

SIR ISRAEL GOLLANCZ MEMORIAL LECTURE

## Anger and ‘Glosynge’ in the *Canterbury Tales*

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PRUDENTIUS’S *Psychomachia*, as is well known, describes a battle between seven Vices and seven Virtues. The third of the seven encounters is between Patience and Wrath (‘Ira’), whose character is manifest in her frenzied and violent appearance.

hanc procul Ira tumens, spumanti fervida rictu,  
sanguinea intorquens subfuso lumina felle,  
ut belli exsortem teloque et voce lacessit,  
inpatiensque morae conto petit, increpat ore,  
hirsutas quatiens galeato in vertice cristas.<sup>1</sup>

From a distance swelling Wrath, raging with bared teeth and frothing mouth, darts her eyes, all shot with blood and gall, at her [Patience], and challenges her with weapon and with speech for taking no part in the fight; fretting under the delay, she hurls a pike at her, meanwhile assailing her with abuse and tossing the shaggy crests on her helmeted head. (112–17)

Patience remains unmoved under Wrath’s onslaughts, protected by a hidden coat of mail; frustrated at the failure of all her weapons to pierce this defence, Wrath eventually turns her violence on herself, committing suicide with her own sword.

If we were called upon to represent Wrath and Patience, this is probably how we would do it; the witty touch of having Wrath commit

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<sup>1</sup> Quotations from the *Psychomachia* are taken from the Loeb Classical Library edition and translation of Prudentius’s works by H. J. Thomson, 2 vols (London, 1953–62), vol. 1, pp. 274–343. I have altered the translation slightly.

suicide, instead of being killed by the opposing virtue, is probably the only unexpected element in this little episode. But when Langland pictures the Seven Deadly Sins making their confessions to Repentance in Passus V of *Piers Plowman*, his treatment of Wrath takes a quite different form. All the other sins are represented in the most obvious way; that is, their portraits are composed of samples of human behaviour illustrating the sin in question. Sloth is slothful in various ways, Avarice is avaricious, Envy is envious and so on. But Wrath is *not* represented as wrathful. There is none of the rage and frenzy that characterizes Prudentius's *Ira*; instead, Wrath introduces himself as one who practises two of the most peaceful occupations imaginable—a gardener and a cook.

'I am Wrathe,' quod he, 'I was som tyme a frere,  
And the coventes gardyner for to graffen impes . . . ' (V. 135–6)<sup>2</sup>

Of course, he turns out to be a *metaphorical* gardener: he 'grafts' lies on to friars, so that they eventually bear leaves of 'lowe speche' to please lords, and then 'blossom' in private chambers where the lords confess to the friars rather than to their parish priests. The 'fruit' of this metaphorical tree is a large-scale quarrel between the friars and the parish priests, who resent their loss of power and income. Wrath is also a metaphorical cook, this time in the kitchen of a nunnery, where he cooks up 'joutes of janglyng' (stews of gossip); he spreads rumours that one sister is a bastard, another the offspring of her mother's adultery, or that another 'hadde child in chirie-tyme', until a full-scale quarrel breaks loose.

Of wikked wordes I Wrathe hire wortes made,  
Til 'Thow lixt!' and 'Thow lixt!' lopen out at ones  
And either hitte oother under the cheke.  
Hadde thei had knyves, by Crist! hir either hadde kild oother. (V. 160–3)

What is interesting in this portrait is that Langland represents Wrath as working, not through direct physical action, but through the corruption of words—words which are not in themselves angry in the first instance but which include the 'low speech' and smooth lies traditionally associated with the friars.<sup>3</sup>

This collocation of anger, the corruption of words, and the friars, recurs in Chaucer's *Summoner's Tale*. It tells of a friar visiting the house of a sick man, to whom he is less welcome than to his wife. The friar boasts of his

<sup>2</sup> Quotations from *Piers Plowman* are from A. V. C. Schmidt, *The Vision of Piers Plowman: A Complete Edition of the B-Text* (London, 1978).

<sup>3</sup> For this traditional association, see J. Mann, *Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire* (Cambridge, 1973), pp. 37–9.

skill in 'glosynge', which turns out to mean interpreting the words of the Bible in such a way as to encourage people to give charitable donations to friars.

I have to day been at your chirche at messe,  
 And seyde a sermon after my symple wit—  
 Nat' al after the text of hooly writ,  
 For it is hard to yow, as I suppose,  
 And therefore wol I teche yow al the glose.  
 Glosynge is a glorious thyng, certeyn,  
 For lettre sleeth, so as we clerkes seyn—  
 There have I taught hem to be charitable,  
 And spende hir good ther it is resonable. (1788–96)<sup>4</sup>

The *Middle English Dictionary* gives three main branches of meaning for the verb 'glose': first, 'to gloss, comment on, interpret, explain, paraphrase'.<sup>5</sup> Even this first meaning has a pejorative sub-category: 'to interpret falsely', and this pejorative meaning is to the fore in senses 2 and 3: 'to obscure the truth ... falsify ... gloze over', and 'to use fair words, speak with blandishment, flattery or deceit ... cajole, flatter'. In its 'pure' sense, 'glosynge' means getting out of a text the meaning it contains; it is an act of disciplined inquiry in which (in theory at least) the interpreter is subordinate to the text. But, as the semantic development of the word shows, it is all too easy for this act of interpretation to become a matter of reading something *into* the text, especially when the text in question—the Bible—is one that is believed to have the power to generate a limitless number of spiritual truths. The text then becomes no more than a tool to serve the interests of the interpreter, meaning whatever he wishes it to.

The friar of the *Summoner's Tale* thus reads the biblical words 'Blessed are the poor in spirit' as a prophetic reference to the mendicant order.

But herkne now, Thomas, what I shal seyn.  
 I ne have no text of it, as I suppose,  
 But I shal fynde it in a manner glose,  
 That specially oure sweete Lord Jhesus  
 Spak this by freres, whan he seyde thus:  
 'Blessed be they that povere in spirit been.' (1918–23)

The friar uses this piece of 'glosynge' to support the mendicants' side in their quarrel with the beneficed clergy, who (he claims) give themselves over to gluttony and good living. (The friar's specifications to Thomas's

<sup>4</sup> Quotations from Chaucer are taken from *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd edn, ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston, 1987).

<sup>5</sup> *Middle English Dictionary*, ed. H. Kurath [and others] (Ann Arbor, 1954–).

wife of what he would like to eat show that his own gluttony expresses itself in the subtler form of ‘nouvelle cuisine’—fastidious delicacy rather than gross quantity.)

The friar’s ability in ‘glosynge’ is soon demonstrated. The sick man’s wife has complained about her husband’s anger (‘He is as angry as a pissemyre’: 1825); when she tries to cuddle him in bed at night, he makes no other response than to groan like a pig (1827–31). Reading between the lines, one can see Thomas’s point of view: his sickness is a good enough reason to make the wife’s physical ministrations unwelcome. One can also guess that her aim in bringing the matter up is to advertise her lack of sexual satisfaction to the friar, in the hope that he may live up to the traditional reputation of his kind and do something about it. For the moment, however, the friar directs his attention to the husband, promising a short sermon on the theme of anger—at which point the wife hurriedly excuses herself to go and make dinner. Her husband is left to endure the friar’s solemn rebukes for his anger against his wife, ‘the sely innocent/ . . . that is so meke and pacient’ (1983–4). However the main reason for him to exhibit patience towards this gentle innocent turns out to be the danger that the slightest provocation will turn her into a raging fury.

And, Thomas, yet eft-soones I charge thee,  
 Be war from Ire that in thy bosom slepeth;  
 War fro the serpent that so silyly crepeth  
 Under the gras and styngeth subtilly.  
 Be war, my sone, and herkne paciently  
 That twenty thousand men han lost hir lyves  
 For stryvyng with hir lemmans and hir wyves.  
 Now sith ye han so hooly meke a wyf,  
 What nedeth yow, Thomas, to maken stryf?  
 Ther nys, ywys, no serpent so cruel,  
 Whan men tret on his tayl, ne half so fel,  
 As womman is, whan she hath caught an ire;  
 Vengeance is thanne al that they desire. (1992–2004)

This association of women and wrath is traditional in medieval satirical and anti-feminist literature;<sup>6</sup> it is probably the reason why Langland chooses a nunnery for his second example of quarrelsomeness.

The friar’s long sermon on wrath is not very successful, since its major result is to make the sick man violently angry: ‘This sike man wax wel ny wood for ire’ (2121). He takes his vengeance by pretending that he has one last gift to give the friar, a treasure which he has concealed down his back

<sup>6</sup> See Mann, *Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire*, p. 123 and n. 82.

at the level of his buttocks, and which he will bestow on him on condition that he shares it equally with the other twelve friars in his convent. As the excited friar gropes for this treasure, Thomas lets fly an enormous fart. The fart is not a simple obscenity; in the context of the narrative it makes a precise point. The standard grammars of the Middle Ages commenced with a definition of the basic unit of language ('vox') as the breaking of air ('aer ictus').<sup>7</sup> As the Eagle explains to Chaucer in the *House of Fame*, 'Soun ys noght but eyr ybroken;/ And every speche that ys spoken,/ . . . In his substauce ys but air' (765–8). The fart reproduces this purely physical aspect of speech, separated from its signifying capacity. Thomas's fart makes a point about the friar's sermon: that its semantic content is, as far as he is concerned, nil; it is merely so much 'hot air', worthy to be countered only by another blast of hot air, the fart.

The friar's words not only fail to connect with reality by their lack of effect on the hearer, they also have no effect on their own author. For on receiving the fart, the friar in his turn becomes violently angry; he leaves Thomas's house in a furious rage.

And forth he gooth, with a ful angry cheere,  
 And fette his felawe, ther as lay his stoor.  
 He looked as it were a wilde boor;  
 He grynte with his teeth, so was he wrooth . . . (2158–61)

His anger is still apparent when he reaches the house of the lord of the village, where he is a regular guest:

Unnethes myghte the frere speke a word,  
 Til atte laste he seyde, 'God yow see!' (2166–9)

The sermon on anger thus has no effect whatever, on either its hearer or its deliverer; it is free-floating, a verbal balloon punctured by Thomas's gross physical response. The tale ends with the solution of the problem posed by the condition Thomas attaches to his gift: the twelve friars are to be assembled round the spokes of a cartwheel with the chief friar at its centre, and Thomas is to administer the fart at the hub of the wheel, so that each friar receives an equal amount of its 'soun' and 'savour' (2226). The suggested resolution parodies visual representations of the bestowal of the

<sup>7</sup> See *Grammatici Latini*, ed. H. Keil, 7 vols (Leipzig, 1857–1880), vol. 2, p. 5 (Priscian: 'Philosophi definiunt, vocem esse aerem tenuissimum ictum'), and vol. 4, p. 367 (Donatus: 'Vox est aer ictus sensibilis auditu..'). For a discussion of the elaboration of these simple definitions in medieval linguistic philosophy, see J. Jolivet, *Arts du langage et théologie chez Abélard* (Paris, 1969), pp. 22–36.

'gift of tongues' on Christ's disciples at Pentecost;<sup>8</sup> the pretentious verbalism of the friars is brought back to its most basic physicality.

Yet despite its ineffectuality, the sermon on ire does have something to tell us about anger. The anecdotes selected to illustrate the theme derive ultimately from Seneca's *De Ira* (perhaps by way of John of Wales).<sup>9</sup> What is interesting about them is that (as with Langland's *Wrath*) they do not conceive anger as frenzied rage. One is the story of Cambises, who was not only 'irous' but also a drunkard; when one of his lords exhorted him to temper his drinking, because wine deprives a man of control over his mind and limbs, Cambises flatly denied this assumption. Having drunk even more than before, he had the lord's son brought before him, and taking up bow and arrow, shot him to the heart, to prove the steadiness of his hand. Another is the story of an 'irous potestat' called upon to judge a knight who had gone out with a companion and returned alone, giving rise to suspicions that he had murdered his fellow. The potestate finds him guilty and orders another knight to put him to death, but on the way to the execution, they meet the man supposed dead, and therefore return to the judge to report that no murder has taken place. So far from acquitting the prisoner, however, the judge condemns all three to death: the first because he has already been sentenced and therefore must die; the second because he is thus the cause of his fellow's death and should therefore be punished for it; and the third, the knight charged with the execution, because he has been given an order and failed to carry it out.

What these two stories show us about the 'irous' man is that he insists on enforcing his own version of reality; or, to put it another way, he imposes his fictions on the world even in the teeth of the world's resistance. Cambises obliterates the lord's picture of the consequences of drunkenness along with the lord's son. The moral the friar draws from this story recommends accepting the fictions of the powerful as reality, never disturbing them with the brutal truth.

Beth war, therefore, with lordes how ye pleye.  
 Syngeth *Placebo* and 'I shal, if I kan,'  
 But if it be unto a povre man.  
 To a povre man men sholde his vices telle,  
 But nat to a lord, thogh he sholde go to helle. (2074–8)

<sup>8</sup> See A. Levitan, 'The Parody of Pentecost in Chaucer's *Summoner's Tale*', *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 40, (1970–1), 236–46 (with accompanying illustrations), and P. R. Szittyá, *The Antifraternal Tradition in Medieval Literature* (Princeton, N.J., 1986), pp. 231–8.

<sup>9</sup> See R. A. Pratt, 'Chaucer and the Hand that Fed Him', *Speculum*, 41, (1966), 619–42, at pp. 627–31.

As for the 'irous potestat', so far from accommodating himself to reality, he re-shapes reality to fit his own arbitrary mental construction of it, insisting that reality conform with his words rather than vice versa. The chain of causality is reversed: the potestate's death sentence makes the knight a murderer, and if there is a murderer, there must be a victim. We can thus see what anger and 'glosynge' have in common: both are a refusal of reality, a refusal to accommodate the self either to events in the world outside, or to the autonomous meaning of the text. They share a blinkered insistence on reducing the world or the text to a mirror-image of one's own narrow desires, instead of opening the self to the impact of an external reality.

The themes of the *Summoner's Tale* are widened and intensified in the rest of the Canterbury collection. We can see this already in the linking passages which introduce it, for this is not only a tale *about* anger, it is also *produced* by anger. It forms part of the quarrel between the Friar and the Summoner which breaks out at the end of the *Wife of Bath's Prologue* when the Summoner takes exception to the Friar's mockery of the length of the Wife's Prologue.<sup>10</sup> The Host puts a temporary stop to their squabble, telling them that they 'fare as folk that dronken ben of ale' (851)—a link between anger and drunkenness that we shall find elsewhere. But at the first opportunity—that is, when the Wife has finished her tale—the Friar tells an insulting story about a summoner which reduces the pilgrim Summoner to apoplectic fury:

This Somonour in his styropes hye stood;  
Upon this Frere his herte was so wood  
That lyk an aspen leef he quook for ire. (1665–7)

His tale about the 'glosynge' friar is the fruit of his anger; it is both fuelled and shaped by hostility to the pilgrim Friar. This is not the only example where anger is the stimulus that produces a tale; odd as it may seem, anger is one of the most important creative impulses in the *Canterbury Tales* (drunkenness is another). The *Miller's Tale* leaves 'a litel ire' in the heart of the Reeve (3862), who, as a carpenter himself, feels offended by the duping of the Oxford carpenter in the tale, and who lists 'anger' as one of the four live passions still smouldering in the ashes of old age (3884). He gives vent to his anger, and takes his revenge, by telling his own tale about the duping of a miller. The *Reeve's Tale* is followed by a skirmish between the Cook and the Host in the *Cook's Prologue*, in which anger lurks

<sup>10</sup> The animosity between Friar and Summoner is an example of the general hostility between the friars and the secular clergy, as F. Tupper noted; see 'The Quarrels of the Canterbury Pilgrims', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 14, (1915), 256–70, at p. 258.

beneath an apparently playful banter; the Host tries to laugh off his blunt remarks about the standard of hygiene in the Cook's shop with the entreaty 'be nat wroth for game' (4354), and the Cook maliciously replies that by the same token he hopes that the Host will 'be nat wrooth' if he tells a story about a 'hostiler' (4359–60). The later altercation between the Cook and the Manciple I shall deal with presently.

Of course these quarrels between the pilgrims have always attracted critical attention, but they have usually been regarded as one of the anarchic, unplanned elements that give the *Canterbury Tales* its verisimilitude, dissolving the neat and ordered framework of the tale-collection into the unpredictable collisions and developments of real life. This is undoubtedly true on the level of the fiction, but I wish to suggest that at the level of theme these manifestations of anger are nevertheless part of a structure of contrasts which underlies the whole work. The Friar–Summoner sequence of tales is a key example. In 1911, G. L. Kittredge outlined his theory that the tales in Groups D–F of the *Canterbury Tales*, running from the Wife of Bath's tale to the Franklin's, constituted a 'Marriage Group' which advanced different views of the relationships between the sexes in marriage, and this theory has become so widely accepted that it is received wisdom even today.<sup>11</sup> Yet the Friar–Summoner sequence has always been something of an embarrassment to this theory, for although it occurs immediately after the Wife of Bath's contribution, which is supposed to open the marriage debate, it quite clearly has nothing to do with marriage at all. Kittredge could only explain it by saying that Chaucer was 'too good an artist' to tie himself to a 'frigidly schematic' development of the Marriage theme, and so allowed 'the talkative members of the company' to thrust themselves forward.<sup>12</sup> I want to suggest an alternative way of looking not only at the D–F sequence, but at the *Tales* as a whole, which will make perfect sense of the placing of the *Friar's* and *Summoner's Tales* where they are. I want to suggest that the central theme of this group of tales, and others besides, is not Marriage but Patience.

In Seneca's *De Ira*, the agent that controls anger is reason;<sup>13</sup> but for

<sup>11</sup> 'Chaucer's Discussion of Marriage', *Modern Philology*, 9, (1911–12), 435–67; repr. in *Chaucer: Modern Essays in Criticism*, ed. E. Wagenknecht (New York, 1959) pp. 188–215.

<sup>12</sup> Wagenknecht, *Chaucer*, p. 194.

<sup>13</sup> *De Ira* I.xvii.2–xviii.2; Seneca, *Moral Essays*, ed. J. W. Basore, Loeb Classical Library, 3 vols (Cambridge, Mass. & London, 1958), vol. 1, pp. 150–5. (This passage immediately precedes the anecdote told of the 'irous potestat' in the *Summoner's Tale*). The opposition between reason and anger is also implicit in the tripartite division of the soul into rational, concupiscible and irascible elements, which was commonplace in medieval thought; see, for example, Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* Pars I.Q.81. Art. 2–3.

Prudentius, and for most of the Christian Middle Ages, anger is counteracted by patience.<sup>14</sup> The *Parson's Tale* tells us that

The remedie agayns Ire is a vertu that men clepen mansuetude, that is debonairetee; and eek another vertu, that men callen pacience or suffrance . . .

Pacience . . . is a vertu that suffreth swetely every mannes goodnesse, and is nat wrooth for noon harm that is doon to hym. The Philosophre seith that pacience is thilke vertu that suffreth debonairely alle the outrages of adversitee and every wikked word. This vertu maketh a man lyk to God, and maketh hym Goddes owene deere child, as seith Crist. This vertu disconfiteth thyn enemy. And therefore seith the wise man, 'If thou wolt venquyse thyn enemy, lerne to suffre.' (654, 657–61)

The Parson's words find an echo in the long lyrical passage celebrating patience at the opening of the *Franklin's Tale*:

Pacience is an heigh vertu, certeyn,  
 For it venquysseth, as thise clerkes seyn,  
 Thynges that rigour sholde never atteyne.  
 For every word men may nat chide or pleyne.  
 Lerneth to suffre, or elles, so moot I goon;  
 Ye shul it lerne, wher so ye wole or noon;  
 For in this world, certein, ther no wight is  
 That he ne dooth or seith somtyme amys.  
 Ire, siknesse, or constellacioun,  
 Wyn, wo, or chaungyng of complexioun  
 Causeth ful ofte to doon amys or spoken . . . (773–83)

'Ire' stands at the head of the list of things that may cause human beings to speak or act amiss; patience counteracts these disturbances and restores harmony and equilibrium. The *Franklin's Tale* shows patience in action in Arveragus's response to the claims of his wife's ill-fated promise. And other tales of the D–F group likewise make patience a central theme. The *Clerk's Tale* is a narrative study of patience, exemplified in Griselda's 'suffraunce' of her husband's cruelty. The *Wife of Bath's Tale*, which begins the group, shows a masculine example of patient acceptance of 'aventure' in the knight who is transformed from a rapist into a husband who meekly surrenders 'gouvernaunce' to his wife (1230–8).

<sup>14</sup> See J. D. Burnley, *Chaucer's Language and the Philosophers' Tradition* (Cambridge, 1979), p. 23: ' . . . Seneca despised pity as irrational. Whilst he was willing to recommend *clementia* as preferable to *crudelitas* wherever possible, Seneca's conception of equity was thoroughly dependent on reason. The Christian middle ages, however, placed a different value upon emotion, and particularly upon pity and compassion.' In Chaucer, reason occasionally appears in alliance with patience (see p. 217 below on the *Knight's Tale*, and cf. *Merchant's Tale* 2369), but its role is a minor one.

All of these three tales are also tales about promises—promises which commit the person who makes them to unpleasant consequences which could not be foreseen at the time they were made. The knight in the *Wife of Bath's Tale* promises the Loathly Lady who saves his life by telling him what women most desire that he will grant the first request she makes him thereafter, and finds to his horror that she asks him to marry her. Griselda promises to obey her husband in thought and deed without protest or 'grucchyng', and finds that she is required to surrender her two children to be murdered (as she thinks) and finally to acquiesce in her own repudiation. Dorigen promises Aurelius her love if he removes all the rocks from the coast of Brittany, and finds to her consternation that she is held to her word when he fulfils this apparently impossible condition. The tales that celebrate patience thus also celebrate a literalism of the austere sort. Dorigen's answer to Aurelius clearly *means* 'no', but she accepts that she is bound by the letter of her promise rather than its spirit. No such problems for the friar of the *Summoner's Tale*, who as we have seen rests confidently on the principle that 'lettre sleeth, so as we clerkes seyn' (1794). It is no accident that the friar's declaration that 'Glosynge is a glorious thyng, certeyn' (1793) echoes and travesties the 'Pacience is an heigh vertu, certeyn' of the *Franklin's Tale*. The submission involved in patience is a submission to words as well as to external 'aventure'; it represents the polar opposite of 'glosynge'. 'Glosynge' of the kind practised by the friars represents the imposition of the interpreter's bias on the words of the text, whereas with these promises the very person who utters the words must accept that he or she is not in control of their meaning. It is events that 'glose' these words by filling them with a meaning that imposes itself on those who have spoken them.

It is often said that the fabliaux 'call a spade a spade'—that whereas the romance relies on elevated language to invest human behaviour with a noble idealism, fabliau employs a verbal directness which fearlessly acknowledges the basic realities of life. In fact, in the *Canterbury Tales* at least, almost exactly the reverse is the case. In Chaucer's romances, the word is taken *au pied de la lettre*, however uncomfortable that might be. Besides the literalism in the rigorous interpretation of promises which I have already cited, there is the literalism exploited by Saturn in order to resolve the planetary debate in the *Knight's Tale*; although both knights clearly *mean* the same thing when they make their prayers in the temples of Mars and Venus, the fact that Arcite asks for victory and Palamon asks for Emily makes it possible to 'satisfy' each of them in a strictly literal sense. In contrast, in Chaucer's fabliaux, words are mere counters in a cynical game; wise players can manipulate them precisely because they always keep them separate from reality. Whether it is Nicholas embellishing his full frontal grab at his landlord's wife with the elegant phrases of love-poetry, or the

students of the *Reeve's Tale* faking a passionate intellectual interest in the workings of a mill in order to make sure that the miller does not cheat them of their corn while it is being ground, or the monk and merchant's wife of the *Shipman's Tale* negotiating a one-night stand and the price to be paid for it without ever mentioning the sex or explicitly linking it with the money, the inhabitants of the world of fabliau use language merely as a stalking-horse under whose cover they can advance on their real desires. 'Glosynge', in the sense of interpreting, is a perennial necessity in such a world; both the actors in the story and its readers have to be continually reading between the lines. What is said has to be decoded in the light of its context and the covert intentions of the speaker. The *Friar's Tale* is appropriately paired with the *Summoner's Tale* because it is a textbook illustration of this kind of 'glosynge'. The summoner who rides in company with the devil takes a literalist line on language when it is in his interests to do so (although he is unable to take in the literal force of the devil's remarks about his future knowledge of hell). When the carter whose horses are failing to pull his cart out of the mire curses them and wishes the devil may fetch them, the summoner (presumably mindful of the devil's agreement to share with him his winnings) urges the devil to claim his prey (1551–4). The comedy of this is surely that whereas we would expect the devil to tempt the summoner, in fact it is the summoner who tempts the devil—a piece of ingenious malice on the part of the pilgrim Friar to demonstrate the moral baseness which characterizes summoners. But the devil resists the temptations of literalism; he patiently explains that the carter's words are not a literal reflection of his 'entente', as is proved when the horses finally succeed in pulling the cart out of the mud and the carter rewards them with blessings instead of curses. 'The carl spak oo thing, but he thoghte another' (1568) is the devil's wise comment. When, however, the old woman who is being harassed by the summoner wishes that the devil may fetch him, *then* the devil perceives that this is no mere figure of speech but a heartfelt desire; her words are united with her 'entente' (1626–38).

Dorigen would have been quite safe with the devil of the *Friar's Tale*; he would have glossed her words according to the 'entente' behind them rather than holding her to their literal form. The summoner is treated more leniently than she is; for she must exercise patience in freely submitting to the mere form of her words rather than their inner meaning, whereas it is only when form and meaning are proved to be united that the summoner must exercise a similar submissiveness to his fate (he is urged by the devil to 'be nat wrooth': 1634). Yet Dorigen's ultimate fate is more benign than the summoner's: submission to literalism proves to be her salvation, while the summoner who attempts to make literalism serve his own ends is damned for all eternity.

The tales told by the Friar and Summoner are thus tales of anger and 'glosynge', and as such they fit perfectly into the group of tales initiated by the Wife of Bath, as a contrast to the tales of patience. But Kittredge was of course right to the extent that it is in the context of relations between the sexes that these themes are often worked out. Women, in particular, are given a special relationship to patience.<sup>15</sup> Chaucer's own tale of Melibee, for example, embodies patience in Melibee's wife Prudence, who by a lengthy process of reasoned argument persuades him to renounce 'ire' against his enemies and instead to 'suffre and be pacient' (1478). The *Clerk's Tale* sees Griselda's patience as characteristic of her sex: however much clerks may boast of Job's great patience, we are told, no man can ever be half as patient as a woman can (932–8). But elsewhere in the *Tales* it is made clear that women also have a special relationship to anger, as we have already seen; the friar of the *Summoner's Tale* does no more than repeat a commonplace when he warns Thomas not to cross his wife because a woman's anger is more terrifying than a serpent's (2001–3). The friar's view of the irascibility of women is one shared by medieval artists, from one of whom Chaucer culled the vignette of female anger that he inserts into the Wife of Bath's portrait in the *General Prologue*:<sup>16</sup>

In al the parissh wif ne was ther noon  
 That to the offrynge bifore hire sholde goon;  
 And if ther dide, certeyn so wrooth was she  
 That she was out of alle charitee. (449–51)

In one sense therefore it can be said that the Wife represents anger; her *Prologue* supports this picture of her by showing her in action as scold and shrew, berating her three old husbands and making sure that the exercise of patience is all on their side.

Thanne wolde I seye, 'Goode lief, taak keep  
 How mekely looketh Wilkyn, oure sheep!  
 Com neer, my spouse, lat me ba thy cheke!  
 Ye sholde been al pacient and meke,  
 And han a sweete spiced conscience,  
 Sith ye so preche of Jobes pacience.  
 Suffreth alwey, syn ye so wel kan preche . . .  
 Oon of us two moste bowen, doutelees,  
 And sith a man is moore resonable  
 Than woman is, ye moste been suffrable.' (431–7, 440–2)

<sup>15</sup> See further J. Mann, *Feminist Readings: Geoffrey Chaucer* (Hemel Hempstead, 1991), esp. pp. 160–4, 180–2.

<sup>16</sup> *Les Lamentations de Matheolus et le Livre de Leesce de Jehan le Fèvre, de Ressons*, ed. A. G. van Hamel, 2 vols, Bibliothèque des Hautes Etudes 95–6 (Paris, 1893–1905), vol. 1, p. 82, 1431–40.

Her fourth husband is tormented by her 'angre' and 'verray jalousye' (488); he becomes the traditional henpecked husband who alone 'knows where his shoe pinches' (486–94). Her account of life with her fifth husband climaxes with the violent quarrel precipitated by his persistent reading aloud from his anti-feminist book; the Wife rips three leaves from the offending volume and knocks her husband backwards into the fire, whereupon he in turn floors her with a blow to the head that leaves her permanently deaf. Yet this picture of the Wife as the classic example of the wrathful woman is complicated in various ways. In the first place, her wrath does not come out of the blue, as a merely natural characteristic; one way or another, it is the result of masculine hostility. Her tirades against her three old husbands are actually composed of anti-feminist insults which she presents as what her husbands said to her when they were drunk.<sup>17</sup> Masculine aggression is turned back on the sex that produced it. Her fourth husband is made to 'fry in his own grease' as a punishment for his infidelities. And the violent outburst against Jankin is caused by his relentless anti-feminist abuse; the anti-feminist material *creates* the wrathful woman that it pretends merely to describe. Female anger here is a result of masculine 'glosynge', of Jankin's subordination of the text to his own malicious purposes. Whatever the anti-feminist material assembled in Jerome's treatise *Against Jovinian* in its defence of virginity, we may assume that Jerome did not have it in mind that it should be used as an instrument of marital torture.

At the opening of her *Prologue*, the Wife declares herself a vigorous opponent of the masculine/clerical 'glosynge' which attempts to define the meaning of a text in accordance with its own interests. Thus she disputes the gloss that reads Christ's words to the Samaritan woman at the well as a prohibition against multiple marriages.

'Thou hast yhad fyve housbondes,' quod he,  
 'And that ilke man that now hath thee  
 Is noght thyn housbonde,' thus seyde he certeyn.  
 What that he mente therby, I kan nat seyn . . .  
 Men may devyne and glosen, up and down,  
 But wel I woot, expres, withoute lye,  
 God bad us for to wexe and multiplye;  
 That gentil text kan I wel understonde. (17–20, 26–9)

The Wife returns to the literal text as a way of rejecting masculine 'glosynge'. She likewise rejects the 'glosynge' that interprets the genital organs as created for the 'purgacioun/Of uryne', or to enable us to

<sup>17</sup> See Mann, *Geoffrey Chaucer*, pp. 77–9.

distinguish a male from a female (120–2); ‘Glose whoso wole’, she proclaims, experience teaches that ‘it is nocht so’ (119,124). Yet this appeal to experience is itself a kind of alternative ‘glosynge’, an attempt to read data from her own point of view, and the Wife shows herself every bit as accomplished a manipulator of texts as the clerics she despises because of their monopoly over books and their interpretation. As her anger counters masculine aggression, her own brand of ‘glosynge’ counters clerical interpretations which restrict and humiliate women.<sup>18</sup> Ptolemy’s recommendation on indifference to Fortune, for example (‘Of alle men his wysdom is the hyste/ That rekketh nevere who hath the world in honde’: 326–7), is brazenly ‘glossed’ so that it becomes an exhortation to her old husbands not to worry about who else is enjoying her sexual favours, so long as they are getting all they want. It may also be noticed that the Wife’s frequent use of euphemisms in her Prologue—‘bothe thynges smale (121), ‘sely instrument’ (132) ‘harneys’ (136), ‘instrument’ (149), ‘*bele chose*’ (447, 510), ‘*quoniam*’ (608), ‘chambre of Venus’ (618)—and her repeated invitations to her listeners to divine ‘what I meene’ behind coy formulations (90, 200), align her firmly with the ‘glosynge’ characteristic of the fabliau and against the literalism of the romance tales.

Yet (and this is the second qualification to the picture of the Wife as representative of anger) neither anger nor ‘glosynge’ brings her final relief; instead it is her own version of patience that does so. She wins more by pathos, that is, than by anger. Finding herself flat on the floor as a result of Jankin’s blow, she acts the role of pathetic victim to the hilt, exploiting his remorse and horror at his own violence until finally he hands over the ‘governance’ of their affairs to her and burns his book (813–16). Destruction of the text is safer than ‘glosynge’. Henceforth the only kind of ‘glosynge’ between them is presumably that which Jankin practises so well in bed:

... so wel koude he me glose,  
Whan that he wolde han my *bele chose*;  
That thogh he hadde me bete on every bon,  
He koude wyne agayn my love anon. (509–12)

In the quarrel between the Wife and Jankin we see something exemplified elsewhere in the *Canterbury Tales*: that anger creates a deadlock, an impasse, from which patience or ‘suffraunce’ offers an

<sup>18</sup> For discussion of the Wife of Bath as practitioner of ‘alternative’ exegesis, see R. W. Hanning, ‘Roasting a Friar, Mis-taking a Wife, and Other Acts of Textual Harassment in Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*’, *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 7, (1985), 3–21, and A. Blamires, ‘The Wife of Bath and Lollardy’ *Medium Aevum*, 58 (1989), 224–42.

escape—patience and its associate pity, which is likewise an antidote to anger.<sup>19</sup> I want briefly to illustrate this from the *Knight's Tale*, in order to reinforce the point that these are themes by no means limited to the D–F sequence of tales, but found from the beginning of the collection to its end. Theseus, who is in a sense the hero of the *Knight's Tale*, is portrayed at its opening as a representative of pity, in opposition to the 'ire' and 'tirannye' of Creon (940–1). The appeal of the widow ladies that he should show them 'Som drope of pitee, thurgh thy gentillesse' is met by an instant response: he dismounts from his horse 'With herte pitous' and promises to do vengeance on Creon (920, 953). Yet the 'ire' that Theseus here combats in Creon he later has to combat in himself, and Chaucer deliberately alters his source (Boccaccio's *Teseida*) in order to bring this about. When Theseus and his party come across Palamon and Arcite fighting in the grove, Theseus first reacts with violent anger to the discovery that the one has escaped from his prison, and the other returned to Athens against his express prohibition. It is only when the Queen and her ladies beg for mercy, weeping and falling to their knees, that he changes his mind, 'For pitee renneth soone in gentil herte' (1761). 'And thogh he first for ire quook and sterte', says Chaucer, his reason and his compassion unite to dispel his anger (1762–82).<sup>20</sup> All this is in striking contrast to Boccaccio's Teseo, who feels no more than a passing twinge of irritation, and accepts the situation without intervention from any women.<sup>21</sup> Chaucer not only wishes to show his hero as 'pitous', he wishes to show pity counteracting and vanquishing anger. And he also wishes, I think, to show how anger closes off narrative possibilities. Putting Palamon and Arcite to death would bring the story to a halt; it is Theseus's pity that allows the story to move on, giving it space for further developments.

Anger can, as we have seen, paradoxically perform the function of a creative impulse in the *Canterbury Tales*. But it also threatens on two occasions to bring the action to a halt, to close off possibilities, by breaking the contract of 'game and play' that holds the pilgrim company together. And in each of these cases anger in one pilgrim follows on from a rejection of 'glosynge' in the other. The first occasion is at the end of the *Pardoner's Tale*, when the Host refuses the Pardoner's offer to let him kiss his relics, using a violent bluntness of speech that resembles Thomas's response to

<sup>19</sup> See Burnley, *Chaucer's Language and the Philosophers' Tradition*, for a full exploration of the opposition between patience and pity on the one hand, and anger on the other, in medieval structures of language and thought.

<sup>20</sup> The inclusion of reason shows the influence of the Senecan tradition (see n. 14 above).

<sup>21</sup> *Teseida* V. 88; ed. V. Branca in vol. 2 of *Giovanni Boccaccio, Tutte le Opere* (Milan, 1964).

the 'glosynge' friar in that it confronts the Pardoner's professional rhetoric with the most basic physical realities:

'Lat be,' quod he, 'it shal nat be, so theech!  
 Thou woldest make me kisse thyn olde breech,  
 And swere it were a relyk of a seint,  
 Though it were with thy fundement depeint!  
 But, by the croys which that Seint Eleyne fond,  
 I wolde I hadde thy coillons in myn hond  
 In stide of relikes or of seintuarie.  
 Lat kutte hem of, I wol thee helpe hem carie;  
 They shul be shryned in a hogges toord!' (946–55)

This bursting of his linguistic bubble makes the Pardoner speechless with anger (as it does the friar of the *Summoner's Tale*):

This Pardoner answerde nat a word;  
 So wrooth he was, no word ne wolde he seye.  
 'Now' quodoure Hoost, 'I wol no lenger pleye  
 With thee, ne with noon oother angry man.' (956–9)

This quarrel is patched up by the Knight, and the tale-telling goes on. The second near-breakdown is in the *Manciple's Prologue*, and again it is caused by plain speaking: the Host calls on the Cook for a tale, but he is so drunk he can hardly stay on his horse. The Manciple then jeeringly suggests he be excused, ridiculing his gaping mouth and stinking breath; 'Of me, certeyn, thou shalt nat been yglosed' (34), he assures him. Again the abandonment of 'glosynge' produces speechless anger:

And with this speche the Cook wax wrooth and wraw,  
 And on the Manciple he gan nodde faste  
 For lakke of speche, and doun the hors hym caste . . . (46–8)

Drink and anger, which had earlier acted as a stimulus to tale-telling, here totally incapacitate the Cook and reduce him to silence. Once again the quarrel is patched up, this time by the Host; the Manciple appeases the angry Cook ('I wol nat wratthen hym': 80), and the atmosphere of 'game' is restored by giving the Cook yet more to drink. Yet the tale the Manciple goes on to tell answers to the menacing resonances of this introductory episode rather than its playful ones; it constitutes the bleakest picture of anger and 'glosynge' in the whole of the *Canterbury* collection.

The tale tells of the crow who was punished for tale-telling. Chaucer must have known it in the first place from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (II. 531–632), but it is also very likely that he knew Gower's version of it in Book III of the *Confessio Amantis* (783–817)—which is, significantly, the section devoted to the sin of Wrath; what is more, this book of the *Confessio* also includes the story of Alexander and the pirate which likewise reappears in

the *Manciple's Tale* (2363–417).<sup>22</sup> Chaucer alters the slant and the significance of the story about the crow, but he retains the connection with anger. The story of Alexander he makes into a story about 'glosynge', as we shall see. The *Manciple's Tale* opens in an apparently paradisaical world, when the god Phebus lived on earth. The 'most lusty bachiler' and the best archer in the world, he was also master of music, both as singer and as a player of instruments. His pet crow, who in those days was as white as a swan, likewise sang like a nightingale and imitated human speech. Phebus also had a wife, of whom he was exceedingly fond and also exceedingly jealous. Chaucer—or the Manciple—then comments on the futility of jealousy: a good wife does not need invigilation, and a bad wife will always manage to elude it (148–54). Phebus's wife is thus unfaithful to him despite his watchfulness, and what is more, she chooses as her lover 'a man of litel reputacioun' who cannot stand comparison with her husband (199–200). The crow who is witness to her adultery reveals it to Phebus, who 'in his ire' seizes his bow and arrows and slays his wife, and then breaks to pieces both his musical instruments and his bow (264–9). Then he repents and blames everything on the crow, who is punished by being turned black, deprived of his song, and tossed out of doors to become a figure of ill omen (270–308).

This simple story is elaborated in Chaucer's telling by the addition of several extended passages of narratorial comment. First, Phebus's attempts to police his wife's behaviour provoke a lengthy digression on the ineradicability of Nature, beginning with the maxim

... ther may no man embrace  
As to destreyne a thyng which that nature  
Hath naturelly set in a creature. (160–2)

This is followed by the illustrative example of the bird in the cage which is used by Boethius to make the same point: however well you feed it on dainties and decorate its cage, if the cage door is left open it will be off to the wood to eat 'wormes and swich wrecchednesse' (163–74). Similarly a cat is never so pampered that it will not abandon all its titbits to run after a mouse. It is significant in this connection that the opening two narratives in Gower's section on Wrath present anger as a refusal of *nature*: in the first, nature takes the form of the incestuous love between Canacee and her brother Macharius, which their father's wrath refuses to accept as natural (III. 143–360). In the second, nature takes the form of the two snakes which Tiresias sees coupling sexually 'so as nature hem tawhte', and which

<sup>22</sup> *The English Works of John Gower*, ed. G. C. Macaulay, 2 vols, EETS e.s., 81–2 (London, 1900–1).

he angrily strikes with his stick; he is then ‘unnaturally’ transformed into a woman as punishment for this ‘disturbance’ of nature (III. 361–80). Like Gower, Chaucer sees anger as a refusal of nature, a fundamental refusal to accept the way things are. Phebus refuses to accept the adultery of his wife, which although as illicit as the incestuous love of Canacee and Macharius, resembles it in being a reflex of the inexorable power of nature.

No sooner is the narrative resumed after this digression than it is abandoned again, as the narrator backtracks on the word ‘lemman’ which has just used of Phebus’s wife’s lover:

Hir lemman? Certes, this is a knavyssh speche!  
Foryeveth it me, and that I yow biseche. (205–6)

Yet he defends this ‘knavyssh speche’ on the principle that the word should be cousin to the deed. ‘I am a boystous man’, he explains (211); as far as he is concerned, the only difference between a high-born lady who commits adultery and a poor wench who does the same lies in the language used to describe them: the ‘gentile’ woman will be called her lover’s lady-love, while the poor woman will be called his ‘wench’ or ‘lemman’.

And, God it woot, myn owene deere brother,  
Men leyn that oon as lowe as lith that oother. (221–2)

The story of Alexander and the pirate told by Gower is then cited to underline the point: a tyrant such as Alexander is just as much a thief as the leader of a band of outlaws; the only difference is that his ravages are on a larger scale (223–34).

In the *Confessio Amantis* this story illustrates the destructiveness of war. In the *Manciple’s Tale* it is used to make a point about ‘glosynge’—about the use of language to camouflage the squalid indignities of human behaviour. The thief is ‘glosed’ into a conqueror; the wench is ‘glosed’ into a lady-love. Chaucer has already shown us this kind of ‘glosynge’ in action in the *Merchant’s Tale*, where the romantic language used to describe the incipient love-affair between ‘fresshe May’ and the young squire Damian seems increasingly at odds with the very unromantic events it is called upon to describe. ‘Pitee’ here is not the meaningful term it was in the *Knight’s Tale*, but merely a euphemism for violent sexual desire; the maxim that ‘pitee renneth soone in gentil herte’ is invoked to account for May’s instantaneous yielding to Damian’s advances (1986). Yet the climax of the tale, the brisk coupling in the pear-tree, is something that virtually defies ‘glosynge’, and the Merchant is temporarily deflected into describing it in plain terms:

And caughte hire by a twiste, and up she gooth—  
Ladies, I prey yow that ye be nat wrooth;

I kan nat glose, I am a rude man—  
 And sodehynly anon this Damyan  
 Gan pullen up the smok, and in he throng. (2349–53)

But given a little time the Merchant recovers himself magnificently, as he describes January, his sight newly restored by Pluto, taking in what is going on over his head:

Up to the tree he caste his eyen two,  
 And saugh that Damyan his wyf had dressed  
*In swich manere it may nat been expressed*  
*But if I wolde speke uncurteisly.* (2360–3: my italics)

It looks at first as if the Merchant will be obliged to repeat his earlier crudeness, but with a superb literary body-swerve he triumphantly defies our expectations. His linguistic avoidance of blunt statement parallels January's refusal of reality: even though a miracle restores to him the power to see his wife's adultery with his own eyes, he nevertheless allows himself to be persuaded that his eyes deceived him. Stylistic 'glosynge' answers to this wilful blindness on the narrative level;<sup>23</sup> it shows us how the operations of physical appetite can, with a different kind of linguistic embodiment, be disguised as the manifestations of romantic passion.

In the *Manciple's Tale* Phebus's romantic illusions are shattered by the brutal simplicity of the one word with which the crow reveals his wife's adultery:

And whan that hoom was come Phebus, the lord,  
 This crowe sang 'Cokkow! Cokkow! Cokkow!' (242–3)

The message hovers at the very limits of human language, already passing over the boundary to become a mere bird-call; human dignity is confronted by animal reality. Even when the crow is called upon to expand on the meaning of his jeering call, his phrasing is unsoftened by euphemism ('on thy bed thy wyf I saugh hym swyve': 256). And just as the narrator of the *Merchant's Tale* fears that his inability to find a suitable 'glose' will provoke

<sup>23</sup> Cf. the recent comments of P. Martin, *Chaucer's Women: Nuns, Wives and Amazons* (Basingstoke, Hants, & London, 1990), p. 118: 'The fabliau mocks the romance, the squalid defiles the sacred, low style ruptures high. The narrator's "rude" (2351) speech at the crucial moment, "in he throng" (2353), January's "Ye, algate in it wente!" (2376) compromise the elevated and allusive style of the rest of the Tale, as if the noble diction were merely a gloss on the vile reality. Understood properly, suggests the narrator, the wonderful cadences, sensuous imagery and holy symbolism of the *Song of Songs* are nothing but "olde lewed wordes" (2149). In this re-vision of Paradise, words are the only covering for the creatures' nakedness and words are showily deceptive.'

anger in his hearers, so the unmitigated directness of the crow's revelation plays a part in creating the violence of Phebus's anger; he cannot withstand the assault of bald and unmitigated truth.<sup>24</sup> His 'ire' is the attempt to obliterate this intolerable reality, to destroy it by destroying his wife. But once he has killed her, he attempts to obliterate reality a second time, not by anger, but by 'glosynge'. In an astonishing flow of sentimental rhetoric, he re-creates his wife as an innocent victim. His remorse at his own anger does not indicate an acceptance of his wife's infidelity, but on the contrary refuses it a second time in the pretence that she was innocent after all.

Allas, that I was wrought! Why nere I deed?  
 O deere wyf! O gemme of lustiheed!  
 That were to me so sad and eck so trewe,  
 Now listow deed, with face pale of hewe,  
 Ful giltelees, that dorste I swere, ywys!  
 O rakel hand, to doon so foule amys!  
 O trouble wit, O ire recchelees,  
 That unavysed smyteth gilteles!  
 O wantrust, ful of fals suspesion,  
 Where was thy wit and thy discrecion?  
 O every man, be war of rakelnesse!  
 Ne trowe no thying withouten strong witenesse.  
 Smyt nat to soone, er that ye witen why,  
 And beeth avysed wel and sobrelly  
 Er ye doon any execucion  
 Upon youre ire for suspesion.  
 Allas, a thousand folk hath rakel ire  
 Fully fordoon, and broght hem in the mire.  
 Allas! For sorwe I wol myselfen slee! (273–91)

Anger is rejected only because its role has been taken over by 'glosynge'; both are a means of shutting out reality, retreating into a world of private illusion. Those who try to break through the boundaries of this cosy world, such as the crow, are viciously punished, turned into the villain of the piece and summarily ejected.

The ending of the tale does nothing to lighten this gloomy picture of the human commitment to illusion. Like the Friar of the *Summoner's Tale*, the Manciple concludes one should never tell unpleasant truths to powerful people:

Lordynges, by this ensample I yow preye,  
 Beth war, and taketh kep what that ye seye:

<sup>24</sup> For a similar example of anger provoked by a refusal to 'glose', see the story of Ahab and Micaiah in Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, ed. Macaulay, V. 2527–685, esp. 2531, 2631, 2664–9.

Ne telleth nevere no man in youre lyf  
How that another man hath dight his wyf. (309–12)

And he reiterates the advice to keep one's mouth shut for a further fifty lines, quoting his mother's exhortations in his childhood to 'kepe wel [his] tonge'. The alternative to 'glosynge', it seems, is silence. It is not a very comforting moral for the poet who, like the crow, is committed to telling tales; it is not surprising that this dour onslaught against tale-telling is followed by the prose *Parson's Tale*, which renounces both poetic form and fiction.<sup>25</sup> This time the refusal of 'glosynge' ('I wol nat glose': 45) is not a sign of aggressive confrontation, but of an austere rejection of 'fable' in favour of plain prosaic 'moralitee and vertuuous mateere' (31, 38). For those who cannot follow the Parson in rejecting poetic fiction along with the less attractive kinds of 'glosynge', comfort is to be had only by retreating to the heart of the *Tales*—for example to the *Nun's Priest's Tale*, the other animal-tale in the collection, where a barnyard incident is 'glosed' into a drama of cosmic significance in a way that makes the disparity between rhetoric and action into a source of comic celebration rather than tragic gloom. Comfort can also be had by retreating to tales such as those of the Knight or the Franklin, with their counterposing images of patience and pity. But the power of these ideals rests precisely with the sharpness and clarity of vision with which Chaucer focusses the human impulses towards their contraries, anger and 'glosynge', and records with unblinking honesty both the comedy and the bleakness of their manifestations in human life.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. B. J. Harwood, 'Language and the Real: Chaucer's Manciple', *Chaucer Review*, 6. (1971–2), 268–79.