The Tales of Magic

After the *Cook's Tale* there is nothing to do but start over. After the givenness of intentional social order has been allowed to degenerate into a commercial ménage à trois, and the duty of awarding a virgin has been transformed, by way of providing for a priest's bastard's daughter, to procuring for prostitutes, Chaucer turns from an array of orders in action to a normative array of disorders as such. These tales, which we consider under the rubric of magic, are the most miscellaneous in Chaucer's collection, and appropriately so, because disorder is infinitely various and miscellaneous. Important here are acts of real magic and the kindred deceptions which result from deceitful or mistaken appearances. In each case there is something, or someone, intrusive and individual, whose particular notion of truth, justice, and order is imposed on a situation. In each case also there is a particular area of human concern, or a particular part or level of reality, upon which disorder intrudes. These three elements—magic, intrusive individual, and the array of situations intruded upon—not only exemplify disorder but also define it. In the General Prologue it was both important and most interesting to ask the question, What general definition of man is implied by illustrating it in terms of arrays of status, learning, and stewardship?; here it is equally instructive to ask the question, What can we learn about human order by seeing what threatens it, and by seeing what areas of human concern are vulnerable to threat?

The importance of individualism as the basis of disorder is well illustrated by Robert Holkot's interpretation of the Phaeton story. After telling how Phaeton took the chariot of the sun and with it
brought the world nearly to ruin, he concludes: "Ita contingeret istis fatuis et praesumptuosis qui de divina gubernatione murmurant. Sed si secundum eos fieret gubernatio pro sua affectione sentiunt, et face- rent sua fatuitate, ut tota mundi machina solveretur." Such ruin, of course, is one possible result of skepticism, or of a nominalism run to excess. In the chiming slogans of popular rebellion, "When Adam delved and Eve span, who was then the gentleman," Chaucer would have been only too aware of the dangers which come when one tries to "take but degree away." In the tales of magic, Chaucer examines the possibilities and, with one exception, finds them wanting.

It is possible, even here among the magical tales themselves, to find an architectonic and contrapuntal order. In the earlier series, from *Knight's Tale* to *Cook's Tale*, we have a clear and simply linear series, through which authorities degenerate but justice (poetic if not legal) operates almost to the end. In the magic group coherence is, as might be expected, far more complicated. Several principles seem to be operating simultaneously, which together generate an order at the verbal or storial level which at once echoes an order which ought to be operating in the stories but is not, and organizes them into a mutually commenting series, in the typological fashion we have already defined. One such principle is the relationship of parody, by which the basic point of one story is repeated in another, but at another level. Another is the principle of thematic echo—as ordered here, the story series will introduce a theme, such as gentilesse, in one story, and elaborate a treatment of it in the next. These echoes interlock as well, forming a kind of thematic enthymeme. Another is the principle of echoed gloss—very often, here as elsewhere, Chaucer will include a detail which, to the medieval mind, has a conventional association based on some glossing tradition. Then, in the same or the next or a following tale, what was first evoked by allusion to an unstated gloss will receive explicit treatment. Finally, there is the principle of linear series, already established so clearly in the first group of tales.

The series begins with the *Tale of St. Cecilia*. Following the critical principle announced earlier, of taking prologues seriously as pro­logues, we should pay particular attention to what the Second Nun says by way of introduction, not as a way of understanding her, but as Chaucer's way of making a beginning for a series and of introducing and justifying the large concerns which that series will exemplify and define. In this prologue material there is a good deal of the sententious—a good deal of material that would qualify under the rubric of *accessus* as *definitiva, probativa, refutativa*. The stories which
follow, of course, belong to the modus tractandi of exemplorum positiva; if we are to receive them as exempla, we must first be told what they exemplify. This the prologue does.

At the outset we are advised to avoid the counsel of the Romance of the Rose:

The ministre and the norice unto vices,
Which that men clepe in English ydnelnesse,
That porter of the gate is of delices,
To eschue, and by hire contrarie hire oppresse,
That is to seyn, by leveful bisynesse,
Wel oghten we to doon al oure entente,
Lest that the feend thrugh ydnelnesse us hente.

For he that with his thousand cordes slye
Continuelly us waiteth to biclappe,
Whan he may man in ydnelnesse espye,
He kan so lightly cache hym in his trappe,
Til that a man be hent right by the lappe,
He nys nat war the feend hath hym in honde.
Wel oghte us werche, and ydnelnesse withstonde.

And though men dradden nevere for to dye,
Yet seen men wel by resoun, douteless,
That ydnelnesse is roten slogardy,
Of which ther nevere comth ne good n'encrees,
And syn that slouthe hire holdeth in a lees
Oonly to slepe, and for to ete and drynke,
And to devouren al that othere swynke,

And for to putte us fro swich ydnelnesse,
That cause is of so greet confusioun,
I have heer doon my feithful bisynesse . . .

(VIII [G] 1-24)

That is, to tell the story of Saint Cecilia.

The prologue continues with a lengthy Invocatio ad Mariam, the subject of an extensive analysis by Paul Clogan,² and a translation of the etymologizing on Saint Cecilia’s name from the Legenda Aurea. The Invocatio talks about faith and works, and makes at least this storytelling a work of business fit for the kingdom. The etymologizing underlines, by elaboration of metaphor, the proper ethical application of the story. Taken as a whole, this prologue tells us three very important things. First, this series of stories will not be concerned fundamentally and sententiously with carnal love—though that, for some of them, is their actual subject. Loving and lusty behavior,
rather, is exemplary of something of larger significance, in the way more nearly defined by the original poems of Alanus than by the incorrigibly sex-only orientation of the *Romance of the Rose.* Second, and to the same end, this prologue's emphasis on work, on the human condition, which Mary is supposed to help, and on the metaphoric applications of names, encourages us to take all the stories as exempla of *consuetudo* and *credulitas,* and that to earthly and ethical significances. Third, the prologue is an introduction, by explicit reference, to the *Friar's Tale* ("He nys nat war the feend hath hym in honde") and the *Pardoner's Tale* ("And though men dradden nevere for to dye"), as well as to the *Tale of St. Cecilia*—that is, to the three tales in this nine-tale series which deal with a divine intrusion into human affairs, rather than a human intrusion into some condition of ethical reality. As such, the introduction frames and introduces disorder, as it were, *in bono,* as we shall see. These tales frame the others; together, they are a normative array *in bono* and *in malo.* Pervasive in them all is a sense of what theologians call today "otherness"—one may call it a sense of the presence of God, a folktale atmosphere, a sense of archetype, hauntedness, magic. Under any name this dimension of the tales is appropriate to a treatment of the relation between order and disorder in a world whose ultimate orderliness is achieved either by miracle or after death.

The *Tale of St. Cecilia* is, as first in the series, the special and defining case. The *Friar's Tale* presents the retributive intrusion of the devil into the exploitative world of a wicked summoner; the *Pardoner's Tale* presents the intrusion of death into the order of drunken riot; both come to divinely good ends. But both are still, in human terms, both disorderly and about disorder. Saint Cecilia, on the other hand, is the single limiting case. Only the saint has absolute rights to civil disobedience; only by virtue (literally) of the grace of God does one have the power and the right to oppose one's individual, intrusive, invisibly crowned convictions to the good order of normal society. When the saint confronts the Roman Empire, it is the empire which eventually loses; when the Wife of Bath (and all others like her) wishfully defy the right of time to bring an old age, she must herself lose, and by losing convict and denounce, however nostalgically and with whatever bittersweet and Kittredgean regret, the faerie values and virtues by which one pretends, for a time, to swap loathly old age for youth again.

In this normative array of disorder, then, the *Tale of St. Cecilia* is properly first, to remind us that all human arrangements and all
ethical generalizations stand under possible correction from miracle and revelation, and at the same time to point, by contrast, to the futility of all intrusions and all disorders which lack the miracle of divine sanction.  

Chaucer underlines this contrast by parody, in the very next tale. Bruce Rosenberg has explained in full and elegant detail the parallelism which at once unites and contrasts these two tales, and so it is unnecessary here to do more than reaffirm the irony and underline the futility of merely human attempts at metamorphosis, by alchemy or magic or any other false power. It is, however, appropriate to mention that this series of human disorders, descending from and introduced by the saint's life, is distinguished from that saint's life, and introduced to the pilgrimage, by the most sweatingly violent intrusion into the world of the pilgrimage to be found anywhere in the links.

When the Canon's Yeoman intrudes upon the company of the pilgrimage, the series of disorders which he initiates seems merely miscellaneous but becomes ostentatiously linear when once we wonder what kind of order, in each case, is being violated. In alchemy, clearly, the fundamental order of elements, of natural substances, is the one which the fraudulent Canon seeks to overturn by changing base metals into gold and silver. In the Squire's Tale the slightly less fundamental but still natural barriers between sincerity and treason, between one place and another, between health and ill health, and between species are to be overcome by the magic horse, mirror, sword, and ring. Moreover, the fable of the faithless tercelet has birds aping the status of men and begins a discussion of gentilesse which will extend over several tales. The fundamental distinction made here is that between good behavior or appearance and the intrinsic gentilesse that comes from birth or some other absolute. Values, in the absolute sense, remain ambiguous. The Franklin's Tale also involves an intrusion upon an order of nature, in this case, a rocky coastline, but devolves into two more central concerns—the question of sovereignty between husband and wife, and the question of the relative gentilesse of members of three different status classes, knight, squire, and clerk. In the Franklin's Tale, moreover, there are quite pointed discussions of magic as false manipulation of appearances, and equally pointed assertions, by Dorigen, that her private notion of the world's good is more correct than God's. The Wife of Bath continues the discussion of sovereignty in marriage but comes to more radical conclusions; both her tale and her prologue, moreover, attempt fundamental mis-
constructions of the value and power of time—or successive history—the Wife by adopting experience as authority without accepting the old age whose wisdom that experience should produce, the loathly lady by being able herself to renew her youth and beauty. The *Friar's Tale* and the *Summoner's Tale* are both concerned with gifts, and with all the proprieties and agreements and relationships which result when people give gifts to one another. The fact that in both cases the gifts actually given involve elements of disaster should not prevent us from seeing through the ironies to the medieval truth, that *donum* or more properly *beneficium* was a fundamental instrument of social order. The *Physician's Tale* recounts a violation of the responsibility of a judge and governor—the theme of *iudicium*, which involves both the labeling of crime and the corresponding responsibility for the good of dependents, Chaucer underlines in a long initial digression. Finally, the *Pardoner's Tale* returns, inversely, to the beginning. As the saint finds a good end, with a holy virtue which not even the Roman Empire can withstand, so the three rioters find their bad end, representing as they do no order but the morning drunkenness of the tavern.

The progress here, from *Canon's Yeoman's Tale* to *Pardoner's Tale*, is from general to particular. From the general order of nature as a whole, composed of substances and distances and orders of creatures, we move to the smaller question of status, by which human society is ordered, and the still smaller question of time and history, by which changes occur that lead to wisdom. Still narrower in scope is the structure of *beneficium*, which in the Middle Ages never lost the personal involvement of individuals who gave and received and were therefore related. Narrower still is *iudicium*, by which the opinion of a single individual is received as true—and the British tradition of case law, already by Chaucer's time well established, would have underlined this individualism even when it was still possible, scholastically and philosophically, to believe in universal or natural law. At the same time, of course, idealistic notions of office and stewardship, analogous to the doctrine of the king's two bodies, which theoretically protected sovereignty from mere royal caprice, would have seen this individualism as orderly. Beyond this in the *Pardoner's Tale* is riot, chaos, and death.

Nature, status, history, benefice, and judgment are sociological or anthropological factors on the basis of which a coherent understanding of society may be easily formulated; such an understanding, how-
ever theoretically and abstractly devised, would turn out to fit the Middle Ages quite well. In order to realize this fact beyond doubt, it is only necessary to see that modern Western society is based on none of them, except perhaps judgment, and that of quite a different and less sacramental kind. We have in fact transmuted lead into gold, and B. F. Skinner at least claims to communicate with pigeons. Our factors, corresponding to these, would probably be technology, rank, process, contract, and expertise—on the basis of these, our society is very different, and very differently ordered, from that of the Middle Ages. Thus, Chaucer's intrusive disorders threaten, and in threatening, define, a medieval set of orders, not a modern one. This is most important. Neither order nor disorder is absolute; both may exist in various modes, depending on their interrelationships, and on the structure of the whole in which they operate. Above a certain level, all perfections must be defined by negation; Chaucer's array of disorders is calculated to define the perfection of his sense of order, and we will miss the greater part of his message if we do not keep firmly and emphatically in mind its difference from our own.

As we have shown, the intrusive disorders with which Theseus had to deal in the Knight's Tale traced to the fact that he had taken under his sovereignty an unawarded Amazon virgin and two Theban royal cousins. It is therefore most appropriate that the disorders in this magic group tend to arise most out of two general problems—the problem of awarding some woman (usually a virgin, but once and repeatedly a widow) in marriage, and the problem of male fellowship, usually for the sake of gold. Death, moreover, is much talked about and sometimes experienced in these magic tales. Love, as a source of physical life, struggles with death in the tales of the Second Nun, the Wife of Bath, the Franklin, and the Squire. In the first two, lovers stand under sentence of death, one for a higher and the other for a lower standard of love than their society admitted. In the second two, death is considered a possible relief from the difficulties of love. Lust for gold threatens to kill the souls of the protagonists in the tale of the Canon's Yeoman, the Friar, and the Summoner. The two senses of death, physical and spiritual, unite in the story of the Pardoner, in which avarice leads to violent crime and death. In addition to these obvious links of plot and character, the stories have in common a considerable preoccupation with the imagery of sight and the problem of perception.

The tale of Saint Cecilia begins with a version of Emelye's prayer:
She nevere cessed, as I writen fynde,
Of hir preyere, and God to love and drede,
Bisekyng hym to kepe hir maydenhede.

(VIII [G] 124-26)

The result of this prayer is a rather wife-dominated marriage, based on an initial, private, secret agreement, obviously evoking the marriage worked out between Arveragus and Dorigen. But Cecilia is no Amazon, and these arrangements, miraculous and disordering though they be in earthly terms, have divine sanction. To the unbaptized there is nothing particularly distinguished about Cecilia; for the baptized she wears a halo of heavenly roses and is accompanied by a heavenly guardian. Cecilia is, in a sense, the true alchemist's stone, for she is the material of the earth transmuted into a saint and thus a citizen of the heavenly city. Throughout the tale the emphasis is not on the violences perpetrated against the Christians, but rather on the strength and power of conversion, which has given the Christians themselves, whom Rome perceives as merely disorderly, a vision and foretaste of heaven.

The Canon and his yeoman, on the other hand, would not be able to see the heavenly crown. The prologue to their tale introduces two themes or narrative motifs—intrusion into an existing world, and the betrayal of fraternal relationships. The intrusion motif is fundamental for this group of tales; some variation of the motif of fraternal relationship occurs in a great many tales throughout the collection, and all relate to that initial fraternal relationship, itself betrayed, defined by the interaction of Palamon and Arcite. The intrusion parodies the miraculous one which preceded it; the Canon's Yeoman's betrayal of his master both evokes the fraternal dissension between Palamon and Arcite and introduces the confidence game which will be the object of the tale itself. These two tales, the saint's life and the tale of alchemical fraud, make an elegantly balanced pair. Rosenberg's explanation of this relationship we have already noted; here we should mention his emphasis on sight: “Insight leads Cecile to love God; mere physical sight causes the Canon and the priest to love the things of this world, and thus they turn away from God.” Rosenberg goes on to identify the bonds of imagery which draw together, through common words and descriptions, these two stories of heavenly and earthly transformations. As a pair, these two stories serve as guideposts to the two types of stories which will follow. In one, God creates a kingdom of safety and glory for his virgin brides,
preparing for them crowns of glory which mark them out among the faithful—there follow other brides and other safeties, more and more ironic and disastrous until, for Virginia, her bodily beauty is merely bad luck. In the other, the devil brands his dupes with a special kind of blindness which makes them see gold where there is none—there follow other dupes who see a good business partner where there is none and a chance for a pot of gold where there is none.

In the Squire's Tale we have a kingdom with a perfect king: "So excellent a lord in alle thyng./Hym lakked noght that longeth to a kyng" (V [F] 15–16). For him the usual disorders which beset society are to be solved by magic tools—the horse, the ring, the mirror, and the sword. He has an unawarded virgin, a daughter, who is to be won (eventually) much as was Emelye. As it stands, the tale is introductory, expository, almost eventless. The only complete action is the enclosed tale of the faithless tercelet, which the ring permits Canacee to hear, and perhaps be warned by.

In this tale we might pause at two significant allusions—the incident of the knight's riding armed into the banqueting hall, including a reference to Gawain, and the description of the faithless tercelet as like a snake and a tomb. The first permits one to suppose that Chaucer knew the Gawain and the Green Knight; the second, given Chaucer's language, seems clearly to relate to Christ's denunciation of the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23: as "whited sepulchres" and "generation of vipers." It is, we believe, generally recognized that Chaucer often derived his best ironies from implicit allusion and gloss. From these we should learn two very important things about disorder.

First, the intrusive, magical knight in Gawain and the Green Knight brings disorder, not order, as do his conventional analogues in the romance tradition. Gawain and the Green Knight has been variously interpreted; but all critics would certainly agree that the poem deals with an apparently disorderly intruder into an ordered world, who brings one member of that world to see that the full truth about whatever is true is more complicated and less stable than he had thought. The Squire's intrusive magic knight, clearly, teaches rather the opposite lesson. To the court of the already perfect king he brings a magical icing on the kingly cake—after this, nothing should ever go wrong. The ironies are obvious—and once seen in terms of secular order and disorder, the gifts of the intrusive knight are a parallel and parody of the gifts of God personified in Saint Cecilia and her Christian fellowship.
It is therefore most appropriate that the Squire’s developed interpretation of these gifts should be a “lewed” one, full of disagreement and comic pretentiousness, and references to contradictory legendary analogues. Chaucer is implicitly telling us what our opinion is worth if we wish to be impressed with these marvels. There is no need to analyze such obvious comedy in detail. For the sake of illustration, however, one might note that the word horsly with which the commons commend the magic horse, a word that Chaucer possibly coined, 12 is itself a parody of the human interest in definition. Such words as manly, kingly, and queenly are common parlance and indicate by their existence a pervasive human interest in the essence of something admired. But normally and straightly, such words tend to be made on the names of things noble, superior, and human—in contrast to which this “horsly” seems as incongruous as Eliza Doolittle’s father in his wedding clothes.

The relation of the faithless tercelet to the hypocritical scribes and Pharisees of the Gospel is clear in Chaucer’s introduction of him:

Right as a serpent hit hym under floures
Til he may seen his tyme for to byte,
Right so this god of loves ypocryte
Dooth so his cerymonyes and obeisaunces,
And kepeth in semblaunt alle his observaunces
That sownen into gentillesse of love.
As in a tounge is al the faire above,
And under is the corps, swich as ye woot,
Swich was this ypocritle, both coold and hoot.

(V [F] 512–20) 13

According to Hugh of St. Cher, the exegete who most frequently seems to fit Chaucer, 14 the Gospel denunciation may be applied to “prelati et magistri nostri temporis exterioris nitidi, interius fetidi.” 15 For our purposes this connection between the faithless tercelet and the scribes and Pharisees, and through them to “praelati et magistri,” expands the significance of this bird-fable love story to politics in general and permits us to relate this hypocrisy and irresponsibility to the frauds and crimes of the alchemist and the unjust Apius at least, and probably to the appearance-making magician of the Franklin’s Tale as well. The allusion, that is, permits one to generalize from a tale about love to a general insight about true and false responsibility in human relationships at large—that is, to see the faithless tercelet as representing a specific case of general disorder.

This love affair of birds also looks forward to the Franklin’s Tale: the
courtly love posturing through which both relationships are established; the falcon's agreement to obey, "kepynge the boundes of my worshipe evere" (V [F] 571), balancing Arveragus's agreement to obey "save that the name of soveraynetee" (V [F] 751); the departure of both males for the sake of honor—all these resemblances link the two stories. If the *Squire's Tale* is first of all an ironic undercutting of the magic that overcomes natural and inevitable difficulties, it is in its enclosed exemplum about gentilesse, and the rhetorics and hypocrisies and relationships within which gentilesse is defined, achieved, and betrayed. Gentilesse, of course, is the ground and definition of medieval status, the basis of social and even moral distinction.

It is therefore fitting that prologue material should have to do with gentilesse. The Squire's prologue is inconsequential; the Franklin's seems to be largely concerned with the relation between rhetoric and gentilesse, and with the desirability of learning "gentillesse aright."\(^{16}\) As the *Squire's Tale* has already made clear, the fit description of any ideal (in this case Canacee) requires

\[
\begin{align*}
\ldots \text{ a rethor excellent} \\
\text{That koude his colours longynge for that art}, \\
\text{If he sholde hire discryven every part.}
\end{align*}
\]

(V [F] 38-40)

Though the Squire does not think himself such a rhetor, the Franklin admires him as at least well on the way toward it and wishes that his own son were the equal of the Squire. That he is not, the Franklin blames on gambling (a link with the chaos of both the *Cook's Tale* and the of *Pardoner's Tale*) and on lack of good example. This, since the Franklin is a self-confessed "burel man," and since the Squire has presumably the example of his knightly father, is an admission of the Franklin's own deficiencies as an exemplary father. The prologue material, then, which links the *Squire's Tale* and the *Franklin's Tale*, relates status or gentilesse to rhetoric, to example, and to family. In doing so, the prologue announces the terms of the debate implicit in the stories, since the relative merits of birth and breeding, or family and example, are explicitly discussed and the necessity of rhetoric is equally explicit in Chaucer's skill as a storyteller.

The importance of rhetoric, both as a verbal technique and as the name for a complex focus of human ethical concern, cannot be too strongly emphasized. Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, after all, is in practice a manual for the expert manipulation of status differences as this manipulation enhances persuasive communication. Its medieval circula-
tion in ethical and political contexts rather than in contexts involving the verbal arts makes clear the very practical value which medieval people placed on such activities.\textsuperscript{17} Rhetoric, perceived medievally, was the prescribed behavior by means of which one constituted one's self a certain kind of social person. Rhetorical behavior determined kind, because it expressed status; it necessarily determined one's social being, because it governed all intelligibly decorous communication.

It is in these terms that we must see the \textit{Franklin's Tale}—not as the deciding tale in Kittredge's marriage group,\textsuperscript{18} but as a tale in which disorderly agreements about sovereignty and disorderly aspirations to possession and power come to no bad end largely because people try, in further disorderly fashion, to be more genteel than they really are. The fact that, in merely human terms, Dorigen and Arveragus have a happier marriage than does the Wife of Bath, or the Merchant's January and May, or Walter and Griselda, is significant only when thrown into relief by a modern determination to see it in the context of a marriage group. In isolation the courtliness of their relationship is ironic, even a little silly, and the contest in gentilesse is compromised by overtones of social climbing. In the context of a group of tales in which things are not as they seem—that is, in Ovidian terms, tales of magic—the fundamental disorderliness of their attitudes and arrangements becomes more visible. The happy ending is, in its own way, as much an ironic accident as is the poetic justice of the \textit{Miller's Tale} or the double twist of the \textit{Knight's Tale}, whereby each of the rivals gets what he prayed for, but no more. What the accident overrules is, in fact, the most explicit preference for human desire over what God has done in all the \textit{Canterbury Tales}. The Summoner and the alchemical Canon are uglier, and the Pardoner's rioters are more blasphemous, but Chaucer's language here in the \textit{Franklin's Tale} is the most clearly theological:

\begin{verbatim}
Eterne God, that thurgh thy purveiaunce
Ledest the world by certein governaunce,
In ydel, as men seyn, ye no thyng make.
But, Lord, thise grisly feendly rokkes blake,
That semen rather a foul confusion
Of werk than any fair creacion
Of swich a parfit wys God and a stable,
Why han ye wroght this werk unresonable?
I woot wel clerkes wol seyn as hem leste,
By argumentz, that al is for the beste,
\end{verbatim}
And when Dorigen explains to Averagus her predicament, her language explicitly prefers her own judgment above the will of God: "This is to muche, and it were Goddes wille" (V [F] 1471). 19

What this theologizing wants, really, is what the intrusive knight brings to Cambyuskan—that is, the magical power to overcome all naturally imposed obstacles to private desire and private good. To Dorigen nature has no purpose except to make her emotionally comfortable, and her fundamental and disorderly silliness is betrayed by the fact that she expresses her need and love for her husband and his safety by an impulsive promise to betray the very relationship with him which made her worry in the first place. 20 The happy ending of this relationship, which evokes that of the Knight's Tale, is as privately idyllic as can be desired:

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\text{Arveragus and Dorigen his wyf} \\
\text{In soveryn blisse leden forth hir lyf.} \\
\text{Nevere eft ne was there angre hem bitwene.} \\
\text{He cherisseth hir as though she were a queene,} \\
\text{And she was to hym trewe for everemoore.}
\]

(V [F] 1551–55)

She is, however, not a queen, and "soveryn blisse" is, in fact, reserved to heaven. The desire for an intrusive miracle, which will overcome natural evil, and the desire to pass responsibility, in a pinch, to someone else, which are the chief characteristics of Dorigen's sense of the order of things, are really appropriate to, and workable for, the saint. And in fact, as Donald Howard has shown, there are substantial parallels between this tale and the story of Saint Cecilia.

The marriage of Cecile and Valerian begins with a vow of chastity ... just as the marriage in the Franklin's Tale has begun with a vow of courtesy and mutual concession. The husband, with a lack of resistance probable only in hagiography, agrees to baptism and a life of chastity and he joins Cecile in the destiny of purity and martyrdom which the angel announces for them. The marriage here, unlike any previously mentioned, is the vehicle for Christian works. . . . There is a kind of mutuality in their relationship, a lack of any noticeable element of "maistrye." This, of course, is strikingly like the relationship in the Franklin's Tale, and it points to a crucial contrast. The vow in the Franklin's Tale is one of mutual concession; its purpose is the establishment of earthly concord. But the vow of the Second
Nun's Tale is a mutual subjugation of both their wills to the will of God, and its end is an eternal reward.  

The parallels redound ironically to reprove the Franklin's Tale's values, particularly since we should admit that the vows here are not really for the establishment of earthly concord but rather attempt the creation of a special case of concord, disorderly in its very essence because of the contradictory commitments it involves.

The other significant feature of the Franklin's Tale is the gentilesse contest, in which a squire attempts to demonstrate that he is as good as a knight, and a clerk that he is as good as a squire. Their mutual emulation is a parodic echo of the recognition in the Franklin's prologue that gentilesse depends upon good example; the fact that in each case, from knight to squire to clerk, the exercise of gentilesse consists of undoing rather than fulfilling the obligation of a plighted "truth" further underlines the essential disorderliness of this contest, whose only accidental result is an all-around happy ending—apart, we must presume, from Aurelius's continued amorous frustration. There is, in fact, no personal desire expressed in the whole of the tale—neither Arveragus's desire to adore his wife, nor her desire to rule him, nor her desire to change nature, nor Aurelius's desire for Dorigen and therefore for the help of magic, nor the magician's desire for real pay in exchange for illusory goods, nor anyone's desire for equivalent gentilesse, which would not, if allowed free rein, upset the totam machinam mundi. And we should not allow the "poetic injustice" of the tale to blind us to what it proposed, however harmlessly, in the end.

The Franklin, as he ends his tale, invites his audience to judgment: "Which was the mooste fre, as thynneth yow?" (V [F] 1622). With this invitation he begins a discussion of judgment which will climax with the disorderly Apius, who judges wrongly of a beautiful virgin. The same invitation is implicit in the Wife of Bath's Tale, covertly addressed to the audience. In the tales that follow, judgment, and wrong judgment at that, becomes more and more obviously the explicit concern within the tales, and the audience is invited, not to judge, but to observe judgment being made. That is, the act which the audience is overtly invited to perform becomes by gradual and implicating degrees the subject of the fiction itself; the posture of the audience is gradually absorbed into the series of tales in order to be evaluated by the events in those tales. Rhetorically, the audience faces a picture which turns out, eventually, to have the faces of the audience on the
bodies in the story, after the manner of carnival photographers' props. 

The last disorder before final calamity is bad judgment pure, in the case of Apius. Before that, however, we have other disorders, which arise as bad judgment is applied to specific situations—status, history, and beneficium, as we have said. The tale of the Wife of Bath, fifth in the series of tales of magic, is a story neglected too often in favor of the Wife's own very colorful life history. However, this tale of Arthur's court and the sinful knight who must go on a pilgrimage to discover woman's greatest desire is an important commentary on most of the major themes of disorder we have noticed. It deals with the problem of the unawarded virgin with brutal directness. It asserts, even more radically than do the interceding ladies in the Knight's Tale, the desire of courtly ladies to assume control over justice—the Arthurian queen and her attendants are the ones who decide the case and send the rapist to find "what thyng is it that wommen moost desiren" (III [D] 905). It admits, more radically than either Valerian or Arveragus, the sovereignty of woman in marriage. It continues, in explicit theoretical terms, the debate over gentilesse. It treats, in most miraculous terms, the theme of magical appearance and transformation. It ends with the predictable (and in practice unattainable) perfection: "And thus they lyve unto hir lyves ende/In parfit joye" (III [D] 1257-58).

It has been said many times and in many ways that the Wife of Bath's tale is a projection, into fiction, of what she desires most—the power to be young again, and to have in thrall a husband "meeke, yonge, and freshe abedde" (III [D] 1259). Failing this, she desires her audience to think of her, aged and somewhat coarse though she is, as still charming, attractive, lively, good company, and fun in bed. In this at least she has succeeded with a numerous company, of which Kittredge and Curry are only the most famous of many. But in the end she will come, like Hamlet's ladies, to Yorick's end: "Now get you to my lady's chamber and tell her, let her paint an inch thick, to this favor she must come—make her laugh at that" (act 5, sc. 1, lines 212-16). And in pretending that this is not, or should not be, true, the Wife of Bath associates herself with the Pardoner's three drunken rioters, who wish to kill Death and only find him after the doom of all mortals. What the Wife wants is true only in fairy tale, and so she tells one, from a time when the realm of England was "fulfild of fayerye" (III [D] 859) instead of friars. In so doing, she wishes violated for her sake the fundamental order of time or history, which makes experi-
ence into authority by transmuting it into remembrance and wisdom. She wishes the west-to-east motion of the planets to rule the firmament; she refuses the paradox of life through death to which Donne gave classic statement in “Good Friday, Riding Westward”; she refuses to see what has always been true, though we have been best reminded of it only in modern times by Tolkien, that the Gospel is the consummate and defining fairy tale, and that its catastrophe is the only happy ending which is finally possible. Thus the Wife desires what only Saint Cecilia knows properly how to get, but refuses the saint’s way of getting it, and such are the charms of her vitality and sex that we are, for a moment, distracted into believing her. Her tale, by a happy and, we hope, not accidental result of linkages and fragments, is the middle tale in this magic group, and tempts us to ignore both the first tale and the last—to avoid the necessity of sainthood by denying, for a time, the death of which the Pardoner warns, instead of accepting, as we must, both.26

But though the Wife’s tale is a projection of what she most desires, we must not be misled by the dramatic principle into too exclusive a focus on her motivations, desires, and biography. Following the example of Shakespeare criticism, Chaucer scholars need to transcend Bradley-type concerns. Considered in medieval categories, the Wife of Bath’s material consists of a vastly overblown prologue and a rather short \textit{tractatus in narratione}; in terms of the fivefold formal cause, that is, \textit{definitiva, divisiva, probativa, refutiva,} and \textit{exemplorum positiva,} what we probably have, after the sententious exordium, is a section \textit{refutiva,} the exemplum of autobiography, the exemplum of the rapist and the loathly lady, and the enclosed defining sermon on gentilesse—rather a mixed bag taken altogether as a discourse instead of as a dramatic monologue. But if one takes the Wife’s beginning as Chaucer’s, that all this has to do with “wo that is in mariage,” then an outline emerges. The first woe of marriage is that it is the end of virginity, second that it is the destroyer of peace, third that it is almost the pain of death, and fourth that it is not conducive to nobility. It is almost a crime against human high spirits to work so homiletic an outline on what the Wife of Bath has to say, yet the ironies point this way, the habits of medieval literary criticism point this way, and the discursive context points this way. We have already seen how disorderly the first three of these themes are, relating as they do to Saint Cecilia, to the question of marital sovereignty, and to the desire to avoid old age and death. The fourth, that is, the question of and contest over gentilesse, reaches its proper conclusion here only as
we see it fitted into the proper outline and labeled with the proper heading.

Gentilesse, according to conventional opinion, was to be equated with virtue, not with lineage, or wealth, or any other worldly asset which might well be, and often was, possessed by scoundrels. This is true enough, both historically and morally. Yet as modern readers trying to get our history right, we must remind ourselves that this opinion was held in spite of the fact that distinctions of gentility in Chaucer's real world were very largely determined by inheritance. Organized threats to the security of this system of inheritance were put down with considerable violence, and with every appearance, on the part of the "gentle" classes, of sincere righteous indignation. In the light of his situation, thus, Chaucer puts his most elaborate defense of an ethical meritocracy in exactly the right place—in the context of marriages which so far as we know neither have nor desire children, and in the mouth of a magical creature from faerie who can renew her youth.

In balance, we have the Franklin's admiration for the gentilesse of another man's son, and his concern for the deficiencies of his own—we have an emphatic connection between gentilesse and rhetoric, and a contest to see who can be the most genteel, by emulative and competitive generosity. All this is probably to be taken as the real, by contrast to the loathly lady's ideal. As an ideal, only saints are both permissible and assimilable, because their proper environment is heaven, and they impose on the world only a sweet example of moral suasion. Otherwise, idealism impinges on society as a principle of disorder, however well intentioned. It is a mark of Chaucer's genius that he puts even gentilesse here, in a tale of magic and in the context of all those private and disordering desires which intrusive individuals wish to impose on the world. He is too honest to settle only for denounced easy and obvious evils; he deals as well with those so near good as to daunt all but the most precise of moralists. As Pratt has shown, this section grew on Chaucer—the Shipman's Tale, the autobiography, and the tale of the loathly lady were by turns assigned as the Wife of Bath's tale; how much poorer and less profound would have been our moral profit had the Wife merely concluded, "score it upon my taille." Instead, we have the bittersweet and universal desire to get without paying the full price what the psalmist described:

Bless the Lord, O my soul: and let all that is within me bless his holy name.
Bless the Lord, O my soul, and never forget all he hath
done for thee. . . .
Who redeemeth thy life from destruction: who crowneth thee
with mercy and compassion.
Who satisfieth thy desire with good things: thy youth shall be
renewed like the eagle's.

(Ps. 102: 1-5)

From this point on, in the magic group, the temptations are smaller. There is no human being over forty who ever lived, medieval or modern, who has not assented to the desire of the Wife of Bath, and only the wisest of them have fully known what price had to be paid to do so. The Friar and the Summoner, whose tales deal with disorderings of beneficium, and the Physician, whose tale deals with disorder of judgment, more warn than tempt; the Pardoner, in himself and in his tale, drives men from sin with horror.

The Friar's Tale and the Summoner's Tale have been an embarrassment to fragment 3 ever since Kittredge settled lamely for the notion of "interlude."^30 Clearly Chaucer was setting something up; it is the Friar and the Summoner who are allowed to interrupt the Wife and who provide the transition from her autobiography to her finally assigned tale. And we properly expect friars after faeries, because the Wife herself tells us to expect them.^31 Yet these tales have nothing to do with gentilesse, nor with marriage; the fornication which always hovers like a leitmotif in the backgrounds of the Chaucerian regular clergy is not really what the tales are about. Tales like this are the test of any critical method which seeks unity, because the analysis must proceed tale by tale, following the divisions which are the forma tractatus, but it must arrange its material for analysis fragment by fragment, accepting such relationships as have clearly been established. In our reading the Friar's Tale and the Summoner's Tale are here because the Wife of Bath's is clearly, on the literal level, about magic. It is reassuring to find that, once the fragment as a whole is placed in the magic group, it is possible to say such coherent and informative things about these two odd tales, as well as about the tale of the Wife of Bath.

The tales of the magic group have to do with deceitful appearances, with trickery, with what seems to change and is really the same, with intrusive disorder which attacks, and in attacking defines, some aspect of order and good. We have already said that these two tales of the Friar and the Summoner have to do with beneficium, particularly in its disorderly manifestations, and with the place of beneficium in the series of orders, descending from general to particular, on the basis of
which society is constituted. It remains here to show in more detail just how the stories treat the theme and how the material of the stories, understood discursively, brings to bear upon the theme the theological overtones which justified its importance in medieval society.

Beneficium is a social virtue now so thoroughly out of fashion that it can hardly be understood, much less justified. Modern economic and social ethics define themselves so largely in terms of contract and quid pro quo that the rhetoric of patronage is dismissed as degrading, and gifts of any substance tend automatically to be seen as bribery. Nevertheless, the notion of donum or beneficium is at the very heart of the ordering process of medieval society and therefore should be expected to appear, in its place, in any serious treatment of social order.

The basis of the notion of beneficium was a God defined as gracious, whose creation and whose sacraments alike were received by men as gifts from God, and whose example of liberality was the proper model of healthy social behavior. One of the conventional duties of human sovereigns, therefore, was to be magnificent, and that magnificence includes the giving of gifts. The continual gentrification of commercial wealth, especially in the later Middle Ages, expresses the desire to rise from a world of quid pro quo (for which there was little theological and sacramental significance) to the world of fiefs in the gift of magnate or king. There may in fact have been a good deal of commercial enterprise involved in the transition, but the rhetoric was of beneficium. Even salaries paid to retainers, and especially those portions paid in kind, as new clothes for festive occasions, indulge the rhetoric of gifts. Though tithes may have been hard to collect, the early successes of the friars, the need for such laws as the statute of mortmain, and the popularity of cathedral building all testify to the fact that gift-giving was an important social structure, regardless of how mixed its motivation may have been. In theoretical terms, Aegidius Romanus even bases his attack on communism and his defense of private property and unequal distribution of wealth on his desire to encourage the virtue of liberality.32

The relation of the tales of both Friar and Summoner with gifts and gift-giving is obvious. Summoners live by bribery, and friars by gifts. The Friar's Tale's point has to do with a gift sincerely given—as it happens, to a devil. The point of the Summoner's Tale is another gift—Thomas's fart. The final episode in the set contains a squire, in a feudal setting, earning a gift of "gowne-clooth" (III [D] 2252). These gifts, all but the last, are parodies of true beneficium. As do all other
disorders in this magic group of tales, they intrude upon order, in this case the order of *beneficium*, which is restored in the action of the lord and his squire. But this intrusion is more than literal. It is also parodic, and this dimension of parody, which is underlined and reinforced by the parodic dimensions of the discussion of devilish bodies, the location of friars in hell, glossing, "ars-metrike" (III [D] 2222), and the "trans substantial" fart, answers to the fact that *beneficium*, more obviously than any of the other orders we have considered in this group, has a transcendental dimension. Creation, once made, operates in a way which can be taken as simply natural, and status, being intimately connected with pride, tends to be exercised in a more secular manner the more one is conscious of it at all. Both, of course, have ultimate validation from God—but his presence is not in practice necessarily insistent. On the other hand, the most important *beneficium* in medieval culture, the Incarnation and its continuance in the Mass, is truly divine. Of the double nature of the sacramental, of "being divine in the world," the genre of parody is structurally, as well as meaningfully, appropriate.

We begin therefore with a prologue which takes the doctrine of the Wife of Bath seriously, rejects authorities (as she had in her turn, even though she is herself one), and defends game. More serious matters are to be left to preaching and clerical pronouncement—and this in introduction of what will in fact be a good deal of explicit discussion of theological matters and an excessive straining after authority through the stratagem of gloss. The topos of quitting is mentioned again and rejected. In the company there shall be no debate. What all this says, of course, is that "yes" will be "no" and "no" will be "yes." The game will be to play games with serious matters, as an activity fitting this "compaignye" or society which the rule of the Host has constituted.

If we divide what follows discursively, a diptych pattern emerges involving five elements. First, there is a definition—of ecclesiastical justice and of the place of summoners in it; then, in parallel, a definition of friars. Second, a society is constituted as a result—the summoner swears brotherhood with the fiend, and the friar claims his privileged relation with Thomas and his wife. Then there is an elaborate discussion of doctrine—on the nature of hellish bodies and their function in the world; and of glossing, intercessory prayer, and the sin of wrath. Fourth, there is a two-part exemplum, which poses a problem—the two curses in the *Friar's Tale*, and the fart and its discussion at the Lord's dinner in the Summoner's. Finally, the problems are solved. We find out from the Summoner that friars live in hell in the
devil's anus; we find out from the lord's squire how to divide a fart. Both these solutions, moreover, are made distinctive and separate by rubrication. Procedurally and formally, the whole thing could not be more obviously something usually left "to prechyng and to scole eek of clergye" (III [D] 1277). And the fivefold *forma tractandi* which medieval critics were accustomed to find in their stories and poems is also obviously governing: *definitiva, divisiva, probativa, refutiva, exemplorum positiva.*

What is missing, of course, is the central panel, *in bono*—the divine definition which makes good society possible, the doctrine by which that society lives and believes, the actions which that society's history and its accumulation of exempla preserve, and the heavenly solution which causes all exempla to make sense. Irony is a form of allegory here. And the overtones which might be noted in these tales—why the devil wears green,34 that devilish appearance and substance resemble those of angels, that the hell of the devil's anus parodies the bosom of Mary of mercies,35 that this gift of wind blasphemously parodies the coming of the Holy Ghost upon the Apostles, with the "sound from heaven, as of a violent wind blowing"36—all evoke elements of truth and value appropriate to this literally absent but ironically present central panel. That these ironic stories are literally about gift-giving, then, properly implies that the central fact of the true story is God's gracious gift of salvation and his commandment that analogous graces be the chief exercise through which earthly hierarchies express themselves.

Incongruities further underline the point. The friar's willingness to take seriously the problem of the division of the fart is Chaucer's way of labeling him a materialist—a person unable to deal with the spiritual (or at least insubstantial) problem, and therefore disqualified from appreciating, or participating in, a social institution which properly is always more than material.37 More important still is the old woman's curse against the Summoner. In orthodox terms she cannot damn her enemy without his consent; the Summoner effectively damns himself by refusing the opportunity to repent.38 Even the fully serious and validated cursing of excommunication is of no effect, if it does not really correspond to the actual state of grace of the one being cursed.39 But cursing and blessing are still a valid and necessary part of religion, because mutuality is the essence of it. This widow's cursing corresponds, thematically, to *beneficium*—and no less clearly because *in malo. Beneficium* is always accomplished by the agency of another; it always generates a mutuality between two or more people.
The allegorical strategy through which much of the meaning of the Friar's and Summoner's tales is generated continues in the rest of the tales of this magic group. The full meaning of the Physician's Tale, and of the judgment which is its theme, is only defined by considerations of the medieval glosses which it evokes and the framing exempla of the tale—the references to Pygmalion and to Jephthah's daughter. Even more, the Pardoner's Tale is allegorical, not just in details, but as a whole in the full typological sense defined by biblical exegesis. The reason for this larger allegorical presence in the latter tales of the magic group is, we think, that in these tales the theme of order being treated has become quite particular. In the series as a whole, from nature and status to judgment, we are going from general to particular, from universal to singular. Since, philosophically, singulars cannot be the basis of certain knowledge, the allegorical strategy functions as validation, or, as it were, universalization, of something which needs to be both particular and true.

The Physician's Tale is a true story, a "historial thyng notable; /The sentence of it sooth is, out of doute" (VI [C] 156-57). The relationship between the true letter and the possibility of further meaning, of true sentence, is a commonplace of exegesis and strengthens Chaucer's assertion of the value of the tale's sentence. But here, as so often in Chaucer, the allegorical overtones which allusions and the investigation of commentaries make possible are not the end for which the tale is meant, but rather reinforcements and amplifications of the literal force of the tale itself, and validations of it.

Most obviously, the tale is an exemplum of the unjust judge. As such it addresses a human problem serious at all times, but for Chaucer not quite the same problem as it might be now. In his society the judicial and the executive functions were not so thoroughly distinguished as they have since been, and the judge and his functions had sacral, or at least theological, overtones, of which secularization has since deprived us. In a society with more case law than statute law, with a great many matters theroretically decided on the basis of customs, and with relatively inefficient public administration, the individual judge and his personal activity were of great practical importance. Pierre Bersuire's definition is helpfully comprehensive:

Nota, quod iudicare idem est quod discernere. Unde de homine sapiente et discreto in aliqua arte dicitur quod ipse est homo boni iudicii. Iudicium enim nihil aliud est quam discretio inter qualitates et conditiones rerum... Quia nomen ergo iudicii importat status iurisdictionem negociorum cognitionem, et negociorum diffinitionem, bene patet, quod
The Tales of Magic

The Tales of Magic

A few details might be singled out for comment. First, judgment is grounded in perception; the judge is a person of discernment. His discernment has much to do with the crucial element of conditio, with which Chaucer was concerned in his General Prologue and which we have already related to the consuetudines and credulitates which the Averroistic Poetics of Aristotle uses to define the content of poetry. He is clearly a ruler as well as an interpreter of statutes. On his personal goodness the health of the body politic greatly depends. After Dante the classic biblical citation for justice and judgment is Wisd. 1:1, “Diligite iustitiam, qui iudicatis terram.” Hugh of St. Cher’s comments on this verse define judges as spiritual men who in judging the earth deal with “terrenos, terrena nimis diligentes.” He associates the activity of judgment with the command in Genesis, given to Adam and Eve, to subdue the earth. Finally, he allegorizes: “Diligite iustitiam, qui iudicatis terram, idest, qui carnem vestro subditis iudicio, ut obediat spiritui, discrete, et cum amore hoc facite, et quod iustum est, iumento reddite, scilicet, onus, virgam, et pabulum, Eccl. 33.d. Unde Apostolus Rom. 12.a. Rationale obsequium vestrum, nemo enim unquam carnem suam odio habuit, sed fovet, et nutrit eam, Eph. 5.f.”

All this corresponds to Apius where he is typical and reproves him where he is wicked. He is a governor, as well as a judge, with a great deal of discretionary authority. The responsibility which he professes to owe to “right,” that is, to natural law, to what is true rather than merely correct, is thoroughly medieval.

... “Of this, in his absence,
I may nat yeve diffynytyf sentence.
Lat do hym calle, and I wol gladly heere;
Thou shalt have al right, and no wrong heere.”

(VI [C] 171-74)
make hire with hir body synne” (VI [C] 137), he violates definition. In his desire to misappropriate his high and spiritual office as a means to accomplish, if not legalize, an act of rape, he is a bad judge by medieval standards, not only because he is attempting to do an injustice to Virginia and Virginius, but also because he has distorted himself, has turned upside down the proper relation between his own flesh and his proper spiritual wisdom, and so acts in a way which denies, rather than affirms, the metaphoric possibilities of his existence as judge which allegorically validate and confirm judgment fully accomplished.42

It is these dimensions which the framing exempla, of Pygmalion and Jephthah’s daughter and of the evocation of the Romance of the Rose, emphasize and define. In the first place, though we must admit Virginia’s beauty, we must also admit from the Romance of the Rose, and ultimately from the poem of Alanus, that the chief complaint against man was that he was too physical and not sufficiently fecund in the spirituality of good works. In addition, the evocation of the Romance of the Rose gives special importance to the allusion to Pygmalion, whose love of his beautiful statue, in the main tradition of commentary, meant either that his wife was frigid or that he was masturbating with the statue.43 In neither case, nor in the very promising treatment of the Romance of the Rose itself, does Pygmalion’s accomplishment deserve ideal commendation.

Bersuire’s gloss, in fact, finds for the Pygmalion story a meaning very closely analogous to that of Apius:

Per istum factorem imaginum intelligo predicatores qui animam sciunt sculpere, et pingere correctionibus et virtutibus, per istam puellam eburneam intelligo quamlibet sanctimonialem, que eburnea dicitur pro eo quod casta frigida ponderosa et honesta esse dicitur. Sed saepe contingit quod aliquis bonus pigmaleon, idest aliquis bonus religiosus proponit perpetuo nec mulierem nec carnales amplexus appetere et talis convertit se ad imagines eburneas faciendae, idest ad benignas sanctimoniales et matronas in castitate et sanctitate informandas, et in moribus spiritualibus sculpendas, et accidit quod quandoque unam inter ceteras sibi eligit quam sororem vel filiam dicit et eam bono ac casto animo et amore associat et tangit. Sed pro certo tandem accidit quod venus dea luxurje idest carnis concupiscencia se interponit et ipsam imaginem mortuam convertit in vivam, et ipsam castam mulierem facit carnis stimulos sentire et eam mutat de bona in fatuam. Ipse enim pigmaleon predictor hoc a venere expetit, et istam mutationem appetit. Sic igitur cum more solito ad colloquia redeunt simul se mutatos invenit, ita quod illa que fuerat eburnea, fit carnea et ille qui mulieres horrebat, incipit carnis spurciciam appetere. Isti igitur carnales sic se mutuo accipient, et quandoque filios generant. Non est igitur tutum religioso cum mulieribus nimirum familiaritatem contrahere vel econverso.44
Just as Apius was “caught with beautee of this mayde” Virginia, so the *predicat*or of Bersuire’s interpretation “incipit carnis spurcicia appe­tere.” But Bersuire’s gloss makes explicit what in the *Physician’s Tale* is only implicit, and that is the positive duty of right judgment. The preacher exhorts the women in his charge to chastity and holiness; the judge must love justice as he judges earthly things and people. As described, Virginia, this most wondrous of nature’s works, exists as an occasion for right judgment as well as a temptation to wrong judgment, and Chaucer’s digression dealing with the obligation of parents and chaperones to rule their charges wisely and well is evidence that he considered her so. Apius is guilty of a sin of omission as well as commission.

So, also, in a way, is Virginius. The loss of chastity is a serious matter, but the loss of physical chastity by rape, without consent, is neither sin nor justification for suicide, and Virginius’s remedy is extreme. In this attempt to preserve the flesh from taint by destroying it, he has overmagnified the importance of the flesh. Thus he has failed to appreciate its relatively lesser, but still true, value. Just as in the *Manciple’s Tale*, the spiritual good achieved at the expense of the flesh, upon reflection, proves a hollow prize. Virginia’s evocation of Jephthah’s daughter is therefore precisely to the point.

Glosses on the story of Jephthah’s daughter are generally disapproving, and generally because human sacrifice is not considered the thing to do. But all angles are considered: Nicholas of Lyra says, for instance, “Licet autem illud votum processerit ex devotione, tamen factum fuit indiscrete: quia de domo sua primo poterat egredi obviam ei canis: qui non est animal immolaticium.” Hugh of St. Cher cites Augustine’s suspicion of ulterior motive, “Item dicit Augustinus quod votum suum retulit ad uxorem, quam habebat odio, cogitans eam sibi occurrere primo, et ita patet, quod mala intentione vovit, ergo malum fuit eius votum.”

For the allegorizations of the story, Pierre Bersuire’s commentary provides a convenient summary. After various applications of the fact that Jephthah was a concubine’s child, rejected by his family, he comes to those applications which include the daughter:

Exponamus allegorice de Christo, dicamus itaque quod iste Iephthe significat Christum, qui revera quasi ex concubina nascitur, pro eo quod ex Deo patre et virgine matre, quae erat alterius thori et fori generatus videtur... Iste igitur quamvis repudiatus a Iudaeis, tamen contra Amon, idest diabolum, princeps et dux filiorum Israel, idest fidelium constituitur, et pro victoria obtinenda propriam filiam, idest humanitatem Deo patri immolavit, et ipsa pro salute humani generis et pro victoria mortem.
patitur, et Amon et populus suus, idest diabolus et vitia superantur, et filii
Israel, idest fideles populi liberantur. . . . Vel dic quod Jephthe est homo,
cuius filia est propria caro, quam scilicet Deo debet vovere, et per
poenitentiam Deo immolandam promittere, ut contra Amon, idest contra
diabolum et peccata possit obtinere victoriam. Quando igitur contingit
quod homo victoriam contra vitia vel contra tribulationes habuit, vel quod
a Deo donum spirituale reportavit, et videt filiam, idest, propriae carnem
cum tympanis et organis, idest cum delitiis et delectationibus occurrere, et
sibi in via morum obviare: statim pro certo debet dicere et clamare: Filia
mea decepi me, et ipsa decepta es. Decepti me, dico, vita suggerendo,
se tu ipsa decepta es, per peccatum et poenitentiam promendo. Istam
igitur statim debet Deo per poenitentiam immolare, et sibi fletum propri
e virginitatis, idest, compunctionem et virtutum sterilitatem iniungere, et
tandem virginitate seu sterilitate deplorata, debet eam per charitatem
comburere, et per laborum fatigationem et poenitentiam Deo sacrificare
vel offerre.  

Just as the judge may by analogy be likened to the eyes, which guide
the body, discern colors, and discriminate dangers, so the social rela-
tionships between father and daughter may be analogous to the rela-
tion of spirit to flesh, whereby the individual keeps his values straight
and his heart right. Ideally, however, the level must be good, though
God can make good significance of evil events. An earthly beauty
defined in terms of the kind of beauty Pygmalion made is, when fully
understood, the kind to which Apius’s lust is appropriate; a flesh
defined by the terms of Jephthah’s vow deserves the judgment of
Virginius and the fate of Virginia.

We may turn profitably from the story itself to the judgment
Chaucer’s pilgrims make upon its meaning. The Host’s interpretation
is a version of Virginius’s attitude—a rejection of the flesh:

Alias, to deere boughte she beautee!
Wherfore I seye al day that men may see
That yiftes of Fortune and of Nature
Been cause of deeth to many a creature.
Hire beautee was hire deth, I dar wel sayn.

(VI [C] 293–97)

Nature’s achievement, from this limited perspective, is not only vain
but positively harmful. Better we were all born ugly, and chastity
would be easier to achieve.

No one of these many judgments on Virginia’s beauty, whether
coming from within the tale or in its surrounding link material, pro-
vides us with the whole truth, but from these erroneous judgments we
may gain a sense of the understanding they ironically evoke. Nature’s
achievement is good, but not supreme; Apius, the judge, exists to
place on the facts of this world, including people, value labels—good,
bad, wicked, criminal, liable, innocent. Virginius exists to foster his
child, and Virginia to be properly loved. And all of this should, when
retold and remembered, be of some moral use. From beginning to
end it is a matter of discernment, and discernment is the essence of
*iudicium*. The allegorical overtones, which relate personal to social and
social to personal, and make possible good insight even from bad
events, tell us what the ideal harmonies are. *Iudicium* is at once so
important and so difficult because it is a particular act which makes
universal claims. When a human being renders sentence, an individu­
al’s perception of particulars is the basis for affirming, defining, and
then applying the universal. It is the duty of a judge to be right—and
at once his privilege and his awesome responsibility to create right in
terms of what he decides, even when sometimes what he decides is less
than perfect. This duty to be right gains complexity, in Chaucer’s
time, from a context in which particulars cannot, by definition, be
right as objects of true knowledge, and in which universals and the
possibility of knowing them are far more palpable than for us. It is the
allegorical overtones, contributed primarily by the allusions which
surround this simple true story of Roman injustice, which celebrate
the resonances by which alone particulars may guarantee universals
and which impose on the judges of Chaucer’s audience the obligation
to discern all of the many truths they perform in their particular
attention to a cause.

The *Pardoner’s Tale* is more allegorical still. Some years ago Judson
Allen argued that it was one of those late medieval poems demanding
a fully exegetical spiritual sense reading.²⁵³ We still think so, but would
go further, first, by relating the *Pardoner’s Tale* to the structurally
defined schema of the four levels and, second, by showing how both
the literal and the allegorical features of the tale are thrown into
sharper and clearer relief by their having been seen as a part of the
group of tales to which we have assigned it. We do not intend to offer
any new interpretation of the tale, or of any of its parts, characters, or
details. Scholarship on the *Pardoner’s Tale* has been unusually rich,
and the allegorical overtones defining the old man, the tree, the Par­
doner’s complex sterility, and his homiletic effectiveness all have been
fully and, we think, correctly explained.²⁵⁴

All four allegorical levels are present, both in the biblical sense and
in the structural sense we developed earlier. The actual tale is the
same for both, of course. Doctrinal overtones are unusually strong, as
Robert P. Miller has shown; in merely secular terms, the tale has about it an abstract or hieratic quality which constantly forces the reader to the sense that these characters are typical and not merely individual. In addition, the readers cannot avoid some personal involvement. People who behave like these rioters will die—all men must die, we know, but the sudden end of the rioters is an insistent reminder that the death which is our common fate, and which cannot be avoided or postponed, can be hastened. Finally, there is about the tale still another dimension, which the tradition would have labeled anagogy or eschatology, and which we label prosopopoeia. Others might attempt to get at the same quality by referring to "folktale" atmosphere. What we mean has been most brilliantly explained, in secular terms, by Donald Howard, in an analogy with the work of Jean Genet. The perversions which Genet's characters enact, Howard said, like the perversion which the Pardoner is and recounts, reveal to the audience, as it were like the sudden opening of a pit, the potential for evil in every one of us. A part of the effect is the powerfulness of the revelation, a part is the shock of recognition, and a part is the almost heart-stopping relief provided by the possibility of aesthetic distance. What all this awareness adds up to, we believe, can in medieval terms be labeled prosopopoeia—at least for nominalist sensibilities. It is the awareness of the presence, not just of evil people, or even evil kinds of people (or good, had it been a different story)—but rather of evilness itself, palpable and real. One of the greatest powers literature has, in all times, is this power to bring people into the presence of universals. It is a power not always present, nor even always intended, and sometimes not achieved when intended. One of the great burdens of Hardy's fiction, for instance, is that our misfortune is to live in a world without universals, yet the child in Jude, like the Pardoner's Old Man, comes very near to being totally transparent to that dark underside of the world outside Plato's cave. The difference between medieval and later literatures at this point is not a difference of power, but rather a difference of clarity—there were more abstractions, with names, and one could recognize the powers when they appeared and give them names. Hence prosopopoeia—a very different kind of mental state from the rationalist trick of poetry it later became.

As is universally recognized, both the Pardoner and his tale are about death. Here, as in the tale of Saint Cecilia, we are in the presence of paradox. The sainted martyr, whom the world that kills her perceives as mere disorder, is the intrusive, authentic, particular indi-
vidual who has the right to be disorder in any world which so perceives her. Rome must fall, that there might be a new Rome, and ultimately a new Jerusalem. In the context of the tales of the magic group, which begins with the Tale of St. Cecilia, it is possible to see just what this death in the Pardoner's Tale is about, just how it relates to the comprehensive treatment of order and disorder in society. Death is the intrusive order, which intrudes upon all the mere arrangements of this world, defines them as disorders, and reduces them to peace (or hell). Taken in isolation, the Pardoner's exemplum of the three rioters who meet death is moral enough. We have a sense of earthy riot and deserved punishment. But if we define the Pardoner's Tale as, in a sense, that part of saint's life visible to merely mortal eyes, then the redeeming ironies become much larger.

The death of Death is an event whose expectation and achievement are central to the faith of Christendom. Saint Cecilia and her co-religionists were, from the point of view of orthodox pagan Rome, no less foolish than the Pardoner's rioters in their insistence that they would conquer death. The difference, of course, is that we view Saint Cecilia, whether we are personally Christian or not, from the point of view of an insider who shares, within the "fiction," her faith. We know more than the Romans do and can appreciate the ironic value of their postures and their claims to be right. In the same way, but even more naively and automatically, we know more than the Pardoner's rioters do (because the expectation of death is more universal in human experience than in Christian faith) and can appreciate the ironic values of their postures and their claims to be able to murder Death. But—and this is the difference the grouping makes—the ironies are enlarged when we see that ultimately the rioters equal the Roman empire, that all merely human arrangements are disorder before their common end, and common peace, which is death. The rioters proposed, in the drunkenness of a morning, to kill death. Rome proposed for one thousand years to be the Eternal City. The end of the rioters, though haunted by archetypes, is expected and unsurprising; the end of Rome was a cosmic shock, even to such a man of faith as Jerome. All mortal things are, by ultimate standards, disorderly, even Rome. The cry of the crusader against the Albigensians, "Kill them all; God will recognize his own," is at one level an unhuman horror, but at another the only proper posture of true faith. The end of the rioters is a mortal horror, and a seeming disorder at all levels. But the allegorical resonance, which was becoming increasingly audible in all these last tales and inescapable in the last, redeems that disorder even
while it is dying, reminding us that facts do connect, while they last, to the truth which neither changes nor dies, whose symbol is the crowns of lilies and roses that only faith can see. Of the great ordering structures into which facts may fit themselves, and from which they derive their meaning—sainthood, nature, status, history, beneficium, iudicium, and death—the last and most difficult is death. But in context we are given a double vision of death—as just punishment within the world of the rioters and the Pardoner, and as the last and analogical peace from the point of view defined by having seen order in dialectic with disorder throughout the series. And we are reminded once again of that quality of Chaucer's faith in life which is the central measure of his greatness—that ironic, gentle handling of fallible facts which accepts their failures even while it sees the truth they bring in resonant focus.

1. Robert Holkot, *In librum Sapientiae* (Basel, 1586), lectio 9, p. 33. "Thus it would happen to those foolish and presumptuous ones who complain about the divine authority. But if the administration were conducted according to what they feel would be in their interest, and they would act according to their foolishness, the whole machine of the universe would be destroyed."


3. The ironic contrast between the sterility of fecund concupiscence and the fecundity of childless chastity is often invoked, with its roots growing perhaps from the complex redefining of love relationships going on in all the intellectual movements of the Middle Ages. Cf. Abelard’s comforting remarks to Heloise on her spiritual children, who must replace the children of her body, which she regrets being unable to bear (letter 4, p. 90, in “The Personal Letters between Abelard and Heloise,” *Mediaeval Studies* 16 [1953]: 47-94).

4. This is the lesson of the prologue combat as well. Unholy interruptions and confusion are rewarded by rude insults and verbal abuse. Only the Knight, at the conclusion of the tales of the Pardoner and the Monk, speaks in the cause of peace.


6. The problem of old age, exemplified by men in their efforts to recapture youth by marrying young and wild wives, is raised in the first fragment. In the *Miller’s Tale*, a family unit is formed of a foolish old man and a young, straying wife—a pattern which will be repeated in the story collection and then in the Reeve’s Prologue, with its ironic evocation of the humility topos, as the Reeve excuses himself from indulging in ribaldry because of his advanced age (I [A] 3867-98).


10. A very brief theoretical definition of this technique, relating it to the ironic mode of allegory, may be found in Allen and Gallacher, “Alisoun through the Looking Glass.” The same presumption is the basis of Allen's “The Old Way and the Parson's Way” and “The Ironic Fruyt: Chauntecleer as Figura,” *Studies in Philology* 66 (1969): 25-35. The most elaborate study of this kind, and the one leading to the most properly subtle conclusions about the effect of the Chaucerian story, is Kaske, “The Canticum Canticorum in the Miller's Tale.”


12. “Therwith so horsly, and so quyk of ye” (V [F] 194). The *OED* lists this line of Chaucer's as the only medieval occurrence.

13. Cf. Matt. 23:27, 33: “Vae vobis scribae et pharisaei hypocritae quia similes estis sepulchris dealbatis, quae a foris parent hominibus speciosa, intus vero plena sunt ossibus mortuorum, et omni spurcitia!... Serpentes genimina viperarum, quomodo fugietis a iudicio gehennae?” “Woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because you are like white sepulchres, which outwardly appear to men beautiful, but within are full of dead men's bones and of all uncleanness.... Serpents, brood of vipers, how are you to escape the judgment of hell?” This allusion may suggest a connection between the blandishing tongues of the tercelet and of Chaucer's clergymen, the friar and the summoner, who will soon appear in tales devoted to their wicked speech. Penn R. Szittya, in “The Friar as False Apostle: Antifraternal Exegesis and the Summoner's Tale,” *Studies in Philology* 71 (1974): 41, finds this same quotation from Matt. 23 serving as a link between Chaucer's Friar and the Pharisees. In these tales of magic, Chaucer suggests that smooth-tongued rascals, particularly the clergy, succeed in making things appear to be what they are not, with dire consequences for their dupes.

14. Allen, in “The Ironic Fruyt,” argues for Chaucer's debt to Hugh for twelve of thirteen details allegorizing the relation between preachers and roosters; in “The Old Way and the Parson's Way” he points out an irony which many commentaries permit but only Hugh requires. Two swallows, of course, do not make a summer, but the fact that Chaucer's debts to exegesis in these cases involves not just atmosphere and general drift of doctrine but precise dependence on *ipsissima verba* seems at least quite strong evidence.

15. Hugh of St. Cher, *Opera Omnia*, vol. 6, fol. 73v: “prelates and masters
of our time [who are] externally clean, internally corrupt." Hugh's comment on the generation of vipers permits the same generalization: "Serpentes astuti sunt, sed in malo tantum. Semper aspiciunt quomodo mordeant, et cum momorderint, quomodo se occultent, sic hypocritae cum aliquem laeserint, ita simpliciter ambulant, ac si nulli nocuerint. . . . Item serpentes vari sunt, et hypocritae variores, quia nunquam os consonat cordi. Ideo enim dicuntur hypocritae, quia aliiu habent in ore, aliiu in corde, ut dicit Hieronimus. Huic serpenti dicitur Genes. 52. c [sic]. Pectore et ventre repes, quia hypocritae omnia faciunt propter ventrem, et inanem gloriam, quod est super pectus repere. . . . Sed et eidem dicitur: Terram comedes omnibus diebus vitae tuae, quia hypocritae nihil aliiu, quam terrena concupiscunt. Item serpentes ven­enum portant in lingua, sic omnes hypocritae detractores sunt" (fol. 74r). "Snakes are cunning, but only for evil. They always take care how they bite, and when they bite, how they hide themselves; in the same way, hypocrites when they injure someone, walk about simply, as if they had done harm to no one. . . . Next serpents are various, and hypocrites more so, because they never make their speech accord with their heart. For that reason they are called hypocrites, because they have one thing in their mouth, and another in their heart, as Jerome says. Genes. 52. c is addressed to this serpent: You will crawl on your chest and belly, because hypocrites do everything to satisfy their bellies, and for the sake of vainglory, which is to crawl on the chest. . . . But to him it is also said: You will eat dirt all the days of your life, because hypocrites do nothing else except lust after the earthly. Next serpents carry poison on their tongue, in the same way all hypocrites are detractors.''

16. For a discussion of the relationship between the two tales, see Joyce E. Peterson, "The Finished Fragment: A Reassessment of the Squire's Tale," Chaucer Review 5 (1970): 62-74. Charles F. Duncan, in "‘A Straw for Your Gentillesse': The Gentle Franklin's Interruption of the Squire," Chaucer Re­view 5 (1970): 161-64, discusses the vexed question of whether Chaucer intended the Franklin to interrupt a bad story or, rather, used the interrup­tion to make the Franklin look ridiculous. He also surveys the scholarship on the subject. As Peterson shows, the question of proper speech, and proper speech as a demonstration of virtue, as well as of virtuosity, is at stake in the two tales.

17. J. J. Murphy is much impressed with this feature of the Rhetoric's for­tuna; see his Rhetoric in the Middle Ages (Berkeley, 1974), pp. 92-101. Aristot­le's Poetics, in the Averroistic version put into Latin circulation by Hermann the German, also tended more often to circulate with ethical than with grammatical or logical texts. It is therefore improper to distinguish too sharply the Ciceronian tradition of colors and ornaments from the Aristotelian tradition of persuasive postures. Similarly, it is necessary to see Chaucer's frequent praise of rhetoric, especially intrusive in this prologue material of the Franklin's, as insisting on sound ethical existence as well as on goodness at storytelling, and that without being much interested in distinguishing the two. The modern convention which takes Chaucer's relations to rhetoric as either stylistically immature or as ironic is beside the point. To the modern sensibil­ity, rhetoric is by definition artificial in a pejorative sense; to the medieval one, rhetoric is artificial in a way which helps existence achieve truth. Chaucer's irony is directed, not at rhetoric per se, but at failed rhetoric. For amplifica-
tion of this point, see the review of Murphy's *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages* in *Speculum* 52 (April 1977): 411-14.

18. Gertrude M. White, in "The Franklin's Tale: Chaucer and the Critics," *PMLA* 89 (1974): 454-62, provides a survey of criticism; she emphasizes the recent critical emphasis on the character of Arveragus. Kaske's article "Chaucer's Marriage Group" is both the most cogent and the most enjoyable analysis in print of this aspect of Chaucer criticism; in it Arveragus emerges very subtly as a ruler more in control de facto than de jure. But the whole question takes on a very different complexion if one presumes, as we do, that Chaucer's stories are not about particulars but rather use them, exemplum fashion, as normative arrays leading to definition.

19. A. C. Baugh, in *Chaucer's Major Poetry* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1963), p. 482, translates the line "if God allow me to say so" and thus misses the easiest construction of the subjunctive. The line might better be read: "This is too much [even] if it were the will of God."


22. Rhetorically, the strategies of this tale and the *Miller's Tale* are precisely the same. In each case the ending is so arranged as to make the audience able safely to entertain the story. The ending of the *Miller's Tale* permits us to enjoy the romping disorders which lead up to it, knowing that the harm they do will be punished; the ending of the *Franklin's Tale* permits us to enjoy the sentimental disorders which lead up to it, knowing that no great harm will come from them. In both cases comic distance encourages precisely the empathy necessary to entertain (in the logical sense) the propositions made in the tale and, at the same time, precisely the objectivity necessary to judge them. In the same way, pornography ceases to be sordid as soon as it stimulates laughter—that is, the social and distanced judgment which keeps the ethical universe in order.

23. For a full analysis of the significance of the exemplum of Midas in the *Wife of Bath's Tale*, which establishes the central importance of the implicit theme of judgment and which shows how the Wife is attempting to manipulate the tale rhetorically so as to make herself the object of a favorable judgment, see Allen and Gallacher, "Alisoun through the Looking Glass."

24. In the analogues the choice is between fair by day and foul by night, or vice versa. Chaucer's version of the choice, between faithful plainness and possibly faithless beauty, underlines the false dilemma between flesh and spirit, or carnality and the religious ideal, which the Wife of Bath has been posing in order to defend her sex-oriented value system. The ironic juxtaposition of her desire for youth and her confidence in her own experience links her with the Old Woman of the *Romance of the Rose*, and thence to the *Ars Amatoria*, as a woman whose behind-the-scenes knowledge of mores has not freed her from love's illusions. Cf. Margaret Schlauch, "The Marital Dilemma
in the Wife of Bath's Tale," *PMLA* 61 (1946), pp. 416-30. William Matthews, "The Wife of Bath and All Her Sect," *Viator* 5 (1974): 413-44, correctly identifies the issue of the tale as related to the medieval interest in old age, but ends by concluding, with most critics, that the Wife is "unique." Old age, in its struggle to maintain itself in authority and to retain its participation in the joys of life, was a theme of the first fragment, as well. Here, in light of the *Pardoner's Tale*, we may say that just as virginity is paired with true riches and virtue in this second group of tales, so old age is linked with avarice and with sexual cupidity.

25. Owen, in "The Transformation of a Frame Story," p. 134, identifies the Wife as one of the three key characters of the poem: "it was the Wife of Bath who was to transform the collection into drama." Curry, *Medieval Sciences*, finds the Wife "so vividly feminine and human," and quotes Kittredge, from *Chaucer and His Poetry*, who called the Wife "one of the most amazing characters . . . the brain of man has ever conceived" (p. 91).

26. We are happy to thank R. A. Shoaf for an archetypal insight which adds a last and neatly climactic twist to this whole argument. Writing, in a letter, of the separations from the world which human self-consciousness causes, and of the encounter with the loathly lady, he says: "The old hag is the world and the young knight is you or I and all our self-conscious ideals. But the young knight must accept the old hag, and then, only then, does beauty happen, the beauty of the world." This of course both modernizes and universalizes Chaucer's message, and places the miracle in the phenomenological world of the acceptance of a transcendence which mortal men can know but never absolutely be, rather than in the faerie transformation of the hag herself. But this placement gives us immediate possession of the miracle.

27. Cf. the *Parson's Tale*: "Now been ther generale signes of gentilesse, as eschewynge of vice and ribaudye and servage of synne, in word, in werk, and contenaunce;/and usynge vertu, curteisye, and clennesse, and to be liberal, that is to seyn, large by mesure;/for thilke that passeth mesure is folie and synne" (X [I] 464-65). See, also, Dante's *Convivio*, 4. xx, and G. M. Vogt, "Gleanings for the History of a Sentiment: Generositas Virtus, non Sanguis," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 24 (1925): 102-23.


31. With the same rhetoric, we are led to expect the Pardoner as well, and as it turns out, his is the last tale of the magic group.

32. "Possessiones et res civium debere[nt] esse proprias, et communes, proprias quidem quantum ad dominium, communes vero propter virtutem liberalitatis. . . . nam quilibet dominans bonis propriis adhibebit debitam diligientiam circa illa. Expedit autem talia esse communia secundum liberalitatem; quia cives inter se debent liberales esse, communicando sibi invicem propria bona" (De Regimine Principum [Rome, 1607; rpt. Aalen, Germany, 1967], p. 430). "The possessions and goods of the citizens ought to be private, and common, private indeed in the sense of ownership, but common for the sake of the virtue of liberality. . . . For any owner will devote to his own goods the care owed them. But it is proper that such things should be common for the sake of liberality; because the citizens ought to be liberal, by giving their own goods to each other reciprocally." "Tertia via ad ostendendum legem Phaleae non esse decentem de aequatione possessionum, sumitur ex parte virtutum quas decente habere cives: decent enim ipsos esse liberales et temperatos: non ergo bene dictum est quod ad bonum regimen civitatis sufficient cives habere possessiones aequatas, nisi aliquid determinetur de quantitate possessionum illarum; possent enim cives adeo modicas possessiones habere, quod oporteret eos ita parce vivere quod opera liberalitatis de facili exercere non valerent. Rursus habendo possessiones aequatas possent ita abundare in eis, et adeo deliciose vivere, quod non contingerebatur quod liberales esse" (p. 442). "The third way for showing the law of Phalea not to be proper, in the equality of possessions, is based on the virtues which it is proper that citizens have: for it is appropriate that they should be liberal and temperate: therefore it is not well said that it is enough for the good management of a city that the citizens have equal possessions, unless something may be determined concerning the quantity of their possessions, but then citizens might have modest possessions so that it might be necessary for them to live simply, and they would not be able to exercise the works of liberality easily. On the other hand, by having equal possessions they might be able to have them in such an abundance and they would live so luxuriously, that it would not be necessary for them to be temperate."

33. The friar's problem resembles the difficulty of the disciples in Matt. 14:17; they must divide the five loaves and two fishes to distribute to the multitude. The spiritual associations suggested would link the tale with the Pardoner's, whose description of the robbers' last meal has been discussed recently in terms of a parody of the Last Supper and the Mass. See Rodney Delasanta, "Sacrament and Sacrifice in the Pardoner's Tale," Annuale Mediaevale 14 (1973): 43-52.


37. Mary Carruthers, "Letter and Gloss in the Friar's and Summoner's Tales," *Journal of Narrative Technique* 2 (1972): 208-14, establishes a helpful tie between the two tales through their common emphasis on glossing. She shows that both the tellers and the characters in their tales suffer from an inability to perceive the allegorical dimensions of language and experience.

38. It is, after all, the Summoner who has struck a bargain with the devil to work as his business partner and who refuses to draw back, even when he learns that his companion is a devil (III [D] 1395-1405, 1447-60).

39. "Not all excommunications imposed in the middle ages... were necessarily valid;... perhaps the person had not been guilty of mortal sin" (F. Donald Logan, *Excommunication in the Secular Arm in Medieval England* [Toronto, 1968], p. 15). "injusta autem excommunicatio caritatem alicui auferre non potest, cum sit de maximis bonis, quae non possent alicui invito auferri" (Thomas Aquinas, *In 4 de Sententiarum, Opera Omnia*, vol. 10 [London, 1873], Dist. 18, Qu. 2, 2. sol. 1, p. 534). "Unjust excommunication cannot take charity away from someone, since it is among the greatest goods, which cannot be taken away from a person unwilling."

40. Pierre Bersuire, *Dictionarii seu repertorii moralis... pars secunda* (Venice, 1589), p. 352, s.v. "Iudicare." Bersuire gives a detailed analysis of the real and ideal behavior of judges, including a number of exempla. "Note that to judge is the same thing as to make distinctions. Wherefore concerning the wise and discreet man in any field it is said that he is a man of good judgment. For judgment is nothing else than discretion among the qualities and conditions of things... Therefore, since the name of judge indicates authority of status, understanding of affairs, and determination of affairs, it is very apparent that the duty of judging ought to be committed to upright and honest men, prudent and discreet men, also God-fearing and perfect men. For the judge in society is as the eye in the body, on which the health of the entire body depends. For just as the eye must judge concerning colors, to forewarn and forejudge pits and dangers, and to foresee for all the other members together, concerning the proper guidance, thus truly the judge ought to distinguish concerning colors, that is, concerning the conditions of people, to know the dangers to the republic, and to govern all members of the body, that is, all the persons of his jurisdiction, rightly."

41. *Opera Omnia*, vol. 3, fol. 139r. "Love justice, you who judge the earth, that is, who submit flesh to your judgment, that it should obey the spirit; do this discreetly and with love. Give the ass what is just, that is, a burden, the rod, and fodder, Eccl. 33.d. Whence the Apostle, Rom. 12.a. Your reasonable service, for no one ever hated his own flesh, but cherishes and nourishes it, Eph. 5.f."


43. Both Arnulf and Giovanni del Virgilio offer the explanation that Pygmalion had conceived a love for a statue of his own making. "Re vera Pigmalion mirabilis artifex eburneam fecit statuam cujus amorem concipiens ea cepit abuti ad modum vere mulieris" (in Ghisalberti, "Arnolfo," p. 223): "What happened was that Pygmalion, a marvelous craftsman, made an ivory statue, fell in love with it, and began to abuse it as if it were a true woman." Cf.
Ghisalberti, "Giovanni," p. 91, where Giovanni adds an alternative explanation: "... ideo aliter potest dici quod Pigmaliónum habebat quamdam uxorem pulcherrimam ut ebur. Sed erat immobils id est sine blanditiis, et nesciebat operari sicut alie in coitu et ideo dicebatur esse statua"; "... otherwise it can be said that Pygmalion had a certain wife as beautiful as ivory. But she was frigid, that is, without seductiveness, and did not know how to behave as others do in sex and therefore she was said to be a statue."

44. Pierre Bersuire, Ovidius Moralizatus: Reductiorum moral Liber XC, cap. ii-xv, Werkmateriaal (2) (Utrecht, 1962), p. 152. "Through this maker of images I understand preachers who know how to sculpt the soul, and to adorn it with corrections and virtues. Through this ivory girl I understand some holy woman, who is said to be ivory, through which she is called chaste, cold, dignified and honest. But often it happens that some good Pygmalion, that is, some good religious man, promises always to seek neither woman nor carnal embraces, and such a man devotes himself to making ivory images, that is, to teaching holy women and matrons in chastity and sanctity and for molding them in spiritual practices. And it happens that he may choose one from among them for himself, whom he calls sister or daughter, and he is with her and touches her with a good and chaste spirit and with love. But certainly it happens that Venus the goddess of lechery, that is, the lust of the flesh, intrudes and converts the dead image into life, and makes the chaste woman feel the stirrings of the flesh and changes her from a good person into a fool. For, Pygmalion himself, the preacher, seeks this from Venus, and desires this change. Thus, when as they were accustomed, they return to their conversions immediately, he finds both of them changed, with the result that she who was ivory has become fleshly and he who feared women, begins to desire the pollutions of the flesh. Therefore, these carnal beings receive each other mutually and generate children. So, it is not safe for a religious man to contract too great a familiarity with women or vice versa."

45. Augustine, in discussing the life of the Roman matron Lucretia, contrasts her suicide with the lives of Christian women who had endured the same evil as she had when she was forced to submit to rape. Augustine judges her suicide to be murder: "Non hoc fecerunt feminae Christianae, quae passae simila vivunt tamen nec in se ulterae sunt crimen alienum, ne aliorum sceleribus adderent sua, si, quoniam hostes in eis concupiscendo stupra commiserant, illae in se ipsis homicidia erubescendo committerent" (P.L. 41, col. 34, bk. 1, chap. 19, De Civitate Dei Libri, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina, 47:21 “Christian women who suffered rape did not do such a thing; they lived and did not revenge upon themselves the crime of another, lest they add their own sin to that of others by murdering themselves for shame because lusting enemies committed rape upon them."

46. Ibid. Augustine suggests that Lucretia, although she knew herself that she was innocent, attached too much significance to a bodily defilement and so took her life.

47. Richard Hoffman, in "Jephthah's Daughter and Chaucer's Virginia," Chaucer Review 2 (1967-68): 20–31, makes the point that Jephthah's daughter died wasting her virginity, whereas Virginia died to save hers. But the real point of the story is not chastity but judgment; it is the two judgments of the
flesh—that is, of a beautiful young woman as a potential sex object and, alternatively, as a piece of property not to be soiled—which are exemplarily wrong, and postures about virginity per se are not centrally relevant.

48. *Biblia Sacra, cum glosa ordinaria . . . et postilla Nicolai Lyrani*, vol. 2 (Lyons, 1520), fol. 46v. “Though the vow may well have proceeded out of devotion, nevertheless it was made indiscreetly, because there might have come first out of the house to meet him a dog, which is not an animal suitable for sacrifice.”

49. *Opera Omnia*, vol. 1, fol. 206v. “Augustine said that the vow referred to his wife, whom he hated, thinking she would meet him first, and so it is clear that he vowed with bad intention, therefore his vow was bad.”

50. Allegorizations, *in bono*, do not, however, justify the literal act. The Glosa’s lengthy discussion is very clear at this point: “Vel per scientes ergo, vel per nescientes significationem futurorum spiritus domini prophetico temporibus est, nec ideo peccata eorum non fuerunt peccata, quia deus qui et malis bene utitur usus est eis ad significanda que voluit. Si ergo peccatum non fuit cuiuslibet necis humane: vel etiam paricidale sacrificium vel vovere vel reddere: quia magnum aliquid et spirituali significavit: frustra deus talia prohibuit: et se odisse dicit: quia et illa que fieri iussit ad significationem spiritualium rerum referuntur, sed humana deo sacrificia non placuerunt: quando non pro iusticia quisque recte vivit vel peccare non vult, interimitur: sed homo ab homine tanquam electa hostia more pecoris immolatur. Si autem dicet aliquis: quia pecorum victime iam usitate ad significationem licet relate minus faciebat intentos ad sacramentum magnum christi et ecclesie requirendum: propterea deus re insigni et inopinata volens animos hominum excitare: eo magis quod sibi talia sacrificia offerri vetuerat: curavit sibi aliquid offerendum, in quo ipsa admiratio magnam gigneret questionem: et questio exigeret studium ad perscrutandum mysterium: pie vero scrutans mens hominis altitudinem prophetie velut hamo piscem christum de profundo scripturarum levaret. Huic rationi non obsistimus. Sed alia questione est de animo voventis, alia de providentia dei” *Biblia Sacra*, fol. 47r). “Therefore, the spirit of the Lord worked in prophetic times, either through those knowing, or those not knowing, the significance of future things; their sins were not sins, because God, who uses evil things for good, used them to signify the things he wished. If therefore the sin was not of some murder of a person: either the father’s sacrifice, the vow or the return, because it signified something great and spiritual, then in vain God prohibited such things. Yet he says he hates them: those things which he ordered to be done refer to the sense of spiritual things, but human sacrifices did not please the Lord. It is unjust when someone who has lived rightly and does not wish to sin, is killed, but a man is sacrificed by another as a chosen victim in the manner of a beast. If someone says: since it is permitted in this account to use the accustomed animal as sacrifice, it made us less intent on requiring the great sacrifice of Christ and the church. For that reason, God, wishing to excite the spirits of men, with an unexpected and notable event, especially because he had prohibited such sacrifices to be offered to him, arranged that something be offered to him, in which this wonder might raise a great question, and the question might require study to penetrate the mystery. But the mind of man, piously searching the heights of the Prophets, might as he raised a fish with a hook raise Christ from the depths of the Scriptures. We are not opposed to
this argument. But the soul of the man promising is one question, and the providence of God another.”

51. *Reductorem morale super totam Bibliam* (Cologne, 1631), p. 88. “We may expound this allegorically concerning Christ. So, we may say this Jephthah signifies Christ, who truly is born as from a concubine, since he seemed to come from God as father and a virgin as mother, who was of another place and bed. . . . Although he was repudiated by the Judeans, nevertheless, he is made prince and leader of the sons of Israel, that is, of the faithful, against Amon, that is, the devil. For the sake of obtaining victory he sacrificed his own daughter, that is, his humanity to God the Father, and she suffers death for the sake of the health of the human race and for victory, and Amon and his people, that is, the devil and vices, are overcome, and the children of Israel, that is, the faithful people, are liberated. . . . Or say that Jephthah is a man, whose daughter is his own flesh, which he ought to offer to God, and to promise to be immolated for the sake of penance to God, so that against Amon, that is, against the devil and sins, he is able to obtain victory. So, when it happens that a man had victory over vices or tribulations, or brought back from God a spiritual gift, and he sees his daughter, that is, his own flesh, to come toward him on the road of practice with drums and pipes, that is, to come with pleasures and tempting things, he ought to say and cry out immediately: My daughter, you have deceived me, and you have been deceived yourself. You have deceived me, I say, by offering vices, but you have been deceived yourself by bringing forth sin and repentance. He should sacrifice her to the Lord immediately as a penance, and bringing forth tears for his own virginity, that is, for the shame and the sterility of his virtues, nevertheless, his virginity or sterility having been deplored, he ought to burn her for charity, and to offer or sacrifice to God for the sake of penance and through the fatigue of labor.”

52. Throughout this group of tales, the emphasis on right judgment has been coupled with images related to sight: Cecilia’s crown seen only by the believer, the Wife’s loathly lady with her options of fair by day or night, the magic mirror in the Squire’s Tale, Dorigen’s hated rocks, and so on. There is a corresponding image from the senses that appears in the third and fourth groups of tales, particularly in the tales of interpretation: images of the tongue and speech. See below, chaps. 6 and 7.


54. The best of these studies is Robert P. Miller, “Chaucer’s Pardoner, the Spiritual Eunuch, and the Pardoner’s Tale,” *Speculum* 30 (1955): 180-99.

55. Ibid.; cf. Delasanta, “Sacrament and Sacrifice in the Pardoner’s Tale,” pp. 43-52; and Robert E. Nichols, Jr., “The Pardoner’s Ale and Cake,” *PMLA* 82 (1967): 498-504. E. R. Amoils, “Fruitfulness and Sterility in the Physician’s and Pardoner’s Tales,” *English Studies in Africa* 17 (1974): 17-37, links the tales of fragment VI as a diptych of physical death redeemed by spiritual values and spiritual death reinforced by murder; in this he provides us with a pattern of ending the magic group which recalls and reinforces, although on a lower scale of perfection, the grouping of tales with which we began, the Second Nun’s and Canon’s Yeoman’s.

56. Donald Howard, “The Pardoner: Actor and Martyr,” read to the meet-
ing of the Medieval Academy, 11 May 1974, Kalamazoo, Michigan. Those privileged to hear Howard's paper performed will never forget how powerfully the moral effect of the Pardoner's Tale was reenacted. Our report is based on memory, and so may well be an extrapolation of Howard's doctrine. We are confident that it is at least fair to its moral effect. Cf. Howard, The Idea of the Canterbury Tales, pp. 339–70.