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CHAUCER'S DESCRIPTION OF PERSONS

by

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A Thesis

submitted to the faculty of the Graduate College of the State University of Iowa in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Even the most cursory reader of Chaucer is conscious of his inimitable portraits, especially those of the Prologue, but an analysis of his whole achievement leads to a deeper appreciation of the variety, richness, and finished technique of his descriptions, in which he has combined the usefulness and beauty demanded of a work of art.

The master touch that can create images almost as clear in the consciousness of the reader as those struck up in the white heat of living contact is remarkable in any day or age, but in view of the comparatively recent development (through the influence, largely, of the novel and short story) of the technique of description of persons, this fourteenth century achievement is phenomenal. Any effort to appreciate it, however, must not tend to exaggerate the importance of the descriptions, to neglect their natural setting in the larger design. Admiration for the details must not blind the vision for the whole mosaic. Chaucer treats his stories, not as allegories but as authentic narratives of human lives, and in order to give them genuineness, he paints his individuals, not as England's "Courtesy" or Gower's lover, or even perhaps as Boccaccio's beautiful but somewhat unreal "raconteurs".
but as genuine persons, earthy but true. This he does even when he leaves indigenous English characters like the Wife of Bath and the Miller, and relates stories of people long dead, Diomed, Constance, and Virginia. The primary purpose is always to keep the illusion of life, to give reality of character, mood, and action to the whole story.

I.

Variety of Kinds and Methods of Description

Though Chaucer wrote in a very early period of our literature, his resources in writing description of persons do not appear at all limited, and indeed he shows great versatility in using the various forms and methods later developed in our literature.

In the first place, he employs either the objective or subjective method as he chooses, more often blending the two, but showing a wide range of choice from the purely objective to the almost wholly subjective which nearly passes out of the scope of description proper.

Chaucer is a rare master of the objective, as any one who reads the 'Prologue' must realize, and yet rarely does he depend for his effect solely on the suggestiveness of his concrete details. That he can employ a pure-
ly objective method successfully is demonstrated in the picture of Alisoun in the Miller's Tale. Her mere physical attractiveness would appeal forcibly to the Miller, and when he describes her he does so with the frank hedonism of certain types of men. Even in this lengthy presentation of concrete details occur a few interpretive expressions such as: "Fair was this yonge wyf", and "In al this world, to seken up and doun, There nis no man so wys, that coude thenche So gay a popelote, or swich a wenche."

(Of the remarkable portraits in the Prologue, only that of the Yeoman is purely objective, and those of the Squire and Miller are almost entirely objective.) It must be noted in this connection, however, that the more or less subjective elements of the other pictures are frequently details of characterization blending in with descriptive matter, and the real strength of the immortal pictures of the Princess, Monk, Wife of Bath, Clerk, Pardoner, Friar, and others rests in the concrete details which have stamped visual images of these people indelibly on the minds of all readers. Interpretation is powerless to perform what has been done by such details as the gay embroidery of the Squire, the jingling of the Monk's bells, the bald head and
shiny face of the Monk, the twinkling eyes of the Friar, the leanness of the Clerk, the sanguine complexion of the Franklin, the great furnace-like mouth of the Miller, the glaring eye of the Pardoner, and the ridiculous garland on the head of the maudlin Summoner. This is Chaucer at his best.

Chaucer combines the objective and subjective methods by occasional bits of interpretation, such as those given in the description of Alisoun just mentioned, and he also uses the subjective in combination with the objective when presenting the appearance as the cause of mood. The latter practice is closely allied to the delightful use made of description through effect, which sometimes suggests more to the imagination than an extended list of concrete details. This is the kind of thing used so effectively by Blackmore in his first description of Lorna Doone. "By the side of the stream, she was coming to me, even among the primroses, as if she loved them all; and every flower looked the brighter, as her eyes were on them. I could not see what her face was, my heart so awoke and trembled; only that her hair was flowing from a wreath of white violets; and the grace of her coming was like the appearance of the first wind-flower. The pale gleam over the western cliffs
threw a shadow of light behind her, as if the sun were lingering. Never do I see the light from the closing of the west, even in these my aged days, without thinking of her". Similarly in the "Book of the Duchess", the Duke says:

"For I dar sweren, if that she
Had among ten thousand be,
She wolde have be, at the leste,
A chief mirour of al the feste,
Thogh they had stonden in a rowe,
To mennes eyen that could have knowe.
For wher-so men had pleyd or waked,
Me thoghte the felawship as naked
Withouten her, that saw I ones, 3.
As a coroune withoute stones."

In the same poem, after the Duke has described Blanche's beauty, occurs this beautiful touch,

"For, be hit never so derke,
We thinketh I see hir ever-mo." 4.

Again in "Anelida and Arcite", there is this rarest gem:

"Femelya, hir younge suster shene,
Faire on a char of golde he with him ladde,
That al the ground about hir char she spradde
With brightnesse of the beautee in hir face." 5.
It is said of Cressida,

"Hir godly looking gladede al the prees."

One such detail used in connection with the description of the Summoner is unusually effective.

"Of his visage children were aferd."

Another curious expression occurs here,

"But it was joye to seen him swete."

Of description by interpretation, there is but little evidence. It appears in the following description of Cressida:

"She was not with the lest of hir stature,
But alle hir limes so wel answeringe
Weren to womanhode, that creature
Was never lasse mannish in seminge.
And eek the pure wyse of here meninge
Shewed wel, that men might in hir gesse
Honour, estat, and womanly noblesse."

In the prologue to "Sir Thopas", the landlord says of Chaucer; "He semeth elvish by his contenaunce", and the Clerk speaks of Griselda's "vertuous beautee". But such passages are not numerous, for, as Emerson says, "His mind must stand on a fact. He will not be baffled or catch at clouds, but the mind must have a symbol, palpable and resisting." Chaucer's
descriptions are, therefore, chiefly objective, but he uses subjective interpretation whenever it serves a useful purpose, such as lending the proper tone to a description or economizing in instances in which a concrete method would be cumbersome.

In the matter of length and selection, the descriptions do not always conform to present day usage, but when Chaucer's achievement is compared with that of his contemporaries, it demands respect. It is true that occasionally he manifests the mediaeval vice of prolixity, that he sometimes forces into his pictures matter that is irrelevant to the unity of impression, but he does not always err on these points, as some of his critics have tried to assert. There is really a nice balance between a dry, minute enumeration of details and meagreeness of detail, varying in degrees of selection as in the choice of methods. There is nothing in Chaucer so tiresome as the following from Gower:

"He seth here face of such colour
That freischere is than any flour,
He seth hire front is large and plein
Withoute frounce of any green,
He seth hire yhen lich an hevene,
He seth hire nose straiht and evene,"
He seth hire rode upon the cheke,
He seth hire rede lippes eke,
Hire chyne acordeth to the face,
Al that he seth is full of grace,
He seth hire nicke round and clene,
Thereinne mai no bon be sene,
He seth hire hondes faire and whyte."

Or take this from Langland:

"I loked on my left half as the lady me taughte,
And was war of a woman wortheli y-clothed
Purfiled with pelwe the finest upon erthe,
Y-crowned with a coroune the king hath non better,
Fetislich hir fyngres were fretted with golde wyre,
And ther-on red rubies as red as any glede,
And diamantz of durest pris and double manere sofferes,
Orientales and eyages enuenymes to destroye;
Hire robe was ful riche of red scarlet engreynde,
With ribanes of red golde and of riche stones.
Hir arraye me ravysshed -- suche reechesse saw I nevere."

The only passage in Chaucer in any way parallel to these
is in the "Knight's Tale", the description of Licurgus and
Emetreus, in which the minutest details are given out of
all proportion to their value in the story, but even here
there is something individualizing, as the circles of red and yellow round the eyes of Licurgus and the freckles on the face of Emetreus. Chaucer, at any rate, is not following a mere convention in his evident attempt to impress one with the pomp of these kings, and if he does catalogue, he has at least convinced one that these are real men. In other descriptions are introduced certain details, particularly of form and feature, which modern practice would omit, such as the minute description of Blanche's neck:

"But swich a fairnesse of a nekke
Had that swete, that bone nor brekke
Nas ther non sene, that mis-sat,
Hit was whyt, smothe, streght, and flat,
Withouten hole; and canel-boon,
As by seming, had she noon." 13.

Notwithstanding some of these defects, there is selection even in descriptions of some length producing, as a rule, a unified effect. When the Duke is first presented in the "Book of the Duchess", there are many details, his size, position, age, beard, hair, clothing. At first glance, the detail of the little hair upon his head appears ridiculous, but in this case it is a unifying detail, bringing out the contrast of his youth with his great sorrow. Again
in the description of Cressida, the selection of details gives sufficient unity of impression, while there are certain careful details which make her real.

"Criseyde mene was of hir stature,
Thereto of shap, of face, and eke of chere,
Ther mighte been no fairer creature.
And ofte tyme this was hir manere,
To gon y-tressed with hir heres clere,
Doun by hir coler at hir bak behinde,
Which with a threde of gold she wolde binde.
And save hir browes joyneden y-fere
There was no lak, in ought I can espyen;
But for to spoken of hir eyen clere,
Lo, trawely, they writen that hir syen,
That Paradys stood formed in hir yên."

No modern can be offended at this. A few salient details are selected, form, general impression, hair, brows and eyes; all the rest are left to the imagination. No time is wasted on details of her form, face, or expression, but the interesting details are selected and emphasized. The most characteristic detail, her brows, is mentioned, and the final detail is the one that clinches the general impression of beauty. This is quite typical of Chaucer's usual practice,
and even in instances in which unimportant and apparently irrelevant details are suddenly introduced, as, for instance, the sword and buckler of the miller, which are inserted right in the midst of the details of his face, still the inclusion of these things is never permitted to mar the unified impression of the whole.  An amateur attempting to record the appearance of the Pilgrims from first hand observation would have been sure to include something that did not accord with the character presented.

Moreover, on the whole, the descriptions which are suggestive and selective, far outnumber those which are complete and elaborate. Even the majority of those in the "Prologue", which are probably the most complete outside of those of Cressida, the two kings in the "Knight's Tale", and Alisoun in the "Miller's Tale", are selective to some extent. In the picture of the Squire, there is all that is necessary, but there are no details of his features as in the case of the Prioress, only those items which express the life and gayety in his personality. The description of the Franklin is highly selective and yet effective enough. That of the Clerk could not have been done with more admirable restraint. That of the Reeve contains but two details, each individual and significant enough to suffice. As to
Harry Bailey, it is enough to know that he is a large man "with eyen stepe".

In connection with selective description it is interesting to note that there are few of the Stevensonian type, such as could be painted. Chaucer's characters are always in motion, and the details are inconstant and progressive, so that he rarely gives a set picture of an individual. That of John of Gaunt, as first seen by Chaucer, is one exception, and possibly the first picture of Cressida at the temple could be also classified as a set, posed portrait.

Chaucer makes little use of the highly selected, impressionistic picture, but occasionally he is satisfied with but a single descriptive detail, though seldom is his use of this method as effective as in Dickens's description of Mrs. Fezzizwig, "one vast, substantial smile", or Kipling's trenchant phrase, "the ugliest man in Asia with two exceptions". Such expressions as, "Calkas daughter with hir brighte hewe"; "A fouler wight ther may no man devyse"; or the Wife of Bath's brief sketch of Jankin, "for his crisp heer, shyninge as gold so fyne", might be grouped with these.

Something of the variety of methods employed by Chaucer is indicated in the fact that outside of these more or less selected and planned pictures, is a considerable body of de-
scriptive matter, which though not formal aids in visualizing.

The use of the general picture, though it contains no specific details, gives some impression of appearance: Constance in "The Man of Law's Tale" is spoken of in this way.

"In hir is heigh beautee, with-oute pryde,
Yowthe, with-oute grenehede or follye."

Walter in "The Clerk's Tale" is referred to as "a fair persone, and strong", and Griselda is first introduced as "fair y-nogh to sighte". Later the marquis is said to be "richely arrayed", and Griselda's clothing is described as "rude and somdel eek to-rent". It is to be noted that general descriptions are found most frequently in the poems whose sources are largely borrowed. In these poems also occur these phrases: "fairer than is the sonne-shene", "the faireste under sonne". In "The Physician's Tale" there is this passage:

"This mayde of age twelf yeer was and tweye,
In which that Natur hadde swich delyt
For right as she can peynte a lilie whyt
And reed a rose, right with swich peynture
She peynted hath this noble creature
Er she were born, up-on hir limes free"
Wher-as by right swiche colours sholde be;
And Phebus dyed hath hir tresses grete
Lyk to the stremes of his burned hete." 19.

In the more original of Chaucer's productions, however, he clings to the definite and concrete.

Somewhat closely related to this general method but more modern in its development is the use of incidental description. It is very well handled, usually bringing an effect of reality to the action. Frequently it is introduced in the words of one character to another as when Pandarus says to Cressida, "Do wey your barbe, and shew your face bare", or when Arcite says to Palamon, "Cosin myn, what eyl-eth thee, that art so pale and deedly on to see?", or when the Host says to Chaucer,

"Thou lokest as thou woldest finde an hare,
For ever up-on the ground I see thee stare",

and

"This were a popet in an arm to embrace
For any womman, smal and fair of face,
He semeth elvish by his contenaunce."

The same incidental work is shown when the Host tells the Monk that he knows by the latter's brawn and bones that he is a "wel-faring person", and thinks he wears too wide a
cope. Again he says to the Monk that he would have fallen asleep except for the jingling of the latter's bridle. In the epilogue to "The Nun's Priest's Tale", Harry Bailey says,

"See, which brauns hath this gentil Preest, 
So greet a nekke, and swich a large breest! 
He loketh as a sperhauk with his yen; 
Him nedeth not his colour for to dyen."

About the only description of persons introduced into the "Pardoner's Tale" is brought out when the old man is asked,

"Why artow al forwrapped save thy face?"

Again the Clerk is accused of riding as "coy and still as dooth a mayde". An especially effective use of incidental description through conversation is given in the "Canon's Yeoman's Tale" In the "Prologue", mention is made of his lack of color and poor attire due to his labors at alchemy, and then through his story he keeps referring to his own appearance.

Beside these touches introduced through conversation, there are other unexpected glimpses of people, as when Chaucer says in the "Book of the Duchess" that he "did off his hood", or when Pandarus "com neer, and gon in at the curtain pyke", or later "bar the candel to the chimeneye". Nor must the detail which Lowell finds so admirable for its
revelation of character be omitted:

"And fro the bench he droof away the cat,
And leyde adoun his potente and his hat,
And eek his scripe, and sette him softe adoun."

20.

Another device, mentioned also by Lowell, is the use of the single general detail having the force of what he calls "simple and obvious epithets so easy to miss". He mentions the line, "And every day hir beaute newed". These expressions also occur: "The fresshe mayde", "lady bright", "fresshe quene", "Antigone the whyte", "Emelye the brighte", "fresshe May", and "lusty knight".

There remains one more method which Chaucer employs extensively and very effectively, the figure of speech. As his imagery is always happily chosen, some of the most striking effects are gained through it. Time has of course destroyed the freshness of some of the poet's figures, but it is possible to find innumerable comparisons breathing the warmth and vigor of an unstudied originality.

A great many of them are based on analogies with objects of nature. Sometimes their length and elaborateness remind one of the old Greek similes, as when the poet describes Troilus casting his eyes up to Venus:

"But right as flores, thorugh the colde of night
Y-closed, stoupen on hir stalkes lowe,
Redressen hem agein the sonne bright,
And speeden on hir kinde cours by rowe,
Right so gan tho his eyen up to throwe."

Several times this likeness to an object of nature recurs;
"Right as an aspes leaf she gan to quake". Diomede is spoken of as "fresshe as braunche in May", and Dido is described in this figure:

"She is fair, as is the brighte morwe,
That heleth seke folk of nightes sorwe."
The "Prologue" is fairly strewn with such figures as these:
"Embrouded was he, as it were a mede."
"He was as fresh as is the month of May."
"His nekke whyt was as the flour-de-lys."
"His eyen twinkled in his heed aright,
As doon the sterres in the frosty night."
"Whyt was his berd, as is the dayesye."
"An anlas and a gipser al of silk
Heng at his girdel, whyt as morne milk."
In the "Knight's Tale" Emily is described thus:
"Emelye, that fairer was to sene
Than is the lilie upon his stalke grene,
And fressher than the May with flores newe,
For with the rose colour stroof hir hewe."

In the same tale Palamon in sorrow is pictured as appearing like "the box-tree, or the asshen dede and colde", and Arcite a little later is described thus:

"And lene he wex, and drye as is a shaft,
His eyen holwe, and grisly to beholde;
His hewe folwe, and pale as asshen colde."

These delightful figures are as gay and spring-like as the character they portray, Alisoun:

"She was ful more blisful on to see
Than is the newe pere-jonette tree."
"Hir forhead shown as bright as any day."
"Hir mouth was swete as bragot or the meeth,
Or hord of apples leyd in hey or heeth."

In the same poem, Absalom's gay surplice is "as whyt as is the blosme upon the rys." In the "Cook's Tale" the "Prentis" is as "broun as a berie". May, in the "Merchant's Tale", is "fresh as is the brighte someres day", and Canace in the "Squire's Tale" rises up "as rody and bright as dooth the yonge sonne".

Chaucer is quick to see resemblances to animals, and he frequently presents a clear image of an individual's movements through comparisons with birds especially, as
"Ful ofte his lady, from hir window doun,
As fresh as faucon comen out of muwe."

Arcite wounded lay as black "as any cole or crow". Absalon has eyes as "grey as goos", and "singeth, brokkinge as a nightingale". In the "Cook's Tale", the Apprentice is "galliard as goldfinch in the shawe", and the Host says of the Nun's Priest that he looks as a "sperhauk with his yen". The resemblances to animals are not conventional as might be said of these figures, "of his loxe as real as lecoun", or "lyk a griffon", but they are the results of the keenest observation, as in the "Prologue", in which the Miller's beard is said to be as red as any sow or fox, the tuft of hairs on his nose as red as the bristles of a sow's ears, while the Pardoner's eyes glare as a hare's and he has as small a voice as "hath a goo't". The description of Alisoun in the "Miller's Tale" is replete with such living, glowing figures as these:

"As any wesle hir body gent and smale."

"Ful smale y-pulled were hir browes two,
And tho were bent, and blake as any sloo"; and she is "softer than the wolle is of a wether."

"But of hir songe, it was as loude and yerne
As any swalwe sittinge on a berne.
Ther-to she coude skippe and make game,
As any kide or calf folwinge his dame."

and

"Winsinge she was as is a joly colt."

In the "Reve's Tale", the miller's head is "piled as an ape". In the "Squire's Tale" is a line descriptive of a crowd of curious people, which reminds one of Tennyson:

"They murmureden as dooth a swarm of been."

In addition to references to natural phenomena, Chaucer makes other vivid comparisons. In the love poems, these are largely conventional phrases of the romances, as in the "Ballad to Rosemounde":

"Madame, ye ben of al beaute shryne
As fer as cercled is the mappemounde;
For as the cristal glorious ye shyne,
And lyke ruby ben your chekes rounde."

The same tendency is shown here:

"This mayde of age twelf yeer was and tweye,
In which that Nature hadde swiche delyt;
For right as she can peyne a lilie whyt
And reed a rose, right with swich peynture
She peynted hath this noble creature,
Er she were born, up-on hir limes free,
Wher-as by right swiche colours shoulde be;
And Phebus dyed hath hir tresses grete
Lyk to the stremes of his burned hete." 24.

Even this seems now quite conventional:

"Hir throte semed a round tour of y-voire", but, on
the whole, the images are taken from the simple, natural
things which come under the poet's fine, observing eye.
In the "Book of the Duchess," for instance, in which Chau-
cer might easily have followed the precedent established
in love stories, such similes as these are to be found:

"She was lyk to torch bright,
That every man may take of light
Ynogh and hit hath never the lesse."
"She wolde have be, at the leste,
A chief mirour of al the feste."

A company without Blanche looks "as a coroune withoute
stones". A favorite simile of Chaucer's is "as still as
stone" or "as dead as stone" in describing the physical
torpor of an individual. Another simile that recurs sev-
eral times is "eyen gray as glas". Twice Chaucer uses the
furnace in comparisons; once, in the description of the
monk whose eyes "stemed as a forneys of a leed", and again
in that of the Miller whose mouth "greet was as a great forneys". In the account of the Monk's appearance, two other figures are used; his bald head shone as glass; his bridle ginged in the wind "as clear and loud as doth the chapel-belle". The Friar's cope is round as a bell out of press. The Pardoner's hair is as yellow as wax and hangs as smoothly as a "strike of flex". Again in the picture of Alisoun occurs this happy simile,

"Ful brighter was the shyning of hir hewe
Than in the tour the noble y-forged newe."

In the same sketch, so highly figurative, occurs this line,

"Long as a mast and upright as a bolt."

That Chaucer appreciates the ludicrousness of an inappropriate use of figures is shown in his burlesque use of them in "Sir Thopas",

"Sir Thopas wax a doghty swayn,
Whyt was his face as payned mayn,
His lippes rede as rose,
His rode is lyk scarlet in grayn,
And I yow tell in good certayn,
He hadde a semely nose,
His heer, his berd was lyk saffroun." 25.

In contrast to this should appear the following, which
though not directly used in describing, shows very subtly the effect of appearance:

"Criseyde gan al his chere aspyen,
And leet so softe it in her herte senke,
That to her-self she seyde, who yaf me drinke?"

Thus does Chaucer vary in methods all the way from the unselected enumeration of details, through varying degrees of selection in formal as well as incidental description to the sketchy but adequate use of the single detail or the general impression, omitting only the set, paintable picture familiar to the readers of Kipling and Stevenson. The latter, however, allied as it is to the impressionistic in art, adapts itself more readily to prose fiction than to poetic tales, although its use may be found in Keats's "Eve of St. Agnes" and Morris's "Atalanta's Race".

II.
Materials

In the materials of his descriptions, Chaucer has few limitations. Only the keenest student of human nature could have such a rich store of material from which to draw in creating his great tapestries of human life, and only an artist could have arranged his effects so satisfactorily.
No cursory observation of people would enable an author to achieve the fullness and richness of Chaucer's portraits. In his grasp of what is universal and significant, Chaucer does not sacrifice what is interesting, striking, and individual. Chaucer observes not only the general appearance, dress, and manners of people, but he seems consciously to record in his memory the little tricks of manner, sudden changes of color and expression, eccentricities of dress, and all the subtle and indefinable peculiarities of the persons whom he meets. He is as careful as Galsworthy to note the color of a woman's hair. While not aiming at the refined distinctions made by Galsworthy, as when he speaks of a girl's hair as being the color of ripe nuts, Chaucer says of Blanche's hair:

"Soth to seyn, hit was not rede,
Ne nouther yelew, ne broun hit nas;
Me thoughte, most lyk gold hit was." 26.

Then he goes on to describe her eyes:

"Simple, of good mochel, noght to wyde;
Therto hir look was not to wyde."

When he looks at the Miller, he misses not a single detail, not even the wart on his nose with its tuft of hairs. Who but Chaucer would have noted the love-knot in the Monk's
pin, the white neck of the Friar, the small bars in the Lawyer's girdle, the lining of the Doctor's purse, and the texture of the Wife of Bath's linen? Philippa Chaucer herself could not have noticed in greater detail Alisoun's costume, the embroidery on her smock, the tassel and lining of her purse, the brooch in her collar, and even the number of gores in her skirt. Sometimes Chaucer may err in introducing a somewhat too fine point of observation, as when he says of Licurgus that the circles of his eyes glowed between a yellow and red, but more often he introduces a mood skilfully by some fine touch of observation, as when he speaks of Cressida's grief showing in the purple rings about her eyes. Only Chaucer, among all the pilgrims, would discover the profession of the Canon's Yeoman by the fact that his cloak is sewed to his hood.

In such careful recording of things as they are, Chaucer seems far ahead of his time. Of Chaucer's English contemporaries Langland alone shows a tendency to picture certain characters realistically; for instance, Coveytise, who is described with painful realism; but Langland's picture is revolting while Chaucer is able to present people as they are without showing repugnance even to the most despicable. The description of the Summoner may seem
an exception to this, but it is easier to accept even this sketch, disagreeable as are the details, than that of a character in a sketch called "Life" in Mr. O'Brien's "Best Short Stories of 1915". Though Chaucer can portray realistically as seen in the description of January in the "Merchant's Tale",

"The slakke skin aboute his nekke shaketh

Whyl that he song; so chaunteth he and craketh",

Chaucer is too wholesome to be a thorough-going realist. He does not miss a detail that is useful to him in preserving the illusion of life, and sometimes he shocks even readers accustomed to modern naturalism by a somewhat too broad and frank presentation of details.

But careful as Chaucer is in observing and rich as is his fund of descriptive material, he does not bore his readers with a meticulous presentation of everything that he observes. Unity, harmony of detail, and a sharp eye for the significant are always evident. As Emerson says, Chaucer, unlike Swift, does not describe "as if for the police". These people are real in appearance as well as character. Although the Yeoman is on the whole a type character, still Chaucer remarks his "not-heed with a broun visage" and the Christopher on his breast. The Pri-
oress, too, wears a prescribed habit, but Chaucer individualizes her by her coral beads and her brooch of gold, even giving the inscription. The Friar's lisping tongue individualizes him, and the Wife of Bath's "gat-toth" distinguishes her from other women of the same type. The wart on the Miller's nose, the thinness of the Pardoner's hair, and the lean legs of the Reeve make us believe that Chaucer has seen the individual in life. Blanche the Duchess is not a generalized type; but Chaucer goes to great pains to describe the distinguishing qualities of her appearance, every detail of her form and features. The Miller in the "Reeve's Tale" has a "camuse nose", and his skull is "piled as an ape". Cressida is very fair, but her eyes "joyneden y-fere". Thus Chaucer makes his descriptions ring true, choosing the individual and distinguishing details, but never carrying this to the extent of caricature.

The weight of the Wife of Bath's kerchief may not be quite ten pounds, but Chaucer probably speaks the literal truth when he says that her hat is as broad as a buckler.

By such skillful selection from the quantity of material which comes under his keen observation, Chaucer creates the great pictures which have captivated the imagination of all his readers. Here are vivid, clear-cut, col-
orful pictures appealing to all the senses and stirring
the impulses with all the fresh contact of life.

The appeals to sight are of course more numerous than
those to any other sense. There is scarcely any appeal
that the sight of an individual can make that Chaucer neg-
lects.

In the first place, Chaucer has devoted many lines to
the description of the human form. This aspect of person-
al appearance seems to interest him, for he nearly always
includes it in his description, no matter how brief a
sketch he may give, often dwelling in such detail as al-
most to offend modern taste. Whenever he describes at any
length, he is sure to include the height and something of
the general shape. In the "Prologue" he mentions that the
Squire is "of evene lengthe", and "wonderly deliver and
greet of strengthe"; the Prioress is not "undergrowe"; the
Monk is "a lord ful fat and in good point"; the Clerk is
"not right fat"; the Wife of Bath has "large hips"; the
Miller is "big of brawn and of bones", "short-shouldered,
broad, a thikke knarre"; and the Reeve is a "sclendre, col-
erik man" with long, lean legs. The first description of
Cressida begins thus:

"She was not with the lest of hir stature,
But alle hir limes so wel answeringe
Weren to womanhede, that creature
"was never lasse mannish in seminge," 32.

and later Chaucer refers incidentally to her small arms, straight back, long sides, and round breasts. Then when she is described again in Book V., she is said to be "mene of hir stature". In the "Merchant's Tale" these details are introduced in the description of May; "hir myddel smal, hir armes longe and sclendre", and in the "Miller's Tale", Alisoun is described as slim and small as a weasel. 34. Of Blanche the Duchess, these details are given:

"Right faire shuldres, and body long
She hadde, and armes, every leith,
Fattish, flesshy, not greet therwith;
Right whyte handes and nayles rede,
Rounde brestes; and of good brede
Hir hippoc were, a streight flat bak." 35.

Emily is described as "of middel stature", and the Miller's daughter is a "wenche thikke and wel-growen". Of the physique of men, Chaucer is equally appreciative. Diomed has "mighty limes square", while

"Troilus wel waxen was in highte,
And complet formed by proporcioun"
So well, that kind it not amenden mighte, 36.
Yong, fresh, strong, and hardy as lyoun."

In the "Legend of Good Women", Aeneas is
"Suffisaunt of persone and of might,
* * * * * * * *
And formed wel of braunes and of bones." 37.

Licurgus has
"Limes grete, his braunes harde and stronge,
His shuldred brode, his armes round and longe." 38.

The Host admires the Nun's Priest for his muscles, great
neck and large breast, and jests with Chaucer for being a
puppet.

Logically enough Chaucer sketches in such details of
form as foundation for other more individual points of
personal appearance. In so difficult a field as the de-
scription of the face, Chaucer achieves remarkable re-
sults. Though he uses objective details wherever possible,
he does not make the mistake of describing the features
too categorically, for such a method results in a ridicu-
rous enumeration, such as is found in this passage:
"His nose was heigh, his eyen bright citryn,
His lippes rounde, his colour was sangwyn." 39.

He has the good judgment to omit mention of the nose ex-
cept a few instances in which mention of it has some value; as in the case of the Miller's nose with its tuft of hairs or the Miller's family with their "camuse" noses. The mouth is described in a few instances, but Chaucer does not enter into much detail as modern authors frequently do. The Prioress's mouth is "small and therto softe and rede", and Alisoun's is "sweet as bragot or the meeth or hord of apples leyd in hey or heeth". The Miller's mouth is great as a furnace. In the general contour of the face, Chaucer seems little interested. He does speak of the Prioress's high forehead and the round face of the Miller.

Although Chaucer gives but scant attention to such features, he very wisely devotes considerable attention to describing the soul of the face, the eyes. His treatment is not strictly objective. He mentions the color, usually gray, only a few times, but he frequently refers to their shape or expression, both in formal and in incidental description. He dwells at some length on the eyes of Blanche.

"And which eyen my lady hadde,
Debonair, goode, glade, and sadde,
Simple, of good mochel, noght to wyde.
Therto hir look was not a-syde,
Ne overthwert, but beset so wel,
Hit drew and took up every del."

Some of the most vivid portions in all of Chaucer's descriptions are found in such lines as these:

"His eyen stepe and rollinge in his heed,
That stemed as a forneys of a leed."

"His eyen twinkled in his heed aright,
As doon the sterres in the frosty night."

"And of my swink yet blered is myn ye."

The Summoner has "eyen narwe", and the Pardoner has glaring eyes like those of a hare. - When Chaucer describes the Host, he chooses but two details:

"A large man he was with eyen stepe."

Alisoun has a "likerous ye", and Quen Esther "loked never with swich an ye" as May, in the "Merchant's Tale." Such expressions as "eyen clere" and "glade eyen" recur often. It is in revealing the shifting action and moods of his characters, however, that Chaucer most frequently brings in the description of the eyes. Throughout"Troilus and Cressida", recur such expressions as these:"And up his eyen cast he", "and doun hir eyen caste", "with that she gan hir eyen doun to caste", "and loked on hir in a besy
wyse", "with that the teres brast out of his yēn", "right so gan tho his eyen up to throwe", and "up his look debonairly he caste", "with that she gan hir eyen on him caste, ful esely and ful debonairly", "and gan his look on Pandarus up caste", "with that a fewe brighte teres newe, out of hir eyen fille", "hir eyen throwen upward in his heed", "as that hir eyen glente a-syde", "and caste his eye upon hir pitously", and so on indefinitely. In the "Knight's Tale" when Arcite is pining for Emily, his eyes become "holwe and grisly to biholde", and in the same story the king looks up with "eyen lighte". The Nun's Priest "loketh as a sperhauk with his yen". When the Cook is being reproved for drinking, the Manciple says,"Thy yen daswen eek", just as in the "House of Fame" the eagle says to Chaucer, "Fully daswed is thy loke". The eye-brows are mentioned occasionally, too, perhaps because they aid also in giving facial expression. Cressida's are too far apart; the Summoner has "scalled browes blake"; Licurgus looks about "with kempe heres on his browes stoute"; and Alisoun is described thus:

"Ful smale y-pulled were hir browes two,
And tho were bent, and blake as any sloo."

In describing facial expression, Chaucer seldom de-
pends on purely objective details which often prove cum-
bbersome and sometimes fail to convey the desired impres-
sion, which can be given so readily by a swift, general
interpretation as here:

"And eke the pure wyse of here meninge
Shewed wel, that men might in hir gesse
Honour, estat, and womanly noblesse." 41.

Later in the same poem, these lines are found:

"Gan for to lyke hir meninge and chere
Which somdel deynous was, for she leet falle
Hir look a lete a-side, in swich manere,
Ascounces! what, may I not stonden her?
And after that hir loking gan she lighte,
That never thoughte him seem so good a sighte." 42.

In the description of the Duchess, these expressions are
found: "She had so stedfast countenance"; "and loke so
debonairly"; "hit was sad, simple, and benigne." Such
general expressions as these occur: "humble yolden chere";
"with a chaunged face"; "hardy chere and face"; "with ful
sad face"; "drery contenaunce"; "so uncouth and so fresshe
contenaunces"; "swich subtil loking and dissimulinges."

But if Chaucer resorts more or less to general terms
in portraying facial expression, he is more specific in
giving details of complexion and the color of the face. The Summoner's complexion is described all too specifically, with "a fyr-red cherubinnes face", with "whelkes whyte" and "knobbes settinge on his chekes" which no remedy could cure. The Franklin's complexion is sanguine; the Wife of Bath's face is "fair, and reed of hewe"; the summer sun has browned the hue of the shipman. In describing his heroines, Chaucer rarely omits to mention their complexion, and in fact this is sometimes the only descriptive detail given as: "this mayde bright of hewe"; "Creseyde bright of hewe"; Canacee rises up as "rody and bright as dooth the yonge sonne." The Cook is "ful pale and nothing reede." The Duchess is "rody, fresh and lively hewed." When Ali-soun goes on a holiday, she washes her face so thoroughly that it "shoon as bright as any day", and in another place she is described in these lines:

"Ful brighter was the shyning of hir hewe
Than in the tour the noble y-forged newe."

To Rosemounde Chaucer says, "And lyke ruby ben your chekes rounde." In men, too, Chaucer observes coloring. The Host says of the Nun's Priest,

"Him nedeth not his colour for to dyen
With brasel, ne with greyn of Portingale."
Very skillful use is made of this kind of detail in the tale of the Canon's Yeoman. The Host asks him, "why artow so discoloured of thy face?", and he answers that his work with the canon has caused this, saying,

"Wher my colour was bothe fresh and reed, 
Now is it wan and of a leden hewe."

A little later, he says,

"For shame of him my chekes weken rede; 
Algates, they beginnen for to glowe, 
For reednesse have I noon, right wel I knowe, 
In my visage; for fumes dyverse 
Of metals, which ye han herd me reherce, 
Consumed and wasted han my reednesse."

It is in describing mood, however, that Chaucer makes most frequent use of this kind of detail throughout all of his works. In the "Compleynte to Pite", he says, "But up I rose, with colour ful diverse." In the "Book of the Duchess", Seys lies "ful pale and nothing rody"; the Duke is "ful pitous, pale, and nothing reed"; and later the blood rushes to his heart,

"That made al 
His hewe chaunge and waxe grene 
And pale, for no blood was sene"
In no maner lime of his", and he refers to himself in these lines:

"That maketh my hewe to falle and fade,"

"And myn hewe al pale,
Ful ofte I wex bothe pale and reed."

In expressing the mood of Anelida this line is used,

"Other colour then asshen hath she noon",

and in the same poem,

"With face deed, betwixe pale and grene."

In a poem like "Troilus and Cressida", with its frequent shift of moods, this kind of description is much in evidence in such lines as these:

"Sixty-tyme a day, he loste his hewe."
"It shewed in his hewe, bothe eve and morwe."
"It made his hewe a-day ful ofte grene."
"But though that he for wo was pale and wan."
"And chaunged al hir hewe."
"He wex sodeinliche reed."
"And now his hewes rede, now pale."
"So she wex sodeynliche reed."
"That changen gan hir hewe."
"This Pandarus, ful deed and pale of hewe."
"Hir hewes, whylom bright, that tho was pale."
"And thus she lyth with hewes pale and Greene."

"With that his courser tordne he a-boute
With face pale."

"Ful pale y-waxen was hir brighte face."

"So was he lene, and ther-to pale and wan."

As will be seen there are no fine distinctions of color,
just sufficient physical expression of mood. In the "Le­
gend of Good Women", similar expressions occur, as,

"Deed wax hir hewe, and lyk as ash to sene."

The sight of Emily in the "Knight's Tale" so affects Pala­
mon that Arcite says,

"Cosin myn, what eyleth thee
That art so pale and deedly on to see?"

Again there is this passage,

"With face deed and pale
Tho chaungen gun the colour in hir face."

The Cook is a "sory, pallid gost", and when the Wife of
Bath reveals her husband's secrets, it makes his face "ful
often reed and hoot". Though Chaucer in all these in­
stances has not developed any special distinctions of color,
still one may judge from the extent to which he uses this
form of description, that he finds this an interesting
phase of personal appearance and a useful one in suggest­
Of the various kinds of details used in describing the face, Chaucer thus uses every one, not always dwelling on them in detail and seldom drawing them with as fine lines as are found in such descriptions as Galsworthy's, for instance, but still giving many clear and vivid images of various faces.

Another kind of detail that seems to interest Chaucer is the hair. As has been pointed out, he is most discriminating in choosing the exact color of Blanche's hair. Of Cressida's hair, these beautiful lines are expressive:

"Hir ounded hair, that sonnish was of hewe
She rente";

and

"The mighty tresses of hir sonnish heres,
Unbroyden, hangen al about hir eres."

In Book V, where further details of her appearance are given, her hair is again described:

"And ofte tyme this was hir manere,
To gon y-tressed with hir heres clere
Doun by hir coler at hir bak behinde,
Which with a thred of gold she wolde binde."

In the "Legend of Hypsipyle and Medea", Medea writes to
Jason,

"Why lyked me thy yelow heer to see
More then the boundes of myn honestee", and later when he recalls her, he says,

"Thus lay hir heer, and thus fresh was hir hewe."

Later in her misery, she is described thus,

"And al deschevele, with hir heres clere."

In the "Physician's Tale", Virginia's hair is given this description:

"And Phebus dyed hath hir tresses grete
Lyk to the stremes of his burned hetel."

The Wife of Bath says that she approves of the apprentice Jankin,

"For his crisp heer, shyninge as gold so fyne."

When the Reave describes the Miller's daughter in no very complimentary terms, he adds,

"But right fair was hir hair, I wol not lye."

In the "Cook's Tale" he describes the Apprentice,

"With lokkes blake, y-kempt ful fetesly."

In the "Knight's Tale" these details are given of Emily,

"Hir brighte heer was kempt, untressed al",

and in another place,

"Hir yelow heer was broyded in a tresse,
Behinde hir bak, a yerde long, I gesse."

In the same poem, these lines are given in description of Licurgus:

"His longe heer was kembt behinde his bak,
As any ravenes fether it shon for blak",
and these of Emetreus:

"His crispe heer lyk ringes was y-ronne,
And that was yelow, and gliterated as the sonne."

The "ruggy, asshy heres" of Palemon are also spoken of in this poem. In the "Miller's Tale", these clear and vivid details of Absalon's appearance are given:

"Crul was his heer, and as the gold it shoon,
And strouted as a fanne large and brode;
Ful streight and even lay his joly shode."

Then in the "Prologue" may be found descriptions of the Squire "with lokkes crulle, as they were leyd in presse"; of the Reeve whose "heer was by his eres round y-shorn"; and most detailed of all that of the Pardoner:

"This pardoner hadde heer as yelow as wex,
But smothe it heng, as dooth a streke of flax;
By ounes henge his lokkes that he hadde,
And ther-with he his shuldres over-spradde;
But thinne it lay, by colpoons oon and oon."
This latter represents the utmost care and nice observation in this interesting field of personal description.

Of men's beards or their lack of them, Chaucer frequently speaks. He says of the Reeve that,

"His berd was shave as ny as ever he can",

and of the Miller,

"His Berd as any sowe or fox was reed
And ther-to brood as though it were a spade."

Of the Pardoner, he says,

"No berd hadde he, one never sholde have,
As smothe it was as it were late y-shave."

Of the Shipman he says incidentally,

"With many a tempest hadde his berd been shake";

and of the Franklin,

"Whyt was his berd as is the dayesye."

In showing the youth of John of Gaunt, he says, "upon his berd but litel heer", and he describes Emetreus thus, "His berd was wel begonne for to springe."

In addition to these constant elements of personal appearance, there are certain inconstant ones such as attitude, position, and movements. As Chaucer seldom pictures individuals in a stationary position, little attention is devoted to attitude of his figures. In the set picture of
the Duke, he is described as sitting with his back turned to an oak. Cressida, when first seen, is standing in the temple:

"And yet she stood ful lowe and stille alloon,
Behinded other folke in litel brede,
And neigh the dore, ay under showes drede
Simple of a-tyr, and debonair of chere,
With ful assured loking and manere." 43.

Later this visualization of Troilus is given:

"He sat on his baye stede,
Al armed, save his heed, ful richely,
And wounded was his hors, and gan to blede.
On whiche he rood a pas, ful softly." 44.

Then again Pandarus is described:

"Fil Pandarus on knees, and up his yen
To hevene threw, and held his hondes hye",
and later he is pictured in this attitude,

"And with his chere and loking al to-torn,
For sorwe of this, and with his armes folden,
He stood this woful Troilus biforn."

The Wife of Bath sits easily on her horse; the drunken Miller sits "unnethe upon his horse"; Nicholas sits in his room, "gaping ever up-righte"; in the "Man of Law's Tale"
"the child stood looking in the king's face"; Chaucer is accused of going along the way looking down. When the Summoner becomes angry at the "Friar's Tale", he stands high in his stirrups and shakes with anger.

But though Chaucer lays little stress on characteristic posture or even temporary pose, he almost invariably uses the one great advantage which description has over graphic arts, that of depicting character in motion. As has been pointed out in the discussion of description as an aid to reality of action, Chaucer seizes the opportunity to make the movement of a story present physically to the reader. Much of this is done through the incidental description accompanying action previously discussed, but in presenting character, too, Chaucer breathes life into a portrait by adding movement and characteristic action to the details of mere personal appearance. Much of the charm felt through the presence of Blanche would be missed without these lines:

"I saw her daunce so comlily,
Carole and singe so swetely,
Laugh and pleye so womanly
* * * * * * *
Therto she coude so wel pleye,
Whan that hir leste, that I dar seye
That she was lyk the torche bright,
That every man may take of light
Ynogh, and hit hath never the lesse."

A flat painting of the Squire would have lost much of its vitality without these lines:

"Singinge he was, or floytinge, al the day,
Wel coud he sitte on hors; and faire ryde,
He coudi songes make and wel endyte,
Jiste and eek daunce, and wel purtreye and wryte."

Similarly the liveliness of Absalon is pictured:

"In twenty manere coude he trippe and daunce
After the scole of Oxenforde tho,
And with his legges casten to and fro
And pleyen songes on a small rubible;
Ther-to he song som-tyme a loud quinible,
And as wel coude he playe on his giterne."

Of Alisoun, too, Chaucer presents characteristic actions:

"Ther-to she coude skippe and make game,
As any kide or calf folwinge his dame", and
"Winsinge she was, as is a joly colt."

Such bits as this are as original and spontaneous with
Chaucer, as little affected by the conventions set by others as his famous description of spring at the beginning of the "Prologue". The manners of the Prioress at table and her court manners are as necessary to an adequate picture of her as her refined features and pleasing attire.

In addition to such characteristic movements, there are occasional visualizations of actions similar to the following:

"Lo, Troilus, right at the stretes ende,
Com ryding with his tenthe some y-fere,
Al softly, and thitherward gan bende
Ther-as they sete, as was his wey to wende
To paleys-ward.
* * * * * * * *
With that he gan hir humbly to salwe,
With dreadful chere, and ofte his hewes muwe;
And up his look debonairly he caste,
And bekked on Pandare, and forth he paste."

Another vivid account of action is given in the conduct of the Cook:

"And with this speche the cook wex wrooth and wraw,
And on the maunciple he gan nodde faste
For lacke of speche, and doun the hors him caste,
Where as he lay, tel that men up him took;
This was a fayr chivachee of a cook!
Alas! he nadde holde him by his ladel!
And, er that he agayn were in his sadel,
 Ther was greet showving bothe to and fro,
To lifte him up, and muchel care and wo,
So unweldy was this sory palled gost."

Another vivid picture of men in action is given in the description of the tournament in the "Knight's Tale".

Chaucer's description of clothing is detailed and extremely vivid. An elaborate classification of garments, especially of royal attire, is evidenced in much of the literature contemporary to Chaucer. Previous literature had made much of the splendid costumes, jewels, and ornaments of people of rank. The direct sources from which Chaucer may have taken some of his stories dwell in more or less detail on splendor of costume. Dress is something so extremely tangible, and in a time like Chaucer's denotes such great social significance, that it is not surprising to find that this is not a new note in the development of the technique of description. But though it may be true that Chaucer has considerable precedent in this field, still he has shown original development in the fullness,
originality, and genuineness of his description of dress. He devotes his attention not alone to tiresome catalogues of court splendors, but he gives in minutest detail the accoutrements of a squire's yeoman or a canon's servant. Here is a veritable feast for the eye, a revel in materials, colors, fashions, and all the intricacies of dress in the fourteenth century.

Chaucer is specific in describing the fashion of garments. In the "Prologue there is infinite variety in this respect. The Knight wears a gipoun or short doublet; the Squire, a gown; the Yeoman, a coat and hood; the Monk, a cope with hood; the Friar, a semi-cope; the Merchant, a motley coat and a Flemish hat; the Clerk, a threadbare "courtepy"; the Lawyer a "medlee cote" with a girdle; the Shipman, a long gown; the Miller, a white coat and blue hood; the Reeve, a long surcoat; the Prioress, a cloak and wimple; and the Wife of Bath, a "foot mantle", kerchief, wimple, and a huge hat. Alisoun in the "Miller's Tale" wears a gored apron, a girdle, a smock, a voluper or cape, a fillet, a collar. Chaucer is just as particular to indicate the exact cut of Absalon's garments also, for he says that he wears a kirtle with a surplice over it, and adds that the points of the kirtle are set "faire and
thikke". In the "Friar's Tale", the yeoman wears a courtepy of green and a hat with black fringe. The Canon has a white surplice under his black cloak to which his hood is sewn. The Miller in the "Reeve's Tale" wears a tippet on his head and red hose, while his wife accompanies him in a "gyte" of red. Usually when Chaucer enters into a formal description, he gives specific details like these, but occasionally he generalizes, as when he says of the Duke that "he was clothed in blakke", or when he speaks of Cressida "in widwes habit blak", or Emily "clad al in grene".

Definite mention is made of hose, the red hose of the Wife of Bath, of Simkin, of Absalon, and the brown hose of Sir Thopas. Shoes are also mentioned, those of the Wife of Bath, "ful moiste and newe"; the elaborate ones of Absalon with "Powles window corven" on them, and Alisoun's "laced on hir legges hye". The boots of the Monk are "souple", and those of the Merchant are "clasped fair and fetisly".

The materials used in these garments also come under Chaucer's closest scrutiny. Dido is dressed in "gold and perre wrye". The Knight's coat is of fustian, while that of the Squire is of an embroidered material. The Monk shows that he is not poor by the trimming of finest fur on
his sleeves. The Friar's cope is of worsted. The Lawyer's girdle is of silk. Chaucer even observes that the Franklin's purse is silk, that the Shipman's cloak is of falding, and that the kerchiefs of the Wife of Bath are of the finest weave. The Reeve's coat, he observes, is of some Persian dyed stuff. The coat worn by Emetreus is of cloth of Tars, "couched with perles whyte and rounde and greet", and his mantle is full of rubies. The garments of Alisoun are of silk, and her purse is of leather, "tasseled with silk, and perled with latoun". Chaucer does not miss even the lining of the Doctor's garments with fine "sendal". Sir Thopas wears a robe of "ciclatoun", "that coste many a jane".

But not only are the cut and materials of garments given, but the little individualizing accessories of dress are also recorded. The gold brooch with the motto, "Amor Vincit Omnia", of the Prioress is a notable example. The Monk, too, wears a curious pin of gold with a love-knot in the "gretter ende", and the forester has a Christopher of silver on his breast. The vernicle sewed on the Pardonier's cap does not escape the shrewd observation of his fellow pilgrim. Alisoun's brooch, too, receives attention. Not a single item of the Forester's equipment, the sheaf
of arrows, his tackle, arrows, bow, shield, sword, buckler, dagger and all, not a purse, dagger, weapon, belt, spur, or staff of a single character is missed.

Of head-dress, too, there are ample details. The expression "y-wimped wel" is quite common. The Wife of Bath's hat, wide as a buckler, the Merchant's beaver hat, the blue hood of the Miller, the garland of the Summoner, the voluper of Alisoun, the black-fringed hat of the Yeoman, the "clote-leef" in the hood of the Canon's Yeoman, all demand attention. Garlands and crowns are frequently described. Speaking of Licurgus, the Knight says,

"A wrethe of gold arm-greet, of huge wighte,
Up-on his heed, set ful of stones brighte,
Of fyne rubies and of dyamaunts",

and of Emetrius,

"Up-on his heed he wered of laurer grene
A garland fresh and lusty for to sene."

When Emily walks in the garden,

"She gadereth floures, party whyte and rede,
To make a sotil gerland for hir hede."

In another place, these lines describe her,

"A coroun of a grene oak cerial
Up-on hir heed was set ful fair and mete."
The images of color called up by Chaucer's pictures of garments are indeed variegated. Usually he merely mentions the primary colors without making any fine distinctions of shades or tints, but occasionally certain expressions puzzle the modern reader not versed in the fashionable shades of the fourteenth century. The blue and red of the Doctor's gown are called "sangwin and pers", really a blood-red and a bluish gray, and again the "watchet" of Absalon's fashionable coat needs to be explained by Skeat as the blue of the hyacinth. But though there are few fine distinctions of shades, there is abundance of color, as a glance through the "Prologue" testifies. The flowers of the Squire's coat are white or red; the Yeoman's coat and hood are green. The motley coat of the Merchant, the red and green beads of the Prioress, the medley coat of the Lawyer with its striped girdle, the white purse of the Franklin, the blue and red of the Doctor's coat, the red hose of the Wife of Bath, the white coat and blue hood of the Miller, and the Persian dye of the Reeve's coat, all bring lively color images to the reader. In other selections, also, are found Cressida in brown, Emily in green, Licurgus resplendent in black, gold, red, white, gray, green. In the "Miller's Tale" different garments are "whyte
as morne milk", "col-blak", and "rede". Used in conjunction with the color of hair, eyes, and complexion previously referred to, the effect of these details is amazingly kaleidoscopic.

Thus it may be seen that by far the greater number of descriptive details employed by Chaucer appeal to the visual sense, and rightly so, for it is through that sense that most impressions of the appearance of persons are gained, but the other senses, too, have some place in description of persons, not so large as in nature description but still important.

Sound appeal could not well be omitted from description of persons. Mindful of the subtle influence exercised by the sound of the voice, Chaucer's description reflects occasionally the effect of the individual's voice and manner of speech. Added to the visible charms of Blanche the Duchess, is the beauty of her voice:

"And whiche a goodly softe speche,  
Had that swee."  
To Rosemounde, Chaucer says,
"Your seemly voys that ye so smal out-twyne  
Maketh my thoght in joye and blis habounde."
Troilus wishes to hear Cressida,
"So womanly, with voys melodious,
Singen so wel, so goodly, and so clere."
Emily as she walks in the garden sings as heavenly as an angel. The Miller says of Alisoun,
"But of hir song, it was as loude and yerne
As any swalwe sittinge on a berne", and of Absalon he says, after enumerating his other musical accomplishments, "he singeth brokkinge as a nightingale". In the "Manciple's Tale", Amphioun is praised thus:
"Pleyen he coude on every minstralcye,
And singen, that it was a melodye,
To heren of his clere vois the soun.
Certes the king of Thebes, Amphioun,
That with his singing walled that citee,
Coude never singen half so wel as he."
Chaucer is also mindful of voices other than purely musical. The Knight in the "Wife of Bath's Tale" speaks "with manly voys" as does the Knight in the "Squire's Tale". January, when he sings, "craketh". Of Emetreus the Knight says, "His voys was as a trompe thonderinge". Then the Summoner and Pardoner sang, "Come hider, love, to me",
"This somnour bar to him a stif burdoun,
Was never trompe of half so greet a soun."
Further on Chaucer comments on the Pardoner's speaking voice,

"A voys he hadde as smal as hath a goot."

The Clerk of Oxford speaks,

"In form and reverence
And short and quik and ful of hy sentence."

The speech of the Friar is also effectively described:

"Somewhat he lipsed, for his wantownesse,
To make his English sweete upon his tonge."

Of the Prioress Chaucer is equally critical:

"Ful wel she song the service divyne,
Entuned in hir nose ful semily."

The Miller cries "in Pilate's voys", and the Miller in the "Keeve's Tale",

"Yexeth and he speketh thurgh the nose
As he were on the quakker, or on the pose."

The quality of the voice as affected by mood is also presented:

"With broken voys, al hoors for-shright, Creseyde,
To Troilus these ilke wordes seyde."

Fear also affects Troilus:

"In chaunged vois, right for his verrey drede,
Which vois eek quook."
John of Gaunt is thus described:

"And with a deedly sorwful soune
He made of ryme ten vers or twelve,
Of a compleynct to himselfe,
The moste pite, the moste rowthe,
That ever I herde."

The description then goes on:

"He sayde a lay, a maner song,
Withoute note, withoute song."

In describing the collective sound of a group Chaucer also succeeds as in these selections:

"For which the peple blisful, al and somme,
So cryden, that unto the sterres it wente."

"They murmureden as dooth a swarm of been."

There are also a few other sounds associated with people mentioned, playing on musical instruments, jingling of the Friar's bells, blowing of trumpets, and clashing of weapons.

There is little field for appeals to other senses in description of persons. The sense of smell, as associated with human beings, requires careful handling or it offends good taste. Certain modern writers make very skillful use of this means of vitalizing description. Galsworthy uses
it effectively in the climax of "Fraternity"; the scent of
the stale violet powder used by the little model offends
Hilary's patrician sense and turns the tables against her.
Kipling uses it too in "Kim" to bring out the sense of the
crowd in the great procession in which Kim passes. But
frank as Chaucer is about many things, he is not quite
modern enough to use this primitive sense in describing
persons very often. Absalon, when about to visit Alisoun,
"cheweth greyn and lycorys,
To smellen swete, er he had kemd his heer."
The Canon's Yeoman describes the genus alchemist:
"Men may hem knowe by smel of brimston,
For al the world, they stinken as a goot;
Her savour is rammish and so hoot,
That, though a man from him a myle be,
The savour wol infeste him, trusteth me."
In the Manciple's Prologue, the Cook is reproached in no
dainty terms for the bad breath resulting from his drunk-
enness.

In taking up other sense appeals, there is danger of
going beyond the limits of pure description, for certain
fundamental and instinctive sensations, which may well
come within the range of description when placed in their
proper setting so frequently involve certain more psychological features that it is difficult to determine where description ends and the emotional element begins. But certain sense impressions are legitimate material for description in order that an author may, as Gardiner says, present "the many-layered richness of experience."\textsuperscript{50}

Surely such vivid details as are presented in the following passages, revealing Troilus after his dreams, may be classed as descriptive:

"And ther-with-al his body sholde sterte, And with the stert al sodeinliche awake, And swich a tremour fele aboute his herte, That of the feer his body sholde quake; And ther-with-al he sholde noyse make, And seme as though he sholde falle depe From heighe a-lofte; and than he wolde wepe."\textsuperscript{51}

The following passage also is vivid:

"And with that word his speche faille gan, For from his feet up to his brest was come The cold of deeth, that hadde him overcome. And yet more-over, in his armes two The vital strengthe is lost, and al ago. Only the intellect, with-outen more,\textsuperscript{51}
That dwelled in his herte syk and sore,
Gan faillen, when the herte felte deth,
Dusked his eyen two, and faillled breath."52.

These statements, appealing as they do to a sense of coldness, may be included as descriptive:

"She lay as for deed,
With-oute answere, and felte his limes colde."

"She cold was and with-outen sentiment."

"As cold as any feast now wexeth she."

The place of the following passages from "Troilus and Cressida" in a discussion of description is more doubtful, although they do depict certain physical manifestations of emotion:

"His herte gan quappe,
Softe and quaking "or pure drea,
His herte gan to sprede and ryse."

"To grounde deed she falleth as a stoon,
Al crampisheth hir limes crokedly."

This statement may appear somewhat exaggerated:

"But wel he felte aboute his herte crepe,
For every teer which that Criseyde asterte
The crampe of deeth to streyne him by the herte," but
it is hardly less genuine than the expression of the same feeling by a modern author, "She had that sore, strange feeling -- as of being skinned". In view of the ancient theory of the heart as the seat of the emotions, perhaps the following could not be considered as descriptive, although in certain instances one may be sure that Chaucer is actually depicting the physical state of an individual, and not employing a mere figure of speech.

"As frost, him thoughte, his herte gan to colde."

"The blood was fled, for pure drede,
Doun to his herte, to make him warm --
For wel hit feled the herte had harm."

"Now was hir herte warm, now was it cold."

"This Palamoun, that thoughte thurgh his herte
He felte a cold swerd sodeynliche glyde."

"Him thoughte his sorwes were so smerte
And lay so cold upon his herte;
So, through his sorwe and hevy thought,
Made him that he ne herds me noght."

"For ere he quook, so gan his herte gnawe."

"But for the peyne him thoughte his herte bledde,
So were his throwes sharpe and wonder stronge."
Similar to these expressions are the vivid words of the Wife of Bath in describing how she feels when she recalls her youth, "It tikleth me aboute myn herte rote." According to psychologists, this can be literally true. Though there is some difficulty in determining the status of such details in the legitimate field of description, because they involve the imagination and point of view of the person described rather than of the reader, still in the broader sense of description as an attempt to produce in the reader's imagination a certain objective fringe of associations in relation to an individual, these details are descriptive.

But in the case of Chaucer who has furnished such an abundance of unmistakable descriptive material, extended inquiry into the philosophy of description is fatuous. After all the greatest effects are gained through such close welding together of the various sense appeals that a separate analysis is of little consequence. All the truly immortal descriptions of persons in Chaucer represent a fine balancing of the numerous visual impressions of form, face, features, expression, complexion, hair, attitude and movement, of clothing, ornament, and dress accessories with the other sense impressions of sound, odor,
and other physical sensations, so that the whole person is present with as much reality as the medium of words can effect. All this is the outcome of a keen observation, recording itself in minute but carefully chosen material, vivid and satisfying in itself, but duly subordinated to the larger design.

III. Technique

Out of materials unequalled in richness, vividness, and significance, Chaucer's technique in producing the effects, for which he purposely employed his description of persons, is of unusual interest. To a large extent, Chaucer was a pioneer in the field of description of persons, for though principles of law and order in literature were laid down arbitrarily for him in much that he wrote, in description of persons he had no great body of precedent and no body of criticism, which, by the way, is still scant in English literature. Chaucer, then, had to blaze his own trail when he undertook to present the real social system of England in his own day. Therefore, if in some respects Chaucer's technique compared unfavorably with that of modern masters of description, it must be recalled that he was working in a new medium. After all,
what he did succeed in doing needs no apology.

The chief criticism of Chaucer's descriptions has been directed against certain features of arrangement of details. The chief points in which Chaucer differs from modern practice are the place of the descriptions in the context and the order of the details themselves.

By modern writers it is seldom the practice to introduce an extended and elaborate description of characters and then, as one critic of Chaucer puts it, "set them up to act and speak to these descriptions". As a matter of fact, outside of the "Prologue" there are not more than five lengthy descriptions; viz., those of Blanche, Cressida, the two kings in the "Knight's Tale", and Alisoun and Absalon in the "Miller's Tale". That of Blanche is the most extended but also the most natural, since it is put in the mouth of her husband who has now nothing but the memory of her charms to comfort him. As has been pointed out, the elaborate sketch of the two kings justifies criticism, for it is not at all necessary to the development of any element of the story, and it represents Chaucer's one concession to the practice of giving the elaborate and impressive trappings of royalty, emphasized in heroic poetry. While the two detailed descriptions of Alisoun and Absalon are
not a necessary preliminary to the tale, still much of the
gayety and youth would be omitted, and the effect of con-trast with the stupidity of Nicholas would be lost, with-out this lively sketch, which is really far more interest-ing than the full length portraits of some of the early novelists, notably Scott. These then are the only in-stances of detailed, preliminary descriptions in the var-iou stories. Cressida's appearance is built up gradually by incidental description. Throughout the "Legend of Good Women" and the other "Canterbury Tales", what description is given is done through a brief general sketch, followed by additional touches through incidental description. The descriptions of the "Prologue" are of course massed, but that fact is determined by the plan of the Tales, and by the fact that the "Prologue" is a unit in itself, having a theme of its own.

But though it is probably not true that the placing of Chaucer's descriptions is all wrong, some criticism of the arrangement of details within a description may be justified, although the variety of kinds of descriptions employed precludes sweeping general statements.

There is no doubt that in the longer, more complete descriptions, it puzzles the reader brought upon the Stev-
enson formula, to discover any evident order. To be sure, Chaucer seldom gives a description of the Stevensonian type, and when he does, no violence is done to one's preconceived ideas of order. The general picture is given first, as in the description of John of Gaunt, a man in black, sitting with his back propped against the trunk of a tree. The next details are general; he is large and young, about twenty-four. There is a little violation of point of view, in that the observer is standing back of him but notices that he has little hair on his face. Then the last details are well planned; the man's head bent low and the sound of his mourning, the two significant details. The set picture of Cressida is also logically arranged. Cressida, in widow's black, stands in the midst of the other persons in the temple. Then is given the general impression of her beauty, followed by details giving her attitude, attire, and face. But in Chaucer's pictures of characters in action, which constitute the vast majority of his descriptions, the order is somewhat erratic, though usually no great violence is done to the reader's imagination as he proceeds to build up the picture.

In the "Prologue" the descriptive material is so combined with characterizing material that the order is some-
what difficult to follow, but the treatment, accorded details of description in the various sketches there, enables one to reach some conclusions as to Chaucer's principles of arrangement. The description of the Miller conforms to present day usage, perhaps, more nearly than any other.

He is presented first as a stout fellow of big bones and brawn. Then Chaucer specifies that he has short, broad shoulders and is a "thikke knarre", who can break a door off the hinges with his head. His beard is then described, and the wart with its hairs, and then his nostrils. Now Chaucer skips to his sword and buckler, and comes back to the description of his mouth. Certain details of character are given next, and the fact that he wears a white coat and blue hood. The playing of the bag-pipe concludes the picture. To observe a purely logical order, it would seem that the hood and coat might come earlier, and there is no explanation for the placing of the sword and buckler in the midst of the details of the Miller's face, except it be the demands of the rhyme, which must be taken into consideration in a discussion of the order of details. Usually, too, Chaucer is occupied first with the details revealing character, and because he has promised to give the array of "ech of him", he often crowds details of
dress in at the end. The description of the Yeoman is also fairly well arranged; first, his costume, then his equipment, his "not-heed", his arms, and finally the most striking and significant detail, the Christopher of silver on his breast. The Clerk, too, is presented logically; first, his leanness, his hollow look, and then his thread-bare coat. There is no violation of one's sense of order in the picture of the Squire, age, stature, dress, etc., although the details of his movements intervene between the account of the embroidery on his garments.

In this picture of the Squire is to be noted another feature which may account for some apparent irregularities in other sketches. The description begins with the curled locks of the Squire, the detail which would perhaps attract one's attention first as the most characterizing point in his make-up. Though this order may not be as logical in aiding one to build up an image, it is not at all an unnatural procedure, for it is not unusual to hear persons identify an individual by some outstanding feature of this kind, some eccentricity of dress or manner. The carefully pressed curls of the young Squire may be the one thing that brands him as a lover scrupulous of his appearance, and is therefore a good starting point. The same
conjecture may be made as to the order of details in the sketch of the Summoner. This man's complexion would be observed first and remembered longest and prepares one for the exposition of his character. The accidental features of the cake and garland are included last to bring the discussion back again to the concrete, from which Chaucer does not long depart. From the great care which Chaucer bestows on the description of the Pardoner's hair, it evidently strikes him as the most significant detail of his appearance, and he proceeds from that to his lack of a hood, his eyes, his insignia of office, his voice, and finally his beard. Some of this is obviously not coherent, but there is not absolute lack of design. The description of the Monk, too, begins with one vivid detail, the jingling of his bridle, proceeds to tell of his view of life, which is clinched by the details of his dress and his gold pin. Then Chaucer tells of his bald head, shining face, and eyes, after which he adds details of his boots, his complexion, tastes, and finally his horse. Here the order again is confused, but there is no lack of unity or evidence of a complete and unrelated inventory of facts, though of course the order cannot be defended.

The description of the Prioress very properly begins
with her manners, and the material considerations are left to the end, while the prosperity of the Wife of Bath is so evident that her description begins with the details that emphasize this phase. The descriptive details pertaining to the Prioress are presented in almost exactly the reverse order, beginning with her wimple, depicting next her features, size, garments, but ending with the interesting details of her brooch. The sketch of the Wife of Bath suffers from lack of arrangement, on the whole, for it skips freely from one kind of detail to another, and in fact, of all the descriptions of the "Prologue", this is the least coherent. It will be seen, however, that there has been some sort of plan in the arrangement of all these pictures, and by the different methods of attack, the "Prologue" has escaped the dead level of monotony which an absolute uniformity of arrangement in the treatment of twenty-nine pilgrims would surely produce.

There are some instances, however, in which the arrangement of details seems positively capricious. It is practically impossible to trace any design in the picture of Alisoun. It begins, properly enough, with her shape, then proceeds to her girdle, apron, smock, collar, voluper, fillet, eyes, eye-brows. This is all very well, but a gen-

eral impression is given next, followed by an account of her purse. Then these points are developed; her color, voice, actions, mouth, and her shape again. Finally come the details of her brooch and shoes and again a summary of the general impression. There is no justification for this arrangement unless it be in what Kittredge calls the dramatic nature of the Tales, which may lead Chaucer to develop his points just as the Miller would mention them. The other excellencies of this description would, however, discountenance such a conclusion. The explanation would not hold good in the description of the two kings, which is also loosely connected. That of Licurgus takes up points in this order: beard, face, circles about his eyes, expression, eye-brows, limbs, shoulders, arms, attitude, armor, hair, crown. That of Emetreus is nearly as disorganized; the details come as follows: steed, armor, saddle, mantle, hair, nose, color, freckles, expression, age, beard, voice, laurel wreath, eagle in hand.

This is Chaucer’s worst offense, however, and much can be forgiven an author who has given to the world the inimitable pilgrims of the "Canterbury Tales", vibrant and dynamic, defying criticism by their sheer vitality.

In blending details together Chaucer had some degree
of success, though occasionally sentences run like this:

"Ful semely hir wimpel pinched was;
Hir nose tretys; hir eyen greye as glas;
Hir mouth ful smal, and ther-to softe and reed;
But sikerly she hadde a fair forheed;
It was almost a spanne brood, I trowe."

Again a lack of blending is shown here:

"His crispe heer lyk ringes was y-roune,
And that was yelow, and glitered as the sonne.
His nose was heigh, his eyen bright citryn,
His lippes rounde, his colour was sangwyn,
A fewe fraknes in his face y-spreynd,
Betwixen yelow and somdel blak y-meynd,
And as a leoun he his loking caste;
Of five and twenty yeer his age I caste;
His herd was wel begonne for to springe;
His voys was as a trompe thunderinge."

Here each detail is introduced separately, requiring a separate sentence for almost every one, and establishing no relationship between any two points. There is a sort of coherence of thought but little established relationship in expression. But these passages represent the extreme while in most descriptions, as there is some sort of
coherence, so there is some degree of blending. In the description of Alisoun occurs this sentence:

"Whyt was hir smok and brouded al before
And eek behinde, on hir coler aboute,
Of col-blak silk, with-inne and eek withoute."

Here the detail of the embroidery serves to draw several details together. (Although, as has been seen, the details of the Wife of Bath's appearance are very scattered, there is one evidence of blending, "A foot mantle aboute hir hips large." The detail of the Monk's pin serves to bring in the detail of his hood.

"And for to festne his hood under his chin,
He hadde of gold y-wroght a curious pin."

Here, by means of incidental use of detail, several points are combined:

"Hir ounded heer, that sonnish was of hewe,
She rente, and eek hir fingres longe and smale,
She wrong ful ofte."

There is evidence of blending also in the following passages:

"What she him saw, she gan for sorwe anoon
Hir tery face a-twixe hir armes hyde."

"Hir whyte brest she bet."
But, on the whole, Chaucer has not developed the art of combining gracefully the different elements in his description of persons, and it is due to this fact, perhaps, rather than to any failure on his part to make selection of details, that his descriptions are sometimes classed as mere catalogues of details.

Much of this effect arises from the nature of Chaucer's sentences. They are usually quite uninvolved, somewhat short, and lacking often in subordination. Descriptive details are presented in a series of statements as:

"Hir hosen were of fyn scarlet reed,
Ful streite y-teyd, and shoos ful moiste and newe.
Bold was hir face, and fair, and reed of hewe."

The same construction may be noted here:

"The Keve was a sclendre colerik man,
His berd was shave as ny as ever he can.
His heer was by his eres round y-shorn,
His top was dokked lyk a preest biforn.
Ful longe were his legges, and ful lene,
Y-lik a staf, ther was no calf y-sene."

Lack of subordination is seen in the following sentences:

"Up-on the cop right of his nose he hadde
A werte, and ther-on stood a tuft of heres,"
Reed as the bristles of a sowes eres;
His nose-thirles blake were and wyde.
A swerd and bokeler bar he by his syde.
His mouth as greet was as a greet forneys."

In these selections, as in numerous other instances, there are few modifying statements, precluding any great variety of sentence form. The normal order is used with little attempt to vary length or beginnings of the sentence. Of course the meter restricts Chaucer as the rhymed couplet favors compound rather than complex sentences, and the recurrence of the rhyme prevents the poet from going far a-field in the sentence. That this consideration has some weight may be seen by a comparison of any of the preceding quotations with a passage from "Troilus and Cressida", in which there is greater subordination and consequently a smoother effect, due, possibly, to a greater freedom in the verse:

"Criseyde mene was of hir stature,
Ther-to of shap, of face, and eek of chere,
Ther mighte been no fairer creature.
And ofte tymes this was hir manere,
To gon y-tressed with hir heres clere
Doun by hir color at hir bak behinde,
The diction of Chaucer's description of persons bears a close connection to this matter of blending through sentence formation. As the statements move along in series, seldom employing participles, phrases, or even many clauses, it is natural that the verbs run something like this:

"Embrouded was he"; "Singing he was"; "He was as fresh --"; "Short was his goun"; "He was clad--"; "Under his belt he bar"; "In his hand he bar"; "Upon his arm he bar"; "An horn he bar"; "Ful semely hir wimpel pinched was"; "But sikerly she hadde a fair forheed"; "It was almost a spanne brood"; "She was not undergrowe"; "Ful fetis was hir cloke"; and so on. The verbs commonly used are "had", "was", "bore", and "wore", and it is only in rare instances that one meets expressions like this: "That stemed as a forneys of leed"; or "That rounded as a belle out of the presse"; "The circles of his eyen **gloweden**; "His eyen twinkled in his heed." By using only the copulative verb, Chaucer contributes little to the use of strong, image-making verbs, at least in formal description. In incidental description, such as is used to give reality to action, Chaucer makes use of telling Anglo-Saxon verbs, such as: "stalketh", "quake", "swapte", "crepe", "slinke", "threste", "glinte", "gloweden"; "His eyen twinkled in his heed."
"gnawe", "winde", "wreigh", "braste", "stakereth", "rampeth", "pressesteth", "heve", "clessen and bite", "stongen", "frothen", and such expressions as these: "clawed him on the bak"; "his legges casten to and fro". But though Chaucer does this sort of thing admirably, the fact remains that he does not make the effective use of the verb which modern technique demands.

In other respects, there is much to admire in Chaucer's diction, for all the wealth of his descriptive material and the skill with which he adapts it to his needs, would avail him little if he were not able to make, as he does, a happy choice of the apt word and telling phrase. Chaucer chooses with precision the word that he requires. He uses a definite, specific term instead of an abstract or general one. When he describes a weapon, he calls it an anlas, a dagger, a sword, or a popper, and he even specifies a "Sheffield thwitel". The specific names of various kinds of garments are given as well as the exact materials from which they are made. Not only are the terms exact, but they are expressive and forceful as well. While they give the correct fundamental image, they are vivid and suggestive enough to produce an emotional reaction.
This is especially true of Chaucer's adjectives, of which he seems to have an unfailing source. They are used precisely in such phrases as these: "assured looking", "humble, yolden chere", "ounded heer", "limes square", "лик­ерous ýd", hair "strouted as a fan", "camuse nose", "piled skull", "arwes kene", "lene legges", "hardy quene", "souple" shoes, "sangwyn" complexion, "scelendre, colerik man", "eyen narwe", "dokked" head, "piled berd", "scalled browes", "gat-tothed", and a face "pale and welked". Other adjectives, in addition to being clear and specific have emotional connotation, as the following: "glade eyes", "softe speche", "sungellyk beautee", "subtile stremes of your eyen", "rosy-hewed", "snowish throte", "eyen clere", "slakke skin", "gay suprlys", "tendre limes, delicat to sighte", bridle "gingling in a whistling wind", "eyes rolling", "thikke knarre", "grene youth", a person "drye as is a shaft", "a flotery berd", "ruggy, asshy heres", "an elvish countenaunce", "blered" eyes, a "rammish" smell, "sory, palled gost", a "stalke pas", and a "louring manere chere". It is through words like these that Chaucer gains his effects.

Adverbs are vivid, too, though not so frequently used by Chaucer. These occur: "debonairly", "goodly", "fetisly", "
"womanly", "comlily", "softe", "sore", "faire". There are such effective uses of the adverb as this: "esily she sat"; "brokkinge he sung"; "kempte his lokes brode"; "softe winde and wrappe"; "gay at point devys"; "faire and thikke the poynes set".

The nouns used, too, are image-making words, such as: "crampe of dethe", "shining of hir hewe", "hertes botme", "not-heed", "cop right of his nose", "tuft of heres", "cherubinnes face", "whelkes", "knobbes", "stif burdoun", "ounces and colpoons" of hair, "clinking of your belles", "cracching of chekes", "popet", "cold of death", "swifte welles"(the eyes), "herte-spoon". In the midst of his abundance, however, Chaucer exercises verbal economy, which gives strength to his style. He rarely employs more than one adjective, and a single modifier of any kind usually suffices. He has one advantage here, the use of the native English compounds, now almost obsolete in our language. He can gain an effect at one stroke by such words as these: "wel y-chaped", "for-wrapped", "y-tukked", "y-dropped al with teres", "eye-brows small y-pulled", a "forpyned ghost".

Certain terms used by Chaucer may appear to modern readers to be somewhat inappropriate, but it is difficult to know whether to attribute this to the language of
Chaucer's day or to his own naive manner of expression. A point in question is the language used in describing Blanche's neck, "flat" and "withouten hole" and "canel-bone * * * * had she none". The words "fattish" and "flesshy", used in describing her arms, also illustrate this point, as does the expression, "myddel smale", used in describing a slender waist. The phrase, "body long", strikes one as peculiar, but only an etymologist could determine such questions of diction in a language undergoing a transition.

The charm of some phrases cannot be analyzed in terms of words, for it is just a neatness of expression that makes certain phrases attractive, as:

"He felt the cold swerde sodeynliche glide."

"And gruf he fel al-plat upon the grounde."

"The brighte swerdes wenten to and fro."

Sometimes the characteristic Old English understatement is observed, as: "she was not undergrowe", or "he was not right fat". Again it is the musical quality of the verse itself which causes to well up in the reader's heart a rush of pleasure, clear and joyous as a mountain spring.
IV. Literary Effectiveness

In the profusion of Chaucer's materials and methods, there is traceable a controlling purpose which gives to his descriptions of persons their crowning distinction, an innate appropriateness and effectiveness in their proper setting. As the story progresses, the reader is not made conscious of the descriptions, but he does have the impression of life; he sees the characters moving, acting, talking; he watches their color come and go; he hears the sound of their voices; but he does this unconsciously just as he watches life's panorama played about him daily, his mind intent on the big issues but subconsciously influenced by the appearance and mannerisms of the people about. Keeping in mind this ultimate purpose, Chaucer uses his descriptions to image concretely for the reader character, mood, and action, and possibly that which in this day of the short story is called "local color".

As character is an inseparable element of story-telling, in order to present character adequately, description of persons is almost indispensable. Since character expresses itself in personal appearance often more eloquently than through words or even actions, an artist like Chaucer does not neglect to make use of this common truth.
when he presents his galaxy of famous portraits, especially those to be found in the "Prologue". The physical charms of his heroines are almost invariably linked with beautiful character. It is almost impossible to separate the elements of pure description from the mental and moral qualities of Blanche the Duchess. Every detail described, her eyes, her facial expression, her voice, her manner, her form, all concretely given, but it is very difficult to separate these elements from the more abstract qualities of character which they indicate, for both are blended into one unified impression. This passage, taken at random from the extended description of Blanche, illustrates this blending in characterization:

"Hir eyen semed anon she wolde
Have mercy; fools wenden so;
But hit was never the rather do.
Hit was no countrefeted thing,
Hit was hir owne pure loking,
That the goddesse, dame Nature,
Had made him opene by mesure,
And close; for, were she never so glad,
Hir loking was not foly sprad,
Ne wildly, thogh that she playde;
But ever, me thoghte, hir eyen sayde,

"By god, my wrathe is al for-yive." 59.

To Chaucer the use of description in presenting character is almost a duty, for he says in the "Prologue" that it is according to reason to tell:

"The condicioun of ech of hem, so as it seined me,
And whiche they weren, and of what degre;
And eek in what array that they were inne."

When Cressida is first presented, she is described with such details as help to bring out her simplicity, charm, and self-possession. Of Troilus no glimpse is given except here and there when incidental details bring out his gallant bravery or deep devotion. It is not until Diomede enters into the story that Chaucer presents a full-length portrait of Troilus. It is a curious procedure, but it serves to bring out the contrast in the two characters. But it is in the "Prologue" that description of persons for characterization reaches its highest development. The reader knows the Squire once he has seen his beautifully curled locks and his embroidered gown; the neat precision of the Prioress's habit gives her character effectively; the Monk's character requires little exposition, once the impression is gained of his generous figure,
his sleek face, and fur-trimmed sleeves; the Wife of Bath with her elaborate head-dress, her red hose and bold red face needs no extended characterization; it is not necessary for Chaucer to explain that the Miller can heave a door from its hinges when the details of his big frame and strong, coarse face have been visualized; the Reve, a slender, choleric man with his lean legs and closely shaven head could not but be a careful steward; and the sly, designing nature of the Pardoner is certainly expressed in his appearance. So on through the Tales where such characters as Emily, the fair Alisoun, the Miller and his wife, the "fresshe May", and the Canoun's Yeoman are made real individuals through description. With the utmost skill, Chaucer manages, in the midst of varying types representative of the picturesque stage of society of his time, to present distinctive and characteristic traits through careful choice of picturing details.

In Chaucer's narratives, however, the greatest number of descriptions of persons, outside of the "Prologue", are used to present mood, either as a manifestation of mood or the source of arousing it as a vital factor in the action of the story.

The use of description of the individual as an ex-
pression of mood is found in all of Chaucer's narratives from first to last. In the "Book of the Duchess", the first description is of Alcyone, who hangs her head, falls in a swoon "as cold as ston". The first lengthy description found in this poem is of the Knight, clothed in black, with his head down, complaining with a "deedly sorwful soune", "ful pitous, pale, and nothing reed." Then:

"His hewe chaunge and wexe grene
And pale, for no blood was sene
In no maner lime of his."

In "Anelida and Arcite" a similar use is found:

"To grounde deed she falleth as a stoon,
Al crampissheth hir limes crokeedly,
She speketh as hir wit were al agoon;
Other colour then asshen hath she noon."

In a tale of great emotion like "Troilus and Cressida", it is very fitting that frequent reminders of the appearance and actions of Troilus and Cressida express their varying emotions, as in this passage:

"Hir ounded heer, that sonnish was of hewe,
She rente, and eek hir fingres longe and smale
She wrong ful ofte, and bad god on hir rewe,
And with the deeth to doon bote on hir bale."
Hir hewe, whylom bright, that tho was pale,
Bar witnes of hir wo and hir constreynte
Therwith the teres from hir eyen two
Doun felle, as shour in Aperill, ful swythe;
Hir whyte bust she bet."^0

A little later occurs this passage:
"For with hir salte teres
Hir brest, hir face y-bathed was ful wete;
The mighty tresses of hir sonnish heres,
Unbroyden, hangen al about hir eres."^1

Later such details as these occur:
"Aboute hir eyen two a purpre ring
Bi-trent in sothfast tokninge of hir peyne."
or
"With broken voys, al hoors for-shright."

and
"Hir limes colde,
Hir eyen thrown upward to hir heed,
Hir colde mouth", and so on.

In the "Knight's Tale", the effect of sorrow on Arcite
is seen in this description:
"His sleep, his mete, his drink is him beraft,
That lene he wex, and drye as is a shaft.
His eyen holwe, and grisly to beholde;
His hewe falwe, and pale as ashen colde."62.

Again the sorrow of Palamon is shown here:

"Tho came this woful Theban Palamoun,
With flotery herd, and ruggy asshy heres,
In clothes blake, y-dropped al with teres."63.

In some of these selections, it may appear that the details chosen to express sorrow are somewhat conventional, but in such passages as the following Chaucer portrays other moods, more distinct and individual:

"This Palamoun knitted his browes tweye."

"Right as an aspes-leef she gan to quake."

"This Somnour in his stiropes hye stood;
Up-on this Frere his herte was so wood,
That lyk an aspen leef he quok for yre."

"The Cook of London, while the Reve spok,
For joye, him thoughte, he clawed him on the bak."

Not only do the descriptions express the mood of individuals, but they are frequently given as the cause of mood in others. This is especially true in the love stories. Cressida is described as so beautiful that as soon as Tro-
ilus sees her, her impression "in his hertes botme gan to stiken", and

"Love hadde his dwellinge
Withinne the subtile streames of hir yen."

Emily, too, is described in such a way as to justify Palamon's immediate surrender to her charms.

In the "Book of the Duchess", the Knight says of Blanche:

"And whiche eyen my lady hadde!
Debonair, good, gladde, and sadde,
Simple, of good mochel, noght to wide;
Therto hir look was not a-syde,
Ne overthwert, but beset so wel,
Hit drew and took up, everydel,
Alle that on hir gan beholde."64.

The Wife of Bath in her Prologue speaks of going to the funeral of her husband, her face covered with a handkerchief, but she is not so grieved that she does not observe Jankin, the clerk, of whom she says:

"Me thoughte he hadde a paire
Of legges and of feet so clene and faire
That al myn herte I yaf un-to his hold."65.

The Wife of Bath knows, as Chaucer knows, that beauty of person has, after all, much to do with arousing emotions,
and in using description in this way, Chaucer not only uses a conventional device of romance but brings out a universal truth of human nature, which is reflected in all literature.

The extent to which Chaucer employs the physical manifestations of emotion, one is apt to attribute to the exaggerated romanticism of the social customs of chivalry, and one is apt to consider the following passage from "Troilus and Cressida" absurdly extravagant:

"He rist him up, and every dore he shette
And window eek, and tho this sorweful man
Up-on his beddes syde a-doun him sette,
Ful lyk a deed image pale and wan;
* * * * * * * *
Right as the wilde bole beginneth springe,
Now here, now there, y-darted to the herte,
And of his deeth routh in compleyninge,
Right so gan he aboute the chaumbre sterte,
Smyting his brest ay with his festes smerte;
His heed to the wal, his body to the grounde,
Ful ofte he swapte, himselven to confoundo,
His eyen two, for pitee of his herte
Out stremeden as swifte welles tweye;
The heigh sobbes of his sorwes smerte
His speche him rafte, unnethes might he seye. "66."

But before condemning such a passage as this for being too mediaeval, it would be well to compare it with one from Galsworthy's "Patrician", in which the situation is similar, the impending separation from the beloved. Barbara comes upon Lord Miltoun lying on the floor trying to cool his head against the wall, sobbing with a sound "like that of a flame noiselessly licking the air." 67. Chaucer's is fully as convincing.

There is an extensive body of descriptions of persons that cannot properly be considered as contributing to either the character or mood elements of the poems but which serve a very real purpose in "credibilizing" the whole, in casting an atmosphere of reality over the action of a story. In the story of Griselda, in which little formal description is given, sufficient description is given to enable the reader to see the tattered garments of Griselda, to picture her as she moves about preparing for the new bride, setting tables, making beds, sweeping and shaking rugs with the servants. This use of description is especially marked in "Troilus and Cressida". From the first moment when Cressida is presented, "in widwes habit large
of samit brown", on her knees before Hector praying, "with pitous voys, and tendrely wepinge", her actions are not lost sight of. When Pandarus comes to see her she is sitting in a paved parlor listening to a story:

"And up she rose, and by the hond in hye
She took him faste, and seyde, 'This night thrye, To goode mote it turne, of you I mette.'
And with that word she doun on benche him sette."

Later when he starts to leave, this line occurs:

"And up he sterte, and on his wey he raughte."

Again at the end of another interview with Pandarus is found this description:

"She rist hir up, and went hir for to playe
Adoun the steyre anoon right tho she wente
Into the garðin, with hir neces three,
And up and doun ther made many a wente."

Cressida is then pictured as walking here, arm in arm with her maids. At the next coming of Pandarus, "

"They wenten arm in arm y-fere
Into the garðin from the chaumbre doun."

In the passage relating the visit, occur such incidental touches of description as these:

"And Pandarus that in a study stood,
Fr he was war, she took him by the hood."

"Tho wesshen they, and sette hem doun and, etc."  

"And fellen forth in speche of thinges smale,  
And seten in the window bothe tweye."

"And doun she sette hir by him on a stoon  
Of jaspre, upon a quisshyn gold y-bete."

Such description, enabling one to visualize the action, is common to all of the Tales. In the "Monk's Tale" Zenobia is seen in all her splendor, led in chains in Aurelian's triumph; in the "Legend of Good Women" Lucretia is described.

"This noble wyf sat by his beddes syde,  
Deschevele".

In the Shipman's Prologue occurs this line:  
"Our hoste upon his stiropes stood anon."

Even in the tale told by the Prioress, though there is but little description, the action is made real by this touch:

"His salte teres trikled doun as reyn,  
And greef he fel al plat upon the grounde,  
And stille he lay as he had been y-bounde."

One of the most dramatic bits of action in the Wife of
Bath's Prologue is given through personal description.

"Out of his book, right as he rudde, and eke,
I with my fist so took him on the cheke,
That in our fyr he fil bakward adoun,
And he up-sterke as dooth a wood leoun,
And with his fist he smoot me on the heed,
That on the floor I lay as I were deed.
And when he saugh how stille that I lay,
He was agast, and wolde had fled his way."

As is readily seen in these passages, such description is largely incidental, but it is an important phase of the general subject, for it enables one to feel the physical presence of the characters while following through their fortunes. It will also be observed that it is somewhat difficult to distinguish between description used for mood and that used to bring reality of action, for they blend into one another in performing their function of adding interest and vitality to any well told story.

There are certain other uses of description of persons, which may be classified roughly as those imparting local color, such as serve to bring out types of character, conventions of society, manners and customs, and station in life. In "Anelida and Arcite", Theseus returns,
"With laurer crowned, in his char gold-bete."

The Trojans go out to fight,

"With spere in hond and bigge bowes bente."

When the tournament in the "Knight's Tale" is about to begin, a great many lines are devoted to the description of Licurgus, who is aiding Palamon. The elaborateness of details, such as the bear's skin studded with nails, his wreath of gold set with rubies and diamonds, the blackness and ferocity of his face, and his splendid following, serves no real purpose in the story except to indicate how impressive he is as a warrior. This same effort to display rank and splendor is shown in the parallel picture of Emetreus, companion of Arcite, with his coat-of-arms couched with pearls, his mantle set with rubies, his laurels, and the eagle in his hand. Of more direct application in establishing vocation are such details as "the scrippe and tipped staf" of the "limitour" in the "Summoner's Tale", the stole of the priest in the "Merchant's Tale", the royal vestments and diadem of Cambuscan in the "Squire's Tale", and the cloak sewed to the hood of the Canon's Yeoman. Even some of the details used in the "Prologue" such as those in the sketch of the Knight and his Yeoman may be classed with these.
Though Chaucer may have been tempted at times to describe certain phases of life because they appeal to him as the splendor of the Greek heroes did to Homer, yet on the whole, he shows admirable taste in fitting his descriptive matter to the exigencies of his theme. Never is there an amateurish attempt to introduce it as an attractive and pleasing ornament of verse; never is it dragged in because of the author's consciousness of doing it well. On the contrary, Chaucer's description of persons performs some vital function in bringing reality to his presentation of life, reality of action, mood, character, or general social status.

The appropriateness (appropriateness of course in its radical sense of kinship) of Chaucer's description in the larger scheme of his work being demonstrated, it is interesting to note the skill with which he adapts personal description to the demands of definite situations. He omits it altogether in certain instances in which it would serve no particular purpose, as in the characterization of the Parson, whose qualities being spiritual are, therefore, not susceptible of concrete presentation. The same may be said of the Plowman. There is no description of the Manciple and little of the Doctor because the points
of their character are best presented by revealing the efficiency of their methods rather than by showing how they looked. Occasionally there is meagreness of detail, as in the picture of the Knight. The reader, cognizant of the armor and weapons which he would normally have, as a modern public would be of the army uniform, would prefer to know where the Knight has been and what he has done. Chaucer knows what he is doing when he dismisses the Franklin, the Lawyer, the Merchant with scant attention to details, not only because a lengthy catalogue would have been very tiresome but also because this method gives greater emphasis to the essential characteristics of an individual as well as to certain other characters which receive a fuller treatment. When a complete picture is given, there is a reason in the unusual interest of the character or in the greater obtrusiveness of his physical characteristics. No one could escape the blatancy of the Wife of Bath's robustness; nor could he avoid the disagreeableness of the Summoner's physical presence; he could not help observing the easy vitality of the Monk in contrast to the ideals of his profession; he could not but become interested in the jolly, well-preserved appearance of the Friar; and he could not fail to be attracted by the daintiness of the Prioress
and the brightness of the Squire. Since these figures stand out as the most vivid, Chaucer shows an excellent sense of values in presenting them fully.

There is an appropriateness of occasion as well as the appropriateness of emphasis. In the "Pardoner's Tale", the interest lies in the irony of the situation, not in the personality of the men, and description of them is not necessary. In the "Book of the Duchess", on the other hand, in which the sorrow of the Duke is the central theme, it is but natural that every detail of the personal charm of his dead wife should haunt his speech. Thus Chaucer shows his art in what he omits as well as in what he includes, and everywhere there is a nice adaptation of means to end.

Someone has written a book called "The Riches of Chaucer". It is a suggestive title and could well be applied to Chaucer's description of persons, for, as has been seen, they show wealth of observation, deep wells of resourcefulness in finding suitable forms and methods, and inexhaustible treasures of expression, and yet Chaucer is not a profligate. Though he is as lavish with his gifts as his own Franklin, he knows the stern hand of discipline, and his richness is that of a vineyard, a riot of green
and purple, steeped in the summer sunshine, and burdened with the sweet wine of life and youth, yet pruned and checked by the deft touch of a master hand.
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