**THE PRIORESS – CHARACTERIZATION’S ANALYSIS**

The object of the present work is to analyse the Prioress’ characterization, in the verse taken into consideration, which is an extract from Geoffrey Chaucer’s “The Canterbury Tales”.

The present work will discuss the most important strategies of the characterization. A denotative analysis will be first provided, on a second moment connotative choices will be considered to find out how they add to meaning.

The most important strategy used by the narrator is irony, which is a figure of speech used to express a concept through its exact opposite. Irony is then expanded to a series of sub-strategies, such as: social status; body language; way of speaking; way of expressing; way of behaving; attitudes; eating style; affected appearance; her relationship with animals; physical description.

Right from the start the narrator exploits the character’s social status and hierarchic role, a prioress, which becomes essential to the reader in order to gather the distinctive ironic tone of the economy of the text.

Indeed, every strategy used later on by the narrator is connoted with irony:

First of all her way of finely smile, nicely speaking and singing, her way of speaking French, all highlighted by the alliteration of sound “s”: “smiling very simple”, “she sang a service”, “seemly, and she spoke”, “school of Stratford-atte-Bowe”, suggest an unconventional behaviour from a nun, which is more likely of a courtly maid.

Hence, the reader wonders why she’s acting in this specific way.

Moving forward with the reading, the intelligent reader realises that “acting” is exactly the key word to understand the prioress’ characterization.

Indeed the narrator, digressing with the illustration of all the peculiarities of her eating manners, which strike the reader attention at the beginning of the list with the alliteration of sound “w”: “were well-taught withal”, isn’t picturing a nun anymore, but a courtly lady.

As a result, the reader is both curious and entertained, since he can sense the irony coming out of the lines.

The reader’s curiosity is later satisfied with the idiom “to counterfeit a courtly kind of grace”, that not only underlines the prioress’ bent to courtliness, but makes explicit that her whole appearance is contrived.

Following with criticizing her tender heart towards animals instead of people, a very not nun-likely behaviour, her well-thought dressing style and her attended physical appearance, the narrator add to the idea of an affected character and increase the ironic tone.

In conclusion, the reader wonders why the prioress focus on looking like a courtly lady and he, or she, understands that she maybe doesn’t want to be a nun. She might have been constricted into it.

Anyway, eventually the reader’s perception of the prioress, and therefore of the whole church institution, is not positive, indeed the narrator’s ironic tone seems aimed to criticize the nun, rather than really portraying her.