

CHAUCER AND MORAL PHILOSOPHY: THE VIRTUOUS WOMEN OF THE CANTERBURY- TALES

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In *The Regement of Princes*, Hoccleve insists that Chaucer is not only the equal of Cicero as a rhetorician and of Vergil as a poet but also the 'bier in philosophic / To Aristotle, in our tonge'.¹ Twentieth-century critics have agreed with Hoccleve about Chaucer's preeminence in rhetoric and poetry, even though they often disagree with each other about which term best describes his genius. And although Hoccleve's praise of Chaucer as the native Aristotle is an exaggeration, several scholars have recently examined Chaucer's concern with 'secular ethics', J. D. Burnley's term for the 'ethical traditions descending by grace of the twelfth-century *ethicii* from the rational philosophy of the classical past'.² Without denying the fact that poetry is not identical to the systematic discourse of philosophy, I wish further to substantiate Hoccleve's claim for Chaucer's philosophical acumen by demonstrating the influence of mediaeval ethics on his characterizations of the virtuous women in the tales assigned to the Man of Law, the Clerk, the Physician and his pilgrim persona.

As I shall show, Chaucer identifies each heroine with one of the four cardinal virtues by enhancing, as necessary, those virtuous characteristics of each protagonist already latent in his sources. In both name and behaviour, he associates Constance, Virginia and Prudence with the ideas about fortitude, temperance and prudence developed by mediaeval moralists from the writings of Cicero, Macrobius and the Pseudo-Seneca, Martin of Braga.³ Although Griselda's name does not so indicate, her behaviour conforms to the traditional definition of justice that includes obedience both to God and to superiors as manifestations of this virtue. The affinity of each of these heroines with one of the cardinal virtues underlines the thematic relationship among these tales. However, only in the case of Prudence, the heroine of the tale which Chaucer assigns to his fictional persona, does the resemblance between the protagonist and the cardinal virtue exhaust the meaning of the character. Recognizing the way moral philosophy informs the characterization of these virtuous women, though, enables readers to appreciate better how Chaucer explores the ethical dilemma posed by the unwarranted suffering of the innocent in the Man of Law's Tale, the Clerk's Tale, the Physician's Tale, and the Tale of Melibee.

Readers of *The Canterbury Tales* have long recognized that Constance, as her name indicates, is a model of fortitude.⁴ In his definitive article on Chaucer's revision of Trivet, Block shows how the poet transforms the chronicle's version into a romance or saint's life by depicting Constance as a general, exemplary character representing fortitude rather than a specific, historical one.⁵ In

keeping with the cardinal virtue she embodies, Constance resists the temptations of adversity and prosperity. This association of fortitude with *contemptus mundi* derives from Cicero's discussion in *De Officiis*:

Omnino fortis animus et magnus ... maxime cernitur ... in rerum externarum despicientia ponitur, cum persuasum est nihil hominem, nisi quod honestum decorumque sit, aut admirari aut optare aut expetere oportere nullique neque homini neque perturbationi animi nec fortunae succumbere.⁶

Transmitted to Christian ethics through Ambrose's *De Officiis Ministrorum*, Cicero's definition of fortitude as equanimity under all circumstances proved very influential throughout the Middle Ages.⁷

Although Chaucer was probably familiar with Cicero's analysis of fortitude, there is no doubt that he knew the other *locus classicus* for mediaeval definitions of the cardinal virtues, Macrobius' *Commentarii in Somnium Scipionis*. In his discussion of the political manifestation of this virtue, Macrobius defines fortitude as the transcendence of the vicissitudes of fortune: *fortitudinis animum supra periculi metum agere nihilque nisi turpia timere, tolerare fortiter vel adversa vel prospera*.⁸ Macrobius identifies constancy as one of the seven species of fortitude, and it is his list, rather than Cicero's in *De Invention*, that Guillaume de Conches includes, with slight modifications, in the *Moralium Dogma Philosophorum*, the twelfth-century adaptation of *De Officiis* popular well into the Renaissance.⁹

Both Cicero's and Macrobius' ideas about fortitude are cited in the most thorough and influential compendium of late mediaeval views about the four cardinal virtues, Guillelmus Perardus' *Summa de Virtutibus* (c. 1248). Perardus also quotes the definition of constancy from the *Moralium Dogma*: *Constancia est stabilitas animi firma et in proposito perseverans*.¹⁰ A similar conception of fortitude is presented in the brief discussion of the cardinal virtues in the *Summa Virtutum de Remediis Anime*, Chaucer's source for the section of the Parson's Tale on the remedial virtues. Often included in manuscripts as a sequel to Perardus' companion compendium on the vices, the *Summa Virtutum* or *Postquam* provides definitions of fortitude from Cicero and Augustine which demonstrate the former's influence on the latter.¹¹

This mediaeval conception of fortitude explains not only Chaucer's characterization of Constance, but also his inclusion of the repeated references to fortune in the Man of Law's Tale; indeed, the former entails the latter. Though Chaucer takes the story of Constance's suffering from Trivet, he realizes the philosophic implications of the chronicle's account. Those rapid changes from prosperity to adversity that Constance undergoes throughout the tale become, in Chaucer's version, dramatizations of the turning of fortune's wheel. Although the three sea voyages occur in Trivet, for example, Chaucer's addition of Constance's prayers before each one reveals her fortitude in the face of adversity and emphasizes the Boethian idea of the sea as an emblem of fortune's hazards.¹² In withstanding the uncertain conditions of the sea, Constance symbolically endures the vicissitudes of fortune and thus enacts the definition of fortitude in the *Moralium Dogma Philosophorum*: *Fortitudo est virtus retundens impetus adversitatis*.¹³

Given this mediaeval conception, it seems that Griselda, the heroine of the Clerk's Tale, is an even better exemplar of fortitude than Constance, for she withstands the temptations of

prosperity as well as the sufferings of adversity. Throughout the Clerk's Tale Chaucer refers to Griselda's patience and he repeats Petrarch's moral praising her constancy during her trial. Undoubtedly, her steadfastness exemplifies one species of fortitude. However, in the case of Griselda, fortitude is not her predominant virtue, but the quality which makes possible her exercise of obedience in the face of her husband's severe tests. A study of Chaucer's revisions of his Latin and French sources shows that it is this latter virtue that is most enhanced by the changes he makes. Patience is only the necessary means for Griselda's extraordinary obedience, a virtue regarded in the Middle Ages as a species of justice.

Although several critics have commented upon Griselda's obedience,¹⁴ none has recognized that it renders her an example of justice, because modern readers of *The Canterbury Tales* are unfamiliar with the mediaeval conception of this cardinal virtue. Moralists of the Middle Ages adopted Cicero's definition of justice from the *De Officiis* as that virtue 'in hominem societate tuenda tribuendoque suum cuique et rerum contractarum fide'.¹⁵ Cicero repeats the same idea in *De Inventione*, where he writes: 'Iustitia est habitus animi communi utilitate conservata suam cuique tribuens dignitatem'.¹⁶ Augustine and Macrobius both endorse Cicero's emphasis on distributive justice, and Abelard, Alain de Lille and Aquinas reiterate it later in the Middle Ages.¹⁷

The correspondence between this cardinal virtue and Griselda's behaviour becomes most apparent in study of the species or parts of justice. Such investigation is complicated, though, by the fact that more schemes of division were proposed for this virtue than for any of the other three.¹⁸ Despite variations in these accounts of the species of justice, however, all the auxiliary virtues involve rendering either to God or to fellow-humans whatever is their due. God's due is religion, which Cicero defines as 'quae superioris cuiusdam naturae, quam divinam vocant, curam caerimoniamque affert'.¹⁹ The other parts of justice govern human relationships; and of these, the ones relevant to the Clerk's Tale are Cicero's reverence (d'Auvergne's obedience to superiors) and *pietas* or duty rendered to country and kin, especially parents.²⁰

The discussion of the parts of justice most useful for understanding the Clerk's Tale is in Peraldus' *Summa de Virtutibus*. After reviewing the divisions made by Cicero, Macrobius, Guillaume de Conches and Guillaume d'Auvergne, Peraldus proposes a synthesis of all four based primarily on d'Auvergne's scheme. Using the term *atria* 'worship' introduced by Peter Lombard, Peraldus first discusses religion. He cites Cicero's definition but expands the classical concept to include not only external acts such as prayers and sacrifices but also the heartfelt acknowledgement of God's sovereignty through faith, hope and charity. Peraldus continues to consider humankind's debt to God in his discussion of the obedience (Cicero's reverence) owed to superiors, including the Creator. By voluntary obedience to the precepts and mandates of superiors, an individual sacrifices his or her will. Through a dual definition of *propria voluntas* 'one's own will', Peraldus emphasizes that such obedience must be rendered to God as well as to human superiors:

Et notandum quod propria voluntas dupliciter accipitur: uno enim modo dicitur propria voluntas: voluntas quae non est Deo subiecta: & secundum hoc abnegatio propriae voluntatis sit, cum voluntas nostra divinae voluntati subijcitur. Alio vero modo dicitur propria voluntas: voluntas quae non est subiecta homine: & secundum hoc propria voluntas abnegatur in eo qui voto se obligans homini voluntatem suam subdit voluntati humanae ...²¹

Justice thus requires obedience both to the Creator and to those fellow-creatures to whom one is obliged, especially by vows. Peraldus further identifies the human superiors who must be obeyed in his chapter on the parts of this virtue. After dividing obedience into reprehensible and commendable, he gives as examples of the latter type the natural obedience of children to their parents and the contractual obedience of wives to their husbands. However, Peraldus also warns against the reprehensible act which occurs when one follows a superior's command to do evil. Citing the authority of Gregory the Great, Bernard and Augustine, he insists that wrongdoing cannot be justified in the name of obedience.²²

Peraldus' discussion of these two parts of justice, religion and obedience (reverence), clarifies the resonance which the Clerk's Tale had for its mediaeval audiences. Petrarch's retelling of Boccaccio's narrative about a dutiful wife as a religious allegory seems less incongruous if we recognize that obedience both to husband and to God were regarded as species of justice by mediaeval moralists. And Chaucer's clever manipulation of the literal and figurative modes of his tale is less bewildering if we know the traditional distinction which Peraldus makes between reprehensible and commendable obedience. The first clue to Chaucer's interest in this issue of lawful obedience occurs in the Prologue to the Clerk's Tale. The Clerk consents to the Host's request for a tale with the dutiful response:

Hooste, ... I am under youre yerde;
Ye han of us as now the governance,
And therefore wol I do yow obeisance,
As fer as resoun axeth, hardily.²³

The Clerk's words not only foreshadow the many acts of compliance with another's will within the tale, but also raise the issue so crucial in modern attempts to interpret the actions of Walter and Griselda: to what extent is it just and reasonable to demand and to give obedience?

The paradigm of voluntary compliance to the will of another in the Clerk's Tale is Griselda. That she was already regarded as an example of obedience is clear from the title given to Petrarch's narrative, *De Insigni Obedientia et Fide Uxoris*. Nonetheless, Chaucer intensifies the theme of Griselda's voluntary submission by amplifying or adding to the Latin and French versions. As Severs shows, the motive for Chaucer's revisions in his characterization of Griselda 'is to heighten [her] humble obedience to the will of her lord and husband'.²⁴

As in his sources, Chaucer's Griselda places herself under a twofold obligation of justice to Walter. In agreeing to become his wife, she accepts not only the marital duty to obey her husband, but also Walter's requirement that she never complain against his demands (IV 35 1-7). Echoing Mary's response to Gabriel, Griselda says:

... Lord, undigne and unworthy
Am I to thilke honour that ye me beede,
But as ye wole youreself, right so wol I.
And heere I swere that nevere willyngly,
In werk ne thoght, I nyl yow disobeye,
For to be deed, though me were looth to deye. (IV 359-64)

Thus Griselda twice pledges to conform her will to Walter's.

Throughout her trials, Chaucer augments the obedience of Griselda already so marked in his sources. For example, in the meeting with Walter preceding the seizure of her son, Chaucer adds to Griselda's profession of obedience what seems to be a cold-hearted statement of acquiescence to her husband's cruelty:

... Naught greveth me at al,
Though that my doughter and my sone be slayn –
At youre comandement, this is to sayn. (IV 647-9)

The final qualifying phrase, however, indicates that Griselda accedes only because of her double vow to Walter. In the next stanza, taken from the sources, she declares her self-abnegation.

'Ye been oure lord; dooth with youre owene thyng
Right as yow list; axeth no reed at me.
For as I lefte at hoom al my clothyng,
Whan I first cam to yow, right so,' quod she,
'Lefte I my wyl and al my libertee,
And took youre clothyng; wherfore I yow preye,
Dooth youre plesaunce, I wol youre lust obeye.' (IV 652-8)

Even when Walter renounces her to take another wife, Chaucer insists that although Griselda perceives his cruelty, she nonetheless reaffirms her vow to him (IV 85 z-6i). That Griselda can still love Walter despite her awareness of his harshness demonstrates, as Severs observes, that her obedience is not the submission of a stupid or spineless wife, but that of a sentient individual who nevertheless voluntarily submerges her will in that of another.²⁵

While Chaucer had only to augment the evidence of Griselda's justice in his sources, he found it necessary to alter radically the tale assigned to the Physician to indicate Virginia's conformity to the mediaeval conception of another cardinal virtue, temperance. As several critics have already observed, Chaucer transforms the narratives of Livy and Jean de Meun, which concentrate on the lustful injustice of Appius and the uncompromising integrity of Virginius, into one emphasizing the pathetic innocence of Virginia.²⁶ Although sometimes amplifying hints from *Le Roman de la Rose*, Chaucer adds approximately 176 original lines, more than half of his tale. Unique to his version are the long description of Virginia, partially adapted from an unrelated section in *Le Roman de la Rose* (VI 9-71, 105-17); the admonition to governesses and parents (VI 72-104); the dramatization of Virginia's murder by her father (VI 207-53); and the Physician's moral (VI 277-86). Through all of these additions, Chaucer changes the meaning of the tale; he begins this transformation in the initial description by presenting Virginia as a paragon of temperance.

In relating his characterization of Virginia to the cardinal virtue of temperance, Chaucer found an effective solution to a difficult problem. The primary definition of temperance in the Middle Ages derives from Cicero's *De Inventione*: 'Temperantia est rationis in libidinem atque in alios non rectos impetus animi firma et moderata dominatio.'²⁷ This concept of temperance as the rational restraint of illicit desires, especially carnal ones, is repeated by most of the mediaeval commentators on the four cardinal virtues, including such influential ones as Augustine, Macrobius, Guillaume de Conches, Aquinas and Peraldus.²⁸ As a poet, however, Chaucer faced

special problems in delineating such resistance to illicit carnal desires, for how does an artist portray an inner quality evinced only by the lack of particular vices? In order to depict Virginia's temperance dramatically, Chaucer would have to present her as compromised by lust; to show her in the act of restraining her carnal desires, she would first have to experience them. Such a lapse, however, would have severely diminished her innocence; a Virginia tempted by Appius, though ultimately not seduced, would obviously not suit Chaucer's purpose.

In order to avoid this problem, Chaucer chooses another method of manifesting Virginia's temperance. Rather than portray the action of the cardinal virtue by dramatizing her resistance to her own lust, he presents a static description which asserts her possession of the species or parts of temperance. A comparison of his encomium with the subdivisions of this cardinal virtue derived from Cicero and Macrobius as well as the six attributes of virginity specified by Peraldus demonstrates the correspondence between Chaucer's characterization of Virginia and mediaeval analyses of this virtue. Because Virginia's qualities in VI 39-71 are those traditionally associated with temperance, it is difficult to ascertain a single source for these lines; however, it is clear that whatever his source, Chaucer's addition is intended to indicate that Virginia exemplifies this third cardinal virtue.²⁹

In *De Inventione* Cicero identifies three parts of temperance: continence, clemency and modesty.³⁰ In his *Commentarii in Somnium Scipionis* Macrobius lists nine species of temperance: modesty, sense of shame, abstinence, chastity, sense of honour, moderation, frugality, sobriety and purity.³¹ Throughout the Middle Ages these two groups of subdivisions were often combined; treatises modelled on Cicero's list frequently cited items from Macrobius and vice versa.³² Furthermore, analyses of temperance often included discussions of virginity since it was considered a manifestation of this cardinal virtue. According to Peraldus, for example, virginity is a species of continence.³³ He amplifies the Ciceronian category by articulating six characteristics of virginity: sobriety, labour, humility, custody of the senses, modesty of conversation and avoidance of the occasion of sin. The inclusion of modesty and sobriety in two different lists and the similarity of continence and moderation reduce these eighteen subdivisions to fifteen. Well known throughout the Middle Ages, these subdivisions of temperance correlate closely with the specific virtues Chaucer assigns to Virginia (VI 39-71, 105 16).

Chaucer bases his initial description of Virginia's virtues on Macrobius' list, for Virginia clearly possesses eight of the nine parts of temperance. Making the transition between Nature's panygeric and the narrator's encomium, Chaucer begins by identifying Virginia's virtue as the primary cause of her praiseworthiness:

And if that excellent was hire beautee,
A thousand foold moore vertuuous was she.
In hire ne lakked no condicioun
That is to preyse, as by discrecioun. (VI 39 42)

Chaucer's statement attributes to Virginia an essential mark of temperance, Macrobius' *honestas* or sense of honour. As Aquinas observes, *honestas* is best defined as worth or virtue deserving honour; quoting Isidore of Seville, he explains:

... honestas dicitur quasi honoris status; unde ex hoc videtur aliquid dici honestum quod est honore dignum. Honor autem . . . excellentiae debetur. Excellentia autem hominis maxime consideratur secundum virtutem ... Et ideo honestum proprie loquendo in idem refertur cum virtute.³⁴

Virginia's integrity renders her praiseworthy and indicates that she possesses the first Macrobian part of temperance, a sense of honour. Complementing this is her strong sense of shame (Macrobius' *verecundia*): 'Shamefast she was in maydens shamefastnesse' (VI 5 5). Chaucer also refers to her abstinence (VI 45) and her sobriety (VI 58-60), those aspects of temperance which regulate the pleasures of eating and drinking. The young girl's virginity attests two of Macrobius' other parts of temperance, chastity and purity: 'As wel in goost as body chast was she; / For which she floured in virginitee' (VI 43 -4).

In describing the heroine of the Physician's Tale, Chaucer follows the example of many mediaeval moral treatises by augmenting Macrobius' list with Cicero's. In addition to these six characteristics derived from the *Commentarii in Somnium Scipionis*, Chaucer ascribes to Virginia the three Ciceronian qualities of temperance: continence, clemency and modesty. In attributing *attemperaunce* (VI 46) to Virginia, Chaucer seems to be influenced by Cicero's conception of continence not simply as an abstinence from sexual activity but, more generally, as self-restraint.³⁵ In this sense Cicero's continence is synonymous with Macrobius' moderation, and Chaucer uses *attemperaunce* to indicate their similarity. Likewise, Chaucer probably derives Virginia's *pacience* (VI 46) from Cicero's *dementia*. Mediaeval moralists often interpreted *dementia* both as forbearance in anger (Cicero's interpretation) and as endurance of adversity.³⁶ Given Virginia's youth and humility, the latter sense is more suitable and 'patience' an apt translation of *dementia*.

Chaucer devotes half the lines in the encomium to a description of Virginia's modesty, an aspect of temperance articulated by both Cicero and Macrobius. He praises her humility (VI 45), her propriety of bearing and array (VI 47), her discreet speech (VI 48-5 4) and her efforts to avoid situations 'That been occasions of daliaunces' (VI 6i-6). After warning governesses and parents to keep close watch over young girls in their charge, Chaucer concludes by praising Virginia's custody of herself:

This mayde, of which I wol this tale expresse,
So kepte hirself hir neded no maistresse,
For in hir lyvyng maydens myghten rede,
As in a book, every good word or dede
That longeth to a mayden vertuuous,
She was so prudent and so bountevous. (VI 105-10)

These kinds of behaviour, all manifestations of modesty, correspond to four of the aspects of temperance which Peraldus finds especially appropriate for virgins: humility, custody of senses, modesty of conversation and avoidance of the occasion of sin.

Peraldus' discussion of the six parts of virginity also explains the final puzzle in Chaucer's description of Virginia, the reference to her constancy and busyness. The second of these qualities correlates with Peraldus' *labor*, the means through which virgins must resist the temptations of idleness. As Chaucer puts it, Virginia is 'Constant in herte, and evere in bisynesse

/ To dryve hire out of ydel slogardye' (VI 56-7). In this context, Virginia's constancy, the only characteristic not yet accounted for, perhaps corresponds to Macrobius' frugality (*parcitas*). Through the influence of the *Moralium Dogma Philosophorum*, *parcitas* came to be defined in the later Middle Ages as 'mensuram refectionis non excedere'.³⁷ It is possible that Chaucer decided to refer to such self-restraint as an inner state of frugality or constancy of desire which keeps the appetites and passions in check.

It must certainly be more than coincidental that Chaucer's encomium on Virginia so closely resembles the subdivisions of temperance derived from Cicero and Macrobius. The traditional nature of this material renders it improbable that scholars will agree on a specific source for VI 39 71 and 105—i6 of the Physician's Tale. More importantly, though, the similarity between the conventional subdivisions of temperance and Chaucer's description establishes that he added this encomium to emphasize Virginia's role as a paragon of temperance.

The last example of a heroine modelled after a cardinal virtue occurs in the second narrative which the pilgrim Chaucer tells, the Tale of Melibee. Ascertaining the poet's purpose in this tale, however, poses unique problems, because the Tale of Melibee is a close translation of its source, Renaud de Louens's adaptation of Albertano of Brescia's *Liber Consolationis et Consilii*. Chaucer thus leaves no clues to his intention except for the fact that he was satisfied to incorporate this tale into his collection virtually unrevised. Perhaps one of the reasons for his satisfaction was that Renaud's *Livre de Mellibee et Prudence* already appropriately develops the theme Chaucer wanted to present. While he had to revise the other moral tales to clarify the relationship between the female protagonist and the cardinal virtue which she manifests, the portrayal of Prudence in Renaud's redaction of the *Liber Consolationis et Consilii* is obviously based on mediaeval conceptions of this virtue. However, because Renaud (and Chaucer following him) omits chapters vi—ix, in which Albertano explicitly discusses the nature of prudence, modern readers of the Tale of Melibee do not always recognize how the definitions of this cardinal virtue inform the characterization of Melibee's wife.

Albertano exhibits remarkable ability in compiling and combining definitions of prudence from the three authorities which dominated Christian moral philosophy throughout the Middle Ages: Cicero, Macrobius and the Pseudo-Seneca, Martin of Braga. In chapter vi Albertano presents a definition of this virtue: 'Prudentia est rerum bonarum et malarum utrarumque discretio' cum electione boni et fuga mali.³⁸ This definition combines Cicero's two most influential expositions of this cardinal virtue. Most often cited in the Middle Ages was his brief discussion in *De Inventione* which defined prudence and identified its parts. Prudentia est rerum bonarum et malarum neutrarumque scientia. Partes eius: Memoria, intelligentia, providentia.³⁹ The second Ciceronian definition, whose influence steadily increased during the mediaeval period, derives from the more thorough and detailed analysis of the four cardinal virtues in *De Officiis*. In the summary at the end of Book i, Cicero distinguishes between philosophical knowledge, *sapientia* or *sophia*, and practical knowledge or *prudentia*. Wisdom 'rerum est divinarum et humanarum scientia'; it is especially concerned with causes. By contrast, prudence 'est rerum expetendarum fugiendarumque scientia'.⁴⁰ This definition, unlike the one in *De Inventione*, ascribes to prudence not only the intellectual ability to discriminate but also the volitional disposition to seek or avoid good and evil.⁴¹

In the late twelfth century the concepts of prudence as intellectual discrimination from *De Inventione* and as volitional disposition from *De Officiis* were combined by Alain de Lille, and it is this conflation of Cicero's two definitions that Albertano cites in chapter vi of the *Liber Consolationis et Consilii*. Except for his reversal of the two final prepositional phrases, Albertano's definition of prudence is an exact quotation of Alain's: 'Prudentia est rerum bonarum et malarum utrarumque discretio cum fuga mali et electione boni.'⁴²

These two Ciceronian conceptions explain Albertano's characterization of Prudence, especially as she contrasts with Boethius' Philosophia. In accord with Cicero's distinction between the two kinds of knowledge, Prudence's lessons are practical rather than abstract, moral rather than metaphysical. Boethius' Philosophia appropriately teaches her pupil about the nature of causation in order to help him withdraw from the realm of fortune. Albertano's Prudence, on the other hand, gives pragmatic advice and seeks to influence Melibeus' action in the world. Thus, in keeping with both Cicero's definitions, Prudence not only informs her husband about good and evil but also tries to persuade him to choose the former and avoid the latter; she guides both his mind and his will.⁴³

Although the Ciceronian tradition explains Prudence's role as Melibeus' teacher, another popular conception of this cardinal virtue accounts for the specific lessons Albertano ascribes to her. In providing her husband with the general principles for eliciting and evaluating counsel, this character conforms to the definition of prudence in the *Formula Honestae Vitae*. This sixth-century treatise, attributed to Seneca and extant in over two hundred manuscripts from before 1500, was, according to Tuve, as important for the Middle Ages as Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* was for the Renaissance.⁴⁴ The discussion of prudence in the *Formula Honestae Vitae* is eclectic, incorporating material from Cicero's *De Inventione* and *De Officiis* together with original ideas. Although Albertano cites the authority of the *Formula* on fifteen different occasions, his most important quotation of Pseudo-Seneca is the description of prudent behaviour: Prudentis enim proprium est consilia examinare, nec cito credulitate ad falsa prolabi.⁴⁵ Obviously, the idea that the special province of this cardinal virtue is to evaluate counsel accounts for the topics of Prudence's discourse in the Tale of Melibee.

Judging by the nature of things rather than the opinions of others, Prudence demonstrates the moral discretion ascribed to the virtue she exemplifies in the *De Inventione* and the *Formula Honestae Vitae*. And advising her husband to flee evil and choose good, she enacts the volitional influence Cicero associates with *prudentia* in *De Officiis*. Because Albertano's Prudence already conforms so well to the mediaeval definitions of the cardinal virtue whose name she bears, Chaucer did not need to revise Renaud's *Livre de Mellibee et Prudence* to accord with the three other narratives about virtuous women.

As the preceding discussion demonstrates, Chaucer probably chose each of the four tales under consideration because the behaviour of its female protagonist suggests an affinity to one of the four cardinal virtues; he indisputably revised each tale, as necessary, to enhance this identification. However, in revealing how mediaeval conceptions of the cardinal virtues inform Chaucer's characterization of these good women, I do not wish to reduce poetry to philosophy. Despite their extraordinary manifestations of virtue, all these figures, except perhaps Prudence, remain literal characters rather than personifications. As others have noticed, Chaucer dramatizes

the suffering of these virtuous women with a realism and pathos that force the reader to acknowledge the personal toll of their ordeals.⁴⁶ In each case, the poet has, in ways I cannot investigate in the limits of this article, put moral authority to the test of human experience. Recognizing the influence of moral philosophy on the narratives of the Man of Law, the Clerk, the Physician and Chaucer's pilgrim persona does not exhaust the meaning of these tales; rather, the unwarranted suffering of their four virtuous protagonists suggests that in these narratives Chaucer explores the tension between philosophy and literature as modes of understanding the human condition.

NOTES

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1. *Hoccleve's Works: The Regement of Princes and Fourteen Minor Poems*, ed. by Frederick J. Furnivall, SETS, ES, 7z (London, 1897), lines 2087-8.
2. J. D. Burnley, *Chaucer's Language and the Philosophers' Tradition* (Cambridge, 1979), p. 9.
3. In stating that Chaucer's characterization of his four heroines is influenced by the cardinal virtue tradition, I do not wish to imply that he knew or was alluding to particular texts, but simply that he was familiar with the standard definitions which were based on these *auctoritates*. In *Summa Virtutum de Remediis Anime*, ed. by Siegfried Wenzel, Chaucer Library (Athens, Ga, 1984), pp. 7-8, the editor explains that the four cardinal virtues, which the Fathers had adapted from the pagan philosophers, were a stable series throughout the Middle Ages even though the lists of remedial virtues exhibited a good deal of variation. The reader should therefore expect not a close verbal correspondence between quotations from mediaeval moralists and Chaucer's text, but rather a more general resemblance between the conventional meaning of the virtue and the behaviour of the female protagonist exemplifying it. The best introduction to the mediaeval tradition of the four cardinal virtues is Rosemond Tuve, *Allegorical Imagery: Some Medieval Books and their Posterity* (Princeton, NJ, 1966), ch. ii. For a survey of scholastic moral theology about the cardinal virtues through Thomas Aquinas, see D. ()don Lottin, *Psychologie et morale aux XII^e et XIII^e siècles*, 6 vols. in 8 (Gembloux; Louvain, 1942), Vol. III. P. M. Kean, *The Art of Narrative* (Volume II of *Chaucer and the Making of English Poetry*) (London, 1972), pp. 173-85, suggests that the cardinal virtues tradition informs the theme of the nobility of humanity and influences Chaucer's characterization throughout *The Canterbury Tales*. However, she does not argue for any systematic development of this material; nor does she single out the four tales I discuss for special attention.
4. The most recent and thorough discussion of Constance as a paragon of fortitude is V. A. Kolve, *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative: the First Five Canterbury Tales* (Stanford, Calif., 1984), chapter vii. I agree with Kolve that Constance 'remains a natural woman proved constant under trial, a woman (in literary terms) at some life-giving distance from *Constantia* personified or from *Fortitudo* (Strength), the cardinal virtue to which Constancy is related in the medieval schema of the Seven Virtues' (p. 304). Chaucer's desire to represent this virtue in a character rather than as a personification probably explains the fact that he uses the name 'Custance' for his protagonist.
5. Edward Block, 'Originality, controlling purpose, and craftsmanship in Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale*', *PMLA*, LXVIII (1953), 572-616 (pp. 580, 589).

6. Cicero, *De Officiis*, I, xx (ed. and trans. by Walter Miller (London, 1913), p. 68).
7. Ambrose, *De Officiis Ministrorum* (PL, XVI, cols. 23-184). The transmission and influence of the Roman moral treatise throughout the Middle Ages are surveyed in N. E. Nelson, 'Cicero's *De Officiis* in Christian thought: 300-1300', in *Essays and Studies in English and Comparative Literature* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1933), pp. 59-160. William Harris, *Skelton's Magnificence and the Cardinal Virtue Tradition* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1965), pp. 73-81, surveys the mediaeval conception of fortitude.
8. Macrobius, *Commentarii in Somnium Scipionis*, i, viii (ed. by J. Willis (Leipzig, 1963), p. 38).
9. *Moralium Dogma Philosophorum des Guillaume de Conches*, ed. by John Holmberg (Uppsala, 1929). Migne provides a version of this treatise based on a thirteenth-century manuscript in PL, CL XXI, cols. 1007-55. For a discussion of this mediaeval adaptation of *De Officiis*, see Nelson, 'Cicero's *De Officiis*', pp. 89-99; Ph. Delehaye, 'line adaptation du *De officiis* au XII^e siècle: le *Moralium dogma philosophorum*', *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale*, XVI (1949), 227-58.
10. Guillemus Peraldus, *Summa Aurea de Virtutibus* (1494) (= Toynbee, 1052), sig. Qtr. I am grateful to the curators of the Bodleian Library for providing me with a microfilm of the chapters on the cardinal virtues. 11
11. *Summa Virtutum*, i, lines 125-40 (ed. Wenzel, pp. 58-9).
12. *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, 11, m. iv.
13. *Moralium*, ed. Holmberg, p. 30; PL, CLX XI, col. 1025.
14. Although they propose very different interpretations, the following critics are among those who regard obedience as the primary theme of the Clerk's Tale: S. K. Heninger, Jr, 'The concept of order in Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale*', *JEGP*, LVI (1957), 382-95; John McCall, 'The *Clerk's Tale* and the theme of obedience,' *Modern Language Quarterly*, XXVII (1967), 260-9; A. C. Spearing, *Criticism and Medieval Poetry*, 2nd edn (New York, 1972), pp. 76-106.
15. Cicero, *De Officiis*, I, v (ed. Miller, p. 16).
16. Cicero, *De Inventione, De Optima Genere Oratorum, Topica*, ed. and trans. by H. M. Hubbell (London, 1949), II, lii (p. 328).
17. Augustine quotes the discussion of justice from *De Inventione* verbatim in *De Diversis Quaestionibus LXXXIII*, I, xxxi (PL, XL, cols. 20-1) and paraphrases it in *De Libero Arbitrio*, I, xiii, 27 (PL, XXXII, col. 1235), *Enarratio in Psalmum*, LIII, xi (PL, XXXVII, cols. 1065-6), and *Sermo c1.*, viii (PL, XXXVIII, col. 812). Even if Chaucer were unfamiliar with Cicero's definition of justice, he would have found a similar conception in Macrobius, *Commeniarzi in Somnium Scipionis*, i, viii (ed. Willis, p. 38). The continuing influence of Cicero's definition during the later Middle Ages is shown by the discussions of justice in Peter Abelard, *Dialogus inter Philosophum, Judaeum, et Christianum* (PL, CLXXVIII, col. 1653); Alain de Lille, 'De virtutibus et de vitiis et de donis spiritus sancti' (ed. Lottin, in *Psychologie et morale*, VI, 45-92 (p. 5 z)); Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, ed. and trans. by the Blackfriars (New York, 1964), 2a2ae.80, i.
18. In the appendix to *Allegorical Imagery* Tuve lists the parts of the four cardinal virtues according to Cicero, Macrobius, Guillaume de Conches and Alain de Lille. According to Cicero, for example, the virtues issuing from justice are religion, duty, gratitude, revenge, reverence and truth: *De Inventione* ii, liii (ed. Hubbell, p. 328). Macrobius, on the other

hand, identifies the parts of justice as uprightness, friendship, harmony, sense of duty, piety, love, and human sympathy (*Commentarii in Somnium Scipionis*, r, viii (ed. Willis, p. 38). In the late twelfth century Guillaume de Conches conflates the two lists, combining Cicero's religion, duty, reverence with Macrobius' innocence, friendship, concord and Augustine's definition of justice as relief of misery from *De Trinitate*; see *Moralium*, ed. Holmberg, pp. z3 9, or *PL*, CLXXI, cols. 1o14-25. Abelard (*PL*, CLXXVIII, col. 1654) and Alain de Lille (Lottin, *Psychologie*, VI, 53 5) suggest other divisions, but both include religion (Abelard's veneration) and obedience under reverence. Finally, Guillaume d'Auvergne proposes a scheme which both Aquinas and Peraldus combine with Cicero's and Macrobius': obedience, discipline, equality, fidelity, veracity and truthfulness. For d'Auvergne and other scholastic theologians who included obedience as part of justice, see Lottin, *Psychologie*, III, 189 9o. The complexity of the mediaeval conception of justice is apparent even in the brief discussion of this virtue in the *Summa Virtutum*, I, lines 106 24 (ed. Wenzel, p. 59). After quoting the standard definition from Augustine and Cicero, the author indicates that justice requires subordinating the lower to the higher; it includes service and worship to God, reverence and obedience to superiors, and various acts which express concord with equals and compassion for inferiors.

19. Cicero, *De Inventione*, II, liii (ed. Hubbell, p. 328).
20. Griselda's relationship with her father is an example of Cicero's *pietas*, the duty rendered to kin and country (*De Inventione*, u, liii (ed. Hubbell, p. 328)). Likewise, her just and equitable rule in Walter's absence and her ability to maintain 'commune profit' (IV 428-41) further contribute to Griselda's association with the cardinal virtue of justice.
21. Peraldus, *Summa*, sig. S2r.
22. *Ibid.*, sig. S7'.
23. *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry D. Benson (Boston, Mass., 1987), IV 22-5. All subsequent quotations of Chaucer's works are from this edition.
24. J. Burke Severs, *The Literary Relationships of Chaucer's Clerkes Tale* (1942; repr. Hamden, Conn., 1972), p. 235. Severs's book is the definitive study of Chaucer's revisions of the Clerk's Tale; he includes the versions of Petrarch and the anonymous French redactor.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 237. Despite Griselda's willing obedience, I do not mean to suggest that Chaucer endorses Walter's cruel test of her; for a discussion of how Chaucer formulates the problem of justice in the *Clerk's Tale*, see Denise N. Baker, 'Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale* and the monstrous critics,' *Postscript: Publication of the Philological Association of the Carolinas*, HI (1986), 61 8.
26. These sources are available in the chapter on the Physician's Tale by Edgar Shannon in *Sources and Analogues of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales*, ed. by W. F. Bryan and Germaine Dempster, (1941; repr. New York, 1958). The evidence of the Variorum edition of the Physician's Tale, ed. by Helen Storm Corsa (Norman, Okla., 1987), supports the conclusion in Helen Cooper, *Oxford Guides to Chaucer: The Canterbury Tales* (Oxford, 1989), p. 250, that Chaucer knew Livy's version only through *Le Roman de la Rose*. Critics who discuss the ways in which Chaucer transformed his sources include Sheila Delany, 'Politics and the paralysis of poetic imagination in the *Physician's Tale*,' *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, III (1981), 47-6o; Lee Ramsey, "'The sentence of it sooth is": Chaucer's *Physician's Tale*,' *Chaucer Review*, VI (1971), 185 97; Anne

- Middleton, 'The *Physician's Tale* and love's martyrs: "ensamples mo than ten" as a method in the *Canterbury Tales*,' *Chaucer Review*, VIII (1973), 9-3z; Emerson Brown, Jr, 'What is Chaucer doing with the Physician and his Tale?' *Philological Quarterly*, LX (1981), 129-49.
27. Cicero, *De Inventione*, II, liv (ed. Hubbell, p. 330). The juxtaposition of the tales of the Physician and the Pardoner in Fragment vi serves to emphasize Virginia's temperance by contrasting her with the concupiscence of the young men of the following narrative.
 28. Augustine quotes the discussion of temperance from *De Inventione* verbatim in *De Diversis Quaestionibus LXXXIII*, I, xxxi (PL, XL, col. 2i) and paraphrases Cicero's definition in *De Libero Arbitrio*, I, xiii (PL, XXXII, col. 1235), *Enarratio in Psalmum*, LXXXIII, xi (PL, XXXVII, col. 1066) and *Sermo* CL, viii (PL, XXXVIII, col. 812). Macrobius cites a similar definition of temperance in *Commentarii*, I, viii (ed. Willis, p. 38): 'Temperantiae nihil adpetere paenitendum, in nullo legem moderationis excedere, sub iugum rationis cupiditatem domare.' See also Guillaume de Conches, *Moralium*, ed. by Holmberg, p. 39; PL, CLX XI, col. 1034; Aquinas, *Summa*, 2a2ae.14 i, 3; and Peraldus, *Summa*, sig. Mev.
 29. Several scholars have attempted to identify a specific source for lines 30-117 of the *Physician's Tale*. Frederick Tupper proposes Ambrose's *De Virginibus* in 'Chaucer's bed's head. I: Chaucer and Ambrose', *Modern Language Notes*, XXX (1915), 5-7; Karl Young, 'The maidenly virtues of Chaucer's Virginia', *Speculum*, XVI (1941), 340-9, suggests Vincent of Beauvais's *De Eruditione Filiorum*; and Martha Waller, 'The *Physician's Tale*: Geoffrey Chaucer and Fray Juan Garcia de Castrojeriz', *Speculum*, LI (1976), 292-306, argues that Chaucer's source is the Castilian version of Aegidius Romanus' *De Regimine Principum*. Glending Olson, 'Juan Garcia de Castrojeriz and John of Wales: a note on Chaucer's reading', *Speculum*, LXIV (1989), 106-11, points out that Castrojeriz relied heavily on John of Wales's *Communiloquium* in composing his commentary and argues that it is more likely that Castrojeriz and Chaucer used the *Communiloquium* as their common source rather than that the Castilian influenced the Englishman as Waller contends. As Olson observes, many of the virtuous qualities which Chaucer attributes to Virginia are mentioned by John of Wales in *Communiloquium*, III, vi, 3, a chapter entitled 'De instructione virginum'. Since mediaeval moralists often classified virginity under temperance, it is not surprising that some of Virginia's virtues should be mentioned in discussions of virginity. Kean, *The Art of Narrative*, pp. 181-2, asserts that Chaucer's list indicates Virginia's possession of all four cardinal virtues. While it is true that some of the traditional parts of temperance overlap with aspects of other cardinal virtues, it is clear even from Kean's list, based solely on Macrobius, that temperance is Virginia's predominant virtue.
 30. Cicero, *De Inventione*, II, liv (ed. Hubbell, p. 330).
 31. Macrobius, *Commentarii in Somnium Scipionis*, I, viii (ed. Willis, p. 38).
 32. Tuve, *Allegorical Imagery*, pp. 64-5. E.g., Peraldus, *Summa*, follows Cicero's three subdivisions but incorporates many of Macrobius' terms into his discussion; conversely, Alain de Lille, 'De Virtutibus' (Lottin, *Psychologie et morale*, VI, 57) includes continence in his Macrobian list.
 33. Peraldus, *Summa*, sig. N2.
 34. Aquinas, *Summa*, 2a2ae.145, 1.

35. Cicero, *De Inventione*, *ti*, liv (ed. Hubbell, p. 330): 'Continentia est per quam cupiditas consili gubernatione regitur.'
36. Peraldus, *Summa*, sig. M5^v.
37. Delehaye, Tine adaptation du *De* p. 249.
38. Albertano of Brescia, *Liber Consolationis et Consilii*, ed. by Thor Sundby, Chaucer Society, 2: 8 (London, 1873), p. 20. The only other definition included in this brief chapter Albertano attributes to Cassiodorus: 'Et certe prudentia expedita est et infatigabilis, et superat cuncta.' Although this definition also contributes to his characterization of Prudence, it did not exercise the influence throughout the Middle Ages that Cicero's definition did. J. Burke Severs includes Renaud de Louens's adaptation of Albertano of Brescia's tractate in his chapter on the Tale of Melibee in Bryan and Dempster, *Sources*, pp. 560-614.
39. Cicero, *De Inventione*, *It*, liii (ed. Hubbell, p. 326). Augustine repeats this definition verbatim in *De Diversis Quaestionibus LXXXIII*, *I*, xxxi (*PL*, *XL*, cols. 20-1) and paraphrases it in *Enarratio in Psalmum*, *LXXXIII*, xi (*PL*, *XX XVII*, col. 065), and *Sermo CL*, viii (*PL*, *XX XVIII*, col. 812). Guillaume de Conches offers a similar definition of prudence as moral discrimination in the *Moralium Dogma Philosophorum* (ed. Holmberg, p. 7; *PL*, *CLXXI*, col. 1009). The *Summa Virtutum*, *I*, lines 90-91 (ed. Wenzel, p. 57), also cites Cicero's definition: 'Secundum Tullium prudentia est "bonarum rerum atque malarum utrarumque discretio."' Wenzel cites the *Moralium* as the probable source (p. 355).
40. Cicero, *De Officiis*, *ii* (ed. Miller, pp. 156, 172). The first definition of prudence which Cicero gives, in *De Officiis*, *I*, v ('inest indagatio atque inventio veri'), is seldom repeated in the Middle Ages.
41. Augustine reiterates this idea of prudence's moral imperative with slight variation in *De Libero Arbitrio*, *i*, xiii (*PL*, *XX XII*, col. 1235), the source for the first definition of prudence in the *Summa I 'Virtutum*, *I*, lines 87-9 (ed. Wenzel, p. 57): 'Et est prudentia secundum Augustinum in libro *'rule malum*: "Rerum appetendarum et vitandarum scientia."' For a discussion of this volitional conception of prudence in mediaeval theology, see Lottin, *Psychologie et morale*, *III*, 25-57.
42. Alain de Lille, 'De Virtutibus' (Lottin, *Psychologie et morale*, *VI*, 51). The thirteenth-century version of the *Moralium Dogma Philosophorum* in *PL*, *CLXXI*, includes a similar definition in col. 1010: 'Prudentia est boni mauve discretio cum appetitu boni et detestatione mali, vel rerum bonarum et malarum et utrarumque inter se discretio.' The earlier version which provided the basis for Holmberg's edition, by contrast, quotes *De Inventione* verbatim (p. 7). See also Delehaye, 'Line adaptation du *De officiis*', 241.
43. Albertano's Prudence also differs from Boethius' Philosophia in another important respect: she is not a maiden but rather a wife. This change may have been suggested to Albertano by a verse from the authority he cites most frequently, Proverbs: 'Domus et divitiae dantur parentibus; A Domino autem proprie uxor prudens' (Proverbs xix.14). Although he does not quote this particular verse in the *Liber Consolationis et Consilii*, Albertano devotes chapter v to the praise of women and twice quotes from Proverbs xix in chapter xlii on patience, a section retained by Renaud de Louens.

44. Tuve, *Allegorical Imagery*, pp. 62, 73 6. Martin of Braga, *Formula Honestae Vitae* (PL, LX XII, cols. 21-8). Peraldus bases his chapter on the diverse actions of prudence almost entirely on Pseudo-Seneca.
45. *Liber Consolationis*, ed. Sundby, p. 5 5. Though not citing the *Formula Honestae Vitae*, the *Summa Virtutum*, i, lines 53-61 (ed. Wenzel, p. 5 5), also associates prudence with counsel.
46. The most extended discussion of the narratives of the Man of Law, the Clerk and the Physician as tales of pathos is Robert W. Frank, Jr, in *The Cambridge Chaucer Companion*, ed. by Piero Boitani and Jill Mann (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 143-56. I discuss how Chaucer examines the philosophical dilemma of the problem of evil in these three tales in 'Chaucer's experiments with the "thrifty tale": the narratives of the Man of Law, the Clerk, and the Physician', *Mediaevalia*, XIV (1991, for 1988), 19--., 115-26.