Chaucer and Langland

Historical and Textual Approaches

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The Liberating Truth:
The Concept of
Integrity in
Chaucer's Writings

There seems nowadays to be some agreement in principle that we ought to try to understand Chaucer as a man of his time, that is, rather to define a historical Chaucer than to create our personal Chaucers. The Chaucer who anticipated the post-Darwinian 'enlightenment', who in all but the actuality was a graduate of Harvard not long before Child and Kittredge, an agnostic or anyway a sceptic genially tolerant of human frailty and just as genially observing the forms of Christianity, whose more pious works had to be 'early', has receded into the shadows of romantic criticism, giving place to the poet of an age of crisis,[1] or in another conception, the poet in whom moralist and artist were at odds.[2] For me this represents an advancement of understanding: I cannot conceive how an intelligent and sensitive man living in a world subject to pressures like those registered in *Piers Plowman* could have been unaffected by them. But I think a refinement of understanding is still possible. The historical dimension, the factor of the state of England, the Church and the world in the concern and thus the art of 'our sage and serious poet'—the term fits Chaucer pretty well—which will have been peculiar to his particular temperament and experience, can be more exactly defined. What appear to have been the concerns of the time which oppressed him most, or most often? These should be discernible in his selection and presentation of subject matter, from emphasis and frequency of occurrence in the first instance. If what then seems to stand out relates easily to late fourteenth-century values, forms of thought and linguistic matrices, the logic of the identification will be strengthened. And if finally it is possible to read the concerns, without critical violence, as part of the meanings of his works, that may seem to verify their relevance.

I have given away my own view of the subject in the title of this lecture. I do not find evidence in Chaucer's writings that he was drawn to the concept of apocalypticism or was preoccupied with the issue of theodicy, though he must have been aware of those grave contemporary preoccupations if only from their prominence in *Piers Plowman*. As to his having been an adept at spiritual exegesis, although he undoubtedly applied the procedure from time to time, his sustained application of it has not, in my view, been proved. I believe that Chaucer was primarily concerned with morality, the matter of the goodness or badness of human behaviour. That proposition seems so obvious to me that I feel it must be old-fashioned. Nevertheless many scholars and critics of my acquaintance who are called 'eminent', or 'distinguished' Chaucerians generally resist it, accusing me of 'pressing it too hard', or 'taking it too far'. That is my excuse for addressing you on the subject today.[3]

Chaucer's specific concern was, in my opinion, with those qualities which we nowadays sum up in the term 'integrity', 'the character of uncorrupted virtue, esp. in relation to truth and fair dealing; uprightness, honesty, sincerity'.[4] I find in the behaviour of his people, that is the personages he elected to represent or actually created, two salient appearances. One is the capacity of sexual selfishness, involving or leading to betrayal, to cause unhappiness, first represented in the Dido story of *The House of Fame*. In that and similar successive representations it is almost always the breach of faith, the dishonesty, not the sexuality, that seems designed by Chaucer to appal. The other appearance is mere crass dishonesty, practised for material gain. The common factor of deceit, the violation of what Chaucer called *trouthe*, I find related to a larger conception of human behaviour in which moral and aesthetic considerations become hard to distinguish, one which might even imply a Chaucerian or a fourteenth-century poetic.

The beginning of my demonstration is necessarily affective: the feeling of being directed by authorial emphasis. The sum of the philandering lies of Arcite in *Anelida and Arcite*, of Aeneas whose desertion is twice related, of Jason twice fugitive from obligations of sexual loyalty, of Theseus and Demophoon, inconstant father and inconstant son, seems too large to be judged in the mere ethos of *fine amour*. The adulteries of Phoebus's nameless wife, and of Alison in *The Miller's Tale*, and of the nameless wife of the merchant of St

Denys, and of Lady May in *The Merchant's Tale* amount to an augmentation of squalid deceit that silences in the end the laughter generic in the fabliau. In the material dishonesty of Manciple and Miller and Reeve and Shipman and Merchant there appears a scale: they assume an order of criminalty as peculating housekeeper and dishonest craftsman and crooked estate manager and pirate and international speculator. At two extremes of law the Serjeant and the Sumnour exploit human weakness. The alchemist Canon exploits covetousness, the Physician preys on fear of the plague, Friar and Pardoner on religious fears: frauds and charlatans and criminals and confidence tricksters.

Considerations of genre have only limited force in softening these impressions. For from the personages being so effectively, convincingly represented, they acquire a second aspect, have as it were two modes of existence. The one is indeed within the literary convention where they occur, with its own scheme of 'morality' or abeyance of morality, as in *fine amour* or fabliau. But the other is in the general actuality of the fourteenth century where Chaucer conceived and his public received them. This latter aspect the reader with historical awareness can never turn away from altogether. By the fact of invoking the convention of the mode or genre in extenuation of a personage's behaviour or as Chaucer's apparent condonation of this, he is acknowledging the paramountcy of the other, of the actual moral considerations. And those apply *a fortiori* if he scans, across the artificial generic boundaries, the whole population of Chaucer's oeuvre.

My reading proposes a development from court poet to moralist, and in particular to moralist preoccupied with *trouthe*, integrity. This is not radical. The moral orientation would be predictable in a serious and intelligent person in later fourteenth-century England from the pressure of social, religious and political conditions. As to the special concern, that is first of all implicit in Chaucer's situation as a court poet, having to write for the diversion of others probably of inferior education and culture, of having to adopt postures of little dignity such as that of the perennial lover,[5] of having to address a superior intellect and talent to trivialities. There will no doubt have been personalities then as now to whom such activity was not uncongenial: being very close to the great, having their material favour, would compensate for having always to agree with them, never to oppose their wish or judgement. That for Chaucer this seemed degrading appears from his Placebo of *The Merchant's Tale* (*I have now been a*

court-man al my lyf) represented as actually believing that the great do know better: *Nay, lordes ben no fooles, by my fay*,[6] a paradigm of successful self-deception compounding abject flattery. Chaucer's moment of realization will have been that in which he became aware of his strength, realized that he had learned from Machaut, court poet *par excellence*, all there was to learn there about poetry, and outstripped him. That is not a cynical observation: this was the moment of maturity when judgement became confident. And now fully self-aware, Chaucer would see in his own situation an implication of truth and falsehood, a concept of his own identity to which deceit and time-serving were repugnant. That concept will have extended to his art no later than his experience of reading Dante and presently Langland, experience of a wholly meaningful, uncompromising and valid poetry of truth.

By contrast he was discovering that some poets lie: this is registered in *The House of Fame*. One or the other version of that Dido story, whether Vergil's or Ovid's, had to be false. Here was an issue not merely of truth but of justice of report, and we must not patronizingly think the disagreement trivial. Those poets were *auctoritees*, Vergil as divinely favoured with the grace of messianic vision, Ovid if not actually a Christian saint at any rate an allegorical repository of truth.[7] Further, Chaucer may well have known, as Langland evidently did,[8] the friar John Ridevall's demonstration on grounds of chronology that it was impossible for Dido and Aeneas actually to have met:[9] that made both great poets great liars.

With the issue of literal truth of report there was associatively and conceptually linked that of truth of interpretation, of whatever class of text, scriptural, or otherwise sacred, or profane. The canonical limitation upon exegesis was lax in setting no requirement of intelligent relation between the literal and a higher sense: if the latter conformed to Christian doctrine it was acceptable.[10] The limit otherwise was the ingenuity of the exegete; this did not escape popular notice.[11] The unprincipled application of spiritual exegesis (called glozing in Langland and Chaucer) by the friars to their material advantage seems to have been a scandal.[12] Chaucer did not miss that this was a matter of intellectual as well as spiritual dishonesty: his friar in *The Sumnour's Tale*, undertaking to prove that the first Beatitude refers to the fraternal orders says, 'I don't think I have a scriptural text to prove that, but I'm bound to find it in some sort of gloss.[13]

In the moral thinking of Chaucer's time the related issues of

truth of report and truth of interpretation, which Chaucer may himself have faced in composing his earliest surviving poem, when he represented the courtship of the Black Knight whose topical referent was John of Gaunt as that of an innocent youth,[14] were comprised in the enveloping conception of personal morality which we denote by 'integrity'. That actual word Chaucer almost certainly did not use; indeed if it was current in his English—the indications are not clear—it did not have the sense we give it. For that sense the word Chaucer used was *trouthe*.

Trouthe appears with a comprehensive moral meaning in the first version of *Piers Plowman*, that is, earlier than the first acceptable *O.E.D.* citation, from a Wyclif text dated 1382.[15] Without counting his personifications Langland uses the word in at least a dozen distinct senses. Three in particular concern my argument. One is 'honesty, honest practice, fair dealing', specifically in money relationships,[16] which *O.E.D.* does not isolate. A second is the one *O.E.D.* glosses 'Honesty, uprightness, righteousness, virtue, integrity',[17] represented in *Piers Plowman* in the sensational context of the salvation of the righteous heathen as a moral condition valuable without reference to religious doctrine. The third is 'Conduct in accordance with the divine standard; spirituality of life and behaviour';[18] again the *Piers Plowman* use is earlier than the Wyclif citation in the *Dictionary*. Those meanings, two of which together constitute what we today denote by 'integrity', are clearly established by their contexts. A fourteenth-century reader of the poem would have been directed to analyse them by the unmistakable complexity and possible novelty of Langland's generally polysemous use of the term: he also appears in *O.E.D.* (for what that is worth) as the first to have used the word to mean 'true statement or account, that which is in accordance with the fact',[19] and to mean 'true religious belief or doctrine',[20] and to have personified it as the Deity.[21] As the occurrences of this word multiplied there would necessarily develop in Langland's reader a sense of the extent of its implications of meaning.

What seems indicated by such lexicographical evidence—my brief demonstration could be extended,[22] and it is not material whether Langland was the innovator—is that in the 60s and 70s of the fourteenth century, Chaucer's artistically formative years, there was semantic development of a vernacular term for expressing a correspondingly developing moral and philosophical conception, that of the quality of a person's moral character seen as a whole rather than

with respect to some particular sin, a conception of integral personality as we today understand the term.[23]

Something like that conception had appeared, severely formulated, in the Thomist scheme, where indeed the term *integritas* is used to signify a condition in man of being without inclination to sin; that condition was lost with the fall of Adam. 'In the state of innocence man's soul was adapted to perfecting and controlling the body, as it is now. . . . But then it had this life in all its wholeness (*hujus vitae integritatem habebat*) in that the body was completely subordinated to the soul, hampering it not at all.'[24] Original sin, which we have inherited genetically from our first parents, 'is a disordered disposition growing from the dissolution of that harmony in which original justice' (that is man's primal innocence) 'consisted, . . . a *sickness of nature*'.[25] This is effectively the misery of the human condition feverishly described in the treatise by Innocent III that Chaucer in the mid-1390s claimed to have translated.[26]

There is no need to be concerned about whether Chaucer read the *Summa Theologiae*: the arguments assembled by Aquinas in his formulation of *integritas*, wholeness, were commonplaces of sermon and scriptural commentary, some from the time of Augustine onwards. They are implicit in Romans vii: 'I delight in the law of God after the inward man; but I see a different law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity under the law of sin which is in my members. . . . Who shall deliver me out of the body of this death?'[27] The relation between the two concepts of man's moral deficiency and his aspiration to an ideal moral condition evoke the third, of the return to a state of moral stability: liberation shall be from death, corruption, mutability. The liberating agency is truth,[28] *veritas per quam homines in presenti efficiuntur de regno Christi, . . . quedam impressio et participatio veritatis divine*, that 'truth by which men in this present life become of the kingdom of Christ, a certain imprint and sharing of the divine truth'.[29] Truth is a property of the *imago Dei*: everything is by so much of the more true *quanto imaginem Dei fidelius exprimit*, 'as it expresses the more faithfully the divine likeness'.[30] Through these and many similar commonplaces of later medieval theology the idea of truth came to embrace general moral excellence, ideal conduct.

It acquired extensions of meaning and emotional values well beyond the Aquinan formulation of integrity. A gloss on Pilate's question, *quid est veritas?* Chaucer's *what is trouthe or*

sothfastnesse?[31] proposes that the Roman saw it as a fundamental principle of humanity, *quoddam principium hominum.*[32] Truth may well, said Bishop Brinton in his last sermon at St Paul's, preached on the text *Veritas liberabit*, Chaucer's *trouthe thee shal delivere*, be likened to the light of the sun, enabling sight, constant and indistinguishable.[33] The most analytical and particularizing medieval examinations of behaviour, the penitentials, find the opposite of truth to be an element of every capital sin. The proud will sin by hypocrisy, the envious by malicious detraction, as will the wrathful. Moreover wrath *stryveth alday again trouthe*: it takes away the quiet of a man's heart and subverts his soul. Avarice promotes every kind of deceit, lies, thefts, dishonest trading, perjury. As to lechery, a consequence of that sin is *brekynge of feith; and certes, in feith is the keye of Cristendom. . . . This synne is eek a thefte, . . . the gretteste thefte that may be, for it is thefte of body and of soule.* Truth concerns even sloth, the sin of inertia: against that sin the remedy is constancy, stability of mind, *stedefast feith.*[34]

In the Aquinan conception the primal innocence, man's *integritas*, was a state of harmony.[35] Commentators extended that notion to the present life: evil or sin is nothing else but a deficiency of natural harmony, melody and rhythmic proportion (*defectus naturalis harmoniæ, modi & commensurationis*).[36] In a very popular secular treatise, the *Moralium Dogma Philosophorum*, where the ideal life is one of tranquil integrity according to the norm of reason (*in tranquillo honestatis uiuere et ad normam rationis uitam reducere*) the author substitutes for the figure of harmony one of perfectly tuned musical instruments.[37] Sin is not merely contrary to positive divine law: it is against reason, for man's proper motion is *secundum rectam rationem*, in accordance with right reason.[38] The light of the mind and the subject of reason (*materia rationis*) is truth.[39] Integrity constitutes its own imperative, and would so even were it possible to conceal one's actions from God.[40] The idea of the wholeness of excellence, with truth as its central principle, acquired æsthetic and philosophical extensions in consequence of which it could appear admirable from other considerations than those of moral theology. The imperfect realization of that ideal of human behaviour became, in my view, the principal formative concern of Chaucer's mature writing. His attitude to and expression of it are as complex as the interpretations of experience at his disposal were various. At one extreme stood Innocent's *De Miseria*: 'there are nowhere rest and

tranquility, nowhere peace and safety, but everywhere fear and trembling, everywhere grief and distress.'[41] At the other stood Boethius's *Consolation*, no less morally rigorous, but unremittingly serene and comforting. Somewhere between moved Seneca whom in *The Parson's Tale* Chaucer quotes in the company of Peter, Ezechiel, Augustine and Solomon,[42] who mocked the epistemologists, the only ancient philosopher much interested in individual personality, concerned to help men live in a sad, bad world.[43] Always there were the pulpit preachers who ensured there was no mistaking the sadness and badness: let Bishop Brinton, Richard II's confessor, speak for them from his last sermon: 'Whereas Truth once had three mansions, in that she dwelt in the heart without duplicity, in the mouth without faintheartedness, in the deed without shadiness (*Quia omnis qui facit veritatem venit ad lucem*: John iii), today she does not find a place to lay her head.'[44]

That dismal judgement is matched in Chaucer's moral balade *Lak of Stedfastnesse*: integrity is devalued, reason accounted idle talk, moral excellence no longer prevails, compassion is in exile, greed for profit blinds moral discernment.[45] If his command of the language of the moralist were in question it could be further shown by his descriptions of Parson and Plowman,[46] by the prologue to *The Man of Law's Tale*,[47] or the curtain lecture on the benefits of poverty in *The Wife of Bath's Tale*,[48] or by the startling outburst of injunction to those with charge of young persons in *The Physician's Tale*.[49] The question is rather, first, whether his moral concern was sustained, and in particular whether, as I believe, it centred on integrity, *trouthe*, and second, whether his work is the product of 'a struggle between the moralist who calls for judgement and the artist who refuses to judge, a struggle in which the artist usually prevails'.[50]

The two questions can be answered together by the proposition that the notion of a conflict between artist and moralist in later fourteenth-century England is both fallacious from its implicit assumption that the only kind of judgement is overt judgement and anachronistic in that the concept of amorality necessary for any 'victory' of artist over moralist did not then exist. Withholding overt judgement implies neither commendation nor condonation. At the same time the process of selection from observed or literary experience during artistic creation is a critical activity; the object of representation, whether a personage or its action, has come into being through acts of considered judgement by the artist.

In Chaucer's case the judgement will inevitably have been in terms of criteria accepted by his world as of absolute authority, those constituting Christian morality. That can be simply illustrated: the attributes, attitudes and behaviour of many of the Canterbury pilgrims correspond extensively to centuries-old formulations of estates satire.[51] Every such correspondence is the product of a decision by Chaucer, implies a moral judgement on his part, and will have evoked one from his public. Such judgements will, moreover, have been uniform, unlike our modern induced-stimulus reactions which differ with individual experience and environmental history. Whatever doctrinally fissile tendencies may have existed in the last decades of Chaucer's century, there was practically uniform acceptance of the moral system to which estates satire relates.

In that situation, for instance, the *Prologue* Narrator's approval of the Monk's contempt for the rule of his order[52] would necessarily appear preposterous rather than suggest authorial understanding and sympathy. It would raise the question why the actual poet had made the Monk's expression of contempt so strong. And Chaucer's audience would not fail to remark how many of the pilgrims belonged to estates notoriously vulnerable to satire, more properly to moral criticism, as if they had been selected for representation by the poet on that basis.[53] In modern critical terms, then, there is an implication that those pilgrims at any rate were not created for us to enjoy as charmingly quaint genre representations but are intensely dramatic realizations of various kinds of moral deficiency, of inharmonious personalities, exposed the more sharply to criticism by the vividness of their realization. And the implication extends to other Chaucerian personages which by their actions or attitudes invite moral criticism.

In identifying that implication I do not wish to suggest that Chaucer, whether he ever considered the question or not, was anything but first and foremost an artist, or that he was less concerned with poetic achievement than other poets of comparable stature, or indifferent to technical excellence, or lacking in emulation, or not passionate to meet his own standards as they mounted. My general proposition is that Chaucer's poetic had a peculiarly fourteenth-century character in which refinements of moral criticism and of literary effect are distinguishable only arbitrarily. I believe that in his historical circumstances considerations of morality were integrally a component of the truth of representation of a personality or an action: there could be a challenge to him as an artist to refine that

representation, and even refraining from the moral stance which we look for might become a part of the technique.

Indeed Chaucer can be observed studying techniques of indirect moral representation. For instance, there had by his time developed out of confession formulæ a literary convention of moral criticism by self-revelation.[54] A personification such as Anger or Sloth in *Piers Plowman*[55] would describe at length a variety of hamartiologically associated sins which he had committed or to which he was subject. Such a confession would be packed with individually convincing detail, but from such disparate situations as to imply changes of identity precluding the realization of the speaker as a dramatic personality.[56] Chaucer develops that convention in the *Pardoner's Prologue* by restricting the class of moral offence to what would be conceivable within a single identity. In the Pardoner's case, however, the dramatic improbability of such total self-exposure survives. Chaucer refines the convention to the point of transcending it in the *Wife of Bath's Prologue*. By coherency of circumstantial detail, a connotative imagery establishing her personality through its setting in a realizable world, and by a consummately devised, quint-essentially loquacious manner of speech he makes her self-exposure wholly credible.[57] Beyond that still he uses the technique as it were casually within a story, for instance with the friar of *The Sumnour's Tale* who unconsciously reveals his cynicism about preaching and exegesis. The occasions of the developing technique are moral ones, and as the technique advances it continues to serve moral ends. To be sure the development can be called essentially artistic, from a preacher's demonstration to dramatic representation. But from its use the two purposes are not separable: it is not possible to speak of either as in ascendancy. The circumstance that the poet is likely to have experienced the gratification of a sense of success at his achievement is not immediately relevant.

Another probably self-gratifying device which Chaucer used extensively with varying subtlety is allusion evocative of moral criticism. In representations of estates satire types there is, for example, direct quotation as when the Monk of the *Prologue* sets no store by the comparison of religious who break the claustral rule to fish out of water.[58] But further, when the same Monk asks, *How shall the world be served?* there is at least a double allusion, in *world* to the moral maxim, *Si quis amat Cristum mundum non diligit istum*,[59] and in *served* to the servitude implied in *Quis liberabit?* Mention of food

in connection with Friar or Sumnour or Pardoner recalls a current condemnatory quotation, *Vos qui peccata hominum comeditis*, 'You whose food comes from the sins of men, unless you pour out tears and prayers for them you shall vomit up in torment that which you consumed with delight.'[60] The Friar in the Canterbury *Prologue* and the Wife of Bath in hers are substantially direct quotations from the *Roman de la Rose*.[61] That professedly reformed libertine, the knight of *The Merchant's Tale*, was born in Pavia where traditionally not even a Hippolytus would be able to preserve his virtue overnight.[62] When Alison in *The Miller's Tale* had sworn to be Nicholas's mistress, 'Then as it happened', the story goes on, 'she went to the parish church' *Cristes owene werkes for to werche*; in due course their lovemaking was punctuated by church bells and the sound of choral singing.[63] The monk of *The Shipman's Tale*, propositioning the merchant's wife, swears his love for her by his *professioun*, his monastic vows.[64] Such quotations or allusions, too frequent to be accidental—and Chaucer's contemporary audience would be more fully attuned to them than we are—would by their nature operate as moral directives through their discordancy. They would imply some falseness, a lack of integrity in the object of representation. At the same time from their variety, subtlety and abundance Chaucer's pleasure in their use seems unmistakable.

In such devices the common element of discrepancy, disharmony, the ironic component, is effective only in terms of the morality which it recalls. In another kind of situation, as for instance when the *Prologue* Narrator calls the Monk 'supremely handsome', *a fair for the maistrie*,[65] and presently describes a grotesque figure bald as a coot, sweating profusely, grossly fat and with bulging eyes, a choice is put to the audience between accepting critical direction and acquiescing in the preposterous. In the allusions the choice lies between the moral reminder being deliberate and fortuitous. In the namelessness of the adulterous wife of *The Shipman's Tale* it is between seeing her essential moral nonentity and presuming oversight by the poet. In the association of the love affairs of lovely Alison and Lady May with excremental functions it is between an intention of the poet to degrade them as sexual adventures and his tastelessness.[66] In the fine high style of Lady May's protestations of virtue just before she couples with Damyan[67] it is between an intention to signify the outrageousness of her lie and the poet's tone-deafness.

In all such instances, as in Chaucer's larger ironies like the

commendation of the Monk I earlier mentioned, the appearance of discrepancy, or implication of falsehood, or possibility of misconception, of false reading, reflects an authorial judgement and directs the reader to repeat it, awakens a responsibility for evaluation in him. Moral judgement is between good and evil: Chaucer's directives may suggest that the decision is between integrity, a moral wholeness, and its opposite, the harmonious and the discordant, or the admirable and the ugly, falsehood being essentially ugly.

What Chaucer will seldom do is attach a moral label. I think this is from his having sensed that to do so with many of his subjects would falsify by oversimplification the representation of the unremittingly difficult choice which in his time shaped the human condition, that represented in Romans vii: 'I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see a different law in my members warring against the law of my mind and bringing me into captivity under the law of sin.' *Imfelix ego homo: quis me liberabit?*[68] 'I wish I had died the moment I was christened', says Langland's Everyman, Hawkin, 'it is so hard to live and be a sinner'.[69] Chaucer's poetic truth, the union of artist and moralist in him, is accuracy in representing that condition of conflict between the absolute excellence of the ideal and the power of the urge away from it. For total accuracy the difficulty of making what is known to be the right choice, or of identifying the right choice, or even of discerning or recalling that a choice exists, must be part of the representation. This Chaucer achieves by laying judgement upon the reader.

How variously he does this appears from, for example, the dilemma of Arveragus, the failure of Sir January in *The Merchant's Tale* to perceive the right alternative to his dissolute life, and the absence of a sense of sin in the adulterous couple of *The Shipman's Tale*. The first is the most complex: the direction lodges in the apparent paradox of Dorigen having to be untrue in order to be true. The story is an exemplary fable: the reader of Seneca and translator of Boethius did not work it over merely to produce a latter-day Breton lay. It illustrates a moral choice made in blindness: there is actually no dilemma. For, from the action being set in a pagan world[70] its characters by fourteenth-century thinking have imperfect spiritual understanding. Arveragus's difficulty of choice comes from not knowing that an oath given in jest or under misapprehension is not binding, that an oath to commit sin is not binding, even that Aurelius's recourse to magic would release Dorigen. A meaning of

the story then is the importance of a real, that is a Christian understanding of truth, even in its contextually limited sense of 'faith or loyalty as pledged in a promise or agreement'.[71] The reader's difficulty, beyond that of Arveragus, comes from that meaning being qualified by the story representing the compelling power of truth, even in the pagan setting. This touches the contemporary interest in the absolute worth of virtuous conduct; we recall how Langland used the term *trouthe* innovatively to describe the behaviour of Trajan, the righteous heathen. *Ne wolde neuere trewe god but trewe trupe were allowed*, 'God in his truth would wish nothing else but that real integrity, even in a pagan, should be rewarded.'[72] The qualification then is that truth even imperfectly understood and sought in error has intrinsic excellence. In the case of the old reprobate, Sir January, the question forced on the reader, how it was possible for him to be so ignorant of the moral teaching about matrimony (*A man may do no synne with his wyf, Ne hurte hymselven with his owene knyf*)[73] would raise a contemporary issue, beyond his spiritual condition, of the gravest concern: the failure of the priesthood in their duty of religious instruction, particularly as confessors. The suggestion is that January's spiritual advisors during and especially at the end of his libidinous career had been like Sir Penetrans Domos at the close of *Piers Plowman*, a succession of what Brinton called *infideles confessores*, 'who do not speak solid truths to their penitents and thereby convert them from their most evil ways',[74] but who, hearing confession *ful swetely* and giving *plesaunt* absolution, told him only what he wanted to hear. As to the couple in *The Shipman's Tale*, the most striking feature of their representation is that they appear wholly without sense of guilt or moral offence. This effect Chaucer ensures by two means. First he gives the action a clear moral reference by making the adulterer a monk, and maintains that reference by a striking number of pious oaths and invocations during the arrangement of the assignation,[75] by the gratuitous detail that a young girl in the woman's care (whether her own child or not) is present while the monk and woman come to terms and he handles and kisses her,[76] and by references to religious observance: the monk is reading his breviary when they meet, he says a mass before dinner. Second, by details of style he suggests the attitudes of the personages: the monk's devotions are *his thynges*; the mass is said *hastily*, the first of a crescendo of adverbs mounting to his dining *richely*, splendidly.[77] If the moral direction of the apparently

toneless and detached but deeply ironic representation is accepted, then the circumstance that the adulterers not only lack a sense of guilt but are pleased with what they have brought off is to be seen as not merely spiritual blindness, but *elacio inobedience*, exultation in their offence, a spiritual condition, Brinton observes, 'to be detested'.[78]

The extremes of attitude, unnatural sense of obligation shown in Arveragus of *The Franklin's Tale* and effortlessly fluent deceit in the tales of Merchant and Shipman, suggest three features of Chaucer's situation. One is that the various concepts denoted by the word *trouthe* constituted for him an ideal of morality, *the hyeste thyng that man may kepe*,[79] and its extremes of disappointment: *Trouthe is a thyng that I wol evere kepe Unto that day in which that I shal crepe Into my grave, and ellis God forbede*, says the charlatan alchemist in *The Canon's Yeoman's Tale* as part of his patter.[80] A second is that Chaucer found it possible to realize the larger ideal of integrity through narrative action only in special settings. Of this there are two striking instances. It is the unreality of the Franklin's Breton fairytale world that authenticates the infectious excellence of its personages, whereby in their behaviour the initially limited expression of *trouthe*, 'fidelity to a pledge',[81] growing by evocation of fine sensibility in Aurelius and generosity in the *philosophre*, comes to seem to have the dimensions of integrity, 'the character of uncorrupted virtue, esp. in relation to truth and fair dealing'.[82] And the exalted religiosity of *The Second Nun's Tale*, the legendary undiminished virtue of the early Church, exhibited in Cecilie's fervour, lends credit to her remarkable conversion of her husband, and his of his brother, this other set of infectiously excellent actions realizing a *trouthe* with the embracing sense 'True religious belief or doctrine'.[83] A third feature is that in Chaucer's representations of an actual world the ideal of integrity is generally realized in specific and limited forms of truth, as keeping the pledged word, the marriage vow, the religious profession, being honest in material things, and in terms of the commandments rather than any high philosophical principle. And to judge by his choice of subjects he saw even that limited truth as most often unfulfilled. At any rate among his lay personages, especially men, there are not many to whom, as to the Knight, he attributes devotion to integrity, *trouthe*, in any large, unqualified sense.[84] Even the wise and chivalrous Theseus of *The Knight's Tale* has, we recall, a past of *grete untrouthe of love*.[85]

In that situation Chaucer developed the art of representing human

behaviour to the point where, apparently, giving it the label 'wicked' seemed to him an inferior artistic procedure. In representations from actual life he praises more often than he condemns, and his conferments of approval made from a moral stance are positive and clear. Clergy and church officials are a case in point. There is no shading in the descriptions of Parson and.Plowman. Those two figures instance unmistakably, and are commended for, the virtues opposed to the traditionally formulated vices of their estates, the Parson in that respect a foil of perfection for Langland's delinquent pastoral clergy. In the case of other clerics and the minor officials of the ecclesiastical system his technique is indirect, to build into representations of their persons and activities, taken ostensibly at their own valuation, a variety of more or less subtle indices of their inadequacies as personalities, symptoms of disharmony in their lives, the traits revealing of moral deficiency, the false elements.[86] The effect is to devalue the whole character: whatever excellent attributes it might possess, the energy of the Monk, the persuasiveness of the Friar, the compassion of the Prioress are made, as falsely applied, to seem of little account from the implicit failure of *trouthe*, to a vow, a purpose of order, a right conduct. The method functions, with lay folk as with clerics, through the constant relevance, pervasiveness of the moral considerations which were determinants in the fourteenth-century understanding of personality, as a part of the individual's self-awareness and of other people's awareness of him. That is the circumstance which determines that in the Chaucerian poetic considerations of art and morality become indistinguishable.

Having refined this poetic excellently Chaucer nevertheless composed the prayer for forgiveness that appears at the end of *The Parson's Tale*, that *myrie tale in prose* designed to conclude his unfinished Canterbury scheme, *To knytte up al this feeste, and make an ende.*[87] Why, if Chaucer's art is essentially moral by his design, did he think to need such abasement, such debasement we might think, of his own creation?[88] My answer lies in the prevalent eschatological obsession of his time. I venture the historical opinion that the cruel logic of Christian morality was not often in the English Middle Ages as rigorously applied as toward the end of the fourteenth century, to oppress the thinking Christian with a sense of general moral deficiency (*I leue fewe ben goode*)[89] to the point where he might have no reasonable or confident hope of being saved.[90] And if he threw himself upon divine love and mercy he was risking delusion: 'Let no

man flatter himself', Innocent had written, 'by saying, "God will in the end relent; He will not be wrathful for eternity"'. *O spes inanis, o falsa presumptio.*[91] Given the constant awareness of moral issues evident in Chaucer's writings there is no ground at all for thinking him unconcerned about the state and fate of his own soul.

I have proposed that in his later works art and morality are inseparable, but he wrote of *translacions and enditynges of worldly vanitees*, and tales *that sownen into synne*, and prayed for intercession and forgiveness. There is a standard doctrinal explanation for that earnest prayer. The works in question could for the spiritually less developed reader be 'dangerous' in that their external worldliness, the magnificently represented beauty of the false good, or what Langland would have called the *harlotry*, the low comedy in them, might distract him from their essential morality. They were artistically too advanced; their morality was buried too deep, and in this Chaucer had placed his reader in proximate spiritual danger to his faith or morals.

Moreover, the poet was in moral danger himself simply in the execution of his art, the entertainment of the multiplicity of pleasurable technical considerations which in sum constitute literary activity. Its self-gratifying nature, the enjoyable sense of achievement, carried a risk of the sin of pride, and if persisted in with increased accomplishment, amounted to an *elacio inobediencie* of the artist; we recall Langland representing his Dreamer as rebuked for mere intellectual excitement: 'You are morally imperfect, *oon of Prides knyȝtes*, a companion of the standard-bearer of Antichrist.'[92] Worse still, in any gratification experienced at the pointing of moral offence the poet could fail in compassion, in charity. He could sin by motive in the course of representing man's sinfulness, the representation becoming an end in itself, pursued in vanity, or by designing the representation to give pleasure to others for his own credit, making capital of human weakness: *vos qui peccata hominum comeditis. . . .*[93] We must credit him with the moral sophistication implied by awareness of those possibilities. And there was the overriding question whether the composition of poetry on profane subjects was morally justifiable at all: the discussion, from early Christian times to Chaucer's own day had not produced a generally accepted affirmative answer.[94] Best, if one had been unable to leave meddling with poetry alone, not to rely on high-flown justifications of the activity[95] but to stand at the back of the temple

with the publican, or to confess with Langland's Dreamer, *ich haue tynt tyme and tyme mysspended.*[96]

For in the danger of sin there was fear—whatever historical effort it may take we must remember that—such as reduced, even negated any artistic ascendancy, indeed devalued the very practice of his art, diverting his concern from any broad philosophical ideal of essential truth to personality he might have developed and cherished, to his own spiritual condition, by representing the need to be saved. That fear would turn him to a truth more instant in his need, the one proclaimed in the refrain of his balade *Truth*,[97] *a veritas . . . que Christus est*, liberating from death, corruption, the mortal body, servitude to sin and the devil[98] *tanquam causa efficiens, gratiam influens*, as an efficient cause, infusing grace.[99] In his sense of need for that grace and liberation Chaucer was a creature of his time.[100]

The liberating truth : the concept of integrity in Chaucer's writings: the John Coffin Memorial Lecture delivered before the University of London on 11 May, 1979

4 The Liberating Truth: The Concept of Integrity in Chaucer's Writings

1 Charles Muscatine, *Poetry and Crisis in the Age of Chaucer*, Notre Dame, 1972.
2 Alfred David, *The Strumpet Muse: Art and Morals in Chaucer's Poetry*, Bloomington, 1976. See esp. pp. 36, 239.
3 Since writing this lecture I have found most welcome support for my position in an essay by the late Rosemary Woolf, 'Moral Chaucer and Kindly Gower', in *J. R. R. Tolkien, Scholar and Storyteller: Essays in Memoriam*, eds. Mary Salu and Robert T. Farrell, Ithaca, 1979, pp.

221–45. There is also George R. Stewart, 'The Moral Chaucer', in *Essays in Criticism by Members of the Department of English*, University of California, Berkeley, 1929, pp. 91–109.

4 See pp. 50 ff., and notes 16, 17.

5 See for example Normand Cartier, '*Le Bleu Chevalier* de Foissart et *Le Livre de la Duchesse* de Chaucer', pp. 241f.

6 ɪᴠ 1505, and compare 1491ff. Chaucer references are to *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. F. N. Robinson, 2nd edn, Cambridge, Mass, 1957.

7 See for instance Judson B. Allen, *The Friar as Critic*, Nashville, 1971, p. 60 n. 18 and below, p. 264, n. 20.

8 This is clear from the friar's use of the name as a term of discredit in *It is but a dido, . . . a disours tale*, in xɪɪɪ 172. *Piers Plowman* references are to G. Kane and E. T. Donaldson, *Piers Plowman: the B Version*, London, 1975, unless otherwise indicated.

9 Beryl Smalley, *English Friars and Antiquity in the Early Fourteenth Century*, Oxford, 1960, pp. 130, 131. It is intriguing to speculate what Chaucer, if he read Boccaccio's De *Genealogia*, made of that man's attempt to justify Vergil's invention (Charles G. Osgood, ed. and transl., *Boccaccio on Poetry*, New York, repr. 1956, pp. 67–9).

10 Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, Oxford, 1941, pp. 216, 217; Allen, *The Friar as Critic*, pp. 58, 59.

11 Smalley, op. cit., p. 217.

12 See for example *Piers Plowman* B Prol. 60, 61; x 197; xɪɪɪ 75; xɪx 221; xx 125, 368.

13 ɪɪɪ 1919, 1920 I ne have no text of it, as I suppose,
    But I shal fynde it in a maner glose.

14 Sydney Armitage-Smith, *John of Gaunt*, London, 1964, pp. 460, 461, adduces evidence which suggests that Gaunt fathered a daughter on a maid of honour of Queen Philippa either before or during his marriage to Blanche of Lancaster. He argues for the earlier event, but either interpretation would support my point.

15 G. Kane, *Piers Plowman: the A Version*, London, 1960, ɪ 132 (B ɪ 145); ɪᴠ 101 (B ɪᴠ 114); ᴠɪɪ 62 (B ᴠɪ 68) where the word has the sense of *O.E.D. Truth*, sb. 9b, 'Conduct in accordance with the divine standard; spirituality of life and behaviour'. This use is frequent in B where once (ɪ 131) *truþe þat is þe beste* actually replaces A's *perfite werkis* (ɪ 120). The *Dictionary*'s earlier *Cursor Mundi* citation under s.v. 4, 'Disposition to speak or act truly or without deceit; truthfulness, veracity, sincerity; formerly sometimes in wider sense: Honesty, uprightness, righteousness, virtue, integrity', is mistaken. This use refers to the Deity, and would belong with the one in *Pearl* 495, *al is trawþe þat he con dresse* (*Pearl*, ed. E. V. Gordon, Oxford, 1953, p. 18). The meaning here is of

an infinite quality of God and belongs in a classification where there is no implication of a possibility of moral deficiency.

16 Instances are B ᴠɪ 96; xɪɪɪ 359; xᴠ 310; xɪx 194.

17 The uses occur at B xɪ 152, 156, 159(ɪ), 162, 164; xɪɪ 287, 290, 292. The meaning here is a contextual specialization of *O.E.D.* s.v. 4, 'Honesty, uprightness, . . . integrity', synonymous with *soopnesse* in xɪ 147, the quality for which the 'righteous heathen' Trajan was saved.

18 See note 15 above for examples.

19 *O.E.D.* s.v. 8, but the example there cited belongs under 9b:

> to louen þi lord leuere þan þiselue;
> No dedly synne to do, deye þeiȝ þow sholdest,
> This I trowe be truþe, B ɪ 143–5

'This, I am confident, is spirituality of life and behaviour.' More satisfactory examples, however, occur at B ɪᴠ 157; ᴠ 277; xᴠ 414; xx 161.

20 *O.E.D.* s.v. 9a: see A ᴠɪɪ 94 (B ᴠɪɪɪ 112). Langland also allegorizes this sense, as in A ɪɪ 86 (B ɪɪ 122) and notably in B xɪx 261, 333, and xx 53, 56.

21 *O.E.D.* s.v. 10b; cp. e.g. A ɪ 97, 122.

22 For example, the enlargement of the meaning of *trouthe* and its acquisition of status as an abstract term appear from Chaucer's use of it in *Lenvoy de Chaucer a Bukton* (*Works* p. 539) as a doublet for *sothfastnesse*. *Sothfastnesse* is his term for translating the philosophical abstraction *veritas* or *verite* in *Boece* and *Melibee*, with only one exception (*of ful sad trouthe* for *solidissimae veritatis* in *Boece* ᴠ pr. 6, 169). This exception, and his use of *trouthe* in glosses (ɪɪɪ metre ɪɪ, 16, 22 and ɪᴠ metre ɪ, 16: with the last, *of cleer trouthe*, compare *of cler sothfastnesse* for *perspicuae veritatis* in ɪᴠ pr. 4, 185) support the appearance. Langland's equivalent to *sothfastnesse*, which he uses only once in B, of the Second Person of the Trinity (xᴠɪ 186) is *soopnesse*, generally in personified abstraction, but once (xɪ 147) to denote the *trouthe* for which Trajan was saved. In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight trawþe* once unmistakably signifies an elaborately conceived wholeness of personality, 'integrity', but with a markedly religious and specifically devotional quality (*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, ed. J. R. R. Tolkien and E. V. Gordon, 2nd edn, rev. Norman Davis, Oxford, 1967, p. 18, lines 625ff.) In *Confessio Amantis trouthe*, variously the philosophical abstraction and its realization in personal integrity, is the principal virtue—*lief To god and ek to man also*—commended by Aristotle to Alexander,

> For if men scholde trouthe seche
> And founde it not withinne a king
> It were an unsittende thing.
> The word is tokne of that withinne.

(*The English Works of John Gower*, ed. G. C. Macaulay, II, EETSES 82, London, 1901, VII, 1723ff.) This is the *trouthe* Richard is enjoined to cherish in the envoy to *Lak of Stedfastnesse* (*Works*, p. 537). The subject is touched by Willi Héracourt, '*What is trouthe or soothfastnesse?*', *Englische Kultur in sprachwissenschaftlicher Deutung, Max Deutschbein zum 60. Geburtstag*, Leipzig, 1936, pp. 75–84, and by Geoffrey Shepherd, 'Make Believe: Chaucer's Rationale of Storytelling in *The House of Fame*', in *J. R. R. Tolkien, Scholar and Storyteller*, pp. 216, 17.

23 I have not come upon discussion of this conception as such in the ancient philosophers, though it seems likely to have existed. Seneca once refers to *religio, pietas, iustitia et omnis alius comitatus virtutum consertarum et inter se cohaerentium* (*L. Annaei Senecae ad Lucilivm Epistvlae Morales*, ed. L. D. Reynolds, Oxford, 1965, II, p. 332, lines 2, 3). Horace's *integer vitae scelerisque purus* (*Q. Horati Flacci Opera*, ed. H. W. Garrod, Oxford, 1912, Odes I, 22 line 1) comes to mind and looks like a reflection of Stoic teaching, but his lexicographer disappointingly glosses *integer* here *pius, innocens* (Dominicus Bo, *Lexicon Horatianum*, I, A–K, Hildesheim, 1965). The conception is occasionally suggested in the twelfth-century compilation of maxims mainly from Cicero's *De Officiis* and *Seneca's De Beneficiis* called *Moralium Dogma Philosophorum*, of which at least 15 Latin and two French manuscripts have survived in England. (John Holmberg, ed., *Das Moralium Dogma Philosophorum des Guillaume de Conches*, Uppsala, 1929, and see J. R. Williams, 'The Quest for the Author of the *Moralium Dogma Philosophorum*', *Speculum* XXXII, 1957, pp. 736–47 and Richard Hazelton, 'Chaucer's *Parson's Tale* and the *Moralium Dogma Philosophorum*', *Traditio* XVI, 1960, pp. 255–74.

24 St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiæ*, vol. 13, ed. and transl. Edmund Hill, New York, 1964, Ia 94,2, pp. 92, 93: '*Anima enim hominis in statu innocentiæ erat corpori perficiendo et gubernando accommodata, sicut et nunc; unde dicitur primus homo factus fuisse in animam viventem, id est corpori vitam dantem, scilicet animalem. Sed hujus vitæ integritatem habebat, inquantum corpus erat totaliter animæ subditum in nullo ipsam impediens.*' The translator notes, 'The English word 'integrity' has come to have a sense too restricted to morals, and a limited corner of morals at that, to serve to translate *integritas* in this context.'

25 *Summa Theologiæ*, vol. 26, ed. and transl. T. C. O'Brien, New York, 1965, Ia2æ, 82,1, pp. 30, 31. *Works*, p. 493.

26 *Prologue to the Legend of Good Women* G 414, *Works*, p. 493.

27 Verses 21–4: '*Inuenio igitur legem, volenti mihi facere bonum, quoniam mihi malum adiacet: condelector enim legi Dei secundum interiorem hominem: video autem aliam legem in membris meis, repugnantem legi mentis meæ, & captiuantem me in lege peccati, quæ est in membris meis. Infelix ego homo, quis me liberabit de corpore mortis huius?*' The con-

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nexion with original sin appears in the *Glossa Ordinaria*: '*Secundum interiorem. Ambrosius. Quia caro ex adam traducitur peccatum in se habet; si anima traduceretur et ipsa haberet, quia anima ade peccauit. Si vero anima peccatum in se haberet, homo non se cognosceret.*' and in the *Postilla*: '*Quoniam mihi malum adiacet. quia magis promptus est homo ad perficiendum malum in opere quam bonum, propter corruptionem nature.*' (*Biblia Sacra Cum Glossa Ordinaria Walafridi aliorumque et interlineari Anselmi Laudunensis*, Basel, Froben and Petri, 1498, vol. vi.

28 John viii 32: '*Si vos manseritis in sermone meo, vere discipuli mei eritis, et cognoscetis veritatem, et veritas liberabit vos.*'

29 Nicholas de Lyra, *Postilla* on John xviii 38, *Quid est veritas?*: '*Non querit diffinitionem veritatis set querit que est illa veritas cuius virtute et participatione homines efficiuntur de regno christi. Intellexit enim per hoc in quodam generali aliquid dominium existens extra communem modum hominum. Et hoc est verum si intelligatur determinate et magis in particulari: quia veritas diuina filio appropriatur. Veritas per quam homines in presenti efficiuntur de regno Christi est quedam impressio et participatio veritatis diuine.*'

30 *Ioannis Saresberiensis Episcopi Carnotensis Metalogicon*, ed. Clemens C. Webb, Oxford, 1929, IV, 39, 942a lines 3–7: '*Est autem primeua ueritas in maiestate diuina. Alia uero est, que in diuinitatis consistit imagine, id est in imitatione. Omnis enim res tanto uerius est, quanto imaginem Dei fidelius exprimit; et quanto ab ea magis deficit, tanto falsius euanescit.*'

31 John xviii 38 and *Lenvoy de Chaucer a Bukton*, line 2, *Works*, p. 539. Chaucer's apparently frivolous use of a scriptural quotation here should not suggest lack of respect for its subject. Compare Dante echoing Luke xxiii 46 and Psalm xxx 6 in the lyric,

> Ne le man vostre, gentil donna mia,
> raccommando lo spirito che more.

(K. Foster and P. Boyde, ed., *Dante's Lyric Poetry*, Oxford, 1972, I, p. 52), and, for other instances, op. cit. II, p. 87, note 1–2.

32 So it appeared in the mid-fifteenth century to Denis the Carthusian, interpreting John xviii 38: *Doctoris Estatici D. Dionysii Cartusiani Opera Omnia in Unum Corpus Digesta*, Montreuil, 1901, XII, p. 587. I have heard this commentator described as highly conventional.

33 Sister Mary Aquinas Devlin ed., *The Sermons of Thomas Brinton, Bishop of Rochester (1373–89)*, Camden Third Series, vols LXXXV, LXXXVI, London, 1954, II, p. 496. Evidence that Brinton did not compose all the sermons in the collection there published does not bear on this very personal one (See the review by H. G. Richardson in *Speculum* XXX, 1955, pp. 267–71). Brinton had taken *veritas liberabit*, the *thema extraordinarium* of his last sermon, as a motto when he came to the see of

Rochester (Devlin op. cit., pp. 496, 7). This subject in its spiritual implication was in the air. There is no need to account for Chaucer's alertness to it as a distillation of Boethian philosophy, and a historical unlikelihood that Chaucer in the balade *Truth* intended 'reference to a great world force, which under any condition, independently of the actions of men, will deliver the world and redress its evils'. (So B. L. Jefferson, *Chaucer and the Consolation of Philosophy of Boethius*, Princeton, 1917, repr. New York, 1965, pp. 116ff, 119.)

34 Chaucer, *Parson's Tale*, x 393, 486, 560, 565, 566, 611–17, 638, 643, 644, 736, 874–86.

35 *Summa Theologiæ Ia2æ*, 82, 1 (vol. 26, p. 30) and see C. Vollert, 'The Two Senses of Original Justice in Medieval Theology', *Theological Studies* V, 1944, pp. 16, 17.

36 *Hugonis de Sancto Charo . . . Tomus Sextus in Evangelia . . . in quo declarantur sensus omnes*, Venice, 1732, p. 341, col. 1.

37 Pp. 72, 73.

38 *Postilla* on John viii 34, *Qui facit peccatum seruus est peccati*: '*In opere autem peccati homo mouetur contra illud quod est sibi proprium, quia uiuere secundum rectam rationem est proprius hominis motus. . . . In peccato autem homo mouetur contra rectam rationem, et ideo licet peccatum sit voluntarium; tamen in ipso consistit maxima seruitus.*'

39 *Metalogicon*, iv 39, 942a line 21: *Veritas autem est lux mentis et materia rationis.*

40 *Moralium Dogma Philosophorum*, p. 71: '*Satis enim nobis persuasum debet esse, etiam si deos omnes celare possimus, nichil tamen auare, nichil libidinose, nichil inconuenienter esse faciendum.*' See also note, p. 193: *De Officiis*, the source of this passage, reads *incontinenter esse* etc. Compare *Parson's Tale*, x 144: *lo, what Seneca . . . seith. . . .* '*Though I wiste that neither God ne man ne sholde nevere knowe it, yet wolde I have desdayn for to do synne.*' Compare p. 69 above.

41 *Lotario dei Segni (Pope Innocent III) De Miseria Condicionis Humanae*, ed. Robert E. Lewis, Athens, Georgia, 1978, p. 129: '*Nusquam est quies et tranquillitas, nusquam pax et securitas; ubique est timor et tremor, ubique labor et dolor.*'

42 *Parson's Tale*, x 141–55. In Pennaforte the two citations of 141–5 appear in inverse order, and the Parson's second one is attributed simply to *Philosophus*. Robinson notes (*Works*, p. 769) that the citation in 466–8 is from *De Clementia*. See Robert C. Fox, 'The Philosophre of Chaucer's Parson', *Modern Language Notes* LXXV, 1960, pp. 101, 102. Elsewhere in *The Parson's Tale* (484, 534–7) the *philosophre* is Aristotle. (A. C. V. Schmidt, 'Chaucer's "philosophre": a Note on "The Parson's Tale" 534–7', *Notes & Queries* CCXIII, 1968, pp. 327, 328.) See also Harry M. Ayres, 'Chaucer and Seneca', *Romanic Review*, x, 1919, pp. 1–15.

Seneca was 'very popular throughout the Middle Ages, when he was considered to be almost a Church Father because of his supposed correspondence with St Paul'. Roberto Weiss, *Humanism in England During the Fifteenth Century*, Oxford, 2nd edn, 1957, p. 132.

43 See for instance Epistle 48, *Epistvlae Morales*, I, pp. 124–7.

44 *Sermons of Bishop Brinton* II, p. 497.

45 *Works*, p. 537.

46 I 477–541.

47 II 99–130.

48 III 1178–1204.

49 VI 91–102.

50 This struggle produces, according to Alfred David (op. cit. p. 36) 'the greatness of *Troilus* and of much else in Chaucer's poetry'.

51 See Jill Mann, *Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire*, Cambridge, 1973, passim.

52 I 183–8.

53 The notable instances are Monk, Friar, Prioress, Man of Law, Physician, Merchant and Guildsmen. The attributes of Knight, Parson and Plowman seem almost systematically opposed to the vices for which those classes are criticized in estates satire.

54 Morton W. Bloomfield, *The Seven Deadly Sins*, Michigan, 1952, pp. 175, 6.

55 B Text v 137–81, 385–440.

56 Anger, for instance, successively confesses to the hatred between friars and beneficed clergy, malice and envy in a nunnery, and tale-bearing in a monastery. Sloth has sinned as a man neglectful of his religious duties, as a parson ignorant through neglect of his duty, as a laggard debtor, a breaker of vows and maker of bad confessions, an employer behind with paying his servants, unappreciative of the kindnesses of his fellow Christians, wasteful of his substance, a person idle in his youth.

57 See Charles Muscatine, *Chaucer and the French Tradition*, Berkeley, 1957, pp. 204–13.

58 Compare *Piers Plowman* B x 298–304.

59 See John Alford, 'Some Unidentified Quotations in *Piers Plowman*', *Modern Philology* LXXII, 1975, p. 399.

60 *Vos qui peccata hominum comeditis, nisi pro eis lacrimas & oraciones effuderitis, ea que in delicijs comeditis in tormentis euometis (Piers Plowman* B XIII 45a). John Alford (private communication) suggests a connexion with Osee 4.8 *Peccata populi mei comedent*. I am not aware that this quotation has been identified.

61 See for example Dean S. Fansler, *Chaucer and the Roman de la Rose*, repr. Gloucester, Mass., 1965, pp. 162–74; Mann, op. cit., pp. 38, 39, 42, 46, 49, 124–6; Muscatine, *Chaucer and the French Tradition*, pp. 204, 205.

62

> quis Papiae demorans castus habeatur,
> ubi Venus digito iuvenes venatur,
> oculis illaqueat, facie praedatur?
> Si ponas Hippolytum hodie Papiae,
> non erit Hippolytus in sequenti die.

Confession of the Archpoet lines 30–4 in F. J. E. Raby, *The Oxford Book of Medieval Latin Verse*, Oxford, 1959, p. 264.

63 I 3307–9, 3655–6.

64 VII 155. See *O.E.D.* s.v. I 1.

65 I 165. That is the primary sense of the expression: see *M.E.D.* s.v. *fair* adj. la: 'Pleasing to the sight; good to look upon; beautiful, handsome, attractive: (a) of persons, more often of women but freq. of men', and *maistri(e* n. 3(f) *for (the)*   'to a well-nigh unequalled degree, as well as possible, very much, very'. As it became apparent to the hearer from the detail that this sense was inappropriate (198–202) he would look for another one, but having heard 166–97 he could not entertain the notion that the Monk's spirituality was being praised. The rest of his description (203–7) would confirm the exclusion.

66 I 3734; IV 1950–54. Compare Woolf, 'Moral Chaucer and Kindly Gower', p. 231: 'one of the most striking characteristics of [Chaucer's] narrative technique is the effect of continuous moral probing and of a sure and delicate sense of decorum, which never fail unless Chaucer contrives a deliberate breach.'

67 IV 2187–2206.

68 Verses 21–4.

69

> 'Allas', quod Haukyn þe Actif man þo, 'þat after my cristendom
> I ne hadde be deed and doluen for dowelis sake!
> So hard it is', quod haukyn, 'to lyue and to do synne.
> Synne seweþ vs euere.'
> *Piers Plowman* B XIV 323–6.

70 The prayer at v 1031–79 and the reference to the temple at 1306 make this clear. The conception of pagans with knowledge of a supreme deity (such as is invoked or addressed at 842, 865–92) would be familiar enough. On the quality of the oath see Woolf, op. cit. p. 240.

71 *O.E.D.* s.v. *Truth*, sb. 2.

72 B XII 287 ff. Chaucer's representations of the after-life of Arcite (I 2809, 10) and Troilus (v 1808–27) imply his awareness of the interest.

73 IV 1839, 40. Compare *Parson's Tale* 858: '*And for that many man weneth*

that he may nat synne, for no likerousnesse that he dooth with his wyf, certes, that opinion is fals. God woot, a man may sleen hymself with his owene knyf.'

74 *Sermons* II, p. 245: '*possunt confessores esse infideles, si sibi confessis non dicant solidas veritates vt eos conuertant a pessimis viis suis.*'

75 VII 113, 115, 125, 131, 135, 148, 151, 155, 166, 170, 178, 193, 208.

76 VII 95–7. The text does not show that she had gone or been sent away at 202, 203 where *he caughte hire by the flankes, And hire embraceth harde, and kiste hire ofte.* This circumstance calls to mind *Physician's Tale* VI 72–102, and specifically 67, 68: *Swich thynges maken children for to be To soon rype and boold, as men may se.*

77 VII 91, 251.

78 *Sermons* II, p. 274: '*in peccato [sunt] quattuor detestanda, scilicet vilitas macule, reactus (sc. reatus?) pene, quantitas offense, et elacio inobediencie.*

79 V 1479.

80 VIII 1044–6.

81 *O.E.D.* s.v. *Truth*, n. 2, 'One's faith or loyalty as pledged in a promise or agreement'.

82 *O.E.D.* s.v. *Integrity*, 3b and cp. *Truth*, n. 4.

83 *O.E.D.* s.v. *Truth*, n. 9.

84 I 46. The *trouthe* ascribed to Palamon in *The Knight's Tale* (I 2789) is specifically that of a 'servant' in love, and therefore no more than constancy of affection. Troilus is commended for his *trouthe*, along with other excellences, including *wisdom*, but by Pandarus (*Troilus and Criseyde* II 160); and the reader has already observed Troilus's defects of personality. His *trouthe* is sexual constancy. As for his *wisdom*, that is never apparent. Here, as elsewhere, Pandarus is lying.

85 *The Legend of Good Women*, 1890, *Works*, p. 510.

86 *Moralium Dogma Philosophorum*, p. 73: '*ut in fidibus musicorum aures uel minima sentiunt, sic nos, si uolumus esse acres uitiorum animaduersores, magna sepe intelligemus ex paruis: ex occulorum obtutu, ex remissis aut contractis superciliis, ex mesticia, ex hilaritate, ex risu, ex locutione, ex contentione uocis, ex summissione, ex ceteris similibus facile iudicabimus, quid eorum apte fiat quidue ab officio discrepet.*'

87 X 46, 47. The word *tale* can mean simply 'discourse'. For the tone of *myrie* see *Piers Plowman* B XIII 436–56.

88 The question is an old one that has elicited widely various answers. Some are sketched in 'Chaucer's Retraction: a Review of Opinion', by James D. Gordon, in *Studies in Medieval Literature in Honor of Professor Albert Croll Baugh*, ed. MacEdward Leach, Philadelphia, 1961, pp. 81–96, and in 'Chaucer's 'Retraction': Who Retracted What?' by Angus Cameron in *Humanities Association Bulletin* XVI, 1965, pp. 75–87. There

is a more recent study, 'Chaucer's 'Retractions'; the Conclusion of *The Canterbury Tales* and its Place in Literary Tradition', *Medium AEvum* XL, 1971, pp. 230–48 by Olive Sayce.

89 *Piers Plowman* B x 444.

90 This state of mind, a product of the development of the doctrines of divine justice and grace against the background of the Augustinian concept of predestination, had an intellectual basis which will have made it particularly distressing to a person of intelligence and sensibility, and hard to escape. It is like that identified by Carré in Fulke Greville's early seventeenth-century *Treatie on Humane Learning*, a 'passionate concern with individual salvation in the midst of a world that appeared politically and intellectually on the brink of collapse. . . . The teaching of Calvin and of Seneca combine to urge even graceful courtiers like its author to abandon all hope in philosophy and to clutch the austere comfort of religious stoicism.' (Meyrick H. Carré, *Phases of Thought in England*, Oxford, 1949, p. 220. The resemblance is strikingly apparent in the final chorus of Greville's *Mustapha*,

Oh wearisome condition of Humanity,
Borne vnder one law, to another, bound:

with its clear references to Romans vii 21–4 and Innocent's *De Miseria*. (*The Works in Verse and Prose Complete of . . . Fulke Greville, Lord Brooke*, ed. Alexander B. Grosart, III, repr. New York 1966, p. 416.)

91 *'Nullus sibi blandiatur et dicat quia "Deus non in finem irascetur, neque in eternum indignabitur," set "miseraciones eius super omnia opera eius," quia cum iratus est, non "obliviscitur misereri," nec quicquam eorum que fecit odit. Assumens in argumentum erroris quod ait Dominus per prophetam: "Congregabuntur in congregacione unius fascis in lacum, et clauden-/-tur in carcerem, et post multos dies visitabuntur." Homo namque peccavit ad tempus; non ergo omnes puniet in eternum. O spes inanis, o falsa presumpcio!'* The terrible feature of Innocent's argument against universalism (the passage is headed *'Quod reprobi nunquam liberabuntur pena'*) or even against undue confidence in divine grace and mercy, is the construction he puts on the 'comfortable words', the scriptural passages which might seem to offer hope to sinners: *'Predestinatis . . . Deus irascitur temporaliter. . . . De quibus illud accipitur: "Non in finem irascetur" et cetera. Reprobis autem Deus irascitur eternaliter.'* 'It is with the elect that God is wrathful for a time only.
Of them it is that this "He shall not be wrathful forever" is understood. With the reprobated, however, God is angry for eternity.' *De Miseria*, p. 217, lines 1–11, 22–5.

92 B xv 47–50; xx 69, 70.

93 See p. 29, note 60 above.

94 As far as I know the history of this subject has yet to be written. The chapter 'Poetry and Theology' and the excursus 'Early Christian and Medieval Literary Studies' in E. R. Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (tr. W. R. Trask, London, 1953, pp. 214–27 and 446–67) bear on it, as does a very interesting article by Glending Olson, 'Medieval Theory of Literature for Refreshment', *Studies in Philology* LXXI, 1974, pp. 291–313. Langland, referred to in this article on p. 303, had reservations about the subject, if I gauge his tone in XII 20 correctly, and he was writing religious verse. But cp. p. 68 above, and p. 264, n. 16.

95 Such as those advanced by Boccaccio in Book XIV of the *De Genealogia Deorum*.

96 *Piers Plowman* C VI 92–101 (W. W. Skeat, ed., *The Visions of William concerning Piers the Plowman . . . Text C*, EETS 54, London, 1873. All time not spent in pursuit of salvation is time lost. The Dreamer's interlocutors do not trouble to comment on his confession or expression of hope for grace. Reason says bluntly. 'I advise you, hasten to begin a commendable way of life, beneficial to the soul'; Conscience adds, 'Yes indeed, and persevere in it'. See pp 130 f. and p. 281 notes 31, 32.

97 *Works*, p. 536. This poem, beginning with a clear reference to Seneca's eighth epistle (*Epistvlae Morales* I, p. 14) and transforming its *vera libertas* (op. cit. p. 16, lines 2, 4) in the refrain that quotes John viii, to which it progresses by a succession of Boethian maxims and the religious commonplace of life as a pilgrimage, could be called an expression of Christian stoicism in the sense of Note 90 above.

98 This is the traditional interpretation of John viii 31, 32: 'Dicebat ergo Iesus ad eos, qui crediderunt ei, Iudæos: Si vos manseritis in sermone meo, veri discipuli mei eritis, & cognoscetis veritatem, et veritas liberabit vos.' The *Catena* ascribes it to Augustine: 'From what shall the truth free us, but from death, corruption, mutability, itself being immortal, uncorrupt, immutable?' (*Catena Aurea: Commentary on the Four Gospels Collected out of the Works of the Fathers by S. Thomas Aquinas*, IV, i, Oford, 1865, p. 303. It appears little different in the *Postilla* on John viii 33: *Et veritas liberabit vos quia in presenti veritas fidei liberat a seruitute culpe . . . et in futuro a seruitute miserie quando ipsa creatura liberabitur a corpore mortis,*' and is restated in the fifteenth century by Denis the Carthusian: *'liberabit, id est liberos faciet a servitute peccati et dæmonis, et in resurrectione liberabit a servitute poenæ et mortalitatis.'* (op. cit., p. 434.)

99 Denis the Carthusian, op. cit., p. 434. The context seems to require treating *influens* as a transitive verb, notwithstanding the dictionaries: it seems to be used for *infundens*. The alternative translation, 'abounding in grace', would make *gratiam* a somewhat recondite accusative of respect.

100 Sayce, 'Chaucer's 'Retractions'', pp. 245, 246, concludes that Chaucer in his prayer for forgiveness and intercession was 'not expressing a conventionally pious attitude' but 'ironic and humorous detachment. . . . Far from being a personal confession of literary sin, it is a conventional structural motif which is used as a vehicle for the expression of opposing æsthetic standpoints. By means of irony and humour Chaucer presents the problem in all its complexity.' The point is in identification of the problem: of Chaucer's personal salvation. Whatever knowledge he may have had of retractions and confessions by other poets such as he cites would have made his own a little less humiliating rather than induced a mindless conformity to convention. And if he had a sense of irony as he wrote his *retracciouns* this will have come from the superior knowledge of the vanity or worse of his works, which negated his sense of achievement, of artistic fulfilment: *Sapientia enim huius mundi stultitia est apud Deum*. As to the 'humour' of the presentation, I cannot see any. Rather I sense pathos in the statement, not least when perversely it breaks into a perfect specimen of the verse line that Chaucer had devised or naturalized, *and many a song and many a leccherous lay*.