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WORD AND IMAGE IN THE GENERAL PROLOGUE TO THE *CANTERBURY TALES*

To compare visual arts and literature is not a new issue: its theoretical tradition goes back as far as the Antiquity: Simonides of Ceos in the pre-Socratic Greece was the first to analyze the similarity of poetry (at that time almost inseparable from music), and painting, calling poetry painting that speaks and painting silent poetry[1]. We all know Lessing's *Laokoon* from the eighteenth century, which is like a late reaction to Simonides' thoughts, illustrating differences between literature and visual arts. There is, nevertheless, an essential similarity between these two, seemingly opposite, theories: they both relate the analysis to the listener or viewer in one way or another. They touch upon the effect produced in the mind of the spectator or his attitude towards the work of art. In this paper I will first paint the theoretical background concerning the mechanism of the human mind where image and sound fuse into one, will analyze the role of rhetoric in the process and finally I will test the method on Chaucer's characters. The emphasis will be on literature as we focus on a poet and a written text, but we shall have some examples from the visual arts and some references to music.

In the Middle Ages we have to think of the receivers of literature rather as audience than as readers. Even if we later see, in the case of Chaucer, that reading becomes more widespread, the influence of the earlier medium, that is listeners and reciter, is essential. Reading makes its approach to our intellect, as compared with listening. Listeners might seem to "lose", for they have to comprehend the work

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1 Yates, 27.

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from a greater distance, moreover, they are more dependent on the circumstances; they are, if you like, at the mercy of the reciter or reader. But this drawback is compensated on another level: listening applies more to the senses.

In the *Timaeus* (45b-47) Plato considers sight and hearing the most important senses, with sight preeminent[2], thus suggesting the importance of the image. In the *Philebus*, Plato compares the mind to a book. Through sense perception, the memory imprints words (logoi) on the mind which are then in recollection illustrated by images (eikones). This theory anticipates Aristotle's more elaborate discussion of the function of the image.[3] With Aristotle we can make one step further: through the senses we reach the realm of imagination.

> The perceptions brought in by the five senses are first treated or worked upon by the faculty of imagination, and it is the images so formed which become the material of the intellectual faculty. ... It is the image-making part of the soul which makes the work of the higher processes of thought possible.
>
> (Kolve, 1984, 32)

The images formed become the material of the intellectual faculty: as Aristotle says in his *De memoria et reminiscentia*[4], "the soul never thinks without a mental picture", "the thinking faculty thinks of its forms in mental pictures"; "noone could ever learn or understand anything, if he had not the faculty of perception; even when he thinks speculatively, he must have some mental picture with which to think".[5]

"Visus et auditus fragilis sunt ostia mentis" - this is how the idea developed in the *Timaeus* and *De anima* survived in Gower's *Confessio amantis*: the doors of the frail mind are sight and hearing.[6]

On a miniature illustration at the opening of *Li Bestiaires d'amours* by Richard de Fournival we can see the metaphor turned into a picture. The doors, one being sight, the other one hearing, lead into the castle of the "frail mind". Before the door stands Lady Memory. If we read the following quotation from the *Li Bestiaires* by Richard, we may have the feeling that painting and poetry are

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2 Kolve.
3 Eden, 67.
4 Based on the theory of knowledge which he expounds in his *De Anima*, see Yates, 32.
5 *De Anima* 427, 18-22, ibid., 432a 17, ibid., 431b 2, ibid, 432a 9, quoted by Yates, 32.
6 Kolve, 24.

interchangeable. Not the sources of the image but the result, i.e. the mental picture, is important:

> And therefore God, who so loves man that he wishes to provide him with all that he needs, has given to man a power and force of the soul that is called memory. This memory has two doors, sight and hearing, and to each of these doors there is a path by which one can reach them; these are painting and speech. Painting serves for the eye, speech for the ear. And the manner in which one may make one's way to the house of memory, both by painting and by speech, is thus made clear: the memory, guardian of the treasure won by man's senses through the excellence of the imagination, makes what is past seem as if it were present. And to this same end, one can come either by painting or by speech.
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> (Quoted by Kolve, 24-25.)

The eye that sees these images, the inner eye or oculus imaginationis, is superior to the "eye of the flesh":

> So when you hear yourself invited to "see", it is not the sight of this eye (of the flesh) that I would have you think about. You have another eye within, much clearer than that one, an eye that looks at the past, the present, and the future all at once, which sheds the light and keenness of its vision over all things, which penetrates things hidden and searches into complexities, needing no other light by which to see all this, but seeing by the light that it possesses of itself.⁷

We have to be concerned here with more technical things, investigating the process by which the mental image is created, if the source is not "painting", but "speech", thus: not seeing, but hearing, since our main concern is literature.

What is the means by which words are turned into images? It is a special mode of organizing the words, of putting them together, of linking one sentence to the other, one paragraph or stanza to the other: this is rhetoric. Let us first turn to the "how" of this art. Painting with words applies to the other door of the frail mind, by tickling another sense of the audience, this time hearing. The function of rhetoric to move the audience has a lot in common with music. But the analogue is not only in its function. In his *De artibus ac disciplinis liberalium litteratum* Cassiodorus mentions St. Augustine who wrote that human voice includes in the

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7 Hugo of St. Victor, *De Vanitate mundi*, quoted by Kolve, 27.

long and short syllables rhythmical sounds and melodious harmony.[8] Boethius speaks about three kinds of "ars musica", the first being ars instrumentalis, the second the ars carmina, that is singing, and the third one is the art as science, "judging" the "productions" of the first two artes. Poetry belongs according to him to the second category.[9] If we step further in the Middle Ages, although the classification is different, we can find basically the same idea in Deschamps, who differentiated between musique naturele, the art of the spoken word or rhetoric, covering vernacular prosody, as opposed to musique artificiele, i.e. as the art of composing music for instrument or for singing.[10] From our point of view it is of great importance that rhetoric is compared to music in both its "how" and "what", that is in both its appearance and function. The link between poet and audience is made by means of rhetoric, or, we might even boldly say that in this human medium, in these Medieval circumstances described above, a unity of the three branches is created. Literature, by means of the music of the spoken word, paints pictures in the mind.

The purpose of rhetoric is identical with that of music: to move the audience. What should the audience be moved to? To action in classical rhetorics. What is the purpose of rhetoric? To persuade the audience to the truth. The contents of "truth" changes throughout the centuries from the Antiquity to the Middle Ages in different genres, ranging from political or juridical speeches through philosophical ones to poetry. In the Middle Ages truth should be printed in memory and "made vivid and striking in accordance with the classical rules, as 'memorial notes' to aid us in reaching Heaven and avoiding Hell".[11]

In rhetoric books much thought is devoted to memory. But it is treated rather from the point of view of the speaker, the rhetorician, and it is an aid for him to remember the structure of his own speech, to perform in a convincing way. Thoughts and passages of a speech could be remembered through striking images painted in the mind, with the help of imagination. The speaker would "move" in his mind through an imaginable building - the text as a whole - through rooms, seeing these striking images in certain places. Each image is associated with a certain idea or passage of the speech. Walking through the rooms and meeting the images, mainly in the form of human characters in a pre-conceived order, the

8 See *Az Égi és a földi szépről*, 163.
9 See ibid. 147.
10 Kelly, 1969, 1.
11 Yates, 60.

speaker can reconstruct and perform the speech in the right way. But, as Yates says, the art of memory "was a creator of imagery which must surely have flowed out into creative works of art and literature"[12], the invisible memory image will become "the hidden generator of externalized imagery"[13]; slowly, the images will move from the mind of the speaker into the mind of the listener. Here is where rhetoric, memory and imagination meet and where rhetoric and poetry are fused together.

What we are most interested in, is the technique of painting the images. In the most frequently used classical work of rhetoric, the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*[14], the importance of *propria*, of striking details is accentuated. Generally, the inner techniques described in classical sources depend on these extremely intense visual impressions, involving the psyche as a whole - as music does.

> These human figures are active and dramatic, strikingly beautiful or grotesque. They remind one more of figures in some Gothic cathedral than of classical art proper. They appear to be completely amoral, their function being solely to give an emotional impetus to memory by their personal idiosyncrasy or their strangeness.[15]

The images created, together with their influence on the soul and imagination, wandered through the centuries and were used according to the actual truth to which the audience had to be persuaded. The Middle Ages wished chiefly to remember the articles of the faith and the roads leading through virtues to salvation and heaven or through vices to damnation and hell. The images of virtues and vices were painted on frescoes and windows and were sculpted in and on the cathedrals. They were the things which viewers and listeners wished to remember by the art of memory. The material of medieval didactic was fixed in the memory by means of this art. As for the techniques, they are very similar to those described in the Antiquity, with the difference that the place where the images are created are now definitely in the mind of the audience. The audience has to be taught. We find the techniques described in *Ad Herennium* in Medieval works on the art of the spoken word. In the early fourteenth century, San

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12 ibid. 9.

13 ibid. 86.

14 The book was for a long time considered to be the work of Cicero, recently Cornificius has generally been accepted as its author.

15 Yates, 4.

Giminiano writes about preaching in his *Summa de exemplis ac simulitudinibus rerum*, advising the preacher to use unusual similitudes in order to make people remember things "for these will stick better in memory than the spiritual intention will do, unless clothed in such similitudes"[16]. Albertus Magnus gives a very clear explanation to the process: "since *propria* (the literal details) represent a thing more accurately than can *metaphorica* (similitudes, metaphors), why should we not prefer *propria* in a memory system? His answer is in three parts: (1) images by their very nature assist the memory; (2) many propria can be remembered through few images; and (3) images are able to move the soul, a power that makes them more memorable still"[17]. Thus, according to Albertus, they should be strikingly beautiful or hideous, "dressed in crowns and purple garments, deformed or disfigured with blood or mud, smeared with red paint, comic or ridiculous" : such memories "pertain particularly to the moral man and to the speaker (...) because since the act of human life consists in particulars, it is necessary that it should be in the soul through corporeal images"[18]. We find the same idea in the *Summa Theologiae* by Thomas Aquinas: "Man cannot understand without images (*phantasmata*); the image is a similitude of a corporeal thing, but understanding is of universals which are to be abstracted from particulars."

In other words, applying the whole theory to the Middle Ages, the audience should be made to think about the great questions of life and death, of sin and virtue, good and bad, about the most sophisticated things through the most palpable images.

Words become pictures, pictures give birth to words. In the Middle Ages to be audience to an "image" (whether verbal or visual) implied activity, not passivity. It called one to thought, to feeling, to meditation."[19] These literary images present the suprasensual in a form of a moving figure which is to be contemplated with the *oculus imaginationis*. We can see this idea reflected in a medieval poem, written by Deguileville and translated by Lydgate[20]:

> Thyn Erys muste haue Eyen clere
> Taparceyve, in this matere,
> And to conceyven euery thyng.

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16 Quoted by Yates, 86.
17 Quoted by Kolve, 48.
18 Quoted by Yates, 66.
19 ibid. 30.
20 Quoted by Kolve, 31.

CHAUCER AND RHETORIC

We discussed the importance of images. But what exactly should a rhetorician, a poet, - or a painter, a sculptor, as we shall see -, set before the eyes of the audience? How should a picture be drawn? Which were the theoretical works, the rules and the rhetoricians, whom Chaucer might have known and what kind of pictures did he see? What is worth remembering in a person and how can someone call attention to the characteristics and the ideas behind? Manly states that the incomparable portraiture of the *General Prologue* "is inconceivable as mere vegetative growth" and that Chaucer "had thought long and deeply upon the principles of composition, description, and characterization and numberless other details of the writers art[21]. According to him, only one rhetorical system was known which drew its precepts from few sources: Horace's *Epistle to the Piso*, the two books of Cicero's *De Inventione*, the *De Rhetorica ad Herennium* and two rhetoric books written in the Middle Ages, the *Ars Versificandi* by Matthew of Vendome and *Poetria Nova* by Geoffrey of Vinsauf.

Although the subject of these books concerning characterization is the same, there are differences in handling it. In the course of the centuries between Cicero and Geoffrey there is a tendency of shifting the accent from the content of character painting to formal, surface aspects. The change can be felt step by step.

In Book I of the *De Inventione*, Cicero enumerates the attributes of persons and actions to which the poet has to pay attention: NAME, NATURE: "we take into consideration such advantages and disadvantages as are given to mind and body by nature, as, for example, whether one is strong or weak, tall or short, handsome or ugly, swift or slow; whether he is bright or dull, retentive or forgetful, affable or unmannerly modest, long-suffering, or the contrary; and in short we shall take into consideration all qualities of mind and body that are bestowed by nature". MANNER OF LIFE: he mentions education, teachers in the seven liberal arts, friendships, occupation, etc. FORTUNE: one inquires, he says, about the social status, whether he acquired his position justly or unjustly, "Whether he is successful, famous or the opposite". HABIT: "the acquisition of some bodily dexterity not given by nature but won by careful training and practice".

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21 Manly, in Shoek and Taylor, 118.

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FEELING: a temporary change in mind or body: desire, fear, vexation, illness, weakness etc. INTERESTS: in philosophy, poetry, geometry, literature. PURPOSE: "a deliberate plan for doing or not doing something. ACHIEVEMENTS, ACCIDENTS and SPEECH: "considered under three tenses of the verb: what he did, what happened to him, what he said: or what he is doing, what is happening to him, what he is saying; or what he is going to do, what is happening to him, what language he is going to use".[22]

I have given so much space to Cicero because I intend to show how complex his enumeration is - as if nothing new could actually be added to it. But the content has to be given a form. Horace's remark from his *Epistle to the Piso* adds something more to the content: one has to take one's example from nature. In the *Ad Herennium* we have something that points towards the formal planning of characterization. The author distinguishes between *effictio* which supplies a description of a man's outward appearance and *notatio*, describing the inner characteristics. As for the content, he is not as elaborate as Cicero but adds something very important which will also contribute to the shaping of characters: we should describe a person in such a way that the audience can recognize him, that is, pointing at individual characteristics, e.g. "the one who has a big wound on his chin".[23] Such sketches are very amusing, he says, because they set before our eyes the inclinations of the envious, bumptious, avaricious, pushy, lecherous persons.

> Now nature herself teaches us what we should do. When we see in everyday life things that are petty, ordinary, and banal, we generally fail to remember them, because the mind is not being stirred by anything novel or marvellous. But if we see or hear something exceptionally base, dishonourable, unusual, great, unbelievable, or ridiculous, that we are likely to remember for a long time ... We ought, then, to set up images of a kind that can adhere longest in memory. And we shall do so if we establish similitudes as striking as possible; if we set up images that are not many or vague but active (imagines agentes); if we assign to them exceptional beauty or singular ugliness; if we ornament some of them, as with crowns or purple cloaks, so that the similitude may be more distinct to us; or if we somehow disfigure them, as by introducing one stained with blood or soiled with mud or smeared with red paint, so that its form is more striking, or by assigning certain comic effects to our images, for that, too, will ensure our remembering them more readily. The things we easily remember when they are real we likewise

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22 Cicero, *De Inventione*, 71-75.
23 Cornificius, 279.

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remember when they are figments. But this will be essential - again and again to run over rapidly in the mind all the original places in order to refresh the images.[24]

Geoffrey of Vinsauf and Matthew of Vendome use the rhetorics of the Antiquity as raw materials and fit them into their age: "Speaking very generally, two tendencies are observable in the cultural life of the twelfth century: first, a tendency towards the systematic organization of materials of every kind, and second, a tendency to make this new organization explicit and to make it functional in the attitudes and lives of the people"[25]. It is also in the age of Geoffrey and Matthew that rhetorics and poetry have become practically equivalent, with the exception of a branch of rhetoric which split off, developing separately in the ars dictaminis. We can see this in the titles given to their manual of rhetorics like *Poetria Nova*.

Matthew of Vendome uses the *De Inventione* as his chief source and he follows more or less exactly Cicero's enumeration of personal attributes. But he also matches certain characteristics to certain types of persons. One should describe a type, he says, extending the particular to the typical: "... those characteristics which are attributed to a Pope, or to Caesar, or to various persons who are described should be understood, not as peculiar characteristics of those peculiar persons, but as characteristics that may apply to other persons of the same social status, age, rank, office and sex". The writer should create, with other words, boxes in which he can stuff a great many things alarmingly typical. He makes a step further in formal questions: "some epithets ought to be attributed to a fair number of persons, some ought to be attributed to all praiseworthy persons generally"[26], (e.g.: rigorous justice = emperor, rigorous strictness + avoidance of sauciness + shunning of incontinence = wife, stern manliness = anyone who is praised...) He goes back to Horace when writing about the credibility of the descriptions, mentions Cornificius's distinction of external and internal characteristics and also speaks about "those qualities which differentiate the person from others".[27] We are somewhere between the cool impersonality of Romanesque

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24 *Ad Herennium* III, xxii, quoted by Yates, 9-10
25 Robertson, 248.
26 Matthew of Vendome.
27 ibid. 34.

paintings and the Gothic grotesque, between personified abstractions and "individuals" or even caricatures.

Geoffrey of Vinsauf is concerned with more technical details. Description is, in his opinion, first of all a means of amplifying the work: "But although the path of description is wide, let it also be wise, let it be both lengthy and lovely. See that the words with due ceremony are wedded to the subject. If description is to be food and ample refreshment of the mind, avoid too curt a brevity as well as trite conventionality"[28]. Let us just remember the surface pattern of lines and planes governed by an abstract order in Romanesque visual arts. To Matthew's remark about the necessity of describing physical beauty he adds the way, the technique of painting: "Let the radiant description descend from the top of her head to her toe, and the whole be polished to perfection".[29]

It is interesting to see a parallel to this description in a "rhetoric book" about manuscript illumination. I will quote from a work by Theophilus called *Schedula diversorum artium*, a twelfth-century work, where highly elaborate rules are set out for the colouring of miniatures. These rules were followed even after the twelfth century.

(1) Prime the bare-skin parts (of the parchment) using skin-colour.
(2) On this background, using a greenish tone, draw the eye-brows, eyes, nostrils, mouth, chin, the hollows around the nose, the temples, the wrinkles, the outlines of the faces, the young men's beards, the joints of the hands and feet.
(3) With skin-colour deepened with cinnabar (rosa prima) slightly redden the cheeks, the lips, the lower part of the chin, the forehead-wrinkles, the temples, the bridge of the nose, the top of the nostrils, the joints.
(4) With skin-colour lightened with white lead (lumina prima) place light tones on the eyebrows, the nose, and with fine lines, round the eyes and the lower part of the temples, and in the centre of the neck and in the curves of the hands, feet and arms.
(5) With grey (veneda) made of white and black, fill in the pupils; with a lighter grey paint the eyes beside the pupils, and with pure white   ind icate the borders between this colour and the pupils; then shade with water.
(6) With dark olive-green red ochre and green earth) fill the area between the eyebrows and the eyes, the lower part of the eyes, the under-chin area, the space between the mouth and chin, the curls of the

28 Geoffrey of Vinsauf, 36.
29 ibid. 37.

young men's beards, the middle of the palms of the hands near the thumb, the feet over the minor joints, the faces of children and women from chin to temple.

(7) With red (made with rosa prima and cinnabar, or rosa secunda) outline mouth, cheeks, neck and forehead, and indicate the folds of the palms and the joints of the limbs.

(8) If a face seems too dark, lighten the skin-colours with white (lumina secunda), tracing everywhere under the chin.

(9) With two black-and-yellow ochre mixture (the one more ochre, the other more black) prime the hair of the children and youths respectively; heighten with lumina secunda. Prime the hair and the beards of the old men with grey a little black and red, and heighten with white lead.

(10) With red-ochre mixed with a little black ... outline the pupils, trace the under the chin, between the mouth and the chin.

(11) With red ochre indicate the eyebrows, finely tracing between eyes and eyebrows and lower part of the eyes; on faces seen frontally trace the nose's shadow, according to whether the light is from right or left; outline the forehead and jawline of old people.

(12) With black make the young men's eye brows, without completely covering up the red outline eyelids, nostrils, the sides of the mouth, ears and fingers.

(13) Outline the body and fingernails with rose-red ochre.

(Bologna, 1988, 34)

We also have model-books made around this period, like for example the one by Ademar de Chabannes from the 11th century. It is a collection of traditional types with useful models which the medieval artist could use for his work. The pages contain examples for whole subjects as well as exempla of figures in motion. The confused order in which they are juxtaposed does not matter as each drawing is a self-contained unit.[30] In a later book of models (Tuscany, 1350-75) we can see sketches of draperies and figures in motion.[31]

In the visual arts of the age, it was first and foremost "a sacred writing of which every artist must learn the characters".[32] The artist had to be familiar with a multitude of precise details and ignoring the traditional type of the persons they represented were not allowed to be ignored. "St. Peter, for example, must have curly hair, a short, thick beard and a tonsure, while St. Paul must have a bald head and a long beard. Certain details of costume are also unchangeable. Over the head

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30 Evans, 35.

31 ibid., 41.

32 Male, 1.

the Virgin must wear a veil, symbol of virginity, and the Jews are known by their cone-shaped caps".[33] These types, moreover, had their well-defined place in similarly traditional scenes. Both content and form are subordinated to certain rules, as we have seen in the techniques of description in both branches of art. Here we must not forget either what Kolve points out: the meaning of "image" was in the Middle Ages more complex, it meant "what could be recollected of any sense experience: our ability to remember sound, smell, taste and touch as well".[34]

The rules that Chaucer may have known are rather strict. It seems that not much freedom is left to the artist. Even the inscriptions of the neat boxes are prescribed. Having had a closer look at the history of character-painting we might think that nothing new can actually be added at Chaucer's time.

Nevertheless, there are four lines in the *Parliament of Fowls* which will lead us a step further, showing us Chaucer as an artist conscious of the values of the past but, at the same time, recognizing the possibility of creating something new (ll.22-25):

> For out olde feldes, as men seyth,
> Cometh al this newe corn from yer to yere,
> And out of olde bokes, in good feyth,
> Cometh al this newe science that men lere.

CHAUCER AND HIS AUDIENCE

In the rhetorical treatises, above all in the medieval ones, the analysis is one of the structure, the rhetorical background is like a two-dimensional plan, and the medium in which the work was received will elevate the building itself, with all its details, adding a third dimension to it.

Which is the medium in which Chaucer's works were received? The question is rather a difficult one, as Chaucer stands at the borderline of two worlds. He had to write in a style that would apply to senses and intellect at the same time, as he had to keep two kinds of audience in mind, both listeners and readers. We already know the image of the solitary reader, the one depicted by Chaucer himself is

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33 ibid., 2-3.
34 Kolve, 51.

very familiar. In The House of Fame the eagle criticizes him, "Geffrey", because of his way of life:

> For when thy labour doon al ys,
> And hast mad alle thy rekenynges,
> In stede of reste and newe thynges,
> Thou goost hom to thy hous anoon;
> And, also domb as any stoon,
> Thou sittest at another book,
> Tyl fully daswed ys thy look,
> And lyvest thus as an heremyte,
> Although thyn abstynence is lyte.
> (Book II., ll.652-660)

Nevertheless, there should be no great difference between the two kinds of responses, that is between that of the listener and the reader. In one of his essays, "Stimme und Sprache"[35], Hans-Georg Gadamer, speaking about "writing" also means "hearing". Hearing, he says, naturally belongs to everything concerning language, either oral or written.[36] According to him, writing is not simply the description of something, just as a painting is not a painting just because something is depicted in it: it becomes a painting if it "calls" us, viewers, if it puts us questions, if a kind of communication is initiated between work and viewer ("Über das Lesen von Bauten und Bildern")[37]. Similarly, a description is a writing, if the writer, through his style, evens up everything that oral communication, with all its emotional colouring, symbolic gestures, modulation of voice, can give us. In other words, we call a writer a good one, if he or she reaches in writing the same power of language, which an immediate, man-to-man exchange of words possesses.[38]

We are in a period when hearing engenders seeing and vice versa. In many medieval French poems we encounter the words "je vois" (I see) at the beginning. The Gawain poet "schawes" instead of writing. Stories are painted on walls in The Knight's Tale and in The Parliament of Fowls. Especially in this latter poem, in the account on the Aeneid, we find a natural "synesthetic blend of reading and seeing,

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35 Gadamer
36 Gadamer, 169.
37 ibid., 161-62.
38 ibid., 177.

hearing and remembering"[39]. Generally, Chaucer varies between 'write' and 'say'" and "even when he is 'telling' us he appears to be 'showing' us"[40]. His mental pictures were "animated ... with vivid local detail"[41]. The task of the *ante oculo ponere* will be accomplished if the poet is skillful enough in creating imaginative verbal structures and rhythms, if he orders the language of poetry in an inventive way. These orders "might loosely be called meaning and music".[42] Dante, in his discussion of poetry in *De vulgari eloquentia* defines poetry as "nothing else but rhetorical composition set to music".[43] Speaking of the authority of poetry he says: "for what is of greater authority than that which can sway the hearts of men, so as to make an unwilling man willing, and a willing man unwilling, just as this language has done and is doing?"[44]

We have seen how strict the rules of rhetoric were in the tradition familiar to Chaucer - and Chaucer's audience. His audience surely knew the conventions, just as we still know the traditions of folk tales, for instance. The singer or teller of folk-tales, or the writer of poetry, like Chaucer, shared with the audience "a stock of conventional, that is 'self-centered', not naturalistic, motifs and themes, and larger segments of story, down through episodes, stock descriptions of all kinds, to formulaic verbal phrases".[45] Deschamps says something similar about the effect of music, in his discussion of poetry: "Its delectable and pleasant songs medicine and recreate those who are fatigued, heavy, or bored by thought, imagination, or labor"[46]. We have here the parallel of Aristotle's and Longinus's discussion of the effect of poetry, this time not from the angle of seeing but from that of hearing. Chaucer, like the good singers or speakers of the oral tradition, usually had a better command of the traditional repertoire than his audience, otherwise he would not have been able to perform his function. But the traditional repertoire did not originate with him. Even variations on the set materials, usually followed rules and what was allowable as variants depended on the audience, on the tradition they shared with the poet. Literary qualities resided in imaginative verbal

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39 Brewer, 179.

40 Gradon, 297.

41 Brewer, 179.

42 Payne, 54.

43 *Tutte le opere di Dante Alighieri*, ed. E. Moore, Oxford, 1894, Payne's transl., Liber secundus, III, p.393, lines 16-2.

44 ibid., Liber primus, XVII, p.389, lines 26-31.

45 Brewer, 170-71.

46 Quoted by Payne, 55-56.

structures, in the inventive use of rhetoric colours, and "the rhythms with which the act of narration deploys them in order to make them comprehensible"[47]. But, paradoxically enough, it was exactly the restrictions that made medieval literature so unique and exciting if handled by a good poet. In that case, rules did not restrict, but rather liberated them. Convention was something without which communication between poet and audience would not have been possible. They both understood it and the source of a good poet's art resided in violating his audience's expectations in interesting and pleasurable ways[48]. He shocked the audience's confidence in the matter, their eyes and ears which were steadily fixed upon it, thus making them be aware of the presence of the poet and making them sharply remember what the poet felt to be important. This was the source of originality, wit and humour. This was the soil of the "newe corn", the "newe science" of Chaucer, in this sense did he "fynde" "wordes newe", to which he associated emotional effectiveness.

CHAUCER AND THE RHETORIC OF CHARACTER PAINTING AS INFLUENCED BY THE PRESENCE OF THE AUDIENCE

The group of pilgrims can be approached from many directions, we may watch them from a greater distance or may get closer to them: each position will again offer us a different view. Here we shall consider the *Prologue* as a whole, without concentrating upon single characters, pointing out, nevertheless, certain peculiarities. What we see is a series of separate portraits. They seem to act independently, without reference to each other, like in some manuscript illuminations where, when groups of figures appear, they are separated from each other by arcades, or like the portraits of saints on Gothic cathedrals, being subordinated to the concept of either the whole painting or the architecture.

> But nathelees, whil I have tyme and space,
> Er that I ferther in this tale pace,
> Me thynketh it acordaunt to resoun
> To telle yow al the condicioun
> Of ech of hem, so as it semed me,
> And whiche they weren, and of what degree,

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47 ibid. 163.
48 Kierman, 1.

> And eek of what array that they were inne...
> (A.ll.35-41)

- promises us Chaucer.[49] If we gather the attributes used in the *Prologue* we get the complexity of the attributes mentioned by Cicero: we have name, nature, manner of life, fortune, habit, feeling, interests, purpose, achievements, accidents and speech, all scattered around in the whole *Prologue*. He "actualizes" the descriptions through the introduction of a new element, the horse, as the pilgrims travel on horseback. Not all of the attributes appear at the painting of each individual character, Chaucer follows a witty technique: he uses all the prescribed raw materials, mingles them and the game begins. He keeps the rules then as a frame but allows himself to move freely within this space. He distinguishes between effictio and notatio as Cornificius demands, and takes pleasure in playing with them, which will have one of the most important roles in the artistic game between Chaucer, the poet and his audience. If we take the inner and outer characteristics apart, to the outer ones counting also attire and analyze the relationship between kernel and husk, we can almost distinguish smaller groups, or at least can trace some kind of order in the seemingly haphazard way in which Chaucer put the portraits one next to the other. This order is exactly the one he has promised us in the lines quoted above: "so as it semed me". Having *effictio* and *notatio* at hand, Chaucer variates them by putting the accent on one or the other. This may be either a conscious or an unconscious game, but the result is the same: we, the audience will know who the poet is interested in, we are almost forced to take part emotionally and to respond to Chaucer's voice. We are tactfully manipulated.

In the case of some characters the husk is either not mentioned or it is important just to emphasize positive inner characteristics, to project the quality of the kernel upon the husk. Let us take the Knight first. Chaucer enumerates a whole list of merits, noble deeds, nature:

> And though that he was worthy, he was wys,
> And of his port as meeke as is a mayde.
> He nevere yet no vileynye ne sayde
> In all his lyf unto no maner wight.
> (ll.68-71)

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49 Morgan, ES 59, 385.

16

and then describes his clothes:

> But for to tellen you of his array,
> His horse was goode, but he was nat gay,
> Of fustian he wered a gypon
> Al bismontered with his habergeon,
> For he was late y-come from his viage,
> And wente for to doon his pilgrimage.
> (ll.73-78)

The contrast is also suggested by the use of the conjunction "but". He does not seem to care much about wordly things, he has much nobler tasks to fulfil. The same applies to the Clerk. His horse is "as leene ... as is a rake" (l.287)

> And he nas nat right fat, I undertake,
> But looked holwe, and therto sobrely.
> Ful thredbare was his overste courtepy:
> (ll.288-90)

because he is not "worldly" enough and he had

> ... litel gold in cofre:
> But al that he myghte of his freendes hente,
> On bookes and on lernynge he it spente.
> (ll.298-300)

He is a perfect clerk, a scholar, "short and quyk and ful of hy sentence" (l.306). Here again, the outer appearance and the inner characteristics complete each other, one is the continuation of the other. In the case of the Parson and the Plowman outer appearance is not even mentioned, we know only about the "mere" of the Plowman at the very end (but I think it is there only to call the rhyme "Millere" in the next verse). The Parson is "povre", and "riche ... of hooly thoght and werk" (ll.179-80), and the description has an obvious conclusion at the end:

> He waited for no pompe and reverence,
> Ne maked him a spiced conscience,
> But Cristes loore and his apostles twelve
> He taughte, but first folwed it hymselve.
> (ll.525-28)

17

The Plowman is similarly perfect:

> A trewe swinker and a good was he,
> Lyvynge in pees and parfit charitee.
> God loved he best with al his hoole herte
> At alle tymes, thogh him gamed or smerte.
> And thanne his neighebor right as hymselve.
> (ll.531-35)

We can see a process of growing more and more abstract through these four ideal portraits. In that of the Knight there is some dynamism, some space is left arond him, in the case of the Clerk the movement slows down and the picture is more motionless; through mentioning their appearance Chaucer suggests that, however minimal, they both have contact with the world here below. But they do not step out of the ideal background, they are like three-dimensional statues perfectly subordinated to the divine structure of the cathedral. With the character of the Parson and the Plowman another step is made: the Parson is on the earth only to connect mortals with the Divine Order, he has lost his worldliness, and the Plowman almost belongs to the world of personified abstractions which is suggested by a nearly word-to-word quotation from the Ten Commandments, here applied to his person. We seem to step back to the two-dimensional Romanesque manuscript illuminations, with the golden, divine background and nearly see their figures surrounded by a halo, getting a glimpse of the divine dimension. This glittering, golden surface in manuscript illuminations "effectively destroys all visual association with this world, it creates a celestial envelope of light, in which bodies have no corporeality"[50].

Husk and kernel are equally present and strongly linked in the case of some other characters. Here the two parts either determine or sometimes contradict each other, there is tension between them. Here is the Friar, for instance. Chaucer speaks about his deeds, hinting in this way at his inner characteristics:

> *For* unto swich a worthy man as he
> Acorded nat, as by his facultee
> To have with sike lazars aquaintance.
> It is nat honeste, it may nat avaunce,
> For to deelen with so swich poraille;
> *But* al with riche and selleres of vitaille.

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50 Salter, 258.

These lines are parallel with the following ones:

> *For* ther ne was nat lyk a cloysterer
> With a thredbar cope, as is a por scolar,
> *But* he was lyk a mayster, or a pope,
> Of double worstede was his semicope,
> That rounded as a belle out of the presse.

He uses fine, formal, if you like, musical means, mingling it with contentual ones to make the tension palpable. Chaucer obviously takes pleasure in painting the portraits, creates an atmosphere of expectation and the audience is dragged energetically into participating. These are the most exciting characters (Prioresse, Monk, Friar, Squier, Wife of Bath, Pardoner).

There is a third possibility of variation, as if the opposite of the first one. The emphasis is laid on the husk. There are two possibilities to create these portraits: either by a minute description of their appearance or by using one or two striking propria, which, like the attributes of the saints on sculptures and paintings, will immediately tell us where they belong and who they are. An example of the first version is the Miller. His appearance is so minutely described, that the audience almost physically feels that one would not be able to lift him above the earth, above the flesh-and-blood reality. This is suggested both formally and contentually; formally it is the accumulation of attributes, contentually their meaning: he is "a stout carl for the nones" (l.545), "short-sholdered, brood, a thikke knarre" (l.549) "ful byg ... of brawn and eek of bones" (l.546), where also a musical device in the form of strong alliteration contributes to the effect. Through this minute description and the density of detail, his worldliness gets an exaggerated weight, he resembles the grotesque figures on the marginalia of manuscripts or the waterspouts, figures on label stops and other details on and in the cathedrals. Moreover, he is also given an attribute, a bagpipe, a symbol of profanity:

> A baggepipe wel koude he blowe and sowne,
> And therwithal he broghte us out of towne.
> (ll.565-66)

The descriptio is, by nature, "a close focus technique not unlike the pictorial enlargements used in medieval art to emphasise the most important figures

without regard to perspective"[51], even without such exaggerations. Here the Miller gets emphasis among the pilgrims, and, more important, the contrast with the Plowman is sharpened. These two extreme figures are put side by side in the *Prologue*, so much so, that, as we have seen, the portraits are linked by a rhyme (a musical means again!). The jump from the two-dimensional, almost holy Plowman to the three-dimensional, colourful, harsh and loud Miller is sudden and pushes the audience energetically to watching the pilgrims from another perspective. The description of the Summoner is similarly intense, the image of his grotesque figure unites, in the medieval sense of the word, sight, sound, taste, smell and even touch, moving from one to the other:

Sight:

> A Somonour was ther with us in that place,
> That hadde a fyr-reed cherubynnes face.
> For saucefleem he was, with eyen narwe.
> As hoot he was and lecherous as a sparwe,
> With scalled browes blake and piled berd.
> Of his visage children were aferd.
> (ll.623-28)

Touch and smell:

> Ther nas quyk-silver, lytarge, ne brymstoon,
> Boras, ceruce, ne oille of tartre noon,
> Ne oynement that wolde clense and byte,
> That hum myghte helpen of his whelkes white,
> Nor of the knobbes sittynge on his chekes.
> (ll.629 33)

Smell and taste:

> Wel loved he garleeek, oynons, and eek lekes,
> And for to drynken strong wyn, reed as blood;
> (ll.634-35)

Sound:

> Thanne wolde he speke and crie as he were wood.
> And whan that he wel dronken hadde the wyn,

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51 Gradon, 291-92.

Thanne wolde he speke no word but Latyn.
(ll.636-38)

This auditive aspect is augmented in the following lines, by this device Chaucer creates some space around him, and then, after this circle, we get back to sight:

A gerland hadde he set upon his heed
As greet as it were for an ale-stake.
A bokeleer hadde he maad hym of a cake.
(ll.666-68)

Let us now see examples to the other version. Emphasis is given to the description by both its length and the density of detail but the focus is given by the detail alone. "The more precise a word the more it gives the impression of close focus"[52]. Let us now replace "word" with "image", applying this statement to the image-theory: the more striking the image, the more it moves the audience, that is, the stronger its reaction. Here is the Cook. On first sight we may have the feeling that Chaucer created this character just to show an example to a rhetorical rule pointing maybe back at the *Ad Herennium* where a man with a wound on his chin is mentioned. In the *Ad Herennium* such techniques are said to serve to provoke emotional response from the audience. But why should we be stirred emotionally by a cook? Nevertheless, we do remember him, not only because of the wound itself, but first of all because of the shocking combination of the wound with food, a juxtaposition of semmingly unrelated detail:

But greet harm was it, as it thoughte me,
That on his shyne a mormal hadde he.
For blankmanger, that made he with the beste.
(ll.385-87)

We should not forget that the Cook was taken to the pilgrimage by a group of people, the "Haberdasshere, Carpenter, Webbe, Dyere and Tapycer" (ll.351-62). Their clothes are minutely described - Chaucer does not pay attention to them one by one -, the stress being laid thus on the husk again, on the world with other words, and this picture is extended in the portrait of the Cook, who is busy with providing them with mundane pleasures:

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52 ibid., 291-92.

21

A Cook they hadde with them for the nones
To boille the chiknes with the marybones,
And poudre-marchane tart and galyngale.
Wel koude he knowe a draughte of Londoun ale.
He koude rooste, and sethe, and broille, and frye,
Maken mortreux, and wel bake a pye.
(ll.379-84)

Chaucer uses an element from Cicero's list, relates it to the Cook, but we connect the description with that worldly group which pays so much attention to appearance. The whole description, both the group's and the Cook's, would not specifically move the audience towards thinking, if finally they did not see the horrible wound, so closely put to the image of delicious foods. Why is that wound there? -we may ask then. Is this the result of vanitas and gluttony? Is this what we should remember?

These are, I think, the three main possibilities of variation in the description of the portraits in the *Prologue*. We have to do with three centres of gravity. The closer we are to the centres the stronger we feel Chaucer's interest and the more intensively we react. The further we get from them, the less tension and expectation we are exposed to, as if the transitional figures were there with the purpose of letting the audience repause and gather strength for the next "round". But even in the case of such figures, where either the husk is missing (Sergeant of the Law, Maunciple) or the link between husk and kernel is not exciting, we have no feeling of want because we can fill in the gaps thanks to the context, to the environment of the figures. For instance, the portrait of the Maunciple is put after the Miller's. The portrait of the Miller, as we have seen, is "shown", whereas that of the Maunciple is "told". This is a proof for Chaucer's good feeling for proportion or for the psychology of the audience: after an intensive visual image the inner eye should have a rest and the ear is put to work.

We can now see, I think, some kind of order in the way Chaucer arranged the portraits in the *Prologue*. This order is dictated by his own interests and the psychology of the audience and it crystalizes at certain places and its means consists both in the witty use of effictio and notatio and a natural and spontaneous lapse from showing to telling and vice versa. We see the portraits connected formally with each other, depending upon and overlapping or being continued in each other (the Cook and the group), one leading to the next one (Summoner-Pardoner). Sharp contrast is also achieved by a set order (e.g. Plowman and

Miller). At other times a certain process can be detected through their arrange-ments (the ideal portraits of the Knight, through the Clerk to the Persoun and the Plowman). Or, through the lapse from showing to telling, from one character to the other, an effect of tension and release, of intensive concentration and repause is achieved. This is the role of the "transitional" figures, too. In this order we can trace one of the most important characteristics of medieval iconography, where position and grouping are of extraordinary importance.[53] But there are other par-allelisms wit the visual arts, too, related to showing and telling. If we are "shown", the picture we get is either static like a two-dimensional painting or it becomes a grotesque where the surface is important. Where the two are combined, we get a late Gothic sculpture, where the stiffness disappears. The late Gothic period is also the one when, for example, the envious person stands in the picture instead of Envy, the gluttonous person instead of Gluttony. The iconographical signs that figures were represented with in Romanesque art, taking place "outside", start now to get internalized, appearing as gestures, facial expressions etc. Besides, the figures are not static any longer, they are in a vivid relationship with the space created around them. In painting, too, beginning with the fourteenth century, the painters started to surround their figures with space, first only a narrow stage was used "to provide free play of movement, so that the figure could be portrayed three dimensionally"[54]. When the accent is on telling, he presents us portraits with perspective, and the characters are given a context of a kind, getting a past, present and even future. To this effect contribute the narrator's comments like

And I seyde his opinion was good
(l. 183).

But let us now step further to see what other rhetorical devices Chaucer applies in the *Prologue*. As for propria, he uses plenty of them, and, like in the case of the Summoner, he makes use of them in the Medieval sense of the word "image", using propria expressed in visual and auditive effect, taste and smell, plus adds the "telling" side of his technique: we can see the Prioresse "wyping" her "overlippe" "clene", and through these her careful, far much too lady-like and down-to-earth motions, we can smell the "garleek, oynons and eek leekes" and the "strong wyn" when the Summoner passes by and can hear the "goot"-like "voys"

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53 Male, 5.
54 Deuchler, 133.

23

of the Pardoner, the Prioress singing "the service dyvyne" "ful weel", "entuned in hir nose ful semely", the "floytinge" of the young Squier and the loud bagpipe of the Miller. It is through these propria that the portraits are made vivid enough to be ragerded as individual ones, and one has the impression (or rather illusion, as we shall see later) that they would stand also without each other's support. This makes us again remember the structure of the Gothic motet: the individual voices can be enjoyed both separately and together.

There is a peculiar means Chaucer uses all over the *Prologue*, a line to be found in the case of almost all pilgrims, a summarizing line which appears everywhere in a similar form:

KNIGHT: "He was a verray, parfit, gentil knight". (1.72)
MONK: "Now certainly he was a fair prelat". (1.204)
FRERE: "There was no man nowher so vertuous." (1.251)
MERCHAUNT: "For sothe he was a worthy man with-alle" (1.283)
SERGEANT OF THE LAWE: "So great a purchasour was nowher noon." (1.318)
FRANKELEYN: "Was nowher such a worthy vavasour". (1.360)
SHIPMAN: "And cereinly he was a good fellawe." (1.395)
DOCTOUR OF PHISIK:　　"In all this world ne was ther noon hym lik."　　(1.4
12)
　　　　　　　"He was a verray, parfit praktisour."(1.422)
PERSOUN: "A bettre preest I trowe that nowher noon ys." (1.524)
SOMONOUR: "A bettre felawe sholde man nought fynde." (1.648)
PARDONER: "Ne was ther such another Pardoner." (1.693)

There are also epithets like "wys", "good", "worthy", "parfit" used as smaller building elements. These lines and epithets become empty, naive or provocative depending on the context, serving as a frame or expectation. They run through the whole *Prologue*, like a musical motif. We might even say that Chaucer creates a kind of tradition with it in the *Prologue*, it becomes a new element belonging to the common stock. Just as in the case of husk and kernel, tension is created. Chaucer is playing on many layers simultanously: we have the background of the Middle Ages, in the form of the structure, the demands of the divine dimension which is obvious to everyone. Against this stable background we have the characters. Tension is present to a certain extent between these two layers already. We have seen other sources for creating tension above. But he goes further, using the

building elenents I have just enumerated: the series of portraits begins with the Knight, the idea of the "parfit" Knight is there in the mind of the audience as element of the common stock they share with the poet. Then the image of this "verray, parfit gentil Knight" follows which fits perfectly into the ideal image of a knight. The audience associates the positive summarizing line and the epithet "parfit" with a positive character. In the following portraits the summarizing line contradicts the image. After some portraits we have the one of the Monk. A fat Monk who likes worldly things like eating, riding wildly "as loude as dooth a chapel belle" (l.171), and is not bookish at all: he seems to be exactly the opposite of the ideal monk. Then, having all this in front of our eye, hearing the funny noise, we are struck by the line:

> Now certainly he was a fair prelat.
> (l.204)

With this statement we are swung out on the third layer, from where the whole image becomes grotesque. We continue now to associate the line with the grotesque image, and this is enforced by a series of portraits where this association is not disturbing, and then suddenly the nearly holy Parson comes - and we are forced to beleive our ears again. Dynamism and excitement is achieved thus on yet another level. "If everything is ironical, nothing is interesting, since the reader has been deprived of those conspiratorial pleasures, those satisfactions of knowing that he has joined an elite fraternity of knowingness, and instead has simply to decode praise as blame and vice versa"[55].

As we have seen, Chaucer does not bring innovations in the raw material of character-painting. Rhetorical rules are clearly to be seen in his planning. The "ante oculo ponere" worked well, the portraits of the Ellesmere manuscript and Dryden's praise of Chaucer prove that: the pilgrims are easy to distingush, the propria can clearly be seen ;"I see ... all the Pilgrims in the Canterbury Tales, their Humours, their Features, and the very Dress, as distinctly as if I had soup'd ith them at the Tabard in Southwark"[56]. At the level of the plan, or the level of prescriptions, he is then conventional, complying with the expectations of the Middle Ages. But as he "elevates" the *Prologue*, he mingles the compulsory prescriptions and begins a game full of tension and dynamism, af serious and

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55 Pearsall, 63.
56 Quoted by Morgan, *ES 69*, 485.

mocking moments, expectations, tensions and release. It is a pull-and-push game and the audience is asked to take part in it.

We can see here drawings from Villard de Honnecourt's sketch-book from the thirteenth century. He was an architect and, although he was intersted in all forms, drawing not only plans but sketches of people and animals too, he conceived human figures also as examples to how they can be constructed out of geometrical shapes, or rather how geometry - the human dimension in our case - underlies art, showing here how his drawings can be reduced to geometric figures. On another page we see two figures fighting, without the underlying geometrical figure, but, our eyes having been "trained", it is easy to see the imaginary lines binding different points together.

"It is indeed our sense of form that enables us to assert (if not to explain) the greatness of any particular work"[57], and it is our sense of form that enables us to appreciate this joggling with prescribed formal elements.

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57 Morgan, ES 59, 481.

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