miller, then, is not completely a churl; he has some access to literacy. It could be claimed that this literacy is merely an unintentional side-effect of Chaucer's desire to empower the Miller by granting him such a highly polished and
literate performance, but if we consider the fact that Chaucer chooses to have the Miller reveal his knowledge of Cato (I.3227), it becomes clear that the Miller is in fact drawn as someone at least somewhat atypical of his profession and social standing. Likewise, the hero and heroine of his tale are neither near the top nor the bottom of the social ladder.  

Furthermore, while transgression is central to the Miller's Tale, the world presented there is not one of absolute chaos. The Miller's performance ends, like the Knight's, with a reaffirmation of community, though the Miller's is a community seemingly held together by laughter. Indeed, as Ganim calls to our attention (83-84), the final scene brings to mind Bakhtin's idea of the "carnivalesque," a laughter which both criticizes restrictive social systems and embodies a unifying and rejuvenating alternative. Still, if this were an adequate description of the Miller's Tale, and if Chaucer did nothing to undercut it, many of us might be likely to applaud the poet, regardless of whether the form and finale of the Miller's performance contain echoes of literate discourse and the Knight's Tale. The problem is that the Miller's performance cannot be correctly termed carnivalesque.

The character of John and the uses to which he is put are key to understanding why this is so. First, consider
the fact that the carnivalesque is meant to stress the commonality and equality of all people, but that in the Miller's Tale John is only the object, not a participant, in the laughter which brings most of the townspeople together. Indeed, it is accurate to say that the Miller's performance is based on what Kenneth Burke calls "victimage": the action and meaning of his tale can only unfold through the sacrifice of someone. In this case the sacrifice is John, who is used to represent the forces of order and traditional notions of sexual conduct and gender relations.

It might be argued that we cannot conclude that Chaucer is undercutting the Miller if the poet in fact saw victimage as an unavoidable condition of making meaning. My answer is that Chaucer seems to go out of his way, even in the Miller's Tale itself, to draw attention to the sacrifice of John, and to cast it in an unfavorable light. For instance, we are shown explicitly that John, whatever his flaws, cares for Nicholas's well-being and is prepared to expend a good deal of energy to protect the clerk's mind, body and soul (I. 3458-89). Secondly, while the injuries and humiliations suffered by Nicholas and his rival Absolon are carefully chosen to participate in and add to the sexual humor of the tale, John receives a very prosaic (and not very amusing) broken arm (I. 3829).
Lest we conclude with Ganim that, despite the above evidence, the image of "the noise of the people" in Chaucer is often stronger than any qualifying contexts (an effect Ganim believes is at least partially intentional), we need only look to what Chaucer does with the Reeve and his tale. To begin with, the Reeve is spurred into speech by what he perceives to be his victimization through the Miller's treatment of John, who is identified, like the Reeve, as a carpenter. Regardless of the extent to which the Reeve's accusation is justified, it does call to our attention the victimization that goes on within the Miller's Tale. This critique is furthered by the fact that the negative potential of sexual transgression is exposed through the Reeve's description of the clerks' (the Reeve's analogues for Nicholas) sexual brutality.

This is not to say that the Reeve is a transparent mouthpiece for the voice of the poet. Indeed, the Reeve seems to be drawn as a rather savage figure, both in the General Prologue and in his own prologue and tale. But even this seems to serve Chaucer's critique of the Miller. The Reeve's voice is vicious, but he tells us in advance that he is adopting the Miller's churlish discourse, "Right in his cherles termes wol I speke" (I. 3917). Thus, even as the Reeve's anger may make us less sympathetic to him as a character, it also asks us to take a more negative view of the Miller's world-view.
But that is not all the Reeve's Tale does. For the Reeve not only attacks the Miller's churlish goals and discourse; he also attacks the Miller for being a "social climber" through his (the Reeve's) denigration of Symkyn's dishonest prosperity and his desire for a learned wife (I. 3921-68). While this attack is consistent with the Reeve's negative mimetic characterization—as someone whose (ill-gotten) sizable income is dependent on the maintenance of the status quo, he has little use for the Miller's valorization of transgression or his social-climbing—it also serves Chaucer as a means of offering a critique of the yoking of churlish and privileged discourse which is at the root of the Miller's project. In short, the Reeve and his performance allow Chaucer to demolish, or contain, the liberating discursive and political potentialities he allowed to be raised in the Miller's Tale, while at the same time remaining distant from any moral taint that such a critique might entail.

This, then, is the context in which we should reconsider the Cook's Tale, and in doing so come to some firmer conclusions about Chaucer's handling of the conflict between different social groups and their discourses in the first fragment. First, it is clear that the Cook's performance brings Chaucer's gradual presentation and critique of churlish discourse to a conclusion, at least in this section of the Canterbury Tales. We first heard the
voice of the churls only as an unquoted murmur against the Knight. Then, in the Miller's Tale, we were presented with an unsuccessful fusion of churlish and privileged discourse given by a character not completely churlish. In the next tale, the Reeve adopts churlish discourse in order to critique it. Finally, with the Cook's Tale, we have a churl voicing churlish discourse, at least as Chaucer conceives of it.

That Chaucer's conception of churlish discourse is negative is made clear not only by the morally negative portrait of the Cook in his prologue, but by the fact that Chaucer's characterization of the Cook and his discourse, while coherent, is cast completely in terms of the privileged strata's fears as documented in the Letter Books and in chronicles of the uprising of 1381. These documents portray churlish rebels as being interested only in the destruction of order, not in the construction of alternative societal orders (see Wallace and Crane). This is very similar to what the Cook's Tale threatens--churlish anarchy supported through the ongoing siphoning of resources from the propertied strata.

It is also important to note that the progression of the first fragment from a lengthy, rhetorically direct articulation (the Knight's Tale) towards near-silence (the extremely short and rhetorically covert Cook's Tale) is paralleled by the progression from a tale which calls
attention to received, written sources to one which foregrounds its existence in the oral world of the pilgrimage. That Chaucer structures the first fragment in this way is not surprising, given that the rebels of 1381 were extremely hostile towards literacy and the literate (see Crane).

Based on the preceding analysis, I would argue that despite the admittedly well-written, entertaining, and seemingly free-wheeling dialogue between the characters of the first fragment, which has led some critics (Grudin\textsuperscript{10}, Ashley) to claim that Chaucer's work is "polyphonic," what we actually have here is a monologic polemic against people of the lower social strata. To have polyphony, Bakhtin tells us in \textit{Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics}, we must have a text in which the discourses of various characters, holding various world-views, are allowed to interact in an open-ended dialogue, a dialogue in which not even the poet's voice is allowed to dominate. What we have in the first fragment is a set of characters and discourses carefully crafted to serve a poet's interest.
CHAPTER II

The Man of Law and Chaucer’s Self-Fashioning

1

My examination of the *Cook’s Tale* and its relationship to the other tales of the first fragment leaves us with a number of puzzles. While Chaucer does paint the Cook—and, indeed, the discourse of the rebellious underclass in general—as being socially destructive and morally repugnant, he also seems to grant his tale considerable power and importance. The *Cook’s Tale* apparently succeeds in silencing of the guildsmen. It would also appear that Chaucer gives the Cook the last word, as it were, by placing the *Cook’s Tale* at what looks like the end of the morning series of tales and by choosing not to have other characters decry or even comment upon it. Chaucer’s highlighting of the lowly, contentious Cook is surprising given the fact that so much of Chaucer’s earlier work was very courtly and/or very philosophical in nature.

The surprise we experience at Chaucer’s handling of the Cook only deepens if we consider both Chaucer’s social
position and the upheaval of 1381, many of the impulses of which are clearly figured in the Cook’s Prologue and Tale. Chaucer was at this time a royal customs official living in London. As such, his literacy was central to his working life as well as his life as a poet. These biographical commonplaces become important when considered in the light of Susan Crane’s demonstration of the extreme hostility of the rebels to written documents. This hostility was so intense that the rebels burned not merely the documents found in manor houses and other sites of seignorial power but also those found in small households, in the home of an admiralty official, and even in the libraries of Cambridge scholars: "a certain old woman named Margaret Starre scattared the heap of ashes [from a book burning] to wind, crying 'away with the knowledge of clerks, away with it’" (Crane 207-208, 215). Furthermore, the rebels’ hostility extended beyond the documents themselves to those who produced them, as is shown in a remarks Crane quotes from the chronicler Thomas Walsingham:

They strove to burn all old records; and they butchered anyone who might know or be able to commit to memory the contents of old or new documents. It was dangerous enough to be known as a clerk, but especially dangerous if an ink-pot should be found at one’s elbow: such men scarcely or ever escaped from the hands of the rebels. (Crane 204)

That this desire to wreak vengeance on the literate was not merely a fabrication of a terrified chronicler can be seen
in the fact that rebels killed proportionally more lawyers and clerks than landlords (Crane 204).

Clearly, this aspect of the rebellion could not have escaped Chaucer's attention, and while it is not certain whether Chaucer was actually within the city during the Uprising, he no doubt knew many people who were affected--such as his patron, John of Gaunt, whose palace, the Savoy, was destroyed and whose own life was placed in jeopardy (Oman 58, 194-195). The intensity of the impact of this chaos on Chaucer can be glimpsed in his decision, on 19 June 1381, four days after the suppression of the revolt, to quit-claim his father's properties in the Vintry Ward, which had borne witness to some of the worst violence (Benson xxii). ¹¹

My second point is that we would do well to recall that not only does a contentious, socially disruptive, oral discourse seem to dominate the first fragment, but that this discourse is rendered as being explicitly (and successfully) set in opposition to the learned, courtly and conservative Knight's Tale. Considering that it was, at least partly, Chaucer's interest in and use of tales of antiquity which distinguished his poetic from that of his contemporaries (Patterson, History 24), the quitting of the Knight's Tale deepens the puzzling nature of Chaucer's portrayal of social and discursive conflict in the first fragment. An auditor of the Canterbury Tales, reading the
first four tales in order, cannot help wondering at how discursive and social power has been distributed by the end of the *Cook's Tale*. The mystery of Chaucer's handling of social conflict in the first four tales can only be compounded by the knowledge that the author himself was among the gentility, having been a *mesnal gentil* (gentleperson in service) of Edward III and Richard II (Strohm, *Social Chaucer* 19-22). As such, he was entitled to wear the "honorable livery" of the king, to bear arms, and to give witness in the Court of Chivalry, all of which, at one time or another, he did (Strohm, *Social Chaucer* 20; Patterson, *History* 180, 194).

What we are left with, then, at the end of the first fragment are two related questions. First, will Chaucer allow the discourse and ideology of the Cook to remain unchallenged (though painted as morally reprehensible, as I have shown in my first chapter) throughout the course of the *Canterbury Tales*? Second, how will Chaucer, a poet who draws heavily upon traditional, written sources and whose social, literary and economic life are largely dependent upon his membership in the King's affinity, construct his own role as author and his *autoritas* given the treatment in the first fragment of the Knight's chivalric discourse? These questions are certainly complicated by the presence of Chaucer-Pilgrim and the character-narrators, and any answers to them must include a consideration of where and
how we can discern the voice and intention of Chaucer-
Author.

2

I believe that we must turn to the Man of Law's Tale
in order to begin resolving the above questions. I choose
this tale for a number of reasons. To begin with, as V.A.
Kolve has argued in his Chaucer and the Imagery of
Narrative (257-296), Chaucer meant the Man of Law's Tale to
signal not the beginning of a new subgroup of tales, nor
the beginning of second day of the pilgrimage, but, rather,
completion the morning's tale-telling begun by the Knight.
Secondly, the moral story of Custance, a young woman torn
from her home and subjected to trials by God (which she
faithfully endures), stands in stark contrast to those of
the Miller, Reeve and Cook. Finally, in the introduction
to his tale, the Man of Law, makes a reference, unique
within the fiction of the Canterbury Tales, to "Chaucer"
and some of his works (II 47-76). Since the narrator does
not show any awareness that the person of whom he is
speaking is present, and since there is no indication that
"Chaucer-Pilgrim" of the General Prologue or The Tale of
Sir Thopas is anything other than an "average fellow" who
must tell a tale and decides to record his experiences, it
is clear that The Man of Law's Tale is the correct point in
The Canterbury Tales to begin to explore Chaucer's
authorial self-presentation and his construction of his auctoritas. This exploration is essential in light of Chaucer’s crafting of the first of the first four tales. Having introduced disruptive voices of social protest, and having allowing these voices to triumph of over the courtly discourse he previously used as a foundation of his poetic, Chaucer must now enact a new poetic—which in turn involves taking some sort of position on the rebellious ideology of the lower strata embodied in the fabliaux.

Kolve’s argument for the Man of Law’s Tale being the final tale of the morning’s telling is based on a study of the two manuscripts most important to editors of the Canterbury Tales, Hengrwt and Ellesmere. He states that in both manuscripts (penned by the same scribe) the gap left between the Cook’s Tale and the Host’s invitation to the Man of Law is accounted for by the scribe’s belief that he was missing a part of the Cook’s Tale which he hoped to find and add at a later date. Kolve founds his argument upon the observation that the note appended to the ending of Roger’s tale ("Of this Cokes tale maked Chaucer na more") appears in the yellow-brown ink with which the scribe penned the end of the Canterbury Tales and made his final corrections. Thus, the blank space between the Cook’s Tale and the Man of Law’s Tale was inserted by the scribe not to create a fictional pause between the two
tales, but rather so that he could insert the "missing" lines when he found them. (In other words, we should not read this disjunction in the text as being analogous to the thematically or mimetically significant breaks between "books" or "chapters" of more modern works but merely as the residue of scribal activity.) Kolve further argues that even when the scribe had finished the manuscript he still had hope that the missing lines would be found. He bases this notion on the fact that the scribe did not include an explicit after the Cook's Tale as he did following the other tales (Kolve p. 471, n.49).

Now that we have some manuscript evidence for examining the dialogue between the Man of Law's Tale and those traditionally though of as constituting the first fragment, I will turn to the critical history of the tale of Custance as a prelude to my own argument. Doing so will both define the central critical debates on the tale and allow us to see how a consideration of the tale in terms the historical and ideological issues I have been exploring can shed new light on these interpretive controversies.

The critical history of the Man of Law's Tale is notable for the lack of interest shown in it between the 1520's, when a printed version of the tale was produced by Thomas Alsop, and the late nineteenth century, when Victorian critics such as Furnivall attacked it for implausibility of event and character and for the tale's
explicit Christian thrust (Edwards 85-86). The "roadside" critics of the first half of this century also had little use for it, characterizing it as an apprentice work (Edwards 86); this lack of interest is most likely due to the fact that they saw in the tale very little of the secular, "realistic" drama which interested them. (We should pause to recall that early in this century the "literary vermiform appendix" of the "Epilogue to the Man of Law's Tale" had not yet been attached by Robinson to the Man of Law's Tale (Kolve p. 470, n. 48), nor, of course, was there yet any suggestion that the tale itself was meant to be linked with those four preceding it.)

In the second half of the twentieth century critical interest in the tale has grown, with commentary appearing (to cite a few examples) on the Man of Law's use of rhetoric (Delasanta, Farrell, Grennen and Astell), the genre of his tale (Duffey, Bloomfield), the slighting allusion to Gower in the tale's introduction (Fisher), and Chaucer's use of his sources (Block, Ellis, and Lewis). However, in addition to the persistent discomfort caused by a tale which celebrates a woman's complete acceptance of trials and tasks given her by God, this criticism has also been hindered by the difficulty in determining the relationship between an overtly Christian tale and Chaucer's satirical treatment of its narrator in both the
The usual method for "resolving" this problem has been to focus on one feature of the tale while ignoring the rest. Even the more rigorous critics who have attempted to account for narrator, tale, and its relationship to its sources often resort either to minimizing Chaucer's rough handling of the Man of Law (Kolve) or to allowing the character's presence to completely "contaminate" the tale itself (Shoaf). Only Alfred David has come close to offering a thorough and even-handed reading of the Man of Law's Tale. David argues that Chaucer uses the Man of Law as a foil to allow himself to both prove to his audience his ability to deliver a moral tale and, by figuring his auditors' desire for such tales in the monolithic and short-sighted literary preference of the lawyer, to give himself room to include other, less moral fictions in the Canterbury Tales (David 118-134).

I intend to argue for a variation on Alfred's theme, a variation recast in terms of the insights embodied in my first chapter. I, too, maintain that Chaucer uses the Man of Law to deliver a tale he desires to be told, and that the reason he chooses to place this particular tale at this particular point in the Canterbury Tales is to provide an
alternative to the fabliaux which precede it. However, I differ with David's belief that Chaucer's choice is determined by what, in effect, amount to artistic and moral imperatives--the need to provide at least some moral tales, and to live up to the "commitment" made to the pilgrims he had brought into existence in the General Prologue (David 121-122; see also Kolve 297). I believe that the Man of Law's Tale was inspired by more specific and immediate ideological imperatives: the need to critique (if not yet to refute) the destabilizing discourse of the Cook, and the need to present an alternative, sanitized model for oral discourse.

Furthermore, while I accept David's assertion that Chaucer may have satirized the Man of Law in order to provide himself with the license to write tales which include off-color action, I also believe that this same satire allows Chaucer the opportunity to define himself socially and artistically by providing himself with a vehicle for the displacement of his own commercial, "middle class" background.

Let us begin, in acknowledgement of our critical debt to Kittredge and company, with a consideration of how the Man of Law's Tale is framed at the dramatic, or mimetic, level as a "quitting" of what has gone before. As well as providing an entre into a very difficult text, this examination will provide additional support for Kolve's
argument for the inclusion of the *Man of Law's Tale* in the first fragment in that it will show how mimetically coherent is the transition from the *Cook's Tale* to that of the Seargant at law.

Given the textual link between this tale and the *Cook's Tale* and, to reiterate, given that the Cook prefaces his tale with a threat to the Host (I 4355-62), it is understandable that Harry Bailly first launches into a lengthy condemnation of "ydelnesse" and then calls upon the Man of Law without making any mention of Roger's performance (II 1-34). The host's reasons for this abrupt and vigorous turn away from the class of speakers most likely to tell the type of tale he enjoys are even more understandable in light of the fact that the Cook's threat is couched in terms which hint at physical as well as verbal revenge. By his recitation of Flemish chestnut (I 4355), Roger calls up images of the slaughter of the Flemings in London during the Uprising of 1381. As David Wallace tells us, the Flemings, who were consider by the rebels to be sapping the wealth of the English economy, were marked for murder through linguistic tests posed by the rebels (70-71). Thus, Roger's familiarity with Flemish does not imply he was a friend of the Flemings, but rather gives his speech a rather menacing character. This threatening overtone of the Cook's allusion are unlikely to be missed by Harry. The host is unlikely to miss the
threatening overtone of the Cook’s allusion, as Harry is streetwise innkeeper who understands the power of language (for example, see the warning he delivers to the Manciple regarding the dangers of angering the Cook [IX 69-75] and also Harry’s well executed attack on the Pardoner [VI 947-59]). The innkeeper is also a resident of Southwark, through which the rebels entered London.

Perhaps even more significant in terms of the social conflict we have been exploring is the manifestation at this juncture of different voice—a voice which does not belong to the Cook, to the host nor to Chaucer-Pilgrim—which can be heard in the description of Harry’s activities:

Oure Hooste saugh wel that the brighte sonne
The ark of his artificial day hath ronne
The ferthe part, and half an houre and moore,
And though he were nat depe ystert in loore,
He wiste it was the eightetethe day
Of Aprill, that is messager to May;
And saugh wel that the shadwe of every tree
Was as in lengthe the same quantitee
That was the body erect that caused it.
And therefore by the shadwe he took his with
That Phebus, which that shoon so clere and brighte,
Degrees was fyve and fourty clombe on highte, and for that day, as in that latitude,
It was ten of the clokke, he gan conclude . . .
(II 1-14)

Notice the echo of the famous opening lines of the Canterbury Tales, "Whan that Aprill with his shoures soote / The droughte of March hath perced to the / Roote . . ." (I 1-3). The first lines of the General Prologue have, of course, elicited much praise, and, it is important to note,
are delivered before the author's construction of the "I" of Chaucer-Pilgrim in line twenty. They are spoken not in the voice of a credulous pilgrim/recorder "along for the ride," but instead in what Barbara Nolan calls a "clerkly" voice: a voice learned in literary tropes, science, and religion and one which lays claim to the power to give "cosmic explications" (Nolan 133-34).

A similarly learned voice speaks the opening lines of the Man of Law's Introduction, which (like the opening lines of the General Prologue) is so full of scientific reasoning and astronomical terminology that is impossible to attribute it to our innkeeper host. Chaucer indeed goes out of his way to make this clear through the irony of line five, which immediately precedes the Host's intricate astronomical calculations of time: "And though he were nat depe ystert in loore..." If there is any doubt that what we have in fact here is not the voice of the Host, we need only consider the fact that the calculations which appear in this passage not only require a good deal of learning (such as that which produced A Treatise on the Astrolabe) but also the possession of astronomical devices and tables (Eberle, "Notes" 854). I believe that the foregrounding of the learning necessary to make such statements, which is not attributable to either the characters interacting in this scene or to the credulous and sometimes bumbling Chaucer-Pilgrim, calls our attention
to the fact that there exists a prior and controlling voice behind the characters and narrator--that of Chaucer-Author.

What is most significant in the presence of Chaucer's voice is the fact that the opening lines of the *Introduction to the Man of Law's Tale* exist as a prologue to the Host's denunciation of "Ydelenesse," a denunciation we can now see is spoken by Chaucer as well:

> And for that day, as in that latitude, 
> It was ten of the clokke, he gan conclude, 
> And sodeynly he plighte his hors about. 
> "Lordynges," quod he, "I warne you, al this route . . . .
>
> Lat us nat mowlen thus in ydelenesse. (II 13-34)

It is important to note here that the term "ydelenesse," when used in a negative fashion as it is here, does not primarily denote "doing nothing" but rather "doing morally dangerous things" (Kolve 286). Thus, what we have here is a condemnation of popular discourse of the preceding tales, which reached a crescendo in the *Cook's Tale*.

This condemnation of idleness is further significant both because it highlights the similarities and differences Chaucer-Author wishes to draw between himself and the Man of Law and because it serves to illuminate an important thread of the ideology of the *Cantrebury Tales* as a whole, an ideology which (among other things) pits a chivalric privileging of leisure against a "middle class" distrust of inactivity. In his essay "Chaucer and Gentility," Nigel Saul recounts that the central debate on gentility was over
whether it was a product of a prestigious (and wealthy) lineage or a virtue which one could possess and regardless of one's heritage. The aristocracy preferred the former theory, while (at least in the later Middle Ages) many clerical writers argued that gentility was a trait was a virtue tied not to birth--the product of a sinful act--but to the development and exercise of reason over body and behavior (Saul 41-43). The latter definition was more advantageous to those who were what we would now call "civil servants," such as Chaucer, because it allowed them to possess a prestigious trait necessary for social, political and economic advancement (Saul 50-52). Saul goes on to show how the latter definition of gentility is the one expounded by Chaucer in his works, and argues that Chaucer also attempted to provide a synthesis of the terms of the debate through his portrait of the Knight, in whom virtue and lineage coexist (45).

There is something of the gentility-as-virtue idea at work in the Introduction to the Man of Law's Tale and in his protrait in the General Prologue. First of all, as Saul points out, Seargants of Law (those at the top of the non-hereditary ranks of the legal profession) were very often given landed estates and knighthoods for diligent service (46). Indeed, while Chaucer does satirize the Man of Law, we would do well to consider that this character is not portrayed in anything like completely negative terms.
We are told, and given no reason to doubt, that he knows all the judgements handed down since the time of William the Conquerer, and that he has memorised all the statutes of England (I 322-324, 327). Furthermore, we are told that he is very often where a man of his occupation should be-at work in the court of assizes. He is, in short, one who has devoted great energy to public service, a trait he shares with his creator. In this important sense, the Man of Law is a very appropriate vehicle for Chaucer's introduction a highly moral tale radically opposed to the Cook's discourse.16

The narrative and ideological situation of the Man of Law's Tale is yet more complicated, however. We must not forget that while the Man of Law is partially valorized by Chaucer through the positive light in which the poet throws upon a mutually shared dedication to "civil service," the same character is also heavily satirized. The best place to begin a exploration of this satire is with the lines "Nowher so bisy a man as he ther nas, / And yet he semed bisier than he was" (I 321-22). As Kolve points out, the irony of the second line does not completely annihilate the meaning of the first, yet it does level a charge at the Man of Law. The first line is a high compliment: it tells us that this character is very diligent in his work, which, given his prestigious and important position, is high praise indeed. The second line does not take away the
praise of the first (nor, significantly, does it question the value of being "bisy") but merely attacks the Man of Law for activity that would appear to be useful but is not.\textsuperscript{17} We should also note that by giving "business" a positive connoation while using "idleness" (which, in aristocratic courtly literature is seen as being condusive to gentility) to condemn the socially disruptive fabliaux, Chaucer further argues for the idea that gentility is not a function of birth, but of character and activity.

The specific character of the misdirected effort through which the Man of Law is satarized is made clear in other lines in his portrait. He spends some of his time (and his talents of reading and writing) not in pursuit of his vocation but in pursuit of the aquisition of land: "So greet a purchasour was nowher noon: / Al was fee symple to hym in effect / His purchaseyg myghte nat been infect" (I 318-320). This greed is reinvoked (and reworked) in the Man of Law's Prologue through his valorization of merchants (II 120-30) and through his twisting of Pope Innocent III's De miseria condicionis humane into an attack on the poor (II 99-121, see also Eberle 856).

There is no doubt that Chaucer gives the Man of Law's commercial activity an extremely negative valence. What makes this fact significant to an investigation of Chaucer's construction of his authority is that just as the poet shares with his character the trait of long and
devoted service to the crown, he also shares with him a connection to the world of commerce. Chaucer's father, John, was a prosperous vinter, who (including his wife's inheritance) owned 28 shops in London, a home in the Vintry ward plus properties in Ipswich, the home of the Chaucer clan (Benson, "Introduction" XV). Furthermore, a good deal of the prosperity of Geoffrey Chaucer's family was obtained as the result of exactly the type of rough-and-ready action to be found in the fabliaux of the first fragment. Lister Matheson has revealed in his essay "Chaucer's Ancestry" that Chaucer's grandfather, originally called Robert Malyn (the first to take the family name "Chaucer") was an apprentice of a wealthy London mercer, John le Chaucer. When John died, he willed a good deal of property to Robert Malyn, who at some point also took his benefactor's name. The circumstances of John's death were a bit scandalous: he was killed in an armed street brawl leading a band which included his taverner and his cook (Matheson 179-182). When we recall that it is Chaucer-Author, as well as the Host, who calls for a tale to quit the idleness of the fabliaux, and that Chaucer establishes the Man of Law's (and his own) authority to do so by valorizing "public service," we understand the attack on commerce in the Man of Law's Introduction is a way for Chaucer to displace rather un-gentle elements of his own position and heritage.
This conclusion is further supported by Matheson’s examination of Chaucer’s original family name, Malyn. Matheson explores the etymology of the name, noting that in addition to at least hinting an origin in bastardy, the name was also linguistically related to Malkyn/Malkin. This latter name carried immoral connotations of its own as it was often used to refer to "a servant woman, a young woman of the lower classes, or a woman of loose morals" (Mathison 178, 181-182). Chaucer works hard to displace this element of his family history as well: he uses the name "Malkyn" in his denunciation of idleness in the Man of Law’s Introduction (II 29-31) and the name "Malyne" in the violent and immoral Reeve’s Tale (I 4236).

Let us now move to consider the Man of Law’s reference to "Chaucer," his works, and their contrast with other, less moral tales (II 45-89). Most existing criticism of this passage has centered on the falling out it was likely to have caused between Chaucer and Gower (Fisher in Eberle, "Notes" 856 and Edwards 88). The argument runs that Gower, a friend of Chaucer’s, became angry (removing from a revision of Confessio Amantis a compliment to Chaucer) when he saw that the stories of Canace and Appollonious, versions of which he had penned, had been criticized as immoral in Chaucer’s work (II 78-81). This criticism, limited though it may be, will become important
when the slight offered to Gower is considered in the context of the narrative and in light of more recent scholarship on the *Man of Law’s Tale*.
I wish specifically to turn to the criticism of R.A. Shoaf. In a very incisive essay, "Unwemmed Custance: Circulation, Property and Incest in the Man of Law's Tale," Shoaf argues that the Man of Law's constant use of such terms as "thrift," "holding," "saving," "keeping" and "pynching" reveal his obsession with and fear of "circulation . . . the flow of things, of media, be they money or women or words . . ." (293). Thus, the tale of Custance is a perfect fit for him, since she remains "constant" throughout the narrative: she is threatened, betrayed, falsely accused, set adrift on the sea, but her character never changes (Shoaf 287-288).

It is because, Shoaf tells us, the Man of Law is anxious about controlling circulation that he is irritated at Chaucer for telling so many stories (II 45-52) and so chooses a tale that he believes will allow him to deny his belatedness, to claim the power of the originary position (298). This is excellent criticism, but I would argue additionally that Chaucer, once again, has a great deal in common with the Man of Law. Furthermore, Chaucer again uses the relationship between his character and himself to construct his own authority.

To begin, I would like to call attention to the fact that Chaucer expresses concern for the circulation (and the resulting corruption and misapprehension) of his own work
several times in his oeuvre. Besides the well known example or the retraction, there are, for instance, the defence of lewd tales and language in the name of accuracy in the *General Prologue* (I 726-746), the admonition to the reader, in the *Miller's Prologue*, to "turne over the leefe and chese another tale" if offended (I 3175), and the meditation upon linguistic change in the proem to Book II of the *Troilus* (22-28). And there is, perhaps most blantly and most colorfully, "Chaucers Wordes Unto Adam, His Owne Scriveyn":

Adam, scriveyn, if ever it thee bifalle
Boece or Troylus for to wryten newe,
Under thy long lokkes thou most have the Scalle,
But after my makyn thow wryte more trewe;
So ofte adaye I mot thy werk renewe,
It to correcte and eke to rubbe and scrape,
and al is thorugh thy negligence and rape.

Turning to the *Introduction to the Man of Law's Tale* itself, I am reminded of David's characterization of the interaction between Chaucer and his character as a "contest." I believe, however, that the contest here is not most significantly over what types of tales an author should produce but rather over the right to claim what Shoaf calls the power of the origin, and that Chaucer sets himself up as the winner. Here we have a piece of literature in which an author creates a character who prefaces his tale with a speech declaring it's independence from the author.
That we understand the character "the Man of Law" to be, in the final analysis, only a construction created by Chaucer is insufficient support for my argument, however. All of the *Canterbury Tales* are "told" by characters created by Chaucer, but yet (as we have seen in our examination of what is traditionally called the first fragment) he is sometimes quite distant, or even hostile, to the thrust of a given tale. The situation in the *Man of Law's Tale* is different from that of other tales, though: as I have previously noted, Chaucer-author calls attention to his own presence both by the inclusion of a "Chaucer" complete with a catalogue of works and through the reinvocation of that clerkly voice which preceded the introduction of the Pilgrim-narrator's "I" in the *General Prologue*. It might be argued that even this is inconclusive: Chaucer could have chosen to declare himself here for another purpose, though the mere fact of his self-declaration would render the Man of Law's claim to originality problematic for the reader.

The case for my argument becomes stronger, however, when we consider the specifics of the reference to Chaucer and his works. While the Man of Law complains (II 45-52) that he knows no tale which Chaucer has not already told (and that Chaucer has even told more tales than Ovid), his list of Chaucer's works (II 57-76) is in fact incomplete. In addition to further the undercutting of the Man of Law,
the irony of this error signifies in another direction as well: if the Man of Law is in error, it is because Chaucer is an even more prolific writer, and, thus, a more dominating figure than our character-narrator recognizes. Furthermore, it is important that the works of which the lawyer is ignorant are Chaucer’s tales of Christian love, suffering and trial (Kolve 293)—precisely the type of work we are about to hear. For an informed audience, the joke is clearly on the Man of Law: he struggles for authority and independence from Chaucer, but this struggle serves only to reinforce Chaucer’s own authority.

The linchpin in my argument (if more evidence is necessary) is that the form of the Man of Law’s Tale calls explicit attention to the fact Chaucer, not the Man of Law, is responsible for the tale of Custance. The tale is in rhyme royal, a form central to Chaucer’s poetic, which Martin Stevens has shown to be a written one, relying for its effect on the eye as well as the ear (Stevens 70). Yet, the Man of Law tells us the source (and, for that matter, the authority) of his tale is oral: he heard it from a merchant (131-133). Indeed, the distinction between the literacy of Chaucer’s works and the orality of his character is highlighted by the fact that, throughout his Introduction, the Man of Law refers to books, volumes and writing when discussing Chaucer’s tales (II 52, 60, 77, 87). In addition, when drawing a contrast between their
practices, the lawyer uses the term "speke" to describe his activity while reserving the more literate "make" for Chaucer's (II 96). Once again, the joke is on the Man of Law: in a superb display of artistry (and humor) Chaucer manages to satirize a character's pretensions to authority while enacting his own.

The difference between Chaucer's self-presentation here and his construction of Chaucer-Pilgrim is marked enough to dwell on. The Pilgrim of the General Prologue assumes the role of compilator of oral texts: a man St. Bonaventure describes as one who "writes others' words, putting together passages which are not his own" (in Burrow 30). The Chaucer of the Introduction to the Man of Law's Tale, on the other hand, constructs himself as an auctor, of whom Burrow tells us:

Authority belongs to the auctor--an honorific title, even as Bonaventure's cool account suggests. To be an auctor is to augment the knowledge and wisdom of humanity, (both words derive from Latin augere); and few latter-day [ie. medieval] writers can claim as much. The great auctores of the past . . . have already said almost everything there is to say (32).

Having determined that Chaucer makes a very aggressive claim for his own authority at this point in the Canterbury Tales, we might ask "why this strong of a claim, and why here?" There are answers. The answer to the first part of the question is quite obvious: Chaucer declares his authority here in order to contain the powerful discourse of the Cook. The second will require more substantial
exploration. In order to help answer the threat embodied in the *Cook's Tale*, Chaucer chose in the story of Custance not just a moral tale, but one that was held by his contemporaries to be historically true (Kolve 299). The reason Chaucer needs to stake his claim to *auctoritas* so strongly is that by using such a tale, he must deal with his own belatedness, especially with his belatedness to those writers who penned the versions most well known to his circle. One of these writers was none other than John Gower.

This, of course, is why Chaucer offers the slight to Gower, and also, perhaps, why he draws more of the *Man of Law's Tale* from his other precursor, Nicholas Trivet. Chaucer's literary relationship to Trivet's work is different than to Gower's. Trivet's version is older than Gower's; he is not a contemporary rival (Eberle, "Notes" 857). Furthermore, Trivet's chronicle was written in Anglo-Norman French, a language which by Chaucer's time was becoming ideologically suspect due to the seemingly endless and increasingly unpopular wars with the French. By using this work, Chaucer performs what by his time has become a very important function for the nascent English nation: the translation of important writings--religious, historical, and scientific--into the vernacular (Fisher 1173-76). That Chaucer was familiar with and a supporter of this cultural project can be seen in his remarks on the subject in A
Treatise on the Astrolabe (25-40). 22 Indeed, has Kolve pointed out, the Man of Law's tale itself is nationalistic in its portrayal of the Christianization of England (Kolve 301).

Finally, if we consider that two-thirds of the tale is wholly Chaucer's creation, and that the use of others' words in moderation is not antithetical to the role of auctor (Burrow 30), we can understand how Chaucer is able (with a great deal of effort) to both claim the authority of that role and relate a narrative empowered by its status as history.

In addition to acting as a brake on the rebellious ideology embodied in the fabliaux of the first fragment and an expression of English nationalism, the Man of Law's Tale carries further ideological implications. First, as Astell has pointed out, the discourse of Custance is drawn in such a way to draw a contrast between her and the Man of Law. The latter's mode of discourse is characterized by apostrophe--a trope which presumes a human audience whose emotions need to be stirred for a given purpose, while Custance's discourse is embodied in prayer, a closed system of communication between herself and God which bypasses other human beings completely. Astell correctly argues that by portraying Custance as being in direct communication with God, Chaucer renders her independent of the moral taint of her worldly narrator (Astell 88-95).
This is important because it allows for an effective answer to the first fragment fabliaux. Even more, it introduces into the *Canterbury Tales* a "safe" mode of orality: Custance speaks, but her speech is aimed at communicating with God, not at affecting worldly change or invoking worldly passions.

Finally, lest auditors of the *Canterbury Tales* forget the nature of the threat which the *Man of Law's Tale* is meant to contain, Chaucer includes a reminder within the *Tale* itself. Greatly expanding upon his source material (Eberle, "Notes" 857), Chaucer dwells at length on the role of a servant charged with delivering a message between the constable and the king (II 729). It is because of the treachery of this drunken letter carrier, we are told, that Donegild is able to arrange for Custance's exile. The messenger is characterized in a way reminiscent of many of the characters in the fabliaux: he is a drunk, and is said to be disloyal to his master, treacherous and greedy. The whole scene enacts anxiety over the mishandling of documents and literacy by the lower social strata. Significantly, the messenger is not only condemned but tortured, though he was not responsible for (or even cognizant of) the theft and forgery of the documents he carried.

To close, the *Man of Law's Tale* is an extremely important nexus of the *Canterbury Tales* because it is here
that Chaucer defines his authority (displacing his non-gentil, mercantile background) and here that he offers at least a partial answer to the social and discursive challenges offered by the fabliaux in general, and the *Cook's Tale* most particularly and powerfully.
CHAPTER III
The Canon's Yeoman, Manciple and Parson:
Quitting the Cook

1

Having seen how the Man of Law's Tale performs the interrelated functions of providing an answer to the Cook's Tale and providing Chaucer with an opportunity to construct his authority, some may wonder why it is necessary to proceed to the final sections of the Canterbury Tales. The primary answer to this question is quite uncomplicated: Chaucer chooses to have the Cook reappear in the course of the Manciple's Prologue, and since the Cook has been so central in Chaucer's handling of social unrest in the Canterbury Tales, we would be irresponsible to ignore this second coming.

Also, we need to consider that while the Man of Law's Tale does stand in marked opposition to the Cook's discourse, the quitting of the latter is not necessarily complete. First, the tale of Custance, while it
undoubtedly embodies a worldview far different from that of the Cook’s, and while it is also placed in a narrative context that asks its auditors’ to react positively toward it, also takes the form of an exemplum. The problem here is that exempla require a good deal of interpretive work on the part of their audiences, who may misinterpret the import of the tale. While it could be claimed that this is true of any genre of fiction, I would like to point out that in the fictional world of the Canterbury Tales Chaucer seems to indicate that the use exempla is particularly problematic.

We see this most clearly in the Clerk’s Tale. The clerk, a grave and learned man who takes his tale-telling duty very seriously, sets out to tell a moral story. He takes a scholar’s care in presenting his material as clearly and straightforwardly as possible: he cites his source (IV 27-32) and announces that he will omit his source’s proheme because it serves no useful purpose (IV 54-56). Furthermore, apparently aware of the educational diversity of his pilgrim audience, the Clerk largely follows the Host’s injunction to forgo the use of "Youre termes, youre colours, and youre figures"--the rhetoric of high style fit for writing to a king but not for the clerk’s current listeners (IV 16-20). Despite his learning and all of his precautions, however, the Clerk (and Chaucer) seems to be rather anxious that the tale of
patient Griselda may be misapprehended. Thus, he often interrupts the Tale to remind members of his audience that while Griselda's patience is to be admired, they are not to believe that Walter's actions, through which her patience is tested, are not to be condoned or reenacted. Moreover, the clerk ends his Tale proper by reminding his hearers that they live in a time inferior to that of Griselda's, and so shouldn't expect find to her like in the course of their lives. Next follows the "Lenovy de Chaucer," which anticipates and attempts to counter the fact that at least one of the Clerk's auditors, the Wife of Bath, will no doubt (willfully) misread the Tale. Finally, the drama of the Canterbury Tales show us that such anxiety is indeed well-founded. The Host, responding to the Clerk's Tale, does not understand the tale as a universal exemplum of Christian patience; he remarks only that he "... were levere than a barel ale/My wyf at hoom had herd this legende ones!" (IV 1212c-d).

The second factor that limits the containment of the Cook's discourse by the Man of Law's Tale is the fact that one of the major ways the Canterbury Tales works upon its audience is through its drama, and we are left uncertain as to the effect upon Roger of the Tale of Custance. We feel this uncertainty all the more profoundly, I believe, because the Cook has as pronounced a mimetic as a thematic function in Chaucer's fiction: as I have shown in my first
chapter, Roger is very aware of the speakers and discourses which have preceded him; he also intends his utterances to have specific effects (which they do) on other pilgrims such as the Guildsmen.

We could also surmise--I think correctly--that Chaucer does not want to resolve such an important conflict as that which centers on the fate of the Cook and his ideology before he as introduced other conflicts into the Canterbury Tales (some of which, like that caused by the Wife of Bath, are related to the Cook). There is, however, one final and, for Chaucer, inescapable reason that the Man of Law’s Tale cannot completely succeed in quitting Roger. I speak here of the fact that Chaucer realizes that for medieval Europeans, in the final analysis, all questions of right and wrong, justice and injustice, and even the truth-value of language could only be answered through reference to Christianity. Even the idea of gentility-through-service which Chaucer appeals to in the Introduction to the Man of Law’s Tale was originally formulated by the clergy (Saul 42). Thus, he must counter the Cook’s Tale with an explicitly Christian piece. This is problematic, however, as Chaucer is himself one of the first generation of royal administrator who were not themselves clerics. So to with his narratorial foil, the Man of Law. Neither character nor author, speaking through direct discourse, could offer a doctrinal Christian rebuttal to the Cook with the
unshakable authority available to a true (and by "true" I mean both ordained and devout) member of the clergy. This tension between Chaucer's secular life and the clerical value system to which he must appeal is compounded by the fact that Chaucer desires not merely to expound an ideology favorable to one of his social position through a pedestrian work of fiction but also to claim for himself role of auctor.

The problem here is that Chaucer's ouevre, while often philosophical or courtly, can hardly be described as clerical. Chaucer, though a Christian and concerned with Christian morality and thought, does not limit himself to these topics. Indeed, the range of his interests is rather expansive: secular love, (pagan) history, and science come readily to mind. In short, Chaucer can plausibly claim to be a great, inclusive, secular poet, but to base his claim to authority on his role as some sort of latter-day church father would be ridiculous. Given both his own social position and his construction of his auctoritas (and his need to use the Man of Law as a foil), Chaucer makes the best choice available to him: he compliments the Man of Law's quitting of the Cook with a further quitting, by the Manciple, through a narrative that is an exemplum, and not, for example, a theological meditation.
Now that we know the reasons why the Cook must reappear, we can turn to the tale which sets the stage for this reappearance, the *Canon's Yeoman's Tale*. I would first like to point out that this tale of alchemy, whatever else it may do, serves as a reprise—or, more accurately, a rewriting—of the performance of the Cook earlier in the *Canterbury Tales*. Roger, as we recall, was in the difficult position of having been accused of professional impropriety in front of his current employers, the Guildsmen. To preempt their reaction, he tells a tale which implicitly suggests that if the Guildsmen fired him, they would only find that his replacement would be every bit as bad as he had been, if not worse. The Guildsmen not only refrain from taking revenge upon Roger, they never speak at all. The *Canon's Yeoman* is portrayed, at least superficially, as being an even more potent incarnation of the Cook: the Yeoman vanquishes his employer as well, and the Canon leaves the pilgrimage altogether. Moreover, the Canon is routed merely by the threat of the Yeoman's tale.

The relevance of the *Canon's Yeoman's Tale* to my exploration of Chaucer's handling of the ideological problem posed by the lower strata of his society can be further clarified if we view the Yeoman's performance as Britton Harwood does in his essay "Chaucer and the Silence of History: Situating the *Canon's Yeoman's Tale.*" Harwood
argues that one of the things that makes this tale worthy of study is that it is the only piece of the *Canterbury Tales* in which Chaucer presents a rendering of the workings of productive capital, which Harwood, appealing to a proclamation by the clergy of the time, defines as "the use of money to buy a material for fashioning something" (Harwood 339). Wage labor is also a salient feature of productive capital, for it is through labor that value is added to a material (Harwood 334). Harwood, following the great social historian Rodney Hilton, believes that it was the rise of productive capital, not merchant capital, which threatened feudalism in the 14th century. Chaucer, whom Harwood connects with the interests of merchant capital, gives us in the *Canon's Yeoman's Tale* a distorted and derogatory picture of the functioning of productive capital. In the *prima pars*, we see the use of capital and labor endow a material with greater value, but the process is masked by the occult nature and glaring futility of alchemy. *Pars secunda* enacts a further mystification: in place of the materially transformative goals of alchemy, we now get only a narrative of a con game and the greed and cupidity that make it possible. Such a reading of the *Canon's Yeoman's Tale* does account for the odd disjunction in the work and fits well with the our developing understanding of the way Chaucer includes socially disruptive elements into his text so that he may neutralize
them. Harwood's reading is incomplete, however, partially due to the fact that he mistakenly believes the Yeoman to be the only example of a wage laborer in Chaucer's works (343). The Cook, we will recall, is an employee of the Guildsmen, an employee who through his labor transforms raw materials into delicacies they find more desirable. Furthermore, the Cook has been hired only "for the nones" (1 379); he will no doubt return to the form of labor for more typical for one of his profession--labor in one of the small kitchens that provided sustenance for many of London's lower caste migrants from the country. Such a business is, of course, the perfect example of the type of small industry relying on wage labor for the production of goods that Harwood describes as being a major element in the rise of productive capital.

But where does this establishment of these ideological between the Cook, the Yeoman, and their respective discursive actions get us? More specifically, why, at this late juncture in the work, does Chaucer create a parallel to the Cook's earlier rebellious discourse, especially a parallel that seems to be more powerful in effects (the routing of the Canon, versus the silencing of the Guildsmen)? A closer examination of the Canon's Yeoman's Tale reveals that while the Yeoman may have gained some sort of victory by causing his master to flee, this victory
is rather hollow and that this tale actually works to undercut the rebelliousness found in the *Cook’s Tale*.

A primary reason for the Yeoman’s agony, and his rebellion against the Canon, is the devastating material effects alchemy has had upon him—upon his body and upon his fortune. Kittredge, for instance, has argued, that the Yeoman’s rebellion begins at the moment the Host asks about the newcomer’s face (Kittredge in Campbell 180, n 3). This may well be the case; certainly it is here that the Yeoman begins to discuss himself and where his painful condition:

"Peter!" quod he, "God yeve it harde grace,
I am so used in the fyr to blowe
That it hath Chaunged my colour, I trowe.
I am nat wont in no mirour to prie,
But swynk soore and multiplie. (VIII 665-69)

Later, the Yeoman bewails his financial losses in conjunction with his physical maiming:

Al that I hadde I have lost thereby,
And, God woot so hath many mo than I.
Ther I was wont to be right fressh and gay
Of clothyng and of oother good array,
Now may I were an hose upon myn heed;
And wher my colour was bothe fresh and reed, Now is it wan and of a leden hewe--
Whoso it useth, soore shal he rewe!--
And of my swyynk yet blered is myn ye. (VII. 722-30)

Note not only that the Yeoman once had not only money, but also that his physical appearance and dress were once reminiscent of the carefree Perkyn Revelour of the *Cook’s Tale*. These similarities only serve to drive home the contrast between the fate of the Yeoman and that of both the Cook and the hero of the latter’s *Tale*. The Cook, we
recall, is able to fend off the impending reaction of his employers to his professional misdeeds and, in doing so, keep his employment secure. Perkyn, while he lose’s his job, gains something he wants more: the freedom to join what is portrayed (through the existence of the whorehouse disguised as a respectable business) as an alternative economy, hostile to and parasitic upon that of his former masters. The Yeoman, on the other hand, vanquishes his master but remains poor and physically deformed. Indeed, both his comments upon his loss of vigor and the debts that he will never be able to repay (VIII 734-38) serve to underline the permanence of his losses.

Chaucer’s reenactment of the Cook’s rebellion also portrays the efficacy of oral discourse in a far different light than that we saw in the Cook’s Tale. The Cook was verbally sophisticated: he knew the danger in which the Host had placed him in, and was able to tell a well-wrought tale which threatened the guildsmen forcefully enough to silence them but not enough to draw a reprisal. In contrast, the Yeoman, as many critics have pointed out (cf. Lumianski, Campbell and Howard), is a rather confused speaker. He often loses the thread of his narrative and must remind himself to return to his tale (cf. VIII 862 and 897). He also has a tendency to become lost in the technical jargon of his former vocation, which he knows only imperfectly (VIII 756-776, 790-829, 852-856).
Finally, there is an element present in the *Canon’s Yeoman’s Tale* which is totally absent in and, indeed, totally foreign to the *Cook’s Tale*. In addition the material costs of his associations with the Canon, the Yeoman is portrayed as having suffered spiritually as well. Jackson Campbell, argues that the *Canon’s Yeoman’s Tale* is a flawed act of penance which prepares us for the Parson’s careful tract on the importance and correct performance of this sacrament. Campbell points out, quite correctly, that the Yeoman has a desire to reveal the experiences which corrupted him and also uses himself as a warning to others about the dangers of pursuing alchemy; but eventually he fails at his bid for redemption because he is still partially enchanted by alchemy (Campbell 174-175, 179-180).

Some critics hint that the Yeoman is not penitent at all, however. Harwood attempts to deny that the Yeoman finds alchemy itself suspect, arguing that the Yeoman never claims that his Canon (as opposed to the fictional Canon of the *pars secunda*) is guilty of any more wrong doing than failure and, possibly, voicing overly optimistic claims to his prospective investors (343). Patterson argues that alchemical discourse was a forerunner of the positivist scientific thought which would eventually overturn the clergy’s monopoly on learning and, with it, the theological worldview of the Middle Ages. While this may be true, Patterson goes further, arguing that Chaucer meant there to
be certain similarities between the Yeoman and himself (their interest in natural science, their connection to commerce and interest in learning, and their desire to be "agents of cultural transformation"). Finally, Patterson believes that the Yeoman's resilient fascination with alchemical lore is portrayed by Chaucer as a reasonable attempt to change the former servant's social position by becoming "an intellectual" ("Perpetual Motion" 53-55).

The text of the Canon's Yeoman's Tale would not seem to support attempts by Harwood and Patterson to deny Chaucer's moral attack upon the Yeoman and alchemy. First, the fact that the Canon does flee without defending himself and before the Yeoman actually attacks him strongly implies that the cleric is guilty of something more than "false advertising" (a rather mild shortcoming compared with some others found in the Canterbury Tales). Even the Pardoner, having revealed the great depth of his corruption, and having been humiliated by the Miller, continues the pilgrimage. Second, there is textual evidence that the Yeoman's master is guilty of the same sort of deception as the "fictional" Canon of the pars secunda: the Yeoman tells us that "to muchel folk we doon illusioun, / And borwe gold. . ." (VIII 673-74, my emphasis).

We can thus see that Chaucer does indict alchemy as being both a practical failure and something which is spiritually bankrupt (though the Yeoman, who voices the
indictment, may indeed be ambivalent towards it). With this knowledge, we can now understand the full extent of the revision accomplished in Chaucer’s rewriting of the Cook’s action: the Yeoman’s attempt to change his socio-economic position by either the accumulation of wealth or the knowledge of his "betters" is a complete and very costly failure. And while the Cook successfully stages his rebellion in order to avoid punishment for his wrongdoing, the Yeoman stages his unsuccessful uprising to free himself from the spiritual and material consequences of his previous attempt at self-advancement. The ideological implication of the Canon’s Yeoman’s Tale is clear: attempts by those from the lower social strata to violate the ideology of the dominant strata can only result in physical, financial and spiritual ruin. Having provided this revision of the Cook’s earlier discursive actions, Chaucer has now prepared the way for the reappearance of the Cook’s character in the Manciple’s Prologue.

Before moving on, however, we need to note that the Canon’s Yeoman’s Tale acts very forcefully to separate the world of commerce from that of the clergy. All of the religious figures in this tale—the "real" Canon, the "fictional" Canon, and the gullible priest—are portrayed unfavorably, and their faults stem mostly from greed. This, as well the fact that the Yeoman is never able to fulfill the desire for spiritual peace which at least
partially motivates his Tale, will become important when we turn to the Parson's Tale.

3

The Manciple's Prologue might just as appropriately have been entitled the "Cook's Prologue II," or, even more accurately, the "Cook's Epilogue." The Prologue is 105 lines long. Roger appears, through the words of the Host, in line six, and remains, as an actor and a subject of the dialogue between the Manciple and the Host, until line 102.

Wallace reads the reappearance of the Cook and his interaction with the Manciple as a "reconciliation scene reminiscent of a guild sponsored 'drynkyng'" because he believes "the fragments featuring the cook are plainly at odds with one another" (81). Finding the Cook's voice coherent (and his love of ale already mentioned in the General Prologue [I. 382]), I read his reappearance not as merely the return of a coherent mimetic character but also as the return and reworking of the thematic issues which Chaucer used him to explore in the first fragment. Thus, my reading of the drinking episode is likewise different from Wallace's.

Wallace thematizes what critics have long, and incorrectly, suspected is an incongruity in the text of the Canterbury Tales (see, for example, Benson, Introduction 20). The Cook has already told a tale, and while the
original plan of the *Canterbury Tales* called for each teller to provide two performances, this plan was clearly abandoned. The argument goes that Chaucer could not possibly intended only the insignificant Cook to tell two tales, so he must have meant to cancel either the Cook’s appearance in the *Manciple’s Prologue* or (more likely) the "incomplete" *Cook’s Tale* of the first fragment.

However, as we have seen, the Cook is far from unimportant, and Chaucer, while he does not assign two tales to any of the pilgrims, does often stage a reappearance of characters after (or before) they have told their tales. If we consider the extremely drunken condition of the Cook at the beginning of the *Manciple’s Prologue* (IX. 4-56) and the fact that Harry Bailly has both knowledge of the Cook’s rhetorical powers and reason to dislike him (due to his threatening the Host during the first fragment), we can conclude that the Host neither expects nor desires the Cook to tell a tale. The Host’s words serve as an attack: he is in fact gloating over the Cook’s inability to carry out his earlier threat. By warning the Manciple that at some time in the future, he, too, may fall prey to the Cook, Harry finds an ally, as can be seen by the call for silence embodied in the *Manciple’s Tale*. The drinking scene, then, which Wallace correctly characterizes as reminiscent of a guild ‘drynkyng,’ becomes not a reconciliation but a silencing of
the Cook, enacted by the Host, the Manciple, and, perhaps, metonymically (in the form of "good drink" and the ritual tinge of the drinking scene), by the guildsmen. The Cook, while somewhat revived by the drink, is also speechless; we are told only that he "thanked hym in swich wise as he koude" (IX. 93).

This silencing of the Cook dovetails well with the rewriting of the efficacy of social transgression in the *Canon’s Yeoman’s Tale*. The Yeoman joins a calling which is held by the dominant ideology to be dangerous and immoral in order to gain wealth and (forbidden) knowledge beyond that which he is entitled to by his social station, but his attempt backfires and injures him both materially and spiritually. In the *Manciple’s Prologue*, the Cook’s drinking, part of the hedonism linked to both his and Perkyn’s rebellious energy, is turned against Roger, rendering him silent and ridiculous. Even at this point, however, the threat posed earlier by the Cook has not been totally neutralized. On a thematic level, Chaucer’s containment of the Cook is not complete because he has enacted it through two very flawed characters with their own far from pure motives for attacking the Cook. Indeed, the fact that the Cook’s discourse remains a potential threat is mirrored in the Manciple’s decision to tell a tale which calls not just for the silence of the Cook but for the prevention of new oral discourse altogether. It
remains for the Parson, an unimpeachably reliable narrator, to finally neutralize the threat embodied in the Cook.

As I have argued in my first chapter, and implicitly in my second, the Canterbury Tales is not polyphonic, not a work in which characters and author are equal in authority and all participate in an open-ended dialogue. Chaucer’s artistic handiwork, and values, can be traced in the text. Sometimes, as in the Man of Law’s Tale, he calls attention himself, preforming fairly openly. At other points, such as the first four tales, he recedes into the background, content--or convinced it is in his best interest--to assume the role of the puppet-master behind his curtain. There is no doubt, however, that he more often takes the latter role, and when he does the dramatic illusion of the Canterbury Tales is very strong, so strong that it would be easy to take the outcome of the ideological in the work being a product of random human interaction.

The Parson’s Tale (though not the Parson’s Prologue) is remarkable in that while it suits it teller, the serious Parson, it also leaves the world of the oral game far behind. The tale, in short, dispenses with any pretense of being one voice among many. First of all, to return to Martin Steven’s essay, the Parson’s Tale’s rigidly structured prose form is one associated by medieval
audiences with writing, not speech, and as we have seen earlier, Chaucer is careful to privilege writing over speech. Indeed, Patterson, after studying a very large sample of related medieval tracts, declares that the Parson’s Tale belongs to the genre of "manuals for penitence," a highly learned genre which takes its form from the summa, a type of work which represents the height of clerical learning (Patterson 347). Likewise, in addition to its forceful didacticism, the authoritative character of the tale is made clear in the fact that, unlike others of its genre, it provides as Patterson tells "... a complete and even absolute view of experience as a whole. Its narrowness of focus does not exclude or reduce reality but on the contrary fits all of reality within a single and peculiarly intense and authoritative perspective.

Second, there is the simple consideration of the length of the tale. We learn in the Manciple’s Prologue (IX 1-3) that the pilgrims are within two miles of Canterbury, and hear in Parson’s Prologue that the sun is about to set (X 3-4), yet the Parson goes on for more than 1000 lines. It is important to note, too, the contrast between the Parson’s Tale another long tale, that of the Knight. While the length of the Knight’s Tale works against the mimetic illusion of "roadside drama," this is balanced formally by the inclusion within the tale of
echo's of the pilgrim audience's restlessness and the Knight's concern with their irritation. We do not find this dialogism in the Parson's Tale, a fact made striking in light of the Host's preparatory injunction to the Parson: "Be what thou be, ne breke thou nat oure pley" (X 24). Additionally, there are many other pilgrims that we would expect to rebel against the dour, weighty and moral treatise that Parson gives, yet there is no indication in the tale of dissent from the other pilgrims.

Having determined that the Parson's Tale to be written, authoritative discourse, it is now necessary to determine how this discourse acts upon what has come before, in particular, the socially revisionist discourse of the Cook. Patterson argues that Chaucer, through the Parson's Tale, expounds a relatively liberating ideology in that churlishness is made a function of sin rather than an inevitable social condition (Patterson, "Parson's Tale" 362-63). I disagree. While the Parson often says that sin makes a churl out the sinner, his discourse is actually conservative in regard to the practical workings of medieval England's socio-economic hierarchy. Most explicitly, in discussing thralldom to sin, the Parson states: "Al were it the foulest cherl or the foulest womman that lyveth, and leest of value, yet is he [the sinner] moore foul and moore in servitude" (X 146). Notice how the Parson's language works. In comparing sinners and churls,
he does not dissolve the social category of "churl"; he in acknowledges its existence and relies upon it for the rhetorical force of his castigation of sin. The Parson accepts that there are indeed foul churls, and there is indeed servitude, and then uses these conditions to make sin terrifying by saying, in effect, "the sinner is even worse than a foul churl."

This subtle reification of social stratification can be found throughout the Parson's Tale. In his discussion of Pride, the Parson tells us: "And yet is ther a privy spece of Pride that waiteth first to be salewed er he wole salewe, al be he lasse worth than that oother is, and eek he witeth or desireth to sitte, or elles to goon above him in the way. . . (X 406). The Parson's definition of pride here not only implicitly sanctions existing social hierarchies, but depends on them for the definition of pride: he who wishes to usurp his betters' place is prideful; he who keeps to his proper station is not. Perhaps even more telling is the fact that the Parson ends his long denunciation of rich clothing with the following caveat: "I speke this for the synne of supperfluitee, and nat for resonable honestitie [decorum, good appearance], whan reson it requireth" (435). Here the Parson seems to acknowledge that clothing is important in the drawing of social distinctions, and to explicitly sanction its use for this purpose. The Parson's acceptance of current social
conditions is also born out in his admonishments to the poor to not chafe against their poverty (cf. X 483, 499). And while the Parson does caution lords against taxing their churls too heavily, he cannot imagine a world without the distinction between lords and churls: "I woot wel that ther is degree above degree, as resoun is, and skile is that men do hir devoir ther as it is due. . ." (763). Finally, the metaphysical system of the Parson is at its foundation inimical to the discourse of the Cook. In the Cook's Tale, chaos (Perkyn's "reveling") and inversion of social norms (seen most powerfully in the appearance of the false shop at the end of the tale) are privileged; in the Parson's Tale, not only is order, social and ontological, of supreme importance, but sin, the devil, and even hell itself are described in terms of chaos and inversion.

Even if we accept, as it is clear we must, that the Parson's Tale is inimical to the discourse of social rebellion introduced early in the Canterbury Tales, we might still question the relationship of the Parson's discourse to the rest of the work. What Bakhtin calls the "zone of contact" between the explicitly authoritative discourse of the Parson's Tale and the illusion of free-play found in much of the Canterbury Tales occurs in the Parson's Prologue. Here we find that the gains his power to speak not through chance (as was allegedly the case with
the Knight) or personal assertiveness (as with the Miller, nor even through the invitation of the Host alone. Instead, we have what amounts to a narrative enactment of the conservative "quiet hierarchies" of which D.W. Robertson is so fond. The pilgrims consider and decide to grant the Parson the privileged act of telling the last tale, but they do not address him directly. Instead they petition their immediate superior, the Host, who in turn asks the Parson to speak. Leadership, so ceremoniously given at the beginning of the pilgrimage to the Host, not passes mutual consent completely into to the hands of the Parson. It is significant that there is no debate here--the pilgrims "assented soone" (X 61).

The Parson’s power and reliability as a narrator is further strengthened by the fact that his portrait in the General Prologue is unambiguously positive. He is everything a priest should be: devout, hardworking, charitable and thoroughly devoted to performing his duties. He is, in fact, the clerical embodiment of the service ideal present in the Man of Law’s Tale. If we recall that both the foundation for Chaucer’s own authority (gentility-through service) and the ultimate moral and intellectual centers of medieval Europe lie in the church, it becomes clear that a cleric, and an ideal one at that, is needed to provide the final quitting of the moral repugnant and socially disruptive discourse of the Cook. Chaucer, a
secular official cannot perform the task in his own voice, unassisted. He is, nonetheless, more clearly present in this tale than in many others, however. This can be seen in the fact that while the Parson's Tale very frequently cites a wide array of religious thinkers, the Parson himself claims that "I am not textueel" (X 55). Since his tale is very textual, both in its form and its impressive (and correctly attributed) arsenal of theological thought, attention is once again drawn to the existence of the hand behind the tale--that of Chaucer. The presence of the author here is not so much a function of the necessity of portraying the Parson as reliable--his portrait and the ritualistic endowment of narrative authority in the Parson's Prologue would seem to be sufficient for this purpose--but rather a function of Chaucer's desire to claim clerical learning for the sake of his own authority. Thus, the stress between Chaucer's secular poetic (and social position) and his need to claim a clerical basis for his authority and ideology manifest itself here, at what is meant to be the point at which all tensions are resolved. This stress is present, too, in the Retraction. Here, Chaucer places himself in a very powerful position. His is the only voice to be heard after the Parson's, and the author in fact takes advantage of the opportunity to participate in the activity which the Parson's Tale has declared to be of supreme importance: penitence. The
Retraction acts as a sort of confession, a confession meant to purge Chaucer of the consequences of his sinful, secular poetry. Nonetheless, the gesture is self-consuming. By taking advantage of his power as author to enact a "self-shriving," Chaucer not only violates the Parson's injunction that confession must be made to a proper priest (X 985-93, 1014), but in fact, in a rather heretical move, usurps for himself the power of providing the sacraments. Furthermore, Chaucer's refusal to be specific about which of the Canterbury Tales "sownen into synne" is not in accord with the Parsons insistence that sins be very specifically enumerated (958-1003). This refusal is also a function of the stress between Chaucer's role as author and his desire for the power (and forgiveness, no doubt) to be had through recourse to the church: Chaucer's art, as we have seen, requires that he be able to foreground his own presence in the text to a greater or lesser degree, to speak more or less directly; the Parson, on the other hand, finds such evasions and subtleties sinful. According to him, all must be revealed.
NOTES

1. Justices of the Peace were responsible, among other things, for the enforcement of the Statute of Laborers, one of the primary causes of peasant unrest (Harwood 340).

2. I use "Chaucer" to refer to Chaucer-poet; for the Chaucer directly represented in the text I use "Chaucer-narrator."


4. Wallace's citations of Chaucer's works refer to The Riverside Chaucer, edited by Larry D. Benson.

5. Like Wallace, all my citations of the Canterbury Tales refer to Benson's Riverside Chaucer.

6. I am indebted to James Phelan for his useful and careful study of character. While I use only a few terms ("mimetic" as a way of talking of a character in terms of him being a "possible person," "thematic" as a way of talking about the use of character as vehicles for ideas, and "progression" as a way of talking about the dynamic, temporal effect of narrative over time) in the ways that as he developed them in his book, Reading People, Reading Plots, this book has been very influential in my reading of narratives. My debt to M.M. Bakhtin is at least as great. I draw upon his concept of the "carnivalesque," developed in Rabelais and His World, to examine the laughter which breaks out at the end of the Miller's Tale. Bakhtin's discussion of "polyphony" in Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics is of great use to me in reaching my conclusions on what is (and is not) transpiring between the different discourses present in the Canterbury Tales. I also utilize his theory of "authoritative discourse," which appears in "Discourse in the Novel," in my interpretation of the Parson's Tale and its relationship to earlier tales.

7. The term is convenient but problematic. For most critics, the word "class" is only appropriate when applied to a group of people who consciously constitute themselves as such. Given what we know of how medieval Europeans perceived their social order (as revealed for instance, in
the tendencies of medieval treatises to use the umbrella term "the Third Estate" to refer to all those not of the aristocracy or the clergy), it would seem inappropriate to utilize the term in a discussion of the Canterbury Tales. Nonetheless, we do need to recognize the fact that there were large numbers of people who shared discursive practices and standards of living not common to society as a whole. A cook was likely to have much more in common with a guild apprentice than either would with a knight, even if the cook was freeman and the apprentice a bondsman. To refer to social groups defined in terms of these of similarities, I shall use the words "stratum" and "strata."

8. Alison, while the wife of a carpenter, is the wife of a prosperous carpenter; she thus can afford the type of clothing she wears. Nicholas, while he may hope to rise through the ranks of either the clergy or the "civil service," is at present only a struggling student.

9. Burke discusses the concept of victimage in Language as Symbolic Action.

10. While Grudin does not employ the term "polyphony" in her essay, I place her in the polyphonic camp based on her focus on the dialogue between the discourse of different tales and her conclusion that "In his [Chaucer's] epistemology nothing is ever complete... this view is suggested not so much by direct statement as by the geography of Chaucer's discourse, which denies stabilizing conclusions and seeks open interaction" (1165).

11. That the shadow of 1381 which hangs over the Cook's Tale was not lost on the scribes who copied the Canterbury Tales, despite what they perceived as the incomplete rendering of the Cook's performance, can be seen in the fact that a number of them supplied "endings" of their own which contained moral commentary aimed at Perkyn and his accomplice and in some cases settled the issue by having the two revellers killed for their transgressions (Kolve 275-276).

12. I am here indebted a good deal to A.S.G. Edward's essay "Critical Approaches to the Man of Law's Tale, though the glosses on Kolve, David, Shoaf and Astell are my own, as are the remarks I make regarding the "roadside" critics probable perception of the lack of drama in the Man of Law's Tale.

13. See Patterson's Negotiating the Past (13-18) for an extremely concise and provocative account of these critics (among them Root, Kittredge, Lowes, Patch, Tatlock, Lawrence and Malone) who scholarly careers were founded upon
zealously researched positivist historical work but whose criticism was often completely ahistorical.

14. Though a few critics, such as Shoaf, have not read the *Man of Law's Tale* as being anything more than an acting out of its narrator's inadequacies, most acknowledge (explicitly or implicitly) the tale's moral thrust, even though many would wish this morality were absent. More importantly, however, is the work of such critics as Bloomfield, David, and Kolve, who have, as it were, reconstructed the "horizon of expectation" of Chaucer's audience and concluded that not only were such tales as that of Custance very popular at the time, but that, in the words of David, "the effect of Chaucer's changes [to his source material] and additions was to heighten the religious tone of the story and to make it as dignified as possible" (127). For a particular thorough treatment of the expectations of Chaucer's audience regarding such tales, see Kolve's chapter "The Man of Law's Tale: The Rudderless Ship and the Sea," in which he carefully examines a voluminous mass of material, both textual and iconographic (297-358).

15. It is significant to note here that "ydelnesse" is a term with a (negative) moral as well as a practical connotation and that Harry's speech cast the term in the former light (Kolve 286-290). I shall return to this subject when I discuss the thematic "quitting" performed by the *Man of Law's Tale*.

16. V.A. Kolve also discusses the appropriateness of the Man Law's being introduced at this point but does so mostly in terms of the Host's selection of him, omitting considerations of the relationship between the Man of Law's character and Chaucer (290).

17. I take as my starting point here the commentary of V.A. Kolve (290).

18. According to Fisher, the quarrel can be seen in the fact that while Chaucer and Gower were on good terms previous to the writing of the *Canterbury Tales*, there is no record of association between them after this work was produced. Furthermore, Gower removed a compliment to Chaucer in one of his own works. The reason for the quarrel: the implication in the *Introduction to the Man of Law's Tale* (II 77-89) that Gower, as one who had written "cursed stories" of incest such as Canace and Apollonius, was an immoral poet. See also Eberle's explanatory notes in the Riverside edition (856).

19. Citation refers to Benson's *Riverside Chaucer*. 
20. Taken from Benson's *Riverside Chaucer*. The poem can be found on page 650.

21. Stevens also argues that the term "prose" could, in late Medieval usage, have either its modern meaning or signify certain types of verse, like rhyme royal, which relied on the appearance on the page for some of their effect. I reject this portion of Steven's argument because the Man of Law specifically mentions that the source and authority (a wise merchant) of his tale are oral, not written (II 122-33).


23. The idea that the central socio-economic conflict of the late Middle Ages stems from the desire of small peasant producers to reclaim the surplus value of their labor for use as productive capital runs through of Hilton's vast corpus, and is of course elaborated in considerably more detail and complexity than either Harwood or I have the space to provide. See his *Bond Men Made Free* for his account of the Uprising of 1381.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


