

As he sips the wine we get prepared to hear something really vile. In The Pardoner's prologue, the monstrous exposition of hypocrisy leads us to believe that we are all on the right track. But to our surprise he really tells a moral tale and that with a vengeance, just as we begin to feel complacent that we have been through Chaucer's trick at last, the pardoner comes out with pardon ~~paperworks~~ and we are informed almost to our irritation that we have been caught napping again. It is only then that we realize in full measure the irony of the description of the Pardoner— "But trewely to tellen atte laste / he was in chirche a noble ecclesiaste."

The narrative material is thin here but it is very artistically handled and an impression of verisimilitude is achieved which is a sure sign of good narration. The Prologue to the Canterbury Tales' tells how the fell with a chance formed group of people with the same objective. His descriptions of the fellow pilgrims are often very detailed, but naturalistically

unorganised. An arrangement to lighten the journey by telling stories seems to develop spontaneously out of a convivial evening. On the actual journey there is a hiatus between the tales, and occasional reference to geographical points enroute. It all could have happened but Chaucer's audience has not that narrator with ostensibly Chaucerian voice and his insistence on his responsibility to report information amounts to a further caution.

The Prologue where the occasion and the pilgrims are reported is exquisitely satirical comedy of manners. The Prioress gives herself the airs of a lady of the court but her beautifully correct French has a Middle Saxon accent. The Squire wants to be thought so ardently in love that he cannot sleep at all, but his liveliness and energy belie this. A Philandering Friar affects a slight lisp, to make his English sweet upon his tongue. The wives of the city burgesses have their mantles ~~usually~~ carried for them as if they were queens. The one passion of a spiritually skillful monk is coveting

hares on horse back. The narrative links between tales are accomplished burlesque or knock-out force with a high degree~~s~~ of dramatic development. Traditional hostilities like those of Miller and Reeve or Friar and Summoner are exploited: the enemies score off each other by the stories they tell.

It is thus clear that the narrative in 'The Prologue' though not very powerful reveals the originality of Chaucer in the treatment of the narrative material. The unity that emerges out of a variety of tales told by the pilgrims, establishes Chaucer as a great narrative artist.