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Alaric Hall



Editorial assistant
Victoria Cooper

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University of Leeds

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Chaucer's *Melibee*: what can we learn from some late-medieval manuscripts?

Kate Jackson¹

Introduction

As is well known, Chaucer's *Tale of Melibee* is a translation of Renaud de Louen's *Livre de Mellibee et Prudence* (c. 1337), which itself is a redaction of a Latin text, Albertano of Brescia's *Liber consolacionis et consilii* (1246).² The story of Melibee and Prudence was popular across medieval Europe, as is evident from the large number of extant manuscripts of Albertano's *Liber* and its many translations, including Renaud's.³

The Tale of Melibee seems designed to fashion a high degree of authority for its teller. While the date of its composition remains uncertain,⁴ there are indications that its place in the *Canterbury Tales* carries particular significance. Not only does Chaucer reserve its narration for his pilgrim persona, but the early manuscripts of the story collection, produced by Chaucer's near-contemporaries, link him to the tale. Hengwrt, possibly the earliest extant manuscript and usually dated soon after Chaucer's death in 1400 and sometimes earlier,⁵ introduces it with 'here bigynne Chaucers tale of Melibeus' (f. 216r).⁶ Ellesmere, 'made probably soon after 1400',⁷ does the same (f. 153v). It also gives the text of *Melibee* special

¹ A grant from the University of Leeds Brotherton Library Scholarship Fund enabled me to consult manuscripts at the British Library as part of my research for this article. I wish to record my thanks for this funding.

² All references to Chaucer's texts, unless otherwise indicated, are to *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry D. Benson, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987); henceforth *Riverside*; line references will be given in brackets, in the body of the essay. For Renaud's version, see William Askins, 'The Tale of Melibee', in *Sources and Analogues of The Canterbury Tales, 1*, ed. by Robert M. Correale and Mary Hamel (Cambridge: Brewer, 2002), pp. 321–408; henceforth Askins. I use Askins' references when quoting from Renaud's text.

³ See Askins, pp. 321–22, on the popularity in England and elsewhere of Albertano's *Liber* and Renaud's *Livre* by Chaucer's time.

⁴ *Riverside*, p. 923, although it gives 1386–90 as 'most likely'. Helen Cooper, *The Canterbury Tales* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), points out that 'reasons have been adduced for dating it to each of the last three decades of Chaucer's life, but hard evidence is lacking' (p. 312). Askins does not consider the date of Chaucer's translation.

⁵ *The Hengwrt Chaucer Digital Facsimile*, ed. by Estelle Stubbs (2000), Introduction, n. 1: <http://www.canterburytalesproject.org/pubs/HGEDintro.html>.

⁶ *The Canterbury Tales: A Facsimile and Transcript of the Hengwrt Manuscript, with Variants from the Ellesmere Manuscript*, ed. by Paul G. Ruggiers (Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1979), p. 859.

⁷ Daniel Woodward, 'The New Ellesmere Chaucer Facsimile', in *The Ellesmere Chaucer: Essays In Interpretation*, ed. by Martin Stevens and Daniel Woodward (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1995), pp. 1–13 (p. 3).

treatment; further, its portrait of Chaucer is larger than that of any other pilgrim and shows him pointing to this tale.⁸ Alan Gaylord argues that by adopting these features, Ellesmere introduces 'the author as *auctor*', and that the portrait should be seen in iconographical terms, as a representation of a wise old man, a 'true poet', rather than an actual likeness.⁹ Donald R. Howard argues that the portrait of Chaucer in Ellesmere suggests his 'living presence' in the *Tales*, of which *Melibee* is 'a major structural unit'.¹⁰ *Sir Thopas* is also introduced as Chaucer's tale but although it precedes *Melibee*, it is not accompanied by a portrait of its narrator. Nor does its narrator seem to have a commanding presence. The Host appears to have barely noticed him, asking, 'What man artow?' (695), and goes on to describe him as 'elvyssh' (703) and 'a popet' (701). He then cuts short Chaucer's contribution, castigating its 'drasty speche' (923) and 'rym dogerel' (925), thus suggesting his story-telling incompetence. While *Sir Thopas* is a skilful parody of popular romance — something the Host fails to appreciate — it is *Melibee* which Chaucer the pilgrim introduces at some length and *Melibee* with which Chaucer as an authoritative figure is closely associated in Ellesmere.

Melibee's importance extends beyond the fourteenth century. As well as appearing in most fifteenth-century manuscripts of the *Canterbury Tales*, it survives independently in five other manuscripts: in Arundel 140, Sloane 1009, Pepys 2006, Stonyhurst XXIII, and HM 144.¹¹ Only the *Clerk's Tale* has more witnesses outside the story collection.¹²

Albertano, an Italian jurist, addressed his *Liber* at least nominally to one of his sons but according to David Wallace, his wider aim was to promote civic values in an emerging city-state culture.¹³ Renaud, a Dominican friar, translated Albertano's text for 'the instruction and profit' of elite males.¹⁴ In doing so, he re-conceptualised Albertano's Prudence, reducing her political and intellectual role and presenting her as being primarily concerned with how her husband and his advisers think.¹⁵ He thus turned Albertano's work into a mirror for princes. The general thrust of Chaucer's *Melibee* is clear enough; it emphasises the need to exercise

⁸ Richard K. Emmerson, 'Text and Image in the Ellesmere Portraits of the Tale-Tellers', in *Ellesmere Chaucer: Essays in Interpretation*, pp. 143–70, analyses the portraits of all the pilgrims in the manuscript and concludes that the portrait of Chaucer was not only 'the best' (p. 151) but also the only one painted by this particular artist.

⁹ Alan T. Gaylord, 'Portrait of a Poet', in *Ellesmere Chaucer: Essays in Interpretation*, pp. 121–42 (pp. 121, 121 n. 1, 124, 138). Gaylord demonstrates that the portrait has much in common with the portrait of an earnest-looking and elderly Chaucer in Thomas Hoccleve's *Regement of Princes* (BL. MS. Harley 4866, f. 88r), where it appears alongside part of the text dealing with the wisdom of taking advice, so linking the poet with old age, wisdom and good counsel.

¹⁰ Donald R. Howard, *The Idea of the Canterbury Tales* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), pp. 14, 309; Howard argues that 'the man and the poet' in the Chaucer portrait 'loom over the fictional pilgrim precisely as in the work itself, one imposed on the other, neither one fully distinguishable from the other' (p. 15).

¹¹ The full references are: BL. MS. Arundel 140 part 2; BL. MS. Sloane 1009 part 1; Cambridge, Magdalene College MS. Pepys 2006 part 2; Whalley Bridge, Lancs, Stonyhurst College MS. B. XXIII; and San Marino, Huntingdon Library MS. HM 144.

¹² The *Clerk's Tale*, with six witnesses outside the story collection, 'represents the most frequently copied work among the *Tales*': Daniel S. Silvia, 'Some Fifteenth-Century Manuscripts of the *Canterbury Tales*', in *Chaucer and Middle English Studies in Honour of Rossell Hope Robbins*, ed. by Beryl Rowland (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1974), pp. 156–63 (p. 155).

¹³ David Wallace, *Chaucerian Polity: Absolutist Lineages and Associational Forms in England and Italy* (California: Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 217. Albertano wrote three treatises, one for each of his sons: Askins, p. 321.

¹⁴ Renaud prefaces his translation with an address to his patron, his 'dearest lady': 'I have translated a little treatise for the instruction and the profit of my dearest lord, your son, and all the other princes and barons who might want to heed it and to study it': Askins, p. 331.

¹⁵ Askins, p. 324.

prudence, to take good advice, to eschew wilfulness, to work within the law, and to show mercy to one's enemies. Yet there is no clear consensus on how it should be interpreted.

Although some twentieth-century assessments find *Melibee* comic,¹⁶ and Edward E. Foster contends that it was 'never meant to be read — only known',¹⁷ recent critics regard it as a serious tale. It has been examined in terms of its style,¹⁸ and of international and domestic politics.¹⁹ It has been seen as 'a kind of writing that was thought to be of particular relevance to youth'.²⁰ It has also been interpreted in terms of gender or marriage. Carolyn Collette sees *Melibee* as 'part of a group of texts designed to instruct aristocratic women', and she cites the Host's response to the *Tale* in support of her argument.²¹ Wallace associates the tale with both Chaucer's authority as a writer, which others find in the early manuscripts, and his representation of gender. He argues that *Melibee* demonstrates how 'the wife in the household may prevent masculine violence from disrupting the public domain' and is 'the most extensive authorial signature of the *Canterbury Tales*'.²²

This article offers an understanding of Chaucer's *Melibee* based on manuscript evidence. It begins by considering the tale in the context of the framing elements found in the early manuscripts of the *Canterbury Tales* — not just the Host's response, which for ease of reference I will sometimes refer to as the tale's *Epilogue*, but also the *Prologue*.²³ I argue that the framing elements invite multiple responses to the text. The *Prologue* suggests that the tale can be seen in relation to translation and literary theory and to Chaucer's promotion of

¹⁶ Dolores Palomo, 'What Chaucer Really Did to *Le Livre de Mellibee*', *Philological Quarterly*, 53 (1974), 304–20, thinks that 'Chaucer deliberately created an overly rhetorical style for purposes of parody, so that the *Melibee* might become a mischievous companion to the *Rime of Sir Thopas*' (p. 309). For other critics who find *Melibee* a joke, see *Riverside*, p. 924.

¹⁷ Edward E. Foster, 'Has Anyone Here Read *Melibee*?', *Chaucer Review*, 34 (2000), 398–409 (p. 408): while *Melibee* is conceptually central to the *Tales* in that it unifies the themes of common profit and personal salvation, 'it did not have to be read to make its point — and probably would not be except by the most earnest moralists' (p. 408).

¹⁸ Diane Bornstein, 'Chaucer's *Tale of Melibee* as an Example of the *Stytle Clergial*', *Chaucer Review*, 12 (1978), 236–54, argues that in *Melibee*, Chaucer imitated French and Burgundian stylistic models. J. D. Burnley, 'Curial Prose in England', *Speculum*, 61 (1986), 593–614, finds examples of curial prose in the English vernacular and touches, briefly, on *Melibee* in this context.

¹⁹ V. J. Scattergood, 'Chaucer and the French War: *Sir Thopas* and *Melibee*', in *Court and Poet*, ed. by Glyn S. Burgess (Liverpool: Francis Cairns, 1981), pp. 287–96, sees *Melibee* as making a pacifist case (p. 288). Lynn Staley, 'Chaucer and the Postures of Sanctity', in *The Powers of the Holy: Religion, Politics, and Gender in Late Medieval Culture*, ed. by David Aers and Lynn Staley (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), pp. 179–259, sees it as 'a shrewd piece of political analysis and advice' in relation to the domestic situation of the late 1380s' (p. 227).

²⁰ Lee Patterson, '“What Man Artow?": Authorial Self-Definition in *The Tale of Sir Thopas* and *The Tale of Melibee*', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 11 (1989), 117–75 (p. 149).

²¹ Carolyn P. Collette, 'Heeding the Counsel of Prudence: A Context for the *Melibee*', *Chaucer Review*, 29 (1995), 416–33 (pp. 419, 425). Other critics interpreting *Melibee* in terms of gender include Paul Strohm, *Hochon's Arrow: The Social Imagination of Fourteenth-Century Texts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), who emphasises Prudence's role as that of a mediating queen (p. 111), and Alcuin Blamires, *The Case for Women in Medieval Culture* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), who has 'no doubt that the gender implications [of Albertano's treatise and *Melibee*'s ultimate source] attracted Chaucer's notice' (p. 23).

²² Wallace, *Chaucerian Polity*, pp. 5, 214; in the *Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer is concerned with 'defining and justifying his own profession of authorship ... He trusts that the *Melibee* in prose, especially when complemented by the prose of the *Parson's Tale*, will win him an authority that is both urbane and religious in its appeal: that will both anchor and licence his poetic fictions' (p. 220).

²³ In Hengwrt, the *Epilogue to Melibee* begins on a new quire and this quire has been bound between the *Summoner's Tale* and the *Prologue to the Man of Law's Tale*. This is clearly a mis-placement, as the *Epilogue to Melibee* begins, 'whan ended was my tale of Melibee' and so should follow the tale.

his own prestigious literary identity. The *Epilogue* suggests that *Melibee* might offer advice about wifehood but it can also be interpreted as a fabliau version of the tale and as a comment about the reception of stories.

I then examine the glosses to *Melibee* in the two early manuscripts. While glosses to some of the *Tales* have been examined,²⁴ those to *Melibee* in Ellesmere have been noted but not analysed in detail,²⁵ and those in Hengwrt have barely been mentioned. Yet tracing the progression from Hengwrt to Ellesmere reveals how the later manuscript defines the status of the tale. Examining the glosses to the *Parson's Tale* in both manuscripts and comparing them with those to *Melibee* demonstrates how Ellesmere brings these tales into a closer relationship than is the case in Hengwrt, so strengthening the moral authority this manuscript gives to the 'makere' of the *Tales*. I argue that far from embracing the plurality of response which *Melibee* and its framing elements invite, the glosses prompt an understanding of the tale as advice literature and construct Chaucer's identity as a figure of authority.

I go on to explore how the five extant fifteenth-century manuscripts of *Melibee* outside the story collection shed light on the tale's reception, and compare late-medieval manuscripts containing Renaud's and Chaucer's versions of the story. Although fifteenth-century manuscripts containing Chaucer's work have been examined for indications of how his writing was received,²⁶ manuscripts of *Melibee* outside the story collection have been neglected, and have not been compared with manuscripts containing Renaud's version. Where critics have interpreted *Melibee* in the context of other contemporary vernacular texts, they have considered manuscripts written in French for a predominantly French audience, but not the English manuscripts in which *Melibee* appears outside the *Canterbury Tales*. Patterson notes that in six manuscripts, Renaud's *Livre* features alongside collections of proverbs and other school texts and argues, from this, that *Melibee* is a pedagogic work.²⁷ He also contends that in contrast to the manuscripts containing Renaud's translation, those featuring *Melibee* outside the story collection 'can tell us very little: the few times that the *Melibee* does not appear with the other *Canterbury Tales* it is either alone or in the company of *The Parson's*

²⁴ Daniel S. Silvia, Jr., 'Glosses to the *Canterbury Tales* from St. Jerome's *Epistola Adversus Jovianianum*', *Studies in Philology*, 62 (1965), 28–39, argues that the glosses deriving from Jerome in the *Wife of Bath's Prologue* and the *Franklin's Tale* may be Chaucer's notes to himself to enable possible later revision. Graham D. Caie, 'The Significance of the Early Chaucer Manuscript Glosses (with special Reference to the *Wife of Bath's Prologue*)', *Chaucer Review*, 10 (1976), 350–60, argues that the glosses to the *Wife of Bath's Prologue* in the early manuscripts of the *Canterbury Tales* are contemporary comments pointing out the Wife's shortcomings. Charles A. Owen, Jr., 'The Alternative Reading of *The Canterbury Tales*: Chaucer's Text and the Early Manuscripts', *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, 97 (1982), 237–50, finds that the glosses and marginalia in Hengwrt and Ellesmere 'confirm the close relationship' between the two manuscripts (p. 238). Graham D. Caie, 'The Significance of the Marginal Glosses in the Earliest Manuscripts of *The Canterbury Tales*', in *Chaucer and the Scriptural Tradition* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1984), pp. 75–88, argues that the glosses to the *Man of Law's Tale* make the reader critical of the narrator.

²⁵ Gaylord, 'Portrait of a Poet', says that the *auctoritates* citations add to 'the textual richness' of the tale's presentation in Ellesmere (p. 124).

²⁶ Silvia, 'Some Fifteenth-Century Manuscripts', examines the contexts in which Chaucer's tales appear in fifteenth-century manuscripts. He finds that fifty-five manuscripts of the *Canterbury Tales* survive with reasonably complete texts of the tales; individual 'moral' tales (such as *Melibee*) or 'courtly' tales (such as the *Clerk's Tale*) also feature in anthologies. Paul Strohm, 'Chaucer's Fifteenth-Century Audience and the Narrowing of the "Chaucer Tradition"', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 4 (1982), 3–32, finds that Chaucer's fifteenth-century audience was 'more widely distributed geographically and more disparate socially than Chaucer's primary audience' (p. 18) — which he identifies as 'a group of persons in social situations rather comparable to his own' (p. 6) — but had narrower, more conservative, tastes.

²⁷ Patterson, "'What Man Artow?'" , p. 151, 151 n. 114.

Tale, a predictable and uninformative conjunction'.²⁸ Collette's argument that Chaucer's tale is a story of female virtue depends not only on her interpretation of the Host's response but also, and to a large extent, on seeing it alongside advice books for aristocratic women written by the Ménagier of Paris, Christine de Pizan, and Philippe de Mézières.²⁹

Examining the five fifteenth-century manuscripts which contain *Melibee* leads me to different conclusions. I find that in its dissemination in manuscripts written in French for a French audience, the story of Melibee and Prudence was sometimes re-contextualised as a conduct text for wives, but this is not a feature of the English tradition. All the surviving English manuscripts are of a functional nature and *Melibee* always appears in collocation with religious or instructional texts. I argue that such consistency of reception suggests that from the start, advice on self-governance — the need for an individual of whatever social status to develop an awareness of ethical and social responsibility — was central to understanding Chaucer's tale. I also find that the glosses in the two extant fifteenth-century manuscripts of *Melibee* which have textual affiliations with Ellesmere — Arundel 140 and Sloane 1009 — reveal that Ellesmere remained influential well into the fifteenth century.³⁰

Melibee* and its framing elements in the early manuscripts of the *Canterbury Tales

The early manuscripts of the *Canterbury Tales* indicate that Chaucer deliberated over, and revised, how he would introduce *Melibee*; it may be that in an earlier plan of the story collection, the Man of Law would have been its narrator.³¹ Both the *Prologue* and *Epilogue* seem to have been added when *Melibee* was incorporated into the *Canterbury Tales*. Although the date of the *Prologue* has rarely been considered,³² there are indications that the *Epilogue* may have been a relatively late addition. The Host's words to the Monk (1941–62) are similar to those in the *Epilogue* to the *Nun's Priest's Tale* (3447–62), 'which perhaps Chaucer cancelled' when he linked *Melibee* and the *Monk's Tale*.³³ The Host's response to *Melibee* — 'I hadde levere than a barel ale / That Goodelief, my wyf, hadde herd this tale' (1893–94) — may rework his response to the *Clerk's Tale*: 'Me were levere than a barel ale / My wyf at hoom had herd this legende ones!' (IV 1212c–d). These repetitions suggest that when Chaucer was writing the *Epilogue* to *Melibee*, he had not finished revising the framing elements of the tales.

²⁸ Patterson, "'What Man Artow'", p. 149. I should point out, parenthetically, that in HM 144, *Melibee* appears alongside the *Monk's Tale*, and that in Pepys 2006, it appears with the *Parson's Prologue* (as well as his tale) and the *Retraction*.

²⁹ Collette, 'Heeding the Counsel', contextualises Chaucer's tale through reference to the work of the Ménagier and de Pizan. In 'Chaucer and the French Tradition Revisited: Philippe de Mézières and the Good Wife', in *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts in Late Medieval Britain*, ed. by Jocelyn Wogan-Browne and others (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), pp. 151–68, Collette adds de Mézières to the French writers alongside whose work *Melibee* can be interpreted.

³⁰ See Charles A. Owen, Jr., *The Manuscripts of 'The Canterbury Tales'* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1991), pp. 59 and 107 for the textual affiliation of Arundel 140 with Ellesmere, and p. 112 for Sloane 1009's textual affiliation with Ellesmere.

³¹ The Man of Law's claim that he will speak in prose when his *Prologue* and tale are in rhyme royal is usually taken to mean that at one stage, Chaucer intended the lawyer to tell *Melibee*: see *Riverside*, p. 854.

³² Neither *Riverside* nor Robinson mentions a possible date; nor does Cooper, *Canterbury Tales*.

³³ *Riverside*, p. 928.

Consideration of the framing elements leads to a realisation that Chaucer opens up *Melibee* to a variety of interpretations. To begin with the *Prologue*: Chaucer the pilgrim says he will 'telle a litel thyng in prose' (937) that has been told 'in sondry wyse / Of sundry folk' (941–42). He explains that in the Bible, the evangelists narrate different parts of Christ's passion but their 'sentence', their essential meaning, is the same. Although he will add proverbs to his tale and use different words from those in his source, he asks his listeners not to blame him as the meaning of his 'litel tretys' (957) will be unchanged. The claim that the tale is a sense-for-sense translation retaining the 'sentence' of its source is traditional; defence of 'sense for sense' translation was familiar from Jerome onwards.³⁴ The argument that although the words of the evangelists differ, their meaning remains the same, was 'reiterated in generations of commentaries on the Evangelists'.³⁵ The disclaimer 'blameth me nat' (961) identifies Chaucer as a 'compiler' rather than an 'auctor', for 'whereas an *auctor* ... bore full responsibility for what he had written, the *compiler* ... accepted responsibility only for the manner in which he had arranged the statements of other men'.³⁶ If primary translations call attention to 'their dependence upon — and service to — the original text' whereas secondary translations 'tend to define themselves as independent textual productions',³⁷ Chaucer sets up *Melibee* as a primary rather than a secondary translation, and presents himself as merely one in a line of people telling the same story.

Such self-presentation need not necessarily be taken at face value, however, since Chaucer often writes as though he is a 'compiler' rather than an 'auctor'.³⁸ Indeed, the same terms which make apparently modest claims for *Melibee* also imply that it will have prestige and authority. The references to Biblical models and the moral nature of the tale (940) indicate that it should be taken seriously. The use of established translation vocabulary aligns Chaucer's work with that of notable writers and places its narrator in respected company.³⁹ The *Prologue*

³⁴ See 'Jerome: Letter to Pammachius', trans. by Kathleen David, in *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. by Lawrence Venuti, 2nd edn (New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 21–30 (pp. 21, 28). For contemporary defence of 'sense for sense' translation which seems very similar to what we find in the *Prologue to Melibee*, see the *General Prologue to the Wycliffite Bible*, chapter 15, in *Selections from English Wycliffite Writings*, ed. by Anne Hudson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), pp. 67–72, where the writer, in the 1390s, recommends translating 'aftir the sentence and not oneli aftir the wordis' (p. 68, l. 37); and John Trevisa, *Epistle to Thomas, Lord Berkeley*, in *The Idea of the Vernacular: An Anthology of Middle English Literary Theory, 1280–1520*, ed. by Jocelyn Wogan-Browne and others (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 1999), pp. 130–38, where Trevisa, writing in 1387, says that although he will sometimes 'sette worde for worde' and sometimes change the 'ordre of wordes', 'the menyng shal stonde and nought be ychaunged' (pp. 134–35, ll. 143–48).

³⁵ Alistair Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages* (London: Scolar Press, 1984), p. 167.

³⁶ Minnis, *Medieval Theory*, p. 192; he also says (pp. 193–94) that Ralph Hidgen adds his initial R to the statements for which he accepts personal responsibility and regards his *auctores* as 'schelde and defens'; Trevisa too shows a desire to avoid 'blame', noting his own *assertiones* with his name.

³⁷ Rita Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages: Academic Translations and Vernacular Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 94.

³⁸ In the *General Prologue*, for instance, he adopts the stance of reporter and presents the *Tales* as a compilation, disclaiming responsibility for what he writes (725–46). In the *Miller's Prologue*, he says he must 'reherce' the words of the Miller if he is to tell the tale faithfully (3172–75). He also claims to be only 'a lewd compiler' in the *Prologue* to the *Astrolabe* (61–62). Yet in the *Retraction* to the *Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer revokes some of his oeuvre, accepts responsibility for his work, and implicitly acknowledges his manipulation of the role of compiler.

³⁹ I am thinking here of John Trevisa, who translated both secular and religious works from Latin into English for Lord Berkeley, and the writer or writers of the *General Prologue to the Wycliffite Bible*. Mary Dove, *The First English Bible: The Text and Context of the Wycliffite Versions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), thinks that Trevisa may have been one of the translators of the English Bible (pp. 2, 72). Chaucer can be seen,

also tentatively places Chaucer's writing in the prestigious academic tradition, since 'mateere' (958) corresponds to the *materia libri* of scholastic literary discussion. It also indicates the range of Chaucer's ambition, something which is suggested in the part of the tale dealing with causation (1393–1426), where Prudence tries to make Melibee examine what his enemies have done and to accept responsibility for what has happened to him. She advises: 'Thou shalt understonde that the wrong that thou has receyved hath certeine causes, / whiche that clerkes clepen *Oriens* and *Efficiens*, and *Causa longinqua* and *Causa propinqua*: this is to seyn, the fer cause and the ny cause' (1394–95).⁴⁰ Chaucer's reference to clerks and his substitution of Latin terms for Renaud's French set up resonances of the Biblical commentary tradition, where the language of the *duplex causa efficiens* was a commonplace. In this way he aligns his work with prestigious models.⁴¹ The *Prologue* suggests, then, that *Melibee* is an authoritative text and that Chaucer is musing on the nature of literary authority.

None of this seems to have any impact on the Host, however, whose only response to the tale is to compare his wife unfavourably and extensively with Prudence (1891–1907):

... As I am feithful man,
 And by that precious corpus Madrian,
 I hadde levere than a barel ale
 That Goodelief, my wyf, hadde herd this tale!
 For she nys no thyng of swich pacience
 As was this Melibeus wyf Prudence.
 By Goddes bones, whan that I bete my knaves,
 She bryngeth me forth the grete clobbered staves,
 And crieth, 'Slee the dogges everichoon,
 And brek hem, bothe bak and every boon!
 And if that any neighebor of myne
 Wol nat in chirche to my wyf enclyne,
 Or be so hardy to hire to trespace,
 Whan she comth hoom she rampeth in my face,
 And crieth, 'False coward, wreck thy wyf!
 By corpus bones, I wol have thy knyf,
 And thou shalt have my distaf and go spyne!'

Collette considers Harry's response to be 'perhaps the most convincing textual evidence for the argument that Chaucer told this story as a story of female virtue rather than as a compendium of authority'.⁴² She contextualises Chaucer's *Melibee* through the work of the French writers mentioned earlier, and argues for Prudence as a female, as well as a male, virtue.⁴³ Yet Harry's focus on exemplary wifeness can be interpreted in a different way.

The vignette quoted above appears at first sight to represent a marriage but a close reading suggests that it constitutes a parodic version of the tale, and comments on it by deploying stock misogynist motifs. Both *Melibee* and the Host's response are about anger, violence and retaliation. The issues which provoke Goodelief, however, are trivial compared to the attack

then, to position his translation alongside the work of contemporary serious-minded translators and prestigious contemporary literary projects.

⁴⁰ Renaud's text reads 'tu dois savoir que l'injure qui t'a esté faite a deux causes ouvrieres et efficaces: la loingtaingne et la prouchainne' (37.1).

⁴¹ The Latin terms and their translations in *Melibee* also promote English as an equivalent to other languages — an idea under contemporary discussion and one which Chaucer addresses in the *Prologue* to the *Astrolabe* (28–33).

⁴² Collette, 'Heeding the Counsel', p. 425.

⁴³ Collette, 'Chaucer and the French Tradition Revisited', p. 159. Collette, 'Heeding the Counsel', p. 419.

Chaucer's *Melibee*

on Melibee's wife and daughter. The social 'trespace' of which she complains hardly compares to the 'trespas' (1357, 1771, 1824, 1825) committed in *Melibee*. Goodelief's violence centres on the beating of servants and the perception of social disparagement, whereas the beating of Melibee's wife and daughter (971) almost precipitates war.

There are further thematic and linguistic parallels between Goodelief and Melibee. She is not patient (1895). Nor is Melibee, as we are repeatedly told, and as is suggested by the only proverb added by Chaucer to Renaud's text: "he hasteth wel that wisely kan abyde" and "in wikked haste is no profit" (1054). Goodelief wants her husband to avenge ('wrek') her; Melibee's strong desire for revenge is noted at 1009, 1051 and 1547. Goodelief is a formidable woman, 'byg in armes' (1921), while Melibee is 'myghty' (1366) and 'of myght' (1019). Goodelief calls her husband a 'coward' (1905, 1910) who is 'overlad' (1911, browbeaten) by everyone. Prudence advises Melibee: 'I sey nat thou shalt be so coward that thou doute ther wher as is no drede' (1327). Goodelief makes Harry stand up for her 'lik a wilde leoun' and be 'fool-hardy' (1916); Melibee behaves 'lyk a mad man' (973) and Prudence asks, 'why make ye yourself for to be lyk a fool?' (980).

The high seriousness of *Melibee* gives way, in the Host's response, to fabliau-like comedy. Gender roles are inverted: Goodelief's behaviour masculinises her and feminises both Melibee and the Host. Whereas Melibee weeps (975, 979), she cries out in anger (1899, 1905). Melibee takes advice from his wife but does not fear her; Harry is frightened of his wife and cannot stand up to her. The references to Harry's 'knyf' and Goodelief's 'distaf' are obvious plays on gender at Harry's expense: the former reference might be seen as phallic and the latter as a traditional image of womanhood.⁴⁴ Choice of vocabulary contributes to the change in register: the weapons used by Melibee's enemies remain unspecified but Goodelief produces 'grete clobbed staves'; Melibee's enemies are his 'adversaries' whereas Goodelief calls their servants 'dogges'. We learn the name of Harry's wife for the first and only time in the *Epilogue*; its incongruity, given her behaviour, provokes a comic response. If Chaucer knew the Flemish saint of the same name who patiently endured years of misery in marriage before being murdered at her husband's instigation, he showed 'wicked humour' naming the Host's wife after her.⁴⁵ Although on the surface Goodelief appears to be presented in realist terms, she is an amalgam of anti-feminist stereotypes: the shrewish, angry wife who gains mastery over her weak husband; the loud and aggressive speaker whose speech instigates violence; and the vain woman bothered about social status. The social snub perceived by Goodelief is reminiscent of the Wife of Bath's complaints about wives in the parish going 'to the offrynge' (*General Prologue* 450) before her. In establishing a similarity between Goodelief and the Wife, as contrast to Prudence, Chaucer prompts those who knew the description of Alison in the *General Prologue* to respond to the gender politics of the story.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Frances M. Biscoglio, "'Unspun' Heroines: Iconography of the Spinning Woman in the Middle Ages", *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 25 (1995), 163–84, argues: 'iconographic evidence indicates that since its origins spinning has always been gender-determined: it is an exclusively feminine task ... When a man is pictured with a distaff and spindle, he is being either ridiculed or burlesqued' (pp. 163–64).

⁴⁵ Ethel Seaton, 'Goode Lief My Wife', *Modern Language Review*, 41 (1946), 196–292 (p. 201).

⁴⁶ There are other times when Chaucer uses the Wife as a means of complicating response and suggesting that there are various ways of interpreting texts — at the end of the *Clerk's Tale* about patient Griselda, for instance. The Clerk notes Petrarch's view that the tale is addressed to everyone. He then proclaims the difficulty of finding wives like Griselda nowadays, implying that the story is indeed about wifehood. He goes on to invoke the Wife of Bath and her 'heigh maistrie' (1172), to tell 'noble wyves' (1183) and 'archewyves' (1195) not to behave like Griselda, and to invert many of the anti-feminist tropes which appear in the *Wife of Bath's Prologue*. The oblique reference

Yet comedy can have serious intent and the *Epilogue* comments on the tale; there is, perhaps, a parallel with the juxtaposition of the *Miller's Tale* and the *Knight's Tale*. If marriage can be seen as political society in miniature, the *Epilogue* might depict what happens in society if violence remains unchecked. While Melibee eventually learns not to exact revenge and the dispute is peaceably resolved, the Host seems powerless to restrain his wife and to prevent violence from escalating. Goodelief's anger and hastiness show that she lacks prudence yet Harry has none to offer her and no way of addressing the problems of their marriage. Sophie might recover but Harry might end up committing murder. If *Melibee* presents the ideal of behaviour — act with prudence, take good advice, eschew wilfulness, work within the law and act with mercy — then the violence in the *Epilogue*, presented in fabliau mode, implicitly supports the argument for rapprochement which is embedded in the tale. Yet it also suggests its unlikelihood; what is desirable might not be possible.

The *Epilogue* also deals with the reception of stories. The Host is unable to dissociate the tale from his own marital relations, to see anything but the literal. He interprets *Melibee* only in line with his experiences as a husband — the same way that he responds to the *Clerk's Tale*, quoted above, and the *Merchant's Tale* (2419–40), where he focuses on women's 'sleightes and subtilitees' and calls his wife a 'labbyng shrew' who has 'an heep of vices mo'. These stories confirm what he already thinks about wives and women. Through these comments by Harry, Chaucer demonstrates that when people read, they do so in line with their prejudices. The Host's response, then, is not only about exemplary wifeness. It also refutes Foster's contention that *Melibee* was 'a tale never meant to be read — only known', for the *Epilogue's* account of marital conflict is enriched by detailed knowledge of the tale, which, in turn, prompts further consideration of *Melibee*.

As individual elements, then, the *Prologue* and *Epilogue* enable Chaucer to explore areas beyond the narrative substance of the tale. The *Prologue* allies *Melibee* with the work of contemporary translators and the academic tradition, and enables consideration of the nature of literary authority. The *Epilogue* offers a fabliau version of the tale and plays with the reception of stories. Chaucer the pilgrim introduces *Melibee* as a translation and a moral tale, whereas the Host interprets it as a text from which his wife could learn. There is nothing in the *Prologue* to suggest that *Melibee* is about marriage or gender, and nothing in the *Epilogue* to indicate that it is a translation. The *Prologue* invokes contemporary translation practice and literary theory, while the *Epilogue* purports to be documentary realism. Since the framing elements bring into play various interpretive possibilities rather than present mutually confirming views of *Melibee*, they constitute ways whereby Chaucer plays with meaning, encouraging a particular interpretation only to discourage it or suggest its inadequacy.

The fragmentary nature of the tales at Chaucer's death supports the view that he was less interested in resolution than in dialectic.⁴⁷ Ellesmere is obviously a polished production and

to Alison in the Host's response to *Melibee* similarly brings into play the question of interpretation. Here, then, as elsewhere in Chaucer's work, gender politics are not a discrete category.

⁴⁷ Critics have sought to explain the lack of fixed meaning in Chaucer's writing. Derek Pearsall, *The Life of Geoffrey Chaucer: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), ascribes the 'defective and evasive strategies' he finds in Chaucer's work to the fact that he was a newcomer to his class (pp. 147–48). Paul Strohm, 'Politics and Poetics: Usk and Chaucer in the 1380s', in *Literary Practice and Social Change in Britain, 1380–1530*, ed. by Lee Patterson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 83–112, argues that Chaucer's 'formal principle of contrastive juxtaposition' is a literary restatement of his varied social and political experience, especially his experience of political faction (p. 111). Mary Flowers Braswell, *Chaucer's 'Legal Fiction': Reading the Records* (London: Associated University Press, 2001), finds that the law influenced Chaucer, since he 'forces his readers

gives the appearance of a completed story collection but the early editors had no copy-text to rely on and were not certain how to order the fragments they inherited.⁴⁸ The tale order in Ellesmere is different from that in the earlier Hengwrt, and even the Hengwrt order is 'scribal and not Chaucerian'.⁴⁹ It seems that Chaucer was either still pondering over the order in which to position his stories and groups of stories or had abandoned the idea of imposing a definitive order. However, where editors and scribes inherited stable fragments of tales, including links between them, they kept them, as in the *Melibee* sequence.⁵⁰ Since this sequence prompts different responses, we can see that Chaucer's 'most extensive authorial signature' is linked to plurality of response in the early manuscripts.

The Glosses to *Melibee* in the Early Manuscripts of the *Canterbury Tales*

Owen usefully identifies three kinds of gloss in Hengwrt and Ellesmere: first, indexing marginalia, including *notae*, names from the text and summary titles of subject matter; second, those which clarify the meaning of an obscure or ambiguous word; and third, Latin commentary giving sources, parallel passages and background information.⁵¹ There are also glosses of a fourth type: those which comment on the text and/or aim to shape response.

Comparing the sparse glossing to the Hengwrt *Melibee* with the systematic programme in Ellesmere reveals how the later manuscript defines the status of this particular tale. Tracing a similar development in the *Parson's Tale* shows how it also brings these two tales into closer alignment. The effect, I will suggest, is that Ellesmere downplays the possibility of varied response which the *Melibee* sequence invites, prompts an unambiguous reading of the tale, and constructs Chaucer as a 'makere' of moral authority.

In Hengwrt, *Melibee* is very lightly glossed, with only seven glosses in the hand of the manuscript scribe.⁵² One belongs to the second category identified by Owen: at 1264 (f. 223r), where we read 'the proverbe seith that to do synne is mannysh', the word 'humanum' is written above 'mannysh', presumably to clarify that the proverb does not apply only to men. Five others can be classified as indexing marginalia, *notae* and names from the text. There is the simple marginal note 'Seneca', the *auctoritas* mentioned in the text at 984 (f. 216v).⁵³ When *Melibee* is speaking at 1233 (f. 222v), a pointer in the margin draws attention to this line of the text.

to search among the links and tales for evidentiary scraps before rendering a verdict' on his characters or arriving at the 'truth' (pp. 17, 20). My own view is that Chaucer's tendency to invite different interpretations of his work has a parallel with, and may derive from, legal reasoning, from the legal interest in debate rather than resolution; see Kathleen Maria Jackson, 'Chaucer's Representation of Marriage: To Have and to Hold' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Leeds, 2009). This part of the article, however, is less interested in explaining Chaucer's thinking than in considering its results.

⁴⁸ Owen, *Manuscripts of 'The Canterbury Tales'*, explains how, 'by judicious spacing and the consistent use of *explicit*s and *incipit*s between the fragments', for instance, the editor of Ellesmere 'minimized the appearance of incompleteness' (p. 13).

⁴⁹ N. F. Blake, 'The Ellesmere Text in the Light of the Hengwrt', in *Ellesmere Chaucer: Essays in Interpretation*, pp. 204–24 (p. 212). Blake adds that the Hengwrt order 'has no more validity than any other' (p. 212).

⁵⁰ Fragment 1, again with linking elements, is another stable authorial unit preserved in the manuscripts; the *General Prologue* is followed by tales of the Knight, Miller, Reeve and Cook. Here too, juxtaposition affects meaning, as reading one tale prompts reconsideration of another.

⁵¹ Owen, 'Alternative Reading', pp. 238–39.

⁵² Although line references are to the tale in *Riverside*, I also give folio numbers for Hengwrt. Ellesmere does not provide folio numbers.

⁵³ To be strictly accurate, the gloss reads 'eneca' since the edge of the leaf is torn.

There are three Latin equivalents to parts of Chaucer's tale: alongside the reference to Ovid and 'his book that cleped is the Remedie of Love' (976; f. 216r), we read 'Ovidius de remedio amoris'; where we read that 'Jhesu Crist, oure lord, himself wepte for the death of Lazarus hys freend' (987; f. 216v), the marginal note says 'qualiter Iesus fleuit propter mortem lazari'; and when Prudence refers to the advice given by 'the apostle Paul' writing 'unto the Romans' (989), the gloss (f. 216v) reads 'Paulus ad Romanus'.

Finally, there is an intriguing gloss which looks at first to be a parallel passage in Latin to part of *Melibee*, and thus to belong straightforwardly to Owen's third category, but on further scrutiny seems to be a playful comment, perhaps drawing attention to the divergence of Chaucer's translation from Renaud's *Livre*. We find it on the same folio as Chaucer's words 'What is better than gold? Jaspre. What is better than jaspre? Wisdom. / And what is better than wisdom? Womman. And what is better than a good woman? Nothyng' (1107–8; f. 219v). Renaud's text is a straightforward translation from Albertano's Latin: 'Quele chose vault mieux que l'or? Jaspe. Quele chose vault plus que jaspe? Sens. Quele chose vault mieux que sens? Femme. Quelle chose vault mieux que femme? Riens'.⁵⁴ By adapting his source and distinguishing between 'woman' and 'good woman', Chaucer subtly dilutes Prudence's defence of women and implies that women are not necessarily better than wisdom. The Latin gloss in Hengwrt reads: 'Auro quid melius. iaspis. quid iaspide, sensus. / Sensu quid. amber. quid muliere. michil'. What are we to make of this, the only gloss to *Melibee* to be placed at the bottom of the manuscript leaf, to be in slightly smaller script than the text, and to diverge from Chaucer's text by alluding to amber, another precious stone? It seems to suggest that the scribe has noticed something unusual about Chaucer's translation. Apparently, such verses were popular and had many variants;⁵⁵ perhaps the scribe is joining in the literary game and offering a variant of his own.

How can we sum up the Hengwrt glosses? To begin with the obvious: there are very few and *Melibee* is a relatively long story. The distribution of glosses is uneven and unsystematic, since four of the seven appear alongside the first twenty-two lines of the tale. If we leave aside the single *auctoritas* citation and the single pointer, the annotations of the manuscript scribe are in Latin and usually repeat what appears in the tale; they give no additional information which would enable the reader to locate the relevant parts of the Bible or Ovid's work. One gloss, however, moves away from a faithful repetition of what is in the tale, possibly engaging playfully with Chaucer's subtle modifications to do with gender politics.⁵⁶

When we turn to Ellesmere, we find a remarkable expansion in the number of glosses to *Melibee*, even allowing for the fact that the manuscript was designed with wide margins to accommodate annotations. Where Hengwrt has seven, Ellesmere has one hundred and seventy-six. Further, every leaf has at least one gloss, a characteristic shared only with the *Parson's Tale*. All are indexing marginalia, *notae*, names from the text or summaries of subject matter. Four of the seven glosses in Hengwrt are repeated in Ellesmere, at 976, 984, 987 and 989, and the speaker at 1233, *Melibee*, is highlighted through a marginal note rather than a pointer. The Latin gloss which may be responding to the subtlety of Chaucer's translation

⁵⁴ Renaud, 5.10; see Askins, p. 341.

⁵⁵ See the note to 1007–8 of *Melibee* in *Riverside*, p. 925 (although it incorrectly gives the Latin gloss as a parallel passage, failing to notice the mention of 'amber'), and the note to Renaud, 5.10, in Askins, p. 341.

⁵⁶ Hengwrt has three further glosses not written by the manuscript scribe, two in English (alongside 1186; f. 221v, and 1479–83; f. 227v) and one in Latin (1846; f. 234r), all staying close to the text of *Melibee*. These are not incorporated into Ellesmere, which suggests that they were probably written after Ellesmere was produced.

is absent, as is the interlinear gloss clarifying meaning; there is nothing which might suggest humour or the provisionality of texts.

Speakers are identified in the margins: 'Melibee' or 'Melibeus' appears twenty-three times, and Prudence twenty-two. One hundred and twenty-four marginal annotations cite *auctoritates* mentioned in the text, for example Solomon, Seneca, Tullius or Apostulus, or draw attention to what is said, for example 'memorandum de Job' (remember Job; 999), 'nota secundum Salomonem' (note according to Solomon; 1057) and 'nota de Rebekka' (note according to Rebecca; 1098). As in Hengwrt, there is more information in the tale than in the gloss; no further information is provided which would direct the reader to specific parts of the texts mentioned.

The large number of marginal notations and the presence of at least one on every leaf mean that the glossing is more consistent and systematic than in Hengwrt. Only two long passages have hardly any glosses. The section where the surgeons, physicians, advocates and old folk offer advice to Melibee (1004–44) has only one. Since some of the advice offered is in line with the prudence which Melibee eventually learns to incorporate — the wise old man's advice against war (1038–42) for instance — the lack of glossing here suggests that it is advice which comes with the status and weight of *auctoritates* behind it which is stressed rather than advice per se. The second passage is at 1349–1403, where Tullius is mentioned six times but there are no marginal notes. However, at this point, Prudence is repeating and referring back to advice given by Tullius at 1200–2, where we find the gloss: 'how a man shal examine his conseilours after the doctrine of Tullius'. Tullius as advice-giver had already been noted.

One difference between the manuscripts is that Ellesmere has glosses in English — something we will also see in the *Parson's Tale* in both Hengwrt and Ellesmere. In addition to the one just mentioned, alongside 1086 we read, 'of iij thynges that dryuen a man out of his hous'; at 1121, 'of iij thynges that been contrariouse to good conseil'; at 1148, 'how a man shal tellen his conseil'; at 1173, 'of conseilours that a man oghte to eschue'; at 1224, 'how a man may chaungen his conseilours withouten repreve'; and at 1336, 'nota of the strongeste garnysoun that may be'. These summarise the subject matter of the tale, sometimes using the third person, and use the vernacular as a mediator of advice.

The rudimentary glossing of *Melibee* in Hengwrt gives way, then, to a systematic programme in Ellesmere, in which nothing detracts from the tale's serious purpose, and its meaning as advice literature is emphasised. Given the importance of glossing in the Middle Ages, and given the high prestige of texts which were glossed, the Ellesmere *Melibee* gains in status, as, by implication, does its narrator.

Although rather more than half of the *Parson's Tale* in Hengwrt has been lost, a comparison of what remains — the first five hundred lines — with the corresponding part in Ellesmere is instructive. There is a similar expansion in the number of marginal glosses in the later manuscript, and similar evidence of a systematic approach. Of the thirty extant leaves of the *Parson's Tale* in the earlier manuscript, thirteen have no gloss and seven have only one, whereas in the later manuscript, every leaf is glossed. In Hengwrt there are fifty-two marginal notations in the hand of the manuscript scribe: five are in Latin, forty-four are in English, two are numbers, and one is unintelligible. These are in addition to Latin chapter heads, incipits and explicits. In Ellesmere the number of marginal glosses increases to one hundred and twenty-nine and they are more evenly distributed: twenty-one are in Latin, one hundred and five are in English, and there are three hybrids. The hybrid glosses demonstrate

the scribe's evident ease in moving between languages; for example, alongside 484 we read, 'what Enuye is secundum Philosophum et secundum Augustinum' (what envy is according to the philosopher and according to Augustine).⁵⁷

All the marginal glosses to the *Parson's Tale* in Hengwrt belong to Owen's first category. The vast majority identify or summarise what is in the tale: for example, 'what bihoueth to penitence' (107; f. 236v); 'the iiij mevere to contricioun' (231; f. 240r); and 'bakbityng' (493; f. 249r). The third person is used only once (133; f. 237v). There are a few *notae* but no *auctoritates* citations such as occur in the Hengwrt *Melibee*, albeit in small numbers.

In Ellesmere, all but one of the glosses to the *Parson's Tale* also belong to the first category but in addition to identifications, summaries and *notae*, there are now more than twenty *auctoritates* citations. To give some examples: 'nota secundum sanctum Gregorium (note according to Saint Gregory; 92), 'Iob ad deum' (Job to God; 176) and 'dominus per Ysayam' (the Lord by means of Isaiah; 210). The third person is also used frequently. Only one gloss is a comment; in the part of the tale dealing with sin and contrition, Solomon says, 'likneth a fair womman that is a fool of hire body lyk to a ryng of gold that were in the groyn of a soughe' (155). Alongside this is the marginal note: 'notate vos muliers et cauete' (take heed, you women, and beware), which is surely the written equivalent of a male authority figure wagging the finger at women, especially beautiful women. Unlike the 'jasper/amber' gloss in the Hengwrt *Melibee*, which is not replicated in Ellesmere, this stern response reinforces what is in the text.

Ellesmere, then, develops the glosses to *Melibee* and the *Parson's Tale* along similar lines. Both tales become more heavily and more systematically glossed. They also feature glosses which almost exclusively fit Owen's first category; only one comments on the text, the admonition in the *Parson's Tale*, but this too reinforces what is being said. The glossing brings the tales into closer alignment since they come to share more characteristics so far as glossing is concerned. English is used in the Hengwrt *Parson's Tale* and is adopted in the Ellesmere *Melibee*. *Auctoritates* citations appear in the Hengwrt *Melibee* and are introduced into the Ellesmere *Parson's Tale*. The use of third person notation is developed in the Ellesmere *Parson's Tale* and appears in the Ellesmere *Melibee*. Given the orthodox morality of the *Parson's Tale*, the strengthened relationship between the tales enhances the moral stature of *Melibee* and its narrator.

The glossing in Ellesmere also distinguishes *Melibee* and the *Parson's Tale* from the rest of the *Tales*. Not only are these the only ones to have at least one gloss on every page but the development of glossing is not characteristic of the other stories. Parts of some other tales are heavily glossed in both manuscripts but a systematic development of glossing has not been put in place. While it is a commonplace to acknowledge that the later manuscript is more heavily glossed than the earlier, it has not been sufficiently acknowledged that most of the increase can be accounted for by *Melibee* and the *Parson's Tale* and that the glossing of these tales brings them into closer relationship.

Reading *Melibee* in the Ellesmere manuscript has an effect on our understanding of the tale since it is impossible to avoid noticing the glosses. The heavy use of *auctoritates* citations encourage a reading of *Melibee* as a compilation and hence a perception of its narrator as a compiler. The glosses thus make more sense in relation to *Melibee's Prologue* than to its

⁵⁷ The other hybrid glosses are alongside 193, where we read, 'of defeaute of tresor vnde dauid' (of default of treasure, of which David [says]) and 322, where we read, 'of spryngynge of synnes secundum Paulum' (of springing of sins according to Paul).

Epilogue and suggest that the editor takes the *Prologue* at face value. The *Epilogue* may as well not have been written, so far as the glosses are concerned. They offer no acknowledgement of the plurality of response which the framing elements invite. In conjunction with the Chaucer portrait, mentioned earlier, they draw attention to the serious nature of the tale and bolster the gravitas and moral authority of the 'makere' of the *Canterbury Tales*.

Late-Medieval Reception: The Manuscript Tradition

If the number of extant manuscripts indicates popularity, Renaud's and Chaucer's versions of the Melibee/Prudence story were popular in the late medieval period. As mentioned earlier, as well as appearing in most fifteenth-century manuscripts of the *Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer's story features independently in five fifteenth-century manuscripts — and many more copies existed.⁵⁸ Renaud's version survives in thirty-four manuscripts; three date from the fourteenth century, thirty from the fifteenth, and one from the sixteenth.⁵⁹ Comparing the contents and material nature of the extant manuscripts of Chaucer's *Melibee* with a sample of the manuscripts containing Renaud's story discovers differences between French and English reception and sheds light on how Chaucer's version was understood. Examining the glosses in the two fifteenth-century manuscripts of *Melibee* which have textual affiliations with Ellesmere reveals the continuing influence of this prestigious manuscript.

Renaud's story is included in the *Ménagier de Paris*, a conduct book for wives, written c. 1394, roughly contemporaneous with Chaucer's *Melibee*.⁶⁰ Although the author does not mention Renaud, he incorporates his tale of Melibee and Prudence 'virtually without alteration'; he also includes Petrarch's story of Griselda, again with only 'minor modifications'.⁶¹ Three high-quality fifteenth-century manuscripts of the *Ménagier* survive, all with links to the Dukes of Burgundy: two appear to have been owned by the Dukes; the third probably belonged to Marguerite de Ghisteltes (1415–98), whose husband was connected with the dukes.⁶² The link with the Burgundian court is strengthened by the identification of the *Ménagier* as Guy de Montigny, a knight once in the service of the Duke of Berry.⁶³ We see here, in a French manuscript produced for a French audience, a connection between costly manuscripts, French aristocratic patronage, and the tale as a conduct books for wives.

The author of the *Ménagier* re-contextualises Renaud's story, explicitly using it to show wives how to manage their husbands. He introduces the story of Melibee and Prudence with words of advice to wives when their husbands behaved foolishly: 'doulcement et sagement vous le retrayer de ses folyes. Gardez que par bonne pacience et par la douceur de voz paroles vous

⁵⁸ Owen, *Manuscripts of 'The Canterbury Tales'*, p. 107.

⁵⁹ For a list of manuscripts of Renaud's *Livre*, and their dates, see Askins, p. 329. Albertano's three Latin treatises were also popular. Angus Graham lists twenty-one English manuscripts which contain his *Liber*; one dates from the thirteenth century, one from the thirteenth or fourteenth century, and the rest from the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries. See 'Latin Manuscript Sources' on the Albertano of Brescia resource site (accessed 13.01.2013): <http://freespace.virgin.net/angus.graham/Albertano.htm>. Chaucer certainly knew Albertano's work; he drew on his *Liber de amore Dei*, as well as his *Liber consolationis et consilii*, at the start of the *Merchant's Tale*, and on his *De arte loquendi et tacendi* at the end of the *Manciple's Tale* (see *Riverside*, pp. 884 and 954 respectively).

⁶⁰ Georgine E. Brereton and Janet M. Ferrier, eds, *Le Ménagier de Paris* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), date it from internal evidence (p. xxi).

⁶¹ Brereton and Ferrier, eds, *Ménagier*, p. xxxviii.

⁶² Brereton and Ferrier, eds, *Ménagier*, pp. xii-xvi.

⁶³ Nicole Crossley-Holland, *Living and Dining in Medieval Paris: The Household of a Fourteenth-Century Knight* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1996), p. 7.

occiez l'orgeuil de sa cruaulté . . . Et s'il est plus estrange, si le refrenez sagement⁶⁴ (sweetly and wisely keep his follies in check. Ensure that by good patience and sweet words you overcome his proud cruelty . . . And if he is angry with those outside the family, use your wisdom to restrain him).⁶⁵ After telling the tale, the author again makes a direct address to wives and gives a clear moral:

Et pour ce je vous dy que ainsi sagement, subtillement, cautelement et doucement doivent les bonnes dames conseiller et retraire leurs mariz des folyes et simpleses dont elles les voyent embrasez et entechez, et non mye cuidier les tourner par maistrise . . . Car cuer d'onme envis se corrige par dominacion ou seigneurie de femme; et sachiez qu'il n'est si povre homme ne de si petite valeur, puis qu'il soit marié qui ne veuille seignourir.⁶⁶

(And so I say to you that good ladies should wisely, subtly, cautiously and sweetly counsel and restrain their husbands from the foolish and silly behaviour which they see inflames and affects them and not think to change them by masterful means. . . For the heart of a man considers himself corrected if a woman assumes domination and lordship; and know that no man is so poor or of such small value that he would not be lord and master when he is married.)

The story does not instruct husbands to be less foolish or angry nor teach a non-gendered audience about self-governance. It teaches exemplary wifehood and directs its advice to wives.

Renaud's story of Melibee and Prudence also appears in two fifteenth-century French manuscripts from the Royal Collection now in the British Library: in the mid fifteenth-century BL. MS. Royal 19 C. VII, as a conduct text for women, and in the early fifteenth-century BL. MS. Royal 19 C. XI, as a mirror for princes. Neither has a secure connection with England at the time of production. Royal 19 C. VII was recorded in an inventory of Henry VIII's library in Richmond Palace in 1535,⁶⁷ and may have been acquired by Henry VII.⁶⁸ The connection of Royal 19 C. XI with England comes even later, with an English inscription in the manuscript dating, according to the British Library, from the early seventeenth century. While we do not know how or when these manuscripts came to England, we can say that in general, French manuscripts passed into English hands through gift-giving, marriage and conquest,⁶⁹ and that the fifteenth-century English court is known to have turned to the Continent for high quality manuscripts rather than patronise English talent.⁷⁰ It seems likely, then, that these manuscripts were produced in France for a French audience.

⁶⁴ Brereton and Ferrier, eds, *Ménagier*, p. 112.

⁶⁵ The translations in this section of the article are my own.

⁶⁶ Brereton and Ferrier, eds, *Ménagier*, p. 113.

⁶⁷ James P. Carley, *The Libraries of King Henry VIII* (London: British Library, 2000), p. 3. Carley lists it as item no. 84. The British Library's website has a slightly different numbering system.

⁶⁸ The inventory of 1535 lists manuscripts, mainly Flemish, formerly owned by Edward IV, and manuscripts and printed books acquired by Henry VII; some items are known to have belonged to Edward IV but Royal 19 C. VII is not listed among them. Henry VII is known to 'have inclined towards the French taste' rather than the Flemish work favoured by Edward IV: J. M. Backhouse, 'Illuminated Manuscripts associated with Henry VII and members of his immediate family', in *The Reign of Henry VII: Proceedings of the 1993 Harlaxton Symposium* (Stamford: Paul Watkins, 1995), pp. 175–87 (p. 179). There is, however, no evidence that conclusively links Royal 19 C. VII to Henry VII.

⁶⁹ Scot McKendrick, 'A European Heritage: Books of Continental Origin collected by the English Royal Family from Edward III to Henry VIII', in *Royal Manuscripts: The Genius of Illumination*, by Scot McKendrick, John Lowden and Kathleen Doyle (London: British Library, 2011), pp. 43–65 (p. 63).

⁷⁰ Carol M. Meale, 'Patrons, Buyers and Owners: Book Production and Social Status', in *Book Production and Publishing in Britain 1375–1475*, ed. by Jeremy Griffiths and Derek Pearsall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 201–38 (pp. 202–4).

In Royal 19 C. VII, Renaud's story of Melibee and Prudence appears between *Le Livre que Fist le Chevalier de la Tour pour l'enseignement de ses filles* and *The Tale of Patient Griselda*, translated from the Latin of Petrarch; all items in the manuscript are in French.⁷¹ The leaves are vellum, the first story has a colour illustration the width of the text, and there are other initials in gold and colour. The illustration features a garden setting and a man reading to three young women with his finger raised, as though he is using the book as a means of instruction. This is presumably meant to depict the Knight reading to his daughters, since the Knight's prologue makes explicit that his book is 'vn livre et vn exemplaire pour mes filles aprendre a romancier et entendre comment elles se doiuent gouuerner et le bien du mal sauoir' (a book and an example so that my daughters may read the stories and understand how they should govern themselves and know right from wrong; f. 2r-v).

Griselda's story (f. 150ff) is Philippe de Mézières's translation, which he included in his *Livre de la vertu du sacrement de mariage*, a book he wrote 'pour le confort et reconfort principalement des dames mariees' (chiefly for the comfort and solace of married women), although he did not exclude men from his readership.⁷² In Royal 19 C. VII, although not in Philippe's *Livre*, the story of Griselda is followed by Petrarch's epilogue (f. 163v-164r) which maintains that the story is directed at readers generally, not just married women. There is then a colophon which reveals that the story is, in fact, directed at wives: 'ci fine listorie du mirouer des dames mariees, cestassauoir de la haulte et merueilleuse vertu de pacience obediencie et vraie humilite et constance de Griseldiz marquise de Saluces' (here ends the story of the mirror for married ladies, that is to say of the great and marvellous virtue of patience, obedience and true humility and constancy of Griselda, marquise of Saluce; f. 164r). It is worth pointing out that whenever de Mézières writes about Griselda, it is in the context of exemplary wifely conduct. In his *Epistre au Roi Richart*, where he advises Richard II to make peace with France, marry a French princess and embark on a crusade with the French to retake the Holy Land, he mentions Griselda's story, written by Petrarch, and recommends that the king choose a wife like her.⁷³ Whether or not the colophon in Royal 19 C. VII derives from de Mézières, it gives the last word to Griselda's exemplarity as a wife.

Le Livre de Mellibee et de Dame Prudence is Renaud's story.⁷⁴ It has no title, prologue or epilogue to suggest how it should be read but its placing between two explicitly moralised stories slanted towards women indicates that an aristocratic female audience is addressed here too. The absence of Renaud's prologue, which says that the story is for men, also suggests that the story here is directed at women. Some names of authorities are written in red — for example, those of Seneca, Solomon and Job — but there are no marginal glosses. The longest

⁷¹ *The Tale of Patient Griselda* has no title in the manuscript; I give the BL's title here. There is a fourth item: 'le codicille maistre Jehan de Meun', a devotional poem of 88 lines beginning, 'Dieux ait lame des trespassez / Car des biens quilz ont amassez'. This is in a different hand from the rest.

⁷² Philippe de Mézières, *Le livre de la vertu du sacrement de mariage*, ed. by Joan B. Williamson (Washington, D. C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1993), p. 46.

⁷³ Philippe de Mézières, *Letter to King Richard II: A Plea made in 1395 for peace between England and France*, trans. by G. W. Coopland (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1975), p. 42, where he says 'may it please God, worthy Prince, for the furtherance of peace in Christendom and the comfort of your royal person, to grant you a wife such as Griselda, the wife of the Marquis of Saluzzo, who was but the daughter of a poor working man, yet, according to the authentic chronicle of the said Marquis of Saluzzo and Griselda his wife, written by that learned doctor and sovereign poet, Master Francis Petrarch, there is no record, from the beginning of the world until today, apart from the saints, of a woman of such great virtue, nor so loving towards her husband, nor of such marvellous patience, as this same Lady Griselda'.

⁷⁴ Carley, *Libraries of King Henry VIII*, p. 22.

part of the text to be rubricated shows the scribe making yet another variation of the ‘jasper’ verse discussed earlier: ‘quelle chose vault mieux que or Jaspre Quelle chose vault mieulx que jasper femme Que chose vault mieulx que femme Riens’ (what is better than gold? Jasper. What is better than jasper? Woman. What is better than woman? Nothing; f. 128r). How were aristocratic women readers meant to read this, with its omission of the reference to wisdom? Did the scribe just simplify Renaud’s text? Was the omission accidental or a subtle implication that women could not be better than wisdom? However we might interpret this divergence from Renaud’s text, the fact that this part is rubricated further indicates that the story of Melibee and Prudence in this manuscript is meant to have a special meaning for women.

Royal 19 C. XI is not aimed at women but it too is courtly and moral, on vellum, with sixteen colour miniatures; all texts are clearly set out in double columns and have decorated initial letters. It has a more learned focus than Royal 19 C. VII, which may be connected with the gendered nature of its audience. The *Tale of Melibee* is the second item in the manuscript and follows Jean de Vignay’s translation of *De Ludo Scaccorum*. The *De Ludo* prologue establishes a royal connection for the text by dedicating the work ‘a tresnoble et excellent prince Jehan de France, Duc de Normandie et aussi filz de Philippe par le grace de dieu Roy de France’ (to the most noble and excellent prince John of France, Duke of Normandy, and also son of Philip, by the grace of God king of France; f. 1r).

The game of chess as political allegory is made explicit in the prologue, for de Vignay states that the text comes from authorities, doctors, philosophers and ancients who ‘sont rancontez et sont appliquez a la moralite des nobles hommes et des gens du peuple selon le gieu dez eschez’ (have encountered the morality of noblemen and their people and have applied it to the game of chess; f. 1r). He repeats his purpose in translating the *De Ludo* in a colophon: ‘je frere Jehan de Vignay hospitalier de lordre de hault pas ay translate de latin en francois ce liure de la moralite des nobles hommes et des gens de commun peuple sur le jeu des eschez’ (I, brother John de Vignay, hospitalier of the Order of Hault Pas, have translated from Latin into English this book of morality of noblemen and their people in accordance with the game of chess; f. 51r). The political allegory is underlined by the hierarchical nature of the illustrations, including those of the king, queen, judges, knights and bishops. The *Tale of Melibee* is Renaud’s translation. Although it lacks Renaud’s prologue referring to his intended princely audience and goes straight into the tale, its collocation with the *De Ludo*, explicitly a mirror for princes, suggests that it can also be read in this way.

The manuscript also has a *Philosophia* of Guillaume de Conches, articles of faith and a translation of the Latin *Elucidarius*. All these items are in French; there are also psalms, prayers and hymns in Latin. The *Philosophia* and the *Elucidarius* suggest an interest in secular knowledge and spiritual growth respectively. The manuscript’s mix of French and Latin, and its learned focus, suggest a male audience; the *de Ludo* is a mirror for princes, and its prologue explicitly establishes a royal connection. Because of its collocation with the *de Ludo*, *Melibee* can be seen to belong to the same genre. In the French tradition, then, Renaud’s story of Melibee and Prudence appears in costly manuscripts and is linked with aristocratic patronage and audience. It was re-contextualised in the late fourteenth century as a conduct text for aristocratic women and, in the fifteenth century, as a conduct text for aristocratic women and as a mirror for princes.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Examining the 34 manuscripts listed by Askins which contain Renaud’s Prudence/Melibee story would be a study

Chaucer's *Melibee* was popular in fifteenth-century England. As mentioned earlier, five copies witness that the story circulated independently of the *Canterbury Tales*.⁷⁶ All five surviving manuscripts date from the second half of the fifteenth century,⁷⁷ and they suggest that *Melibee* had a wide geographical reach. The scribe of Arundel 140 probably came from the borders of the East Midlands and East Anglia; Sloane 1009 may have been connected with Ludlow, and its scribe with South Herefordshire; Stonyhurst XXIII and its scribe may have been connected with the north west Midlands; HM 144 may have been associated with Berkshire or West Surrey; and the scribe of Pepys 2006 writes in a standardised south east Midlands dialect.⁷⁸ The story also appears in a variety of contexts. Sloane 1009, for instance, appears to have been associated with a religious household, as it has a mix of Latin and English, a preponderance of religious material (including some addressed to clerics) and various religious references. In contrast, Arundel 140 appears to have been directed towards a secular audience and looks like a book for a domestic household, since its contents are all in English and are generically diverse, ranging from romance to texts of spiritual and moral instruction.

The relative plainness of all five manuscripts indicates their functional nature, distinguishes them from French manuscripts of the Melibee/Prudence story, and suggests a different audience. Stonyhurst XXIII is parchment and has rather more decoration than the others but is not a lavish production;⁷⁹ the other four are paper. In some cases — in Arundel 140, Sloane 1009 and HM 144 — *Melibee* was originally produced in booklet form.⁸⁰ In Arundel 140, it is the last item in the manuscript and different in format and script from the texts it accompanies. M. C. Seymour dates the first part of the manuscript to the early fifteenth century, and *Melibee* to the second half of the century.⁸¹ The Arundel 140 *Melibee* is incomplete and fragile. It lacks two leaves between folios 177 and 178 (lines 1459–562 of the

in itself. My initial research reveals that the story almost always appears in vellum manuscripts, and that it more often features in collocation with moral or philosophical material than with texts offering advice to women. An example of the former is Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale MS fr., 578, where it appears after the *Consolation de Boece* and is followed by *Le Livre sur le Jeu des Eschacs*, *Epistola beati Bernardi*, *Le Testament maistre Jehan de Meun*, and a *Paraphrase des IX leçons de Job*. See *Catalogue des Manuscrits Français*, I (Paris: Firmin Didot, 1868), p. 58. An example of the latter is Paris, Bibliothèque de l' Arsenal, MS 3356, where it features between *Le Livre que fit le chevalier de la Tour* and Christine de Pizan's *Le livre des troys vertuz a l'enseignement des dames*. See *Catalogue des Manuscrits de la Bibliothèque de l' Arsenal*, III (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1887), pp. 345–46.

⁷⁶ The following analysis is based on examination of the two manuscripts at the British Library which feature *Melibee* outside the *Canterbury Tales* (Arundel 140 and Sloane 1009). For analysis of the other three, I am indebted to M. C. Seymour, *A Catalogue of Chaucer Manuscripts, I: Works Before the 'Canterbury Tales'* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1995) and Owen, *Manuscripts of 'The Canterbury Tales'*.

⁷⁷ Seymour, *Chaucer Manuscripts, I*, dates them as follows: Arundel 140 1450–75 (p. 137); Sloane 1009 1475–96 (p. 145); Pepys 2006 1475–1500 (p. 136); Stonyhurst XXIII 1450–75 (p. 154); Huntingdon HM 144 after 1482 possibly c. 1500 (p. 153).

⁷⁸ Seymour, *Chaucer Manuscripts, I*, pp. 137, 145, 154, 153, 136 respectively. *A Linguistic Atlas of Late Mediaeval English*, 4 vols, ed. by Angus McIntosh, M. L. Samuels and Michael Benskin (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1986), says that Arundel 140 is written in the language of S. Lincs, but mixed with various different dialectal components (I. 105), and that the language of Sloane 1009 is probably S. Herefords (I. 116).

⁷⁹ Seymour, *Chaucer Manuscripts, I*, p. 154, describes the decoration in Stonyhurst XXIII as 'provincial work'.

⁸⁰ On the original booklet format of *Melibee*: for Arundel 140 see Seymour, *Chaucer Manuscripts, I*, p. 137 and Owen, *Manuscripts of 'The Canterbury Tales'*, p. 107; for Sloane 1009, see Seymour, *Chaucer Manuscripts, I*, p. 144 and Owen, *Manuscripts of 'The Canterbury Tales'*, p. 111; for HM 144, see Seymour, *Chaucer Manuscripts, I*, p. 152 and Owen, *Manuscripts of 'The Canterbury Tales'*, p. 117.

⁸¹ M. C. Seymour, 'The English Manuscripts of *Mandeville's Travels*', *Edinburgh Bibliographical Society Transactions, IV, 1955–1971* (Edinburgh: Printed for the Society, 1974), 169–210 (p. 184).

text) and the last folio (181b) ends mid sentence, the last words being: ‘And therefore I asiontze [assent] And’ (*Riverside*, line 1777). All the folios (166–81) also show signs of damage, which becomes more extensive towards to the end of what has survived. The *Melibee* in Sloane 1009 also shows signs of wear; it is torn at the front and incomplete at the end, concluding (f. 48v) with ‘his goode name for it is written’ (*Riverside*, 1845–46). It seems likely that if these copies of *Melibee* had not been incorporated into manuscripts, they would have perished. In the fifteenth century, then, copies of *Melibee*, including those now in Arundel 140 and Sloane 1009, were produced in booklet form and read almost to pieces. Their material nature indicates that their readers and patrons were of a different class from those of the French manuscripts which contained the story of Melibee and Prudence.

In no case — unlike in the French tradition — does the story of Melibee and Prudence appear alongside that of Griselda or any other good wife. The *Clerk’s Tale* was certainly popular in the fifteenth century but was not paired with *Melibee*:⁸² the only items from the *Canterbury Tales* to appear alongside *Melibee* in these manuscripts are the *Parson’s Prologue and Tale* and the *Retraction* (in Pepys 2006), and the *Monk’s Tale* (in HM 144). Nor do any of the five manuscripts which abstract *Melibee* from its *Canterbury Tales* context include its epilogue, with its comments on wifhood, either in full or in part; the opportunity to re-inscribe the Host’s comments about his wife or to suggest that different kinds of wifely behaviour are exemplified by Prudence and Goodelief is not taken up.

In all five manuscripts, *Melibee* appears alongside religious or instructional texts. In Pepys 2006 — the only manuscript under discussion where explicit identification with Chaucer is apparent — it accompanies Chaucer’s *Parson’s Prologue and Tale*, Chaucer’s *Retraction*, and nine of Chaucer’s minor poems. There is ‘some Latin indexing and even occasional translation into Latin of the text’ but all this is ‘very unevenly distributed’.⁸³ In HM 144, the whole text of *Melibee* is called *Prouerbis*, has small Latin translations of English phrases, and appears alongside Chaucer’s *Monk’s Tale*, which here is entitled *The falle of Princis*.⁸⁴ This manuscript also includes items of a religious nature: Lichfield’s *Compleynt betwene God and Man*, Lydgate’s *Life of Our Lady*, the *Gospel of Nichodemus*, and the *Stations of Jerusalem*. Secular items include extracts from Trevisa’s *Polychronicon*, and some of Lydgate’s works.⁸⁵ In Stonyhurst XXIII the items alongside *Melibee* are the *Three Kings of Cologne*, the *Abbey of the Holy Ghost* together with the *Charter of the Abbey*, and *Four Feathers*.⁸⁶

Sloane 1009 has strong religious resonances, having a mix of Latin and English, as well as overtly didactic texts.⁸⁷ It contains, in this order: a piece of English prose beginning ‘penance is the seconde medycyne’; *Recusorium anime* in English prose beginning ‘we knowyth welle by comyn sapience’; *De contemplacione* in English prose beginning ‘a grete Clerke Richard of Seynt Victores’; *Nonnulla de hominum natura prava* beginning ‘cur fecit deus homines’; a piece in English prose on the six religious duties beginning ‘ther be vi. Thynges’; a

⁸² See Silvia, ‘Some Fifteenth-Century Manuscripts’, pp. 155, 157.

⁸³ Owen, *Manuscripts of ‘The Canterbury Tales’*, p. 116. Owen gives no further information.

⁸⁴ Neither Owen, *Manuscripts of ‘The Canterbury Tales’*, nor Seymour, *Chaucer Manuscripts, 1*, mentions any marginalia.

⁸⁵ Seymour, *Chaucer Manuscripts, 1*, pp. 152–53.

⁸⁶ Again, neither Owen, *Manuscripts of ‘The Canterbury Tales’*, nor Seymour, *Chaucer Manuscripts, 1*, mentions any marginalia.

⁸⁷ Information about Sloane 1009 has also been collated by Rebecca Farnham in *Manuscripts of the English West Midlands: A Catalogue of Vernacular Manuscript Books of the English West Midlands, c. 1300–c. 1475*; project director Wendy Scase. See <http://www.hrionline.ac.uk>.

Chaucer's *Melibee*'

Latin prayer beginning 'o vos sacerdotes'; Chaucer's *Melibee*; *De vita et honestate clericorum*, which Seymour identifies as *Speculum sacerdotis*; *Computacio Danielis prophete* in Latin; and *Somniale*, Latin verse beginning, 'apis videre vel capere lucrum significat'.⁸⁸

Sloane 1009 has, then, a mix of English and Latin, an obvious didactic emphasis, and sophisticated religious material. Some items, 'O vos sacerdotes' and *De vita et honestate clericorum*, seem to be addressed to clerics. Inspection of the manuscript reveals a number of Latin marginal glosses: for example, in the margins of the first text, we read 'respice sapience' (f. 7), 'de corpore et sanguine Jhu xpi' (f. 6) and 'de fide' (f. 8). There are also several signs of the cross in red within this text, presumably suggesting moments at which a blessing would be given. On f. 57 there is a memorandum of small sums paid to "the Coll" of Lodelowe'.⁸⁹ The Latin titles and texts, the items addressed to clerics, the religious symbols, and the religious references suggest that Sloane 1009 may have been connected, and perhaps originated, with a religious or ecclesiastical household. The emphasis on penitence and contemplation in the English items would support this interpretation. The fact that *Melibee*, produced originally as a booklet, is placed alongside specifically religious material suggests that it has been included on account of its general moral dimension.

Comparing the marginal glosses to *Melibee* in the Sloane and Ellesmere manuscripts reveals a strong correspondence in both their number and nature. As mentioned earlier, Sloane 1009 is incomplete but if we compare what remains with the corresponding part of the tale in Ellesmere, the Sloane *Melibee* would have one hundred and fifty-five glosses if the glossing were identical in the two manuscripts.⁹⁰ In fact it has one hundred and thirty-one; almost all occur alongside the same parts of the text as in Ellesmere and are virtually identical. Apart from a few *notae*, all identify speakers or cite *auctoritates*. Variations are infrequent and very minor: whereas in Ellesmere at 989 we read, 'Apostulus paulus ad Romanos', Sloane 1009 has 'paule' (f. 29v); at 1098, where Rebecca is giving advice to Jacob, Ellesmere has 'nota de Rebekka' and Sloane 1009 has 'Jacob' (f. 32r). The most notable difference between the two manuscripts is that with one exception (the citation of 'Seynt Jerome' 1595; f. 43r), English does not appear in any of the glosses in Sloane 1009; those in Ellesmere where English is used as the language of advice do not feature. The glosses in the Sloane *Melibee* highlight the status of the tale as advice literature and reveal that the textual influence of Ellesmere continues into the last quarter of the fifteenth century.

Arundel 140 may have been connected with an urban household; I use Hajnal's definition of an urban household as a site where, typically, men in their late twenties marry women in their mid twenties and establish a separate household.⁹¹ In Arundel 140, *Melibee* is bound with *Ypotys*, *Mandeville's Travels*, *The Prick of Conscience*, *Gy Earl of Wewyke* and the *Seven Sages*. If the number of surviving manuscripts indicates the popularity of texts, all these

⁸⁸ Seymour, *Chaucer Manuscripts*, 1, pp. 144–45.

⁸⁹ Seymour, *Chaucer Manuscripts*, 1, p. 145, identifies this as the collegiate church of St. Lawrence, Ludlow; he notes other references of a religious nature on the same folio.

⁹⁰ Sloane 1009 is incomplete at the end; after this point in Ellesmere, there are five glosses. The beginning of Sloane 1009 is torn and some rubrics may have been lost; at this part of Ellesmere, there are another five glosses. The Sloane manuscript also lacks lines 995–1034 of *Melibee*, where Ellesmere has eight glosses. It omits 1189–90 (where Ellesmere has one gloss) and 1215–17 (where it has two). Since the total number of glosses to the Ellesmere *Melibee* is one hundred and seventy-six, the extant text in Sloane 1009 would have one hundred and fifty-five if the glossing in the two manuscripts were identical.

⁹¹ J. Hajnal, 'European Marriage Patterns in Perspective', in *Population in History: Essays in Historical Demography*, ed. by D. V. Glass and D. E. C. Eversley (London: Arnold, 1965), pp. 101–43, although he suggests that this pattern did not exist in the Middle Ages (p. 134).

were popular.⁹² The *Prick of Conscience* directly addresses the salvation of the soul and the necessity for righteous living. The other texts are more secular and entertaining and can be broadly categorised as romance; *Ypotys* and *Gy* are among the ‘romances of prys’ mocked in *Thopas* (897–99). Felicity Riddy sees *Guy* in the context of late-medieval patterns of family and marriage and as part of a literate if unlearned lay culture centred on the home.⁹³ Perhaps *Melibee* was added to the miscellany to complement the emphasis on salvation, and on proper ethical and social conduct, found in the *Prick of Conscience*.

Inspection of Arundel 140 reveals that the marginal glosses to *Melibee* are very similar to those which accompany the text in Ellesmere. The Arundel *Melibee* is incomplete but has one hundred and eight glosses where the corresponding part of the text in Ellesmere has one hundred and forty-five.⁹⁴ Some of its glosses are indecipherable because of manuscript damage but the overwhelming number are identical to those in Ellesmere. As in Sloane 1009, there are a few *notae*; the rest largely name Melibee and Prudence as speakers and cite Latin names of biblical and classical *auctoritates*. There are a few variations from Ellesmere. Alongside 1200 in Ellesmere we read, ‘how a man shal examine his conseilours after the doctrine of Tullius’; in Arundel 140 the gloss is simply ‘bono’ (f. 172v). Ellesmere has ‘nota de Rebekka’ (1098), where Arundel 140 has ‘nota de bono consilio Rebekka’ (note the good counsel of Rebecca; f. 170r). On folio 170r there are also two glosses which do not appear in Ellesmere:⁹⁵ at 1103 there is ‘de creacione Ade’ (on the creation of Adam) and at 1107, alongside the ‘jasper’ distich discussed earlier, ‘nota de quodam clerico versifactor’ (note what a certain clerk says in his verse). Both these glosses draw attention to what is in the text and so are of the same kind as those found elsewhere in the manuscript, as well as in Ellesmere and Sloane 1009. Latin is used except on one occasion.⁹⁶ Apart from the almost complete absence of the vernacular, the glosses to the Arundel *Melibee* show continuity from Ellesmere and highlight the status of the tale as advice literature.

Arundel 140 has less in common with the French manuscripts, described earlier, than with the devotional miscellanies and ‘common profit’ books which circulated among London merchant families from the early fifteenth century onwards.⁹⁷ A comparison of *Melibee* with a particular household book, Westminster School MS. 3, reveals some similarities. Westminster

⁹² There are 6 surviving copies of *Ypotys*: C. Horstmann, *Sammlung Altenglischer Legenden* (Heilbronn: Henninger, 1878), p. 511; 32 copies of *Mandeville’s Travels*: Seymour, ‘English Manuscripts of *Mandeville’s Travels*’ (pp. 170–71); 115 copies of the *Prick of Conscience*: Robert E. Lewis and Angus McIntosh, *A Descriptive Guide to the Manuscripts of the ‘Prick of Conscience’* (Oxford: Society for the Study of Mediæval Languages and Literature, 1982), p. 1; 3 copies of *Guy*: Neil Cartlidge, *Medieval Marriage: Literary Approaches, 1100–1300* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1997), p. 104; and 8 copies of *Seven Sages*: Jill Whitelock, ed., *The Seven Sages of Rome (Midland Version)*, Early English Text Society, o.s., 324 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. xiv–xv.

⁹³ Felicity Riddy, ‘Middle English Romance: Family, Marriage, Intimacy’, in *Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*, ed. by Roberta L. Krueger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 235–52.

⁹⁴ The Arundel *Melibee* lacks two leaves (lines 1460–562, where Ellesmere has twenty glosses) and is incomplete at the end (where Ellesmere has a further eleven).

⁹⁵ My thanks to Dr. Oliver Pickering for his help in deciphering these glosses.

⁹⁶ This is on f. 170v, where we read: ‘iij thynges ... contrarius ...’. Despite the manuscript damage, it seems reasonable to conclude that it repeats what is in Ellesmere: ‘of iij thynges that been contrariouse to good conseil’ (1121).

⁹⁷ Amanda Moss, ‘A Merchant’s Tales: A London Fifteenth-Century Household Miscellany’, *Yearbook of English Studies*, 33 (2003), 156–69, discusses the fifteenth-century fashion for common profit books among London merchant families (p. 158). Kellie Robertson, ‘Common Language and Common Profit’, in *The Postcolonial Middle Ages*, ed. by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (London: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 209–28, also discusses the production of common profit books in London in the early years of the fifteenth century.

MS. 3 was written in English, in the early to mid fifteenth century, and was originally in booklet form;⁹⁸ *Melibee* was also produced in booklet form, although no examples survive from the early fifteenth century, and, in the case of Arundel 140, was added to a miscellany of English texts. Westminster MS. 3 was probably owned by a London citizen in the 1470s, and a manuscript of the early fifteenth century, Cambridge University Library Ff.6.31, was financed through the estate of Londoner John Colop for a 'comyn profite'.⁹⁹ It seems reasonable to assume that *Melibee* first circulated in London. Westminster MS. 3 provided both 'religious and conduct advice for the various members of a lay household'.¹⁰⁰ *Melibee*, a secular text, straddles the secular/religious divide; its high moral tone justifies its inclusion in a specifically religious as well as a more secular manuscript.

Westminster MS. 3 is, however, a 'handsome' household book 'copied onto vellum',¹⁰¹ and was probably put together for an elite London merchant family. The *Melibee* in Arundel 140, dating from 1450–70 and originating in the East Midlands/East Anglia borders, is a far more basic production. The demand for instructional vernacular material and the interest in the proper ordering of the self was not confined to the capital in the early years of the century, as the geographic spread of *Melibee* shows. Nor, if the material nature of the manuscript related to the prosperity of the household in which it was read, was it confined to the kind of elite merchant households which produced the 'handsome' Westminster MS. 3.

The manuscript evidence presented here suggests that there were important differences between French and English reception of the *Melibee*/Prudence story. In French manuscripts written primarily for a French audience, concerns about marriage and appropriate gender relations were arguably central to its reception and interpretation in some cases. The fifteenth-century manuscripts of *Melibee*, however, demonstrate that it was popular in the English tradition but not as a conduct book for women. Rather, they suggest that *Melibee* was understood to be about morality and self-governance: the implications of the tale for marital and gender relations, which are taken up in the French female courtesy tradition, are not apparent. This leads me to conclude, given the consistency of reception witnessed to in the fifteenth-century manuscripts, that from the start, Chaucer's tale was not seen as a conduct book for wives. I would, then, revise Collette's contextualisation of Chaucer's *Melibee* through reference to the writings of the *Ménagier de Paris*, Philippe de Mézières and Christine de Pizan, which links to her argument that Prudence is a female virtue. Findings based on part of the French tradition should not automatically be transposed to *Melibee*. Examination of the manuscripts of *Melibee* outside the *Canterbury Tales* also leads me to revise Patterson's view that they 'can tell us very little' since they reveal the popularity of the story in the fifteenth century, its wide geographical reach, and its use in both secular and religious households alongside religious and instructional texts. The glosses to *Melibee* in Arundel 140 and Sloane 1009 suggest that the influence of Ellesmere continued well into the fifteenth century.

Conclusion

The framing elements of *Melibee* prompt various responses to the tale. In the *Prologue*, Chaucer the pilgrim presents *Melibee* in terms of translation and literary theory, so associating

⁹⁸ Moss, 'A Merchant's Tales', pp. 156–57.

⁹⁹ Moss, 'A Merchant's Tales', pp. 157–58.

¹⁰⁰ Moss, 'A Merchant's Tales', p. 160. The manuscript's contents are listed pp. 156–57.

¹⁰¹ Moss, 'A Merchant's Tales', pp. 169, 156.

his work with prestigious models. The Host's response, when interpreted as documentary realism, indicates that we are meant to keep wifehood in mind but it can also be seen to comment variously on the *Tale* and the reception of stories. The *Prologue*, *Tale* and *Epilogue* together employ and exemplify a principle which informs the *Canterbury Tales* whereby multiple meanings are suggested and no single response seems to be privileged.

Although Chaucer left the *Canterbury Tales* in a fragmentary state at the time of his death, he left his 'most extensive authorial signature' as part of a stable sequence which encouraged plurality of response. Yet the glosses to *Melibee* in Ellesmere suggest that the editor of this prestigious manuscript was keen to construct the 'makere' of the *Canterbury Tales* as a figure of moral authority rather than a writer who suggested multiple interpretations. The glosses to those fifteenth-century manuscripts of *Melibee* with textual affiliations to Ellesmere show that Ellesmere influenced the *ordinatio* of the tale well into the fifteenth century and perhaps also prompted its understanding as a compendium of advice literature.

The manuscript witnesses of *Melibee* outside the *Canterbury Tales* do not suggest that Chaucer's tale was seen to be primarily about exemplary wifehood or prescriptions about gendered behaviour. The story of Melibee and Prudence was sometimes re-contextualised as a conduct text for wives in French manuscripts produced primarily for a French audience, but this was not the case in the English tradition. The material nature of the English manuscripts, and the collocation of *Melibee* with religious or instructional literature in all instances, suggest that despite the tale's wide geographical reach and its appearance in a variety of contexts, advice on self-governance may have been central to understanding Chaucer's *Melibee*.