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makes a man feel that maybe there is somebody somewhere who makes it a business of looking out for people." In this review of the Richards, Stedman, Robinson interrelationship we have seen that Laura Richards and members of her family played crucial roles in helping Robinson survive the other periods of great difficulty: in coming through the “hell” of his Gardiner life in 1897, in finally publishing Captain Craig in 1902, and then escaping from its harmful aftermath in 1905. Laura Richards made it her business to look out for Robinson. Her letters to Stedman on Robinson’s behalf were but one aspect of this basic commitment. Perhaps the best description of her own motivation is her accurate prediction that Stedman would be of assistance to Robinson “first because kindness is your nature, and secondly for the love of poetry, and third and lastly for the lad himself when you come to know him.”


CHAUCER’S PILGRIMS AND CATHER’S PRIESTS

By MARY-ANN STOUCK

IN AN ARTICLE discussing the artistic and literary analogues which influenced Willa Cather in writing Death Comes for the Archbishop, D. H. Stewart argues that the organization and characterization of the book are derived more from the scheme of Dante’s Divine Comedy than Miss Cather admits, both works being based upon an exposition of the seven virtues and the seven vices, crowned by a Beatific Vision at the end.1 Stewart’s article is helpful in that it points to the logical period (the medieval) to have influenced Miss Cather in writing her American saint’s legend,2 and she may indeed have recalled the complex scheme by which the Italian poet organized his account of another spiritual journey. However, the fact that her general style of writing is more restrained and allusive than the somewhat strict equations of medieval allegory would allow makes

1 D. H. Stewart, “Cather’s Mortal Comedy,” Queen’s Quarterly, LXXIII (Summer 1966), 244-258.
2 For the case for Death Comes for the Archbishop as a saint’s legend, see D. H. and M. A. Stouck, “Hagiographical Style in Death Comes for the Archbishop,” forthcoming in University of Toronto Quarterly.
it unlikely that she conceived of her characters in the rigidly schematic manner which Stewart suggests.\(^3\)

Undoubtedly she is most likely to have been influenced by medieval literature — she herself acknowledges her debt to *The Golden Legend*\(^4\) — since saints’ legends were among its most popular forms, and, more important, since its world view was essentially a spiritual and moralistic one. But a work more consistent with her manner of writing, and consequently having a more direct influence than *The Divine Comedy* on the characterization of *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, can be found in Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*. Indeed, the possibility of Chaucerian influence is further supported by the fact that, in recalling the composition of the *Archbishop* (in an unpublished letter to E. K. Brown, Yale University Library), Miss Cather expresses the wish that her book may be considered as part of the great tradition of English literature formed by Chaucer, Shakespeare and the *King James Bible*. She goes on to justify Chaucer’s place in this tradition by praising his unequaled humor and humanity, and the suggestive singling out of the medieval poet may well be an indication of the particular interest which she had felt in him at the time.

In the “General Prologue” to *The Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer’s narrator describes the “sondry folk” who make up the band of pilgrims journeying to the shrine of Thomas à Becket at Canterbury — a journey which is of course spiritual as well as geographical in its implications. The pilgrims represent all classes of medieval society and are described in roughly descending order, from highest to lowest; another type of order, intermittent and frequently ironic in its manipulation, is also followed by the narrator, and this is the order of moral worth, seen in the grouping of the most obviously depraved characters at the end of the “Prologue,” and in the frequent contrasts between social position and moral nature. However, the distinctions between vice and virtue as represented in each pilgrim are not usually clearly or strictly made. There are a few obviously idealized portraits, such as those of the parish priest and his brother the ploughman, as well as the obviously vicious charac-

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\(^3\) Stewart argues that the first seven parts of *Death Comes for the Archbishop* correspond generally to the seven deadly sins, each of which has its counterpart in the last part of the novel in the seven virtues of the Bishop. See particularly pp. 250-255 of his article, cited above.

ters, but more often the pilgrims are comprised of such a be­
wildering mixture and degree of vice and virtue that the reader
is left uncertain whether to laugh or to condemn. This is the
essence of Chaucer’s ironic method; it is also the aspect of his
characterization which renders him the most “modern” of me­
dieval writers in the minds of many readers who, having sampled
the much less ambiguous and more clearly allegorical charac­
terizations found in such types of literature as the morality
plays, the religious manuals with their narrative exempla, and
the popular romances and saints’ legends, tend to hail Chaucer
as the earliest exponent of “psychological realism.”

While Chaucer’s psychological realism has probably been
overrated, it is clear that unlike many of his contemporaries he
does not delineate his pilgrims according to the strict limitations
of a single vice or virtue, and in this his allusive, restrained
manner and looser form of organization correspond closely to
those of Miss Cather in the Archbishop, particularly in her pres­
entation of many of the lesser figures of the novel. While a num­
ber of these portraits recall medieval exempla illustrating the
vices and virtues, they scarcely suggest the careful schematic
form which exists in The Divine Comedy. If Padre Martínez is
the personification of lust, he is equally suggestive of Luciferan
pride; he tells the Bishop “We pay a filial respect to the person
of the Holy Father, but Rome has no authority here.” Friar
Baltazar suggests wrath, pride and gluttony in equal proportions
and Padre Jesus de Baca (to whom a chapter is devoted, but
whom Stewart does not mention), with his simple childlike
faith suggests superstition — not one of the traditional vices at
all, though undoubtedly a sin. Certain vices tend to dominate
in particular individuals, but the characters are not patently
over-schematized; Miss Cather herself admits in her letter to
The Commonweal that her knowledge of Catholic lore was not
extensive.

Apart from a similarity in manner and general procedure,
however, several of the portraits in the Archbishop strongly sug­
gest prototypes in The Canterbury Tales. Father Gallegos clearly
has some of the characteristics of Chaucer’s Monk, who, like
the wining, dining Mexican priest, “was nat pale as a forpyned

5 Stewart, 254.
Subsequent page references are to this edition.
7 On Writing, 11.
Gallegos' preference for spending his time with rich Americans (rather than with the poor Mexicans who should have been his concern), and his propensity for dancing the fandango, gambling, and enjoying the contents of his well-stocked wine cellar are also reminiscent of Chaucer's Friar, who "knew the tavernes wel in every toun/ And everich hostiler and tappester/e Bet than a lazar or a beggestere"; while his popularity as a dinner guest and his long-standing affair with a rich Mexican widow echo the amiability of the Friar, who was "Ful wel biloved and famuler . . . / With frankeleys over al in his contree,/ And eek with worthy wommen of the toun." A close verbal parallel exists at the end of Miss Cather's description: the Bishop reflects that Gallegos "did not look quite like a professional gambler, but something smooth and twinkling in his countenance suggested an underhanded mode of life" (p. 84). Chaucer's description of the Friar concludes with a similar observation and implication: "His eyen twynkled in his heed arght,/ As doon the sterres in the frosty nyght."

Miss Cather does not systematically follow a single portrait in *The Canterbury Tales* for any of her own characterizations; rather, her borrowings are in the nature of lines and phrases so well remembered that they seem to come to her mind almost inadvertently in her presentations of the delinquent Mexican priests. The portrait of Padre Martínez, who has debauched a young girl and then arranged her marriage (pp. 156-7), also owes something to Chaucer's Friar, who "hadde maad ful many a mariage/ Of yonge wommen at his owene cost." Martínez's perversion of the teachings of St. Augustine on celibacy—"'Celibacy may be all very well for the French clergy, but not for ours. St. Augustine himself says it is better not to go against nature,' " he tells the Bishop (p. 146) — also recalls Chaucer's Monk, who rejects Augustine's injunctions to poverty, obedience and chastity ("Lat Austyn have his swynk to hym reserved!") in favor of being "a prikasour aright," the phrase suggesting both venery and Venus. The possible prototypes in *The Canterbury Tales* for Father Lucero, the miser in the *Archbishop* whose passion for money "grew stronger and sweeter in old age" (p. 161), are numerous, and include both the Pardoner

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8 All quotations from Chaucer are from *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, 2nd edition, editor, F. N. Robinson (Boston, 1937). For the portraits of the Prioress, Monk, and Friar, see *The Canterbury Tales*, "General Prologue," lines 118-209.
and, in the Pardoner's grim little exemplum, the three rioters whose avarice leads them to death. However, the quarrelsome dependency of Martínez and Lucero parallels even more closely the relationship of Chaucer's Friar and Summoner. Both the Friar and the Summoner, when permitted by the Host to tell their tales, relate obscene fabliaux which have as their object the incrimination of one another. In the *Archbishop* we are told that "The two priests had always talked shamelessly about each other. All Martínez's best stories were about Lucero, and all Lucero's were about Martínez" (p. 161).

Not one of the ecclesiastics but no less indebted ultimately to Chaucer is Doña Isabella, who with her charming vanity and social accomplishments captures the exact mixture of irony and affection which Chaucer expends upon his Prioress. Like the Prioress, who in her provincial convent or among pilgrims of a rougher cast, "peyned hire to countrefete cheere; Of court, and to been estatlich of manere," Doña Isabella provides an oasis of civilized social life for the two French priests in the deserts of New Mexico: "Certainly it was a great piece of luck for Father Latour and Father Vaillant, who lived so much among peons and Indians and rough frontiersmen, to be able to converse in their own tongue now and then with a cultivated woman" (p. 177). A devout Catholic in intention at least, as the Prioress undoubtedly is also, Doña Isabella is childishly proud of her ability to look younger than she is, and her hair "perhaps worn in too many puffs and ringlets" reminds us of the Prioress's careful arrangement of her wimple to show off her broad forehead. Her excellent French and her vanity in showing it off (p. 177) are a recollection of the Prioress's carefully cultivated accent in that language "after the scole of Stratford atte Bowe," and her agreeable singing voice suggests the Prioress's version of the divine service, which she sang "Ful weel . . . / Entuned in hir nose ful semely." Whether or not the description of Doña Isabella's ball gown "all covered with little garlands of pink satin roses" (p. 181) is still another echo of the Prioress, whose name is "Madame Eglentyne," is perhaps difficult to say; yet it is clear that Doña Isabella's character, essentially childish and superficial but delineated with humor and charity, owes much to the tone and details of Chaucer's description of the Prioress.

Numerous other Chaucerian parallels are suggested (the description of the month of May for instance, pp. 200-1, is another
version of the seasonal headpiece with which *The Canterbury Tales* begins) but their importance lies not so much in a close comparison of concrete detail as in the fact that Miss Cather was aiming in her narrative for effects similar to those which the medieval poet created in his. For Chaucer's principle of delineation lies somewhere between the personification of vices and virtues and the complete psychological realization of character, being perhaps more weighted to the former than to the latter. Vivid, versatile and diverse as his pilgrims are, they are nevertheless "flat," in the sense that their motivations and inner complexities are not developed; they act out of lust, greed, pride or for other relatively straightforward reasons, and the vibrant fact of their existence precludes further psychological investigation. In Chaucer's descriptions the concrete details relating to physical characteristics, dress and accoutrements are highly selected and organized to suggest inward nature — not psychological inward nature, but moral nature — and a similar method is often used by Miss Cather. The cataract which obscures the right eye of old Padre Jesus de Baca is an external indication of his blind superstition in religious matters, and the "grey, oily look of soft cheeses" (p. 145) which the Bishop notices on the face of Trinidad is not meant only to repulse us, but also to suggest a moral depravity which contrasts with the "fine intelligence" of the Bishop's countenance.

Behind the parallels between Miss Cather's portraits and Chaucer's lies the basic similarity that both writers regard their characters in the light of religious or moral conviction rather than from the viewpoint of psychological development with its stress upon cause and effect. For Chaucer this viewpoint is dictated by the age in which he lived; for Miss Cather it is no less firmly dictated by the genre to which her book belongs, namely the saint's legend. The characters in *Death Comes for the Archbishop* are not personifications, but neither are they fully realized in a psychological or realistic sense, for the external causes or inner desires and frustrations which motivate their lives are not developed. The Bishop reflects on Padre Martinez that "Rightly guided . . . this Mexican might have been a great man. He had an altogether compelling personality, a disturbing, mysterious magnetic power" (p. 150). But as with all the characters, both in the *Archbishop* and in *The Canter-
bury Tales, this is never investigated further, and we are left with the simple yet mysterious fact of existence.

Certainly Willa Cather did not need to look for preconceived models for her characters, but the fact that, consciously or not, she uses the Chaucerian idiom in her descriptions is proof once again both of the richness of her imagination and of her sure instinct for selecting the most fitting frame of reference for the material at hand.

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AMERICA AND APOLLONIAN TEMPLES:
CONVERSATIONS AND CORRESPONDENCE
WITH SEAN O’CASEY

By IRMA S. LUSTIG

IN THE SPRING OF 1950 I expressed to my friend, Barrows Dunham, what I thought a hopeless wish to meet Sean O’Casey while I was studying in England that summer. Himself an author, Barrows persuaded me that writers were not besieged by admirers, and that O’Casey might respond warmly to my attention. But still timid, never having approached a renowned figure before, I delayed asking for an interview until I had been in England for over a month. I was overjoyed at the response to my letter:

Tingrith, Station Road, Totnes, Devon July 27, 50

My dear Mrs. Lustig,

Sean asks me to answer your letter. If you can manage to get to Devon on August 7th, 8th, 9th, or 10th, we will be pleased to have you—it will mean staying overnight and I can also put you up for the night. Can you tell me which night you will be coming? I hope you have had a good time in all ways on your trip, and saw some good theatre. Our best wishes until we see you.

Sincerely,

Eileen O’Casey

In the interval of this exchange of letters, my husband informed me that he could join me in Europe earlier than we first had planned. Believing that two guests would be an imposition