Leeds Studies in English

January's Genesis: Biblical Exegesis and Chaucer's *Merchant's Tale*

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Chaucer's *Merchant's Tale* must have one of the strangest reputations of all *The Canterbury Tales*. It is simultaneously one of the most widely read pieces of medieval literature, and one of the least liked. Eschewing the breezy slapstick bawdry of the *Miller's Tale* and failing to maintain the necessary 'high style' for its debating classical gods and apostrophes on betrayal and fortune—deeply evocative of the *Knight's Tale*—the *Merchant's Tale* often appears in Chaucer scholarship as not only the ugly duckling of Chaucer's fabliaux, but a 'savagely ironic' 'scene of moral desolation'.[1] That what is seen to be essentially a fabliau should attract such sentiment might seem odd, but part of the problem is indeed generic.[2] For the *Merchant's Tale* is read, taught, and discussed as a fabliau, yet barring the sketchiest of fabliau set-ups, the fabliau narrative itself makes up roughly 400 lines of what is nearly a 1200 line text.[3] The text is in fact full of distinctly non-fabliau material; long discourses on prudential and advisory matters, dramatic apostrophes, and most famously the 'marriage encomium': a notoriously difficult passage which dominates the opening of the text.[4] This passage, usually described as homiletic or mock-homiletic, is one of the densest areas of biblical citation and quotation in the whole of *The Canterbury Tales* outside the *Parson's Tale*, and it is this connection between the *Merchant's Tale* and the Bible, or more specifically biblical exegesis, on which I focus in this essay.

Scholarship on 'Chaucer and the Bible' has been neither voluminous nor particularly thin on the ground, but as a recent survey of this area notes, much of it has grown up in the daunting and rather eccentric shadow of D. W. Robertson's extraordinary analysis in *A Preface to Chaucer* (1962).[5] Whilst my argument is broadly that biblical exegesis is vital to the construction of meaning in Chaucer's

Merchant's Tale, I do not here follow a 'Robertsonian' approach, which always ran the risk of producing 'biblically based homilies on Chaucer instead of contextually sensitive criticism'.[6] Instead of reading 'through' Chaucer's text to the essentialist battle between *caritas* and *cupiditas* that Robertson argued was being played out in *The Canterbury Tales*, I want to focus far more on the surface of the text, and the way that the *Merchant's Tale* invokes biblical exegesis, particularly on Genesis, in forming its meanings.[7]

That Chaucer was aware of exegetical tradition is not really in doubt; the number of explicit references displaying variations on Prudence's 'therfore seith Seint Austyn' (VII. 1617) makes it clear that Chaucer was aware of both the substance and the stylistic characteristics of a deeply authoritative tradition of biblical exegesis.[8] But what I want to argue is that the *Merchant's Tale*, and the marriage encomium in particular, invokes biblical exegesis on Genesis 1-3 from essentially two different traditions: not only this highly influential Augustinian strand, but also that of the thirteenth-century Italian writer Albertanus of Brescia. These traditions of exegetical thought on Genesis work as a vital context to Chaucer's writing here, in both explicit and implicit ways. In particular, I focus on three central aspects of Genesis exegesis. First, I argue that the marriage encomium's invocation of Genesis 2. 18 is both explicitly, visually, and stylistically linked to exegetical thought on Eve's creation, particularly the problematic Vulgate term 'adjutorium', 'helper'. Secondly, I discuss the way that Chaucer's tale acts to re-write, to reverse, the gender dynamics of exegetical thought on the creation of male and female bodies in Genesis. Finally, I argue that the *Merchant's Tale* uses the disjunctions between different strands of exegetical thought about Eve, rationality, and female counsel to form its political meanings.

Paradisal Labours (I)

> And herke why—I sey nat this for noght –
> That woman is for mannes helpe ywroght.
> The hye God, whan he hadde Adam maked,
> And saugh him al allone, bely-naked,
> God of his grete goodnesse seyde than,
> "Lat us now make an helpe unto this man
> Lyk to himself"; and thanne he made him Eve.

> Heere may ye se, and heerby may ye preve,
> That wyf is mannes helpe and his confort,
> His paradys terrestre, and his disport. (IV. 1323-32)[9]

This passage in the 'marriage encomium' of the *Merchant's Tale*, a passage in which Genesis is evoked in order to explicate the benefits and purposes of marriage, is also one of the most densely glossed passages in early manuscripts of *The Canterbury Tales*. In a large number of these manuscripts, including Hengwrt and Ellesmere, scribes annotate the passage with Latin marginal commentary, tracing the relationship between vernacular encomium and Latin source. What Manley and Rickert term the 'elaborate Latin glossing' of the marriage encomium is remarkable in a number of ways.[10] Scribal annotations here act to link Chaucer's text in a tangible, visual way with a long, influential tradition of exegesis on Genesis. The exegetical moments in the marriage encomium do not appear in a vernacular vacuum, but are deeply rooted in their relation to an authoritative Latinate tradition of biblical commentary and explication. In this case, the source of the marriage encomium's evocation of Genesis does not originate directly in the Vulgate, but, as editions of *The Canterbury Tales* often note, via Albertanus of Brescia's *Liber de amore Dei* (1238) and, in other passages, from his *Liber consolationis et consilii* (1246).[11] It is both the importance of Albertanus as an *auctor* that Chaucer returns to repeatedly when writing about Genesis and marriage—in both the *Merchant's Tale* and *Melibee*— and more broadly the relationship between the evocation of Genesis in the *Merchant's Tale* and the influential Latin traditions of exegesis, particularly Augustinian thought, that I argue to be a vital catalyst in the creation of meaning in Chaucer's text.

The substance of the passage above similarly links it closely to the stylistic and methodological habits of exegesis. The first seven lines are essentially a sparse narrative of Genesis 2. 18, and in a characteristically exegetical manner, the passage re-quotes the scriptural text within its own narrative and explicatory account of the biblical text. This is a dense overlaying of passages, including biblical 'base text', biblical paraphrase, Latin paratext and vernacular exposition. Indeed, the direct speech of God in Genesis 2. 18, appropriated by the exegetical voice, serves to produce a sense of close proximity to the scriptural text, a sense of the fidelity of the exegetical point to the actual substance of the biblical passage. But, of course, this ostentatious show of interpretative 'plainness' is destabilized by the movement from paraphrase and quotation to explication. The

marriage encomium's exegesis, for all its apparent proximity to both Genesis and Albertanus's *Liber de amore Dei*, quickly becomes a sequence of over-stretched *non sequiturs*. What can be 'seen' in the passage is clearly not necessarily what it 'proves' (IV. 1330). The word 'preve', with its accompanying sense of determining finality, is a necessary precursor to what comes next: the sudden movement from the sparse scriptural 'helpe'—a vital but vexed term for exegetes—and the hyperbolic build up of 'confort', 'paradys terrestre' and 'disport'. Whilst the overblown 'paradys' echoes throughout the *Merchant's Tale*, reinforcing the image of a distorted or grotesque Eden throughout the text, the rhyme of 'confort' and 'disport' is repeated in the *Merchant Tale*'s most notorious biblically-inflected passage (IV. 2147-8): January's wrenching of the Song of Songs into the 'olde lewed wordes' (IV. 2149) used to entice May (and, unsuspectingly, her serpent-like 'naddre' (IV. 1786), Damyan) into his garden.[12] Significantly, traces of the Genesis narrative are still present in January's *hortus inclusus*, a garden with associations, as many critics have noticed, that hover somewhere between Eden, the Song of Songs, and the *Roman de la Rose*, and the purpose of which is significantly and solely sexual amusement and play—albeit 'disport' of a kind that January does not expect, even as the fabliau framework of the *Merchant's Tale* demands it.[13]

Whilst the speaker of the marriage encomium remains difficult, even impossible, to identify completely with either January or the Merchant-narrator, the text's invocation of exegesis on Genesis, foregrounded by the marginal annotations, places the passage firmly in the context of patristic and scholastic attempts to explicate the meaning of Genesis, attempts which, significantly, also focus on the ambiguities surrounding the biblical word 'adjutorium', 'helper', in Genesis 2.[14] Augustine, who returned to exegesis on Genesis no fewer than five times, was both massively influential for later biblical exegesis, and tangibly perplexed by the nature and role of Eve signalled by the term 'helper' in the Genesis narrative.[15] In his fullest account of Eve's creation, Augustine writes:

> Aut si ad hoc adjutorium gignendi filios, non est facta mulier viro, ad quod ergo adjutorium facta est? Si quae simul operaretur terram; nondum erat labor ut adjumento indigeret, et si opus esset, melius adjutorium masculus fieret: hoc et de solatio dici potest, si solitudinis fortasse taedebat [...] Quapropter non invenio ad quod adjutorium facta sit mulier viro, si pariendi causa subtrabitur.[16]

[Now, if the woman was not made for the man to be his helper in begetting children, in what was she to help him? She was not to till the earth with him, for there was not yet any toil to make help necessary. If there were any such need, a male helper would be better, and the same could be said of the comfort of another's presence if Adam were perhaps weary of solitude [...] Consequently, I do not see in what sense the woman was made as a helper for the man if not for the sake of bearing children.][17]

The rhetorical question that Augustine begins with here seems to be a way of forming an article for debate or answer, yet its puzzled interrogative essentially returns in the form of Augustine's 'non invenio'. The question of the nature of Eve's status as 'adjutorium' is a vexed one, and Augustine's attempt to explicate the term as a procreative duty through deduction, whilst clearly influential, actually works to overpower the biblical text.[18] The explicit cause of Eve's creation is the Vulgate's 'non est bonum esse hominem solum', 'it is not good for man to be alone', the sentiment that Chaucer elaborates with the image of Adam 'al allone, bely-naked' (IV. 1326): precisely the solitude that Augustine identifies and rejects as the motivation for God's creation of a female companion.[19]

The association between the term 'adjutorium' in Genesis 2. 18 and the idea of procreation originated in Augustine's earliest exegetical account, and there also it was problematic:

Incipit exponi quomodo sit facta femina: et facta dicitur in adjutorium viri, ut copulatione spirituali spirituales fetus ederet, id est bona opera divinae laudis; dum ille regit, haec obtemperat; ille a sapientia regitur, haec a viro. Caput enim viri Christus, et caput mulieris vir.[20]
[Hence, Scripture begins to explain how the woman was made. It says that she was made as man's helper so that by spiritual union she might bring forth spiritual offspring, that is, the good works of divine praise, while he rules and she obeys. He is ruled by wisdom, she by the man. For Christ is the head of the man, and the man is the head of the woman.][21]

This earlier 'literal' interpretation is of course figurative, rendering Eve's children as 'bona opera divinae laudis', 'the good works of divine praise', rather than the literal 'filios' of Augustine's later writing, but the overpowering of the rather

sparser text of Genesis is familiar. Here, the imposition of Pauline thought on gender, specifically I Corinthians 11. 3's 'omnis viri caput Christus est caput autem mulieris vir', 'Christ is the head of all men, but man is the head of woman' works to project a strict vertical gender hierarchy onto a biblical text which does not necessarily bear it out. This foundational exegesis on Genesis can be seen to overpower the biblical text, in a way that is being deliberately evoked by Chaucer in the *Merchant's Tale*. Using exegesis on Genesis as the basis for a discussion of marriage might suggest, both to author's and readers' minds, interpretative gymnastics which sometimes border on what Alcuin Blamires has characterised as 'exegetical wizardry'.[22] Just as Augustinian thought on the motives and purpose of Eve's creation in Genesis is frequently characterised by an exegetical overpowering of scriptural texts, so Chaucer's marriage encomium works by building up from 'helpe' to the multiple roles of 'conforte', 'paradys terrestre', and 'disport'.

But the purpose of Chaucer's exegetical writing here is two-fold. Whilst the speaker of the marriage encomium over-stretches Genesis' term 'helper', he simultaneously omits the primary meaning of 'adjutorium' as construed by the vast majority of the exegetical tradition: procreation is in fact the one thing that has disappeared. However, procreation as the purpose of marriage does make an appearance in the *Merchant's Tale*, but outside the exegetical material of the marriage encomium, and more clearly in January's voice:

> Ne children sholde I none upon hire geten;
> Yet were me levere houndes had me eten
> Than that myn heritage sholde falle
> In straunge hand, and this I telle yow alle.
> [...]
> If he ne may nat lyven chaast his lyf,
> Take hym a wyf with greet devocioun,
> By cause of leveful procreacioun
> Of children to th'onour of God above,
> And nat oonly for paramour or love;
> And for they sholde leccherye eschue,
> And yelde hir dette whan that it is due;
> Or for that ech of hem sholde helpen oother
> In meschief, as a suster shal the brother,
> And lyve in chastitee ful holily.
> But sires, by youre leve, that am nat I. (IV. 1437-40; 1446-56)

January's argument is a dense conglomeration of established thought about marriage—the 'proof' of his blunt claim to 'woot the cause why / Men sholde wedde' (IV. 1441-2)—but it develops significantly out of an argument not in favour of marriage, but in favour of specifically marrying a much younger wife; someone who, according to January's estimate, should be less than a third of his age.[23] January's sudden focus on procreation as an important correlative of marriage is also rather less straightforward than one might expect.

As Lawrence Besserman has noted, January's hyperbolic desire to be eaten by hounds rather than forgo the production of children to secure his 'heritage' is intricately wrought with potentially ironic overtones, both biblical and Ovidian.[24] But most importantly, it is already a distorted version of what an overwhelmingly influential exegetical tradition thought of as the 'cause why / Men sholde wedde'. Procreation appears, but only to defend January's refusal of a wife older than twenty years of age (IV. 1417). January's argument throughout this section is a glaringly self-interested appropriation of established thought on marriage, which viewed it as a necessary control of the inevitable dangers of a fallen and pernicious human desire, a concept encircled by the Pauline maxim that 'melius est enim nubere quam uri', 'it is better to marry than to burn' (I Corinthians 7. 9). January takes this idea and contorts it into an argument 'proving' that he needs a young wife, or will inevitably turn to adultery, potentially leaving the stability of his heritage and the fate of his soul in jeopardy. Vitally, it is January's omission of his own responsibility and agency in this eventuality that problematizes the passage. But the familiarity of some of these ideas about marriage is strikingly Chaucerian in tone. They are the ideas propounded by the rather endless homiletic commonplaces of Chaucer's *Parson's Tale*, which connects marriage and Genesis in its assertion that 'God maked it, as I have seyd, in paradys', and virtually repeats January's point about 'leveful procreacioun' (IV. 1448-9): 'Trewe effect of mariage clenseth fornicacioun and replenysseth hooly chirche of good lynage, for that is the ende of mariage [...] as seith Seint Augustyn, by manye resouns' (X. 918; 920). The sentiments, then, are familiar, but have been distorted under the pressure of January's ruthlessly selective self-interest: the 'lynage' to be protected by procreation in the *Merchant's Tale* is not 'hooly Chirche's', but January's.

Importantly, January's pre-empting of the Parson's commonplaces on marriage screech to a halt on the line: 'But sires, by youre leve, that am nat I' (IV. 1456). This is obviously an echo of the *Wife of Bath's Prologue* (III. 112)—one of many in the *Merchant's Tale*—and one that carries with it Chaucerian connotations of what we might call a 'revisionist' exegesis on certain biblical

texts.[25] The Wife's paraphrase of Matthew 19. 21 to argue against the imperatives of 'greet perfeccion' (III. 105) produces a kind of exegetical template for January, one that throws an interrogative light on the integrity of the exegete even as it acts as a testament to their self-interestedness (or intellectual energy, depending on the reader's view of the Wife of Bath).[26] The sudden denial of the previous ten lines with the brusque, confident self-definition of 'that am nat I', made more self-possessed by the mock-politeness of 'sires, by youre leve', leaves a reader in a rather perplexed situation in the *Merchant's Tale*. Whilst Alison's line is amongst Chaucer's funniest and is surely designed, on some level, to be comic, January's— an almost exact replica of it—doesn't seem to be. January's masculinist and aristocratic assertion of self-interest is, in the context of the *Merchant's Tale*'s complex denunciations of his 'lewed wordes', not funny but frightening.

In the final section of this essay, I argue that it is January's similarly assertive performance of receiving counsel, coupled with his flagrant and implacable refusal of it, that shapes the meaning of much of the *Merchant's Tale*. It is just this ostentatious awareness of a long clerical tradition of exegesis on Genesis and marriage which acts to highlight the ruthless, megalomaniacal drive towards masculine sexual prerogative—the centrality of 'disport' in January's 'paradys terrestre'—that characterises January's palimpsest of Genesis.[27] The foregrounding of exegetical thought on Genesis in the *Merchant's Tale* works not simply to produce a comparison between an 'ideal' paradisal marriage and the realities of January's and May's relationship; it is more specifically exposed to be a performative veil over the tyrannical assertion of masculine desire that is ultimately 'bely-naked'.[28]

Words, Bodies, and Derivation

The invocations of Genesis exegesis in the *Merchant's Tale* reach further, however, than a single moment in the marriage encomium: Genesis is in the veins of Chaucer's text. The heightened focus on physical bodies in the text—from January's 'slakke skyn' (IV. 1849) to the blunt detail of 'algate in it wente!' (IV. 2376)—while to some extent a product of the tale's generic form, also relates the text closely to the focus of exegetical thought on Genesis, which frequently centred on Adam's and Eve's bodies, the sequence of creation of those bodies, their physical origins in the earth or each other, and on the gender dynamics which arose from these bodily connections.

One of the most fundamental biblical passages on the physical nature of Eve, Genesis 2. 23-24, is again invoked directly by the speaker of the marriage encomium:

> O flessh they been, and o flessh, as I gesse,
> Hath but oon herte, in wele and in distresse.
> [...]
> Al that hire housbonde lust, hire liketh weel;
> She seith nat ones "nay," whan he seith "ye."
> "Do this," seith he; "Al redy, sire," seith she. (IV. 1335-6; 1344-6)

The text's 'O flessh' again originates in the exegetical stockpile of Albertanus of Brescia's *Liber de amore Dei,* where Albertanus quotes the Vulgate's 'erunt duo in carne una', 'they were two in one flesh' to argue 'that a wife is to be cherished'.[29] Yet again, scribal marginalia traces the idea to Latinate exegesis, highlighting the exegetical connections of the vernacular text.[30] Significantly, the text's exegetical practice characteristically stretches the point of the biblical and exegetical passage to absurdity. 'O flessh' leads, in a process similar to the previous 'preve', to the idea of 'oon herte', in a way that constrains the possibility of individuality, and in particular the enunciation of the female voice. The unity of bodies leads to a forced unity of words: as masculine and feminine bodies are synthesised, so are their hearts and voices, constricting the wifely voice to monosyllables.

Again, Chaucer's text is evoking a ubiquitous strand of exegetical thought on Genesis and the relationship between male and female bodies which focused on the apparently derivative and auxiliary nature of female bodies and words. As Alcuin Balmires has argued, 'On the basis of a selective reading of the Book of Genesis, patriarchy in the medieval West constructed woman to be *secondary* in creation, and *primary* in guilt'.[31] It is the idea of this derivative, 'secondary' nature of Eve which is the context for the marriage encomium, and which forces the synthesis of 'O flessh' into the constriction of the female voice to 'nay' and 'ye'. Adam's speech on discovering Eve in Genesis 2. 23 focuses simultaneously on this idea of physical and verbal derivation: 'hoc nunc os ex ossibus meis et caro de carne mea haec vocabitur virago quoniam de viro sumpta est', 'Now this is bone from my bones, and flesh from my flesh. She shall be called 'woman' because she is made from 'man''. While Adam originated in the soil to which, following the fall, he would inevitably return (Genesis 3. 19), Eve's origin in Genesis 2 was the

original, masculine, created body, and her very name, significantly applied to her by Adam, acted as a verbal reminder of this origin.

Again, this derivative relationship was commented on, and elaborated on, frequently by exegetes such as Augustine. For example, in *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, Augustine writes:

> Vocavit ergo mulierem suam vir, tanquam potior inferiorem, et dixit: Hoc nunc os de ossibus meis, et caro de carne mea [...] Quod autem dictum est, Haec vocabitur mulier, quoniam de viro suo sumpta est; ista origo nominis, et interpretatio in lingua latina non apparet. Quid enim simile habeat mulieris nomen ad viri nomen, non invenitur.[32]
>
> [As the master, the man gave a name to his woman, his inferior, and said, "Now this is bone from my bones, and flesh from my flesh" [...] It said, "She will be called woman because she was taken from her man". This derivation and interpretation of the name is not apparent in the Latin language. For we do not find any similarity between the word, 'woman' (*mulier*), and the word, 'man' (*vir*).][33]

Augustine's need to explain the derivation of 'woman' here is striking given that the Vulgate makes the necessary connection by using the word 'virago', a word denoting a kind of *mulier fortis*. Augustine's explanation here, and eventual dismissal of the problem as 'caused by the differences in languages' is problematic precisely because his explication of the scriptural passage depends on a clear hierarchy of rule and power.[34] The power to name Eve as woman is predicated on her being 'inferior' to Adam, an elaboration on the biblical text. The physical origins of the female body in Genesis come to imbue Adam with linguistic power over Eve. The Vulgate's 'virago'—perhaps suggestive of a rather more combative Eve than Augustine had in mind—becomes rather awkward in this context, and is consequently explained away.

But the connections between masculine physical and linguistic primacy that are made by Augustinian exegesis was never far removed from later thought, and reappear regularly in elaborated ways. For example, in a remarkable passage in *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas wrote:

> Videtur quod mulier non debuit produci in prima rerum productione. Dicit enim Philosophus quod *femina est mas occasionatus*. Sed nihil

occasionatum et deficiens debuit esse in prima rerum institutione; ergo in illa prima rerum institutione mulier producenda non fuit.

[It seems that woman ought not to have been produced in the original production of things. For the Philosopher says that the female is a male *manqué*. But nothing *manqué* or defective should have been produced in the first establishment of things; so woman ought not to have been produced then.][35]

Aquinas, as he frequently does, elaborates on Augustine's exegesis by turning to Aristotelian 'science', in this case *De Generatione Animalium*.[36] Aquinas is here working in established scholastic methodology: constructing articles for inquiry with a 'pro' and 'contra' argument. In this case, the 'male *manqué*' thesis is demonstrably not Aquinas's final word on Eve. He returns to the question, again taking resource to Aristotle's text, complete with its astonishing explanation that females are produced because of environmental phenomena such as southern winds, 'qui sunt humidi ut dicetur in libro *De Generatione Animalium*', 'which are damp, as we are told by Aristotle'.[37] But while Aquinas works to ensure that Eve's place in original creation *is* supported by scholastic analysis, the idea of the derivativeness of the female body never leaves the exegetical project. Even while it is countered in some way, it remains ubiquitous and persistent.

But whilst these elaborations on the text of Genesis 2. 23-24 do influence the marriage encomium's hyperbolic over-stretching of 'O flessh' and its associated dynamics of linguistic power between male and female voices, I want to argue that the *Merchant's Tale* actually works to reverse these dynamics. It is January's body, or at least his perception of it, rather than May's, that appears as derivative in Chaucer's text. January's bodily self-image is dependent upon and derived from its contact with the female body. When January enters into marriage in the *Merchant's Tale*, what he gains is a construction and renewal of masculine identity, in a way that combines aspects of public recognition and reputation, and simultaneously private perceptions of bodily capability and virility.

January not only attempts to transform himself through marriage with May in terms of a moral reform of his voracious sexuality—though whether this is motivated 'for hoolynesse or for dotage' (IV. 1253) the narrator leaves pointedly ambiguous—but also in terms of masculine stature or status in a perceived public sphere. The 'heigh fantasye and curious bisynesse' (IV. 1577) that January fosters around his choice of a bride is performed in the very public arena conjured up by the image of the 'mirour' and the 'market-place' (IV. 1582-3). January's visions of

marriage are based on ideas of a wife as a commodity value in the public exchange and construction of competitive male identity. The idealised body of May—'myddel small [...] armes longe and sklendre' (IV. 1602)—provides January with a medieval 'trophy wife'. May's physical body acts simultaneously in appearing to be the product and manifestation of January's financial power. And as with his choice of bride, so with the ceremony itself. The magnificence of January's ceremony, 'ful of instrumentz and of vitaille, / The mooste deyntevous of al Ytaille' (IV. 1713-4), is, like much of January's characterisation, sharply similar to that of the last aristocratic Italian man to throw a wedding feast in *The Canterbury Tales*: Walter in the *Clerk's Tale*.[38] The image of January dancing with Venus' 'fyrbrond' in hand 'biforn the bryde and al the route' (IV. 1727-8) captures the essential point that January's wedding is above all a public performance, a spectacle, a way of constructing masculine identity via the reactions of the public gaze.

The re-creation of January through his interaction with May is repeated in the comparative privacy of the bedroom scene of May and January's wedding night. January, in consoling May for the 'trespace' and 'offense' (IV. 1828-9) of the sexual consummation of the marriage, gleefully promises that, now married, they 'han leve to pleye us by the lawe' (IV. 1841). The 'pleye' described is the sexual play gestured at repeatedly through the word 'disport'. But what is clear is January's bodily unsuitability to the 'play' itself. The foregrounding of parts of his aged body by the narrator works to undermine any sense that January should be 'playing' with such a young wife, and serves to expand the distance between the reality of January's body and the self-image he clearly gains from physical interaction with May's sexualised body.[39]

In the line following January's promise to 'play' comes a narrative interjection that undermines his actual physical capability: 'Thus laboureth he til that the day gan dawe' (IV. 1842). The juxtaposition of the verbs 'pley' and 'laboureth' serve to create a double impression of January at the point of his first sexual contact with May. Proclaiming to 'pley', a word connoting physical ease and enjoyment, January actually 'labours', toiling against his unresponsive physical body.[40] May's response, though unexpressed to January, clearly supports the narrative judgement rather than January's: 'She preyseth nat his pleyyng worth a bene' (IV. 1854). The return from 'labour' to 'play', and May's negative opinion, works to condemn January's vision of lithe sexual play as pure self-deception, but notably, January's self-image as young Casanova remains intact as he retires in the morning 'al coltish, ful of ragerye' (IV. 1847). If the narrator, reader, and

certainly May herself are under no illusions about January's sexual talent, what is plain is that January *is*; his physical interaction with the body of May transforms the actuality of age into the 'heigh fantasye' of youthful virility. The interaction of physical bodies acts to intensify the self-deception that caused January to characterise himself as a 'blosmy tree' that becomes 'neither drye ne deed' (IV. 1463). Again, like January's original choice of May, his sexual interaction with her actually works to invert the assumptions about original and 'derivative' bodies of male and female found in the exegetical tradition connecting Genesis to the gender dynamics of medieval marriage. The way in which January is transformed and rejuvenated through his relation with May's body seems to invert Aquinas's conclusion and suggests instead that January is in fact a kind of 'May manqué': formed and rejuvenated in reaction to the native characteristics of May's body.

A vital aspect of the *Merchant's Tale*, as I argue above, is January's public, performative formation of his identity. But what this performance opens up is the possibility of judgements that January might not want. May's (presumably silent) appraisal of January's sexual performance, signalled by the word 'preyseth' (IV. 1854), is related semantically to a broad theme of judgement and discernment that threads through the text, from the debates of the counsellors, Placebo and Justinus, and the 'mirror in the market place', to January's metaphorical and literal blindness, and May's punning connection of 'mysconceyveth' with 'mysdemeth' (IV. 2410) at the close of the text.[41] The language of 'avysement' and 'preyseth' leads us into the language of public consultation and advisory discourse: the kind of language that, as numerous critics have noted, brings January ever closer to his counterpart in the preceding *Clerk's Tale*.[42] Yet again, there are important connections to be made between the status of female counsel—such an ostentatiously broached topic in the latter part of the marriage encomium—and the exegetical traditions that underpin so much of the *Merchant's Tale*.

Paradisal Labours (II): Reason and Counsel

The *Merchant's Tale*'s marriage encomium, as Donald Benson saw its structure, consisted of three fundamental points, each couched within a body of exegetical lore.[43] The ultimate point of the encomium concerns, rather strikingly, wifely counsel: the imperative that a husband should 'werke after his wyves reed' (IV. 1357). That counsel and advisory discourse are an important aspect of the *Merchant's Tale* is obvious enough; the glaring 'non-debates' of January's

counsellors, Placebo and Justinus, connect Chaucer's text to a long tradition of anticurial satire and advisory literature going back at least as far as John of Salisbury's *Policraticus* (1159).[44] But while counsel in the *Merchant's Tale* might seem to be a virtually self-explanatory presence, much more can be made of the connections between reason, counsel, and the Genesis narratives which underpin the marriage encomium and make up such a vital part of it. Moreover, more must be made of the intersections between Genesis, ideas of reason and counsel, and the political resonance of the Italian setting and sources of the *Merchant's Tale*, something I return to at the close of the essay.

> For thanne his lyf is set in sikernesse;
> He may nat be deceyved, as I gesse,
> So that he werke after his wyves reed.
> Thanne may he boldely beren up his heed,
> They been so trewe and therwithal so wyse;
> For which, if thou wolt werken as the wyse,
> Do alwey so as wommen wol thee rede. (IV. 1355-61)

The marriage encomium's final focus appears in a patterned repetition of the words 'reed' and 'wyse'. Wisdom, reason and counsel—and explicitly female counsel—are presented as the easy way to 'sikernesse' and security. But, as always with this encomium, the homiletic imperatives of the passage come with the tangible possibility of self-parody. The proximity of 'deceyved' to the rather absent-minded 'I gesse', the hyperbolic sense of certainty in 'He may nat be', the repetition of 'reed', and particularly 'wyse', in four out of five lines that sounds suspiciously like vacuous reiteration: the parroting of received wisdom that occurs throughout the marriage encomium seems to be happening here too. Indeed, it is the citation of received wisdom, particularly the 'evidence' of female biblical figures, that again demonstrates the *Merchant's Tale*'s proximity to exegetical tradition. But what is really striking about the exegetical tradition that informs the marriage encomium here is its self-contradictory nature. Chaucer was heir to two sharply contrasting traditions of thought on female rationality, wisdom and counsel.

The first of these, epitomised by Augustine and Aquinas, focused discussion on the comparative irrationality of Eve. For example, Augustine, in attempting to explain the fall, wonders:

Fortasse secundum sensum carnis, non secundum spiritum mentis viveret [...] sed quod fortassis illa hoc nondum perceperat quod sit in agnitione Dei, et viro regente ac dispensante paulatim fuerat perceptura.[45]
[perhaps that she was living according to the spirit of the flesh and not according to the spirit of the mind [...] But perhaps the woman had not yet received the gift of the knowledge of God, but under the direction and tutelage of her husband she was to acquire it gradually.][46]

Again, Augustine's thinking is actually tentative and professedly provisional, something signalled by his repeated 'fortasse', 'perhaps', throughout the passage. But the opposition of female 'sensum carnis' and male 'spiritum mentis', and the assertion of masculine governmental and rational superiority was again a hugely influential thread of exegetical thought. Augustine's earlier construction 'ille a sapientia regitur, haec a viro', 'He is ruled by wisdom, she by the man', was amongst the most foundational of exegetical ideas in the Middle Ages.[47] Aquinas concurs in the *Summa*'s discussion of pre- and post-fall subjection: 'naturaliter in homine magis abundat discretio rationis', 'the power of rational discernment is by nature stronger in man', and goes on to spend a great deal of time constructing a kind of domestic 'body politic' image out of the origins of Eve's body in Adam's rib, rather than his head or foot.[48] All in all, Augustinian thought constructed the first woman, and all women, as comparatively lacking in reason, the foundation of *sapientia* and the primary faculty that we might associate with wisdom and counsel.[49]

But the marriage encomium shows Chaucer's awareness of an exegetical tradition, exemplified by Albertanus's compilation of biblical exempla, which used exegesis to assert the exact opposite of this Augustinian tradition. The encomium's repetition of 'wyse' and 'rede', its imperative to 'Do alwey so as wommen wol thee rede' (IV. 1361), is followed by a compendious list of biblical figures from Albertanus of Brescia's *Liber consolationis et consilii* which is designed to illustrate the biblical origins and authority of female counsel. As before, this sequence of figures—Rebecca, Judith, Abigail, Esther—is surrounded in early manuscripts by Latin glosses, visually foregrounding the authoritative connection between scriptural text and vernacular encomium.[50] This list has become something of a 'crux within a crux' in Chaucerian scholarship, but what is striking here is the close connection between Chaucer's text and Albertanus's exegetical compendium which, like *Liber de amore Dei*, made strong connections between biblical exegesis and prudential and advisory discourse. Most strikingly

of all, the evocation of Genesis, and particularly the creation of Eve in Chaucer's text (via Albertanus), is echoed again in one amongst many connections between the *Merchant's Tale* and the *Tale of Melibee*:[51]

> And the same bountee in good conseillyng of many a good womman may men telle./ And mooreover, whan oure Lord hadde creat Adam, oure forme fader, he seyde in this wise:/ 'It is nat good to been a man alloone; make we to hym an helpe semblable to hymself.'/ Heere may ye se that if that wommen were nat goode, and hir conseils goode and profitable,/ oure Lord God of hevene wolde nevere han wroght hem, ne called hem help of man, but rather confusioun of man. (VII. 1101-5).[52]

The motivation for Eve's creation in Genesis 2. 18 is again portrayed through an appropriation of the direct speech of God in the biblical passage, just as occurs in the marriage encomium (IV. 1328-9). But Albertanus's text focuses sharply on Eve's 'help', the status of 'adjutorium' that so troubled Augustine, and sees the term 'helper' as, explicitly, 'advisor', 'for without the help and counsel of women the world would not be able to endure'.[53] Whilst Albertanus's exegesis hedged somewhat by recording antifeminist material as well, his emphasis on female reason, wisdom and counsel, and the way biblical exegesis was offered to cement these ideas, was what Chaucer repeatedly turned to Albertanus for.[54] Against the exegetical tide, some authors offered exegesis on Genesis which emphasised female counsel in a way that must have been, to some extent, controversial and contested.[55] This differing emphasis on the significance of Eve's creation in Genesis was similarly enunciated in another text to which Chaucer returns repeatedly, remarkably the text that Christine de Pizan lambasted as full of 'excessive, violent, and totally unfounded criticism, denigration, and defamation of women': the *Roman de la Rose*.[56] The introduction of the figure 'Raison', notably female, is accompanied by the following assertion, rendered in the Chaucerian translation:

> Hir goodly semblaunt, by devys,
> I trow were maad in paradys,
> [...]
> God hymsilf, that is so high,
> Made hir aftir his ymage,
> And yaff hir sith such avauntage

> That she hath myght and seignorie
> To kepe men from all folye (3205-6; 3210-14).[57]

The final line here: 'To kepe men from all folye' echoes back to Albertanus's *Liber consolationis et consilii*, and forward to both *Melibee* and the *Merchant's Tale*. While Chaucer is surely heir to the exegetical tradition that could be referred to by a simple 'as seith Seint Augustyn' (X. 920), he was also sharply aware of a very different strand of exegetical thought, one that produced connotations of female rationality and counsel as a check on masculine 'folye' whenever Genesis came to the fore.[58]

The presence of female counsel as one of the main themes of the marriage encomium is, I think, crucial to the wider meanings of the *Merchant's Tale*. Yet that presence is, strangely, what has been noted as an absence. Donald R. Benson's formative article on the marriage encomium describes the place of wifely counsel in the text before adding 'the old man [January] reveals no interest whatsoever in this subject [...] nor is wifely counsel a significant issue in the tale's action'.[59] In Benson's account, the absence of wifely counsel in the tale is another reason to conclude that 'we can only accept the passage as a major Chaucerian crux, a tantalizing anomaly' which refuses interpretative closure. But this absence is pointed and deliberate. The combination of female counsel's appearance in the encomium with its glaring absence throughout the rest of the tale works to focus the more politicised aspects of the *Merchant's Tale*'s meaning.

Much of this politicized meaning depends on the language of counsel in the tale, a language it shares with both *Melibee* and the *Clerk's Tale*. But whilst this vocabulary of advice abounds in the *Merchant's Tale*, the actuality of counsel is repeatedly prevented. It is not just that Placebo and Justinus, the actual counsellors of the text, fail to produce anything like 'counsel'—Placebo is baldly sycophantic, Justinus is not necessarily any better—it is that the text emphasises over and over again the public, performative, even ostentatious spectacle of January using the political facade of counsel while ruthlessly suppressing it.[60] 'And syn that ye han herd al myn entente, / I prey yow to my wyl ye wole assente' (IV. 1467-8) he says. But the words 'entente' and 'assente', brought together by rhyme, actually clash: January's 'entente' is absolute, and his theatrical request for 'assente' is utterly empty of the need or desire for wider advisory opinion. When Justinus does venture a qualification against January's 'entente' to marry a young wife, his counsel is met with the violent outburst 'Straw for thy Senek', and the assertion that 'Wyser men than thow, / As thou hast herd, assenteden right now /

To my purpos' (IV. 1569-71). Placebo sycophantically pleads that January has no need 'Conseil to axe' (IV. 1480), and he is ultimately right: in asking for counsel, January simply demands 'assente'. Meeting with his retinue of 'freendes' after choosing May as his bride to be, January requests, essentially, silence: 'And alderfirst he bad hem alle a boone, / That noon of hem none argumentes make / Agayn the purpos which that he hath take' (IV. 1618-20). This is, strikingly, an almost exact replica of the bullish, tyrannical Walter of the *Clerk's Tale*, who coerces his 'counsellors' into agreement with just the same 'boone':

> And forthermoore, this shal ye swere: that ye
> Agayn my choys shul neither grucche ne stryve; [...]
> And but ye wole assente in swich manere,
> I prey yow, speketh namoore of this matere' (IV. 169-70; 174-5).

Walter and January, aristocratic Lombards both, utilize the language of counsel but actually offer only two choices: consent or silence. Whilst scholars have located this antipathy towards advice as a key aspect of January's self-delusion, what is being picked up on by Chaucer here is precisely what was raised as a vital aspect of marriage in the encomium, and something that acts from line 1374 onwards as a metaphorical 'elephant in the room': female counsel.[61] From the point that a reader leaves behind the marriage encomium, with its exegetical compilation of biblical examples of female 'good conseil' (IV. 1369), it is increasingly obvious that January exists in a world without any counsel whatsoever. His silencing of masculine counsellors leads inevitably to the fact that May is predominantly silent until the generic affiliations of the tale's close prompt her into the language of a virtuoso deception.

It is worth emphasising here the Italianate nature of Chaucer's choice of setting and sources, as both are significant. David Wallace's monumental *Chaucerian Polity* (1997) has focused attention on the way that Chaucer's travels to Italy in the 1370s may have affected his writing, and indeed his sense of the political life of fourteenth-century Europe. Chaucer is portrayed, like Milton in the 1630s, as an English writer rejuvenated by Italianate literary culture who simultaneously developed a rather critical awareness of political phenomena in southern Europe.[62] It is no accident that Chaucer's major source for large sections of the marriage encomium in the *Merchant's Tale* is Albertanus of Brescia, 'one of the most popular and widely disseminated of all medieval authors', but also one who combined first-hand experience of the connections between intellectual

labour and political discourse in Italy with a repeated assertion about the importance of counsel, and frequently female counsel, in shaping governmental practice.[63] Neither can it be a coincidence that January is introduced as 'dwellynge in Lumbardye [...] born was of Pavye' (IV. 1245-6), linking him in geographical, and indeed political, terms with the Clerk's remarkably detailed locating of Walter in Saluzzo (IV. 57-63), the thumbnail sketch of Bernabò Visconti in the *Monk's Tale* (VII. 2399-2406), and above all the warning of the Prologue of *The Legend of Good Women*: to 'nat ben lyk tyraunts of Lumbardye' (G. 354).

While the political language of counsel in the *Merchant's Tale* fits neatly into the text's wider themes of judgement, perception and self-delusion, it surely must also be read in the light of Chaucer's choice of setting, his geographical and political frame of reference, and in particular the presence, or absence, of wifely counsel after it has been so clearly brought into focus at the start of the tale. Many scholars have seen the *Merchant's Tale* as morally bleak, or even 'savage', but it is rather one of Chaucer's most political tales.[64] The place of wifely counsel in late medieval political discourse has been discussed at length, notably by Paul Strohm and Carolyn Collette, in a way that demonstrates the proliferation of a female advisory role in both the literature of the period, and the highly theatrical instances of statecraft that saw Edward III's Queen Phillipa and Anne of Bohemia, for example, effecting changes to royal policy in the later fourteenth century.[65] It is this discourse which, intersecting with the 'sinister potency' of Chaucer's images of Lombard Italy, grounds the exegetical matter of the marriage encomium in a politicised way. Albertanus, an Italian writer whose most important advice for Chaucer in both the *Merchant's Tale* and *Melibee* seems to have been to listen to wifely advice—whether in the form of Dame Prudence, Ester, or Eve—was the writer that underpins Chaucer's ideas about the necessity of wifely counsel being a central dynamic of wise marriage.

The palpable absence of female counsel in the tale throws an oblique light on the character of May and the arguments of Proserpine at the close of the tale. May's clever subversion of aspects of January's parroted ideas about marriage— the young wife as wax image (IV. 1430) turned into a way to cut her own set of keys to the garden (IV. 2117), the turning of 'heritage' (IV. 1439) to her 'mysconceyveth' (IV. 2410)—can be read as something slightly different to the callous fabliau manipulation that they are often taken to be. And given the political milieu of the tale, they should be. The ruthless deception of the tale's close is perhaps the only space left for female intelligence in a milieu that so ruthlessly constrains both the female voice and female counsel. The close of the

tale, for all its apparently fable-like antifeminism, can be read as the revenge of female reason. What is foregrounded in the marriage encomium but so conspicuous by its absence in the tale is what comes, in a distorted form, to constitute the most fitting of examples of 'fabliau justice'.

As the *Merchant's Tale* contorts itself into a virtuoso panoply of genres that covers tragedy, fabliau, homily, and fable, the one thing that underpins it in its entirety, from the marriage encomium to the reified 'fall' of its close, is its origins in that most vital of origin texts: Genesis. The exegetical tradition that sought to explicate the biblical text also worked to create dominant ideas about gender, sexuality, and marriage which helped form both literary texts and social practices throughout the Middle Ages. Yet creation, as Chaucer's text testifies, is a complicated thing. Just as Chaucer uses both the stylistic trappings and moral commonplaces of exegesis to create the marriage encomium, his writing demonstrates the malleability, rather than the stable veracity, of ideas about the roles of marriage and women based on Genesis. Moreover, it comes to reverse, rather than repeat, the hierarchy of gendered bodies assumed by much Augustinian thought and, finally, uses the elucidation of Eve's role as origin of female counsel found in Italianate sources to critique the attempt to legitimise the unbridled masculine desire of a 'tyraunt [...] of Lumbardye'. Exegesis can clearly be used to cast a veil over self-interest, but Chaucer also suggests that some forms of biblical exegesis can work to counteract others. Eve can be seen to 'kepe men from all folye', just as she can be seen to lead them into it.

APPENDIX

A TRANSLATION OF ALBERTANUS OF BRESCIA,
LIBER DE AMORE DEI, II. 16.

Parts of the 'marriage encomium' in Chaucer's *Merchant's Tale* have long been known to originate in Albertanus of Brescia's *Liber de amore Dei*, or to give the text its full title: *Liber de amore et dilectione Dei et proximi et aliarum rerum et de forma vitae* (1238). Chaucer's debt to another of Brescia's texts, *Liber consolationis et consilii* (1246) is equally well known. This text, via the French Dominican Reynaud de Louens's *Livre de Melibee*, is the ultimate source for Chaucer's *Tale of Melibee* and for some passages in the *Merchant's Tale*, and appropriate parts of it have been translated and anthologised in easily accessible ways (see, for example, N. S. Thompson, 'The Merchant's Tale' in Robert M. Correale and Mary Hamel (eds.) *Sources and Analogues of the Canterbury Tales*, 2 vols (Cambridge: Brewer, 2005), II. 479-534, 498-500; Alcuin Blamires (ed.) *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended: An Anthology of Medieval Texts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), pp. 237-242). However, no readily available English translation of *Liber de amore Dei*, either in whole or part, exists to my knowledge. This translation is based on a Latin edition that formed the major portion of the PhD dissertation of Sharon Lynne Hiltz (now Sharon Hiltz Romino), University of Pennsylvania, 1980. The Latin text is available on-line at the following address: http://freespace.virgin.net/angus.graham/DeAmore2.htm, and was accessed 17th July 2008. This translation has benefited greatly from the very generous help of both Nick Havely and Alaric Hall. Any errors that remain are entirely my own.

That a wife is to be cherished

Surely you ought to love your wife perfectly, because she is part of your body, and is one body with you, as the Lord said when he called her the helper of man. For when he had made man he said: 'Let us make a helper for him', and by extracting a rib from Adam's body he made Eve, and said: 'On account of this a man will leave his father and mother, and cleave [to his wife]: and they were two in one flesh'.[66] And elsewhere the apostle said in the epistle to the Ephesians:

'Love your wives just as Christ loves the Church'.[67] And the apostle adds also: 'So men should love their wives as their own bodies. For he who loves his wife loves himself. No one ever has hate for his own body, but nurtures and cherishes it.'[68] And after that he adds also: 'Let everyone of you love his wife as himself: but a wife should fear her husband'.[69] And it is good for a wife to be loved because she is a gift from God. For Jesus, son of Syrac said: 'A house and goods are given by the parents, but a good and prudent wife is given properly by the Lord'.[70] For it is said that she is a helper to man and greatly needed, as he said also: 'Where there is no hedge, the possession shall be spoiled; and where there is no wife, he mourns that is in need'.[71] And indeed you should remember to love a wife, as it is said that she should have sovereignty over your body. The apostle also said in the first epistle to the Corinthians: A man does not have power over his own body, but the woman. Just as a wife does not have power over her body, but the man. Do not defraud one another, except perhaps by consent for a time, in order to give yourselves to prayer: and return together again, lest Satan tempt you on account of your incontinency.[72]

And elsewhere: 'Let him render the debt to his wife: and likewise the wife to the husband'.[73] So you should ever remember to love your wife and you should never be able to be separated from her except because of fornication. Whence it is said: 'Those that God has brought together, man cannot separate'.[74] Neither believe it to be a sin when the married come together carnally, for by the apostle it is said: 'For fear of fornication, let every man have his own wife'.[75] And elsewhere through him it is said in this way: 'It is better to marry than to burn'.[76] And elsewhere also by him it is said: 'truly, he who gives his virgin in marriage does well: and he who does not give her in marriage, does better'.[77] And elsewhere: 'Are you bound to a wife? Do not complain. But if you have accepted a wife, you have not sinned. And if a virgin marry, she has not sinned.'[78] And also of widows he says: 'A woman is bound by the law for as long as her husband lives, but if her husband should die, she is at liberty from the law: let her marry who she will, only in the Lord. But she will be more blessed if she remains according to my counsel.'[79] Thus the apostle instructs one to act well. He is foolish and heretical who against the saying of the apostle forbids any to marry and commands them to abstain from the nourishment that God created. So the apostle in the epistle to Timothy said: Now the Spirit manifestly saith, that in the last times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to spirits of error, and doctrines of devils, Speaking lies in hypocrisy, and having their conscience seared, Forbidding to marry, to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be

received with thanksgiving by the faithful, and by them that have known the truth.[80]

Neither is the heretic able to say that the statement of the apostle is to be understood to concern divine marriage. For if it is to be understood as concerning divine marriage, according to that authority, it would be better to abstain from divine marriage than to marry in Christ, which is openly false. You should neither adhere to the heretic, nor believe those who say that a wife is to be forsaken, and not enjoyed carnally, for they interpret the gospel perversely when it is said: 'He who leaves his father, or his mother, or his sons, or his lands, or his wife, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall possess eternal life.'[81] This is to be understood when, by the will of both spouses, it happens that they vow chastity, or they turn to religion with the consent of both, or even one turns to religion with the consent of the other spouse, with the other growing old yet remaining alive and vowing chastity; or even against his desire, if marriage is not consummated through carnal union, because this is true of marriage, just as the decrees, decretals and laws proclaim. Therefore I say that you should not ever refrain from carnal marriage, if it pleases you to have a wife. And you should rather take a wife of good habits and one who has been brought up in good society, than one who has plenty of wealth and is otherwise a bad woman, and rather a girl than a widow. For a certain philosopher said: 'Take a girl for your wife, whatever her age'.[82] And Cato said:

> Flee from taking a wife for the sake of dowry,
> Nor wish to keep her if she begins to be troublesome.[83]

Neither make great expense in the marriage of a wife. For Seneca said: 'extravagant weddings are to be avoided'.[84] And if perhaps you find something in your wife which displeases you, you should tolerate it with a calm spirit if it is possible to do so conveniently. For a certain philosopher said: 'There is no wife so good that you will not find something to complain about'[85] and 'there is no fortune so good that it can give no cause for complaint'.[86] And Tullius said in *De Amicitia*: 'there is nothing more difficult than to find that which is in all parts perfect in its kind'.[87] Whence Solomon in Ecclesiastes said: 'one man among a thousand have I found; but a woman among all those have I not found'.[88] Although if Solomon should find none, nevertheless Seneca more graciously commended wives over all things, saying: Just as nothing is superior to a good-natured spouse, so nothing is crueller than an aggressive woman. For just as a

wise wife would risk her life for her husband's safety, so a vicious one would count hers as worth more than her husband's death'.[89]

And for this reason a good wife is to be loved. For a certain philosopher said: 'you know good company to be in a good wife; a good woman is a faithful guard and a good home'.[90] And elsewhere he said: 'A pious wife obeys a man's commands'.[91] Therefore, if a wife is bad, you should be able to bear her fittingly. For a certain wise man said: 'you should bear things, rather than blaming them, because it is not possible to change them'.[92] But although you should love your wife, you ought not to give her power over you in your life, nor ought to give her superiority, nor such strength to contradict you. For Jesus, son of Sirac said: 'A woman, if she has superiority, is contrary to her husband'.[93] So that, as you keep faith with her, you will not turn to another during her lifetime but preserve chastity. For the law says thus: 'It is seen to be very unfair when a man leaves his wife for chastity, as he should not relinquish himself'.[94] And Seneca said in his epistles: 'We shall say that a man is dishonest when he demands from his wife the chastity that he himself does not observe'.[95] And Solomon said: 'But he who is an adulterer, for lack of wisdom he destroys his own soul; he surrounds himself with disgrace and ignominy, and opprobrium shall not leave him'.[96]

And neither should you flatter your wife, nor should you praise her too much, or curse her, nor should you correct her sharply with disgraceful words. For Seneca said in *De Formula Honeste Vite*: 'You should acquire no friends through flattery. Praise little, curse less.' For just as too much praise is to be reprehended, so too immoderate cursing; indeed one should be mistrustful of both such flattery and such spite'.[97] Nor should you provoke a wife to anger, if you are able to avoid this, because Solomon said thus: 'There is no head worse than the head of a snake, nor is there anger greater than a woman's anger'.[98] But if perhaps anger breaks out without your fault, you should fear words but a little. For Cato said:

> Do not fear the words of an angry wife,
> For when a woman weeps, she fills the tears with ambush.[99]

Then even Seneca said: 'There are two types of tears in the eyes of women; one of certain pain, the other of trickery'.[100] For 'Women's tears are the spice of malice'[101] and 'Ready tears indicate deceit not grief'.[102] And therefore Cato said:

> Believe nothing blindly of a wife complaining about the servants;
> For often the wife hates the one the husband likes.[103]

Neither should you adhere to a wife's counsel too much. For a certain wise man said: 'Through their evil counsel women prevail over men'.[104] And it is said in the proverbs: 'a woman's advice is either too costly or too cheap'.[105]

NOTES

[1]   J. D. Burnley, 'The Morality of "The Merchant's Tale"', *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 6 (1976), 16-25, (p. 17); Robert R. Edwards, 'Narration and Doctrine in the Merchant's Tale', *Speculum*, 66 (1991), 342-67, (p. 342). A useful summary of critical attitudes can be found in John Finlayson, '*The Merchant's Tale*: Literary Contexts, The Play of Genres, and Institutionalised Sexual Relations', *Anglia*, 121 (2003), 557-80.

[2]   Of all medieval literary genres, the fabliau is perhaps the genre that is least likely to be accompanied by expectations of emotional and moral sententiousness. 'Savagery' and 'moral desolation', to some extent, surely come with the generic territory. For a concise and useful account of the genre, see John Hines, *The Fabliau in English* (London: Longman, 1993). On the decidedly conventional morality that tends to accompany these texts of bawdy comedy and sexual betrayal, see pp. 33-37.

[3]   On this structure, see *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. L. D. Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), p. 884, and Helen Cooper, *Oxford Guides to Chaucer: The Canterbury Tales* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 206.

[4]   The foundational discussion of the difficulties of this passage is Donald R. Benson's 'The Marriage "Encomium" in the *Merchant's Tale*: A Chaucerian Crux', *Chaucer Review* 14 (1979), 48-60. Whilst numerous scholars have reacted to Benson's formulation of this 'crux', no critical consensus, even about the speaker of the lines, exists.

[5]   Valerie Edden, 'The Bible', in *Chaucer: An Oxford Guide*, ed. Steve Ellis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 332-51 (pp. 346-47). See also Lawrence Besserman's account in *Chaucer and the Bible: A Critical Review of Research, Indexes, and Bibliography* (New York: Garland, 1988), pp. 15-37. Besserman's exhaustive cataloguing of biblical echoes in Chaucer's work is extremely useful and clearly paved the way for his *Chaucer's Biblical Poetics* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998). A rather mixed bag of essays also exists in the form of *Chaucer and Scriptural Tradition*, ed. David Lyle Jeffrey (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1984).

[6]   Besserman, *Chaucer and the Bible*, p. 25.

[7]   Robertson's argument, and his methodology—itself largely based on medieval exegesis—are amply demonstrated by his reading of the *Miller's Tale*, surely one of the hardest texts to read as a biblical homily. See D. W. Robertson, *A Preface to Chaucer: Studies in Medieval Perspectives* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), p. 113. For a sensible, eloquent, and often funny critique of Robertson's criticism, see E. Talbot Donaldson, *Speaking of Chaucer* (London: Athlone Press, 1970), pp. 134-153.

[8]   See also, for example, I. 187; VII. 259; VII 3241; X. 97; LGW 1690. I view Augustine as the exemplary figure of exegetical tradition because of both the amount of exegesis he produced, particularly on Genesis, and his influence on western intellectual culture in a broader sense. On this influence, see James J. O'Donnell, *Augustine* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1985), p. 124.

[9]   All references to Chaucer's works are to *The Riverside Chaucer*.

[10]   John M. Manley and Edith Rickert, *The Text of the Canterbury Tales*, 8 vols (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1940), III, 508-11 (p. 508). The gloss reads: 'ffaciamus ei adiutorium et extracta costa de corpore Ade fecit Euam et dixit propter hec relinquet homo patrem et matrem et adherebit et cetera et erunt duo in carne una' (p. 509); '"Let us make a helper for him", and by extracting a rib from Adam's body he made Eve, and said: "On account of this a man will leave his father and mother, and cleave [to his wife]: and they were two in one flesh"', from the 'De Uxore Diligenda' section of Albertanus of Brescia's *Liber de amore Dei*. For a translation of the appropriate section of Albertanus's text, see the appendix above. As Roger Ellis describes, this glossing also allows a reader to view the process of translation and therefore confirm the 'publicly professed status of *fides interpres*' to which Chaucer so regularly, and often so disingenuously, takes recourse. At the same time, through the very act of Latin marginal glossing, Chaucer is cemented in the more authoritative role of *auctor*. See Roger Ellis, 'Translation' in *A Companion to Chaucer*, ed. Peter Brown (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), pp. 443-58 (p. 454).

[11]   See for example the tracing of marginal annotations to Albertanus's texts in *The Riverside Chaucer*, pp. 885-6, notes to lines 1311-14; 1325-9; 1362-74; 1375; 1380; 1381-2; 1384-8. To my knowledge, no English translation of *Liber de amore Dei* exists, despite its unquestioned status as one of Chaucer's most important sources in the *Merchant's Tale*. A translation of the section of *Liber de amore Dei* which Chaucer and his scribes used is therefore provided as an appendix to this article.

[12]   Kenneth A. Bleeth traces the image of 'paradys' throughout the tale, and also notes the echoing of January's 'confort and disport' here. See Bleeth, 'The Image of Paradise in the Merchant's Tale', in *The Learned and the Lewed: Studies in Chaucer and Medieval Literature*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), pp. 45-60. I differ from Bleeth in viewing the encomium passages as deeply connected to exegetical tradition on Genesis, rather than more straightforwardly being 'a wry inversion of the inevitable antifeminist moral' (p. 47).

[13]   On the numerous connotations of the garden in the *Merchant's Tale*, see for example Seth Lerer, 'The Canterbury Tales' in *The Yale Companion to Chaucer*, ed. Lerer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), pp. 243-94, (p. 270), and Burnley, 'The Morality of 'The Merchant's Tale'', p. 23. Lerer adds both Christ's cross and 'the illicit pear tree of Augustine's

childhood confession' to the possible connotations of the *Merchant's Tale*'s pear tree. Searching for a particular significance for a tree-image out of all the possibilities in medieval culture might seem pointless, but I find Lerer's idea of the pear-tree of Augustine's *Confessions* tempting. As I argue below, Augustinian exegesis on Genesis is surely a powerful context for the marriage encomium.

[14]   The vexed problem of identifying the narrating voice of the marriage encomium is most clearly summed up in Benson's 'The Marriage "Encomium" in the *Merchant's Tale*: A Chaucerian Crux'. Attempts to provide a solution to this crux include Edwards, 'Narration and Doctrine in the Merchant's Tale', and Jill Mann, *Feminist Readings: Chaucer* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), esp. pp. 50-64, 61. Edwards notes that scribes tended to mark the narrative voice of the Merchant-narrator as 'auctor' throughout the tale, and do so during the encomium as well (p. 350). Mann argues that the apparent 'crux' disappears altogether when the encomium is seen to be affected by the inherent irony of the 'dissuasio de non ducenda uxore' genre, epitomised by Deschamps' *Miroir de Mariage*.

[15]   Augustine's attempts to explicate Genesis are spread out across the full span of his intellectual activity. They number *De Genesi Contra Manichaeos* (388-89); *De Genesi ad Litteram Imperfectus Liber* (393-95); the final three books of his *Confessiones* (397-401); *De Genesi ad Litteram* (401-16); and books 11-14 of *De Civitate Dei* (412-27). On the changing nature of Augustine's interpretative practice in these texts, see Yoon Kyung Kim, *Augustine's Changing Interpretations of Genesis 1-3: from De Genesi contra Manichaeos to De Genesi ad Litteram* (Lampeter: Mellen, 2006).

[16]   Augustine, *De Genesi Ad Litteram*, IX, 5, in *Patrologia Latina*, ed. J. P. Migne, 34. **396.**

[17]   *St. Augustine: The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, trans. John Hammond Taylor, 2 vols. Ancient Christian Writers, 42 (New York: Newman Press, 1982), II, 75. The passage is also reprinted in *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended: An Anthology of Medieval Texts*, ed. Alcuin Blamires (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 79.

[18]   Augustine's thought on this point clearly influenced later exegetical accounts of Genesis, for example that of Thomas Aquinas in the *Summa Theologiae*. Aquinas concludes that Eve was created 'non quidem in adjutorium alicujus alterius operis, ut quidam dixerunt, cum ad quodlibet aliud opus convenientius juvari possit vir per alium virum; sed in adjutorium generationis'; 'not indeed to help him in any other work, as some have maintained, because where most work is concerned man can get help more conveniently from another man than from a woman; but to help him in the work of procreation'. See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Thealogiae*, trans. R. J. Batten *et al*, 60 vols (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1975), XIII, 34-37. Augustine, along with Aristotle, is the most frequently cited author in Aquinas's work.

[19]   Donaldson argues that this image itself works to 'vulgarize the creation of Adam and Eve'; see Donaldson, *Speaking of Chaucer*, p. 39. His interpretation is attractive but not, it seems to me, wholly persuasive.

[20]   Augustine, *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, II, 11, in *Patrologia Latina*, 34. 204.

[21]   *Saint Augustine On Genesis: Two Books on Genesis Against the Manichees and On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis: An Unfinished Book*, trans. Roland J. Teske, Fathers of the Church 84 (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1991), p. 111.

[22]   Alcuin Blamires, *The Case for Women in Medieval Culture* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 100. Blamires' account of how exegetes used this 'wizardry' to iron out interpretative problems about gender is, I think, both important and convincing.

[23] This may, in itself, have seemed problematic to Chaucer's readers. Not only is January fitting neatly into the *senex amans* role of the fabliau genre, but clerical advice on marriage tended to recommend marriages of approximate equality, at least in terms of age and social status. See, for example, *Mirk's Festial: A Collection of Homilies*, ed. Theodor Erbe, EETS. e.s. 96 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Trübner, 1905), 290/13-15; and Langland's attack on similar matches: *The Vision of Piers Plowman*, ed. A. V. C. Schmidt (London: Dent, 1995), IX. 163.

[24]   Besserman, *Chaucer's Biblical Poetics*, pp. 121-22. Besserman notes that this sentiment echoes narratives concerning Ahab and Jezabel in Kings 1 and 2, as well as a perhaps more distant evocation of the story of Acteon in *Metamorphoses* 3.

[25]   The clearest reference is, of course, Justinus's citation of Alisoun as an authority on the subject of marriage (IV. 1685). The connections between these two texts, regardless of whether they are part of a strictly definable 'marriage group' as George Kitteredge famously argued, are numerous. For Kittredge's argument, see 'Chaucer's Discussion of Marriage', *Modern Philology* 9 (1912), 435-67.

[26]   Indeed, a reader may not have to choose at all. As Isabel Davis puts it, 'her portrait both subverts and confirms the gender arrangements of the society of which she is a product; it both celebrates and demonizes female sexuality'; *Writing Masculinity in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 108; see also Glenn Burger, *Chaucer's Queer Nation*, Medieval Cultures 34 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), pp. 79-100. Intriguingly, this line also appears in the rather different environment of Chaucer's *Tale of Melibee* (VII. 1088). As in a number of cases, *Melibee* rehearses aspects of other tales, particularly the *Merchant's Tale*, but seemingly without the irony that tends to characterise them elsewhere.

[27]   I differ here from Richard Neuse's account of the *Merchant's Tale*. Where Neuse sees the use of clerical commonplaces on marriage as a way to construct January as 'a faithful son of the Church' and a way to expose 'the Church's flawed conception of marriage', I see the tale's

criticism levelled largely at January. See Richard Neuse, 'Marriage and the Question of Allegory in the *Merchant's Tale*', *Chaucer Review* 24 (1989), 115-31 (p. 119).

[28]   The idea of clerical discourse on marriage, particularly the presence of clerical blessings and the vernacular marriage service, producing such an implied comparison originates in Burnley, 'The Morality of the "Merchant's Tale"', p. 23.

[29]   See the translation of *Liber de amore Dei* above.

[30]   For the marginal comment, see note 10.

[31]   Blamires, *The Case for Women in Medieval Culture*, p. 96.

[32]   *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, II. 13; *Patrologia Latina* 34. 206.

[33]   *Saint Augustine on Genesis*, trans. Teske, p. 114.

[34]   Emphasis on the derivation of 'woman' can also be found in what we might call the 'popular' exegesis of the mystery plays. See for example the Chester Cycle creation play: 'Therefore she shall be called, iwiss / "virago," nothing amiss; / for out of man taken she is': *The Chester Mystery Cycle*, ed. David Mills (East Lansing: Colleagues Press, 1992), ll. 149-51. Whilst the biblical texts on which these plays were based were constant, it is notable that the differences between the plays' versions of Eve's creation are a testament to the nuanced differences in exegesis that could be produced from Genesis 2. The N-Town creation play focuses on Adam's power to name Eve: 'Thi wyff thu geve name also': *The N-Town Plays*, ed. Douglas Sugano (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2007), l. 26, whilst the York cycle places the naming of Adam and Eve in the mouth of God—'Adam and Eue 3our names sall be'—omitting Adam's linguistic power over Eve altogether: *The York Plays*, ed. Richard Beadle (London: Edward Allen, 1982), l. 44.

[35]   Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, XIII. 34-35.

[36]   'For the female is, as it were, a mutilated male, and the menstrual fluids are semen, only not pure; for there is only one thing they have not in them, the principle of soul': Aristotle, *On the Generation of Animals*, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. and trans. Jonathan Barnes, 2 vols (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), I. 1144.

[37]   Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, XIII. 36-37. For related ideas about the anatomical and medical nature of bodies by Aristotle, Galen *et al*, see Blamires, *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended*, pp. 38-49.

[38]   Walter's equally ostentatious wedding gestures are recorded in the now notorious line 'Whan she translated was in swich richesse' (IV. 385). For the significance of this 'translation', see Carolyn Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), pp. 132-55, and David Wallace, *Chaucerian Polity: Absolutist Lineages and Associational Forms in England and Italy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), pp. 261-98. I deal with the connections between the *Clerk's* and *Merchant's Tale* and *Melibee* in more detail below. It is perhaps significant that Albertanus's *Liber de amore Dei* contains the maxim:

'Nuptias sumptuosas facere vita', 'Sumptuous weddings are to be avoided', wrongly atrributed to Seneca.

[39] Many of these details may well originate in Boccaccio's *Comedia delle ninfe fiorentine*; see N. S. Thompson, 'The Merchant's Tale', in *Sources and Analogues of the Canterbury Tales*, ed. Robert M. Correale and Mary Hamel, 2 vols (Cambridge: Brewer, 2005), II, 479-534 (p. 483), and the text provided on pp. 502-7.

[40] As Carol Everest has argued, a body of medical literature which connected blindness with sexual over-indulgence may have influenced Chaucer here as well; January's 'labouring' might actually be seen to 'hasten his own demise'. See Everest, 'Sight and Sexual Performance in the *Merchant's Tale*', in *Masculinities in Chaucer: Approaches to Masculinity in the Canterbury Tales and Troilus and Criseyde*, ed. Peter G. Beidler (Cambridge: Brewer, 1998), pp. 91-103 (p. 103).

[41] As Blamires notes, 'preyseth' is often taken to mean 'praised'. The accurate sense of 'appraised' relates the word much more closely to the language of counsel, judgment, and perception that is such a ubiquitous aspect of the text. See Blamires, *Chaucer, Ethics and Gender* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 96, n. 60.

[42] See for example Edwards, 'Narration and Doctrine in the Merchant's Tale', pp. 347-50; Neuse, 'Marriage and the Question of Allegory', p. 115; Lerer, 'The Canterbury Tales', p. 267. As should be obvious from the following discussion, I too see the *Clerk's* and *Merchant's Tales* as closely connected, with both being linked again to *Melibee*. Some of these connections are strengthened by the order of tales, at least in the Ellesmere text. As A. S. G. Edwards notes, however, in 19 manuscripts, including Hengwrt, the *Merchant's Tale* is preceded by the *Squires's*, rather than the *Clerk's Tale*; see A. S. G. Edwards, 'The Merchant's Tale and Moral Chaucer', *Modern Language Quarterly* 51 (1990), 409-426 (p. 413). The connections in my eyes remain very strong either way, just as there are arresting links between the *Knight's* and *Merchant's Tales*, despite the impossibility of their being a 'quitting pair' like Knight and Miller, Friar and Summoner, and Clerk and Merchant. On these connections, see Helen Cooper, *The Structure of the Canterbury Tales* (London: Duckworth, 1983), pp. 66-68.

[43] See Benson, 'The Marriage "Encomium" in the *Merchant's Tale*: A Chaucerian Crux', p. 54.

[44] See also Blamires, *Chaucer, Ethics and Gender*, p. 66. Blamires manages to locate the 'precise moral framework' of January's refusal of counsel in prudential discourse, something which goes beyond the apparently 'self-explanatory' discussions of counsel in the *Merchant's Tale* which litter Chaucerian criticism.

[45] Augustine, *De Genesi ad Litteram*, XI. 42; *Patrologia Latina*, 34. 452-53.

[46] *St. Augustine: The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, trans. John Hammond Taylor, II. 175-76. Also reprinted in Blamires, *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended*, p. 80.

[47]   Augustine, *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, II. 11, in *Patrologia Latina*, 34. 204; *Saint Augustine on Genesis*, trans. Teske, p. 111. On the influence of this idea, see Blamires, *Chaucer, Ethics and Gender*, p. 71, and his article, 'Women and Creative Intelligence in Medieval Thought', in *Voices in Dialogue: Reading Women in the Middle Ages*, ed. Linda Olsen and Kathryn Kerby-Fulton (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), pp. 213-30.

[48]   Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, XIII. 38-39; for the analysis of Eve's origin in Adam's rib, and its figurative significance, see pp. 42-43.

[49]   Augustine's portrayal of his mother, Monica, in the *Confessions* perhaps complicates this somewhat. On this issue, see Richard J. McGowan, 'Augustine's Spiritual Equality: The Allegory of Man and Woman with Regard to *Imago Dei*', *Revue des Études Augustiniennes*, 33 (1987), 255-64.

[50]   Manley and Rickert, *The Text of the Canterbury Tales*, III, 509. Whilst some of these figures appear in Deschamp's *Mirroir de Mariage*, the list of figures originates clearly from Albertanus's text. See for example *Sources and Analogues of the Canterbury Tales*, ed. Robert M. Correale and Mary Hamel, II, 498-89.

[51]   Albertanus's texts, both the *Liber de amore Dei* and *Liber de Consolatio et Consilii*, are sources for both tales. Chaucer's *Melibee* originates in Albertanus, via the French Dominican Reynaud de Louens's *Livre de Melibee*. The 'crux' of the list of Old Testament female figures lies again in the marriage encomium's constant proximity to self-parody. All the figures can be seen to be representative of female deception, particularly towards their husbands, rather than female virtue. However, a number of scholars have noted, I think rightly, the presence of an identical list in the *Tale of Melibee* (VII. 1098-1102), and the fact that in Chaucer's prose tale, it is virtually impossible to detect any irony attached to their usage. See, for example, Edwards, 'Narration and Doctrine', p. 352; Valerie Edden, 'The Bible', pp. 340-41; and Jill Mann, *Feminist Readings*, p. 60, who notes that the list in *Melibee*: 'can be ironically interpreted only by the most violent kinds of exegetical straitjacketing'.

[52]   The passage is very close, though not identical, to Albertanus's in *Liber de Consolatio et Consilii*. See Blamires, *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended*, p. 241.

[53]   The translation is from Blamires, *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended*, p. 241.

[54]   It is worth noting, I think, that Albertanus quotes passages such as 'a woman's advice is either too costly or too cheap' in the *De amore Dei*, maxims that potentially work against his ostensibly pro-feminist purpose.

[55]   The ubiquity of antifeminist exegesis might make us wonder about the reception of Prudence's phrase 'confusioun of man', given its proximity to similar contemporary texts. See, for example, Chanticleer's deliberate mistranslation of precisely this phrase in the *Nun's Priest's Tale* (VII. 3163-66), or the small mountain of antifeminist lyrics such as 'Of all creatures

woman be best', in *Middle English Lyrics*, ed. Maxwell S. Laria and Richard L. Hoffman (New York: Norton, 1974), pp. 63-64. Strikingly, where a reader might expect an almost inevitable antifeminist gibe here, Chaucer's *Tale of Melibee* seems absolutely free from such irony.

[56]   Blamires, *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended*, p. 286. Christine's attacks were, however, largely directed towards Jean de Meun's contributions. The passage quoted here comes from Guillaume de Lorris's section of the text.

[57]   Compare: 'A son semblant et a son vis / part qu'el fu fete ou paravis [...] que Dex la fist ou firmament / a sa semblance et a s'image / et li dona tel avantage / qu'ele a pooir et seignorie / de garder home de folie', *Le Roman de la Rose*, ed. Félix Lecoy, 3 vols (Paris: Champion, 1968), I. 2969-70; 2974-78. Doubt surrounds the authorship of the extant Middle English translation, originating as it does only in Thynne's 1532 edition of Chaucer's works. The doubt only extends as far, though, as the identification of this particular translation with Chaucer. The God of Love would have had little purpose in accosting Chaucer with the words: 'Thow hast translated the Romauns of the Rose, / That is an heresye ageyns my lawe' (Prol *LGW*, G. 255-56) if Chaucer had not at some point done just that.

[58]   Reason, descending from her 'tour' to provide advice and counsel, is surely evocative of a tradition of such figures, from Boethius's Lady Philosophy to Langland's Holy Church. While this might be explained to some extent by the linguistic connections between abstract qualities and female gender in Latin, the accumulated effect of these figures must surely have acted as a bolster to the association between women and counsel. See Helen Cooper, 'Gender and Personification in *Piers Plowman*', *The Yearbook of Langland Studies*, 5 (1991), 31-48, esp. pp. 31-32.

[59]   Benson, 'The Marriage "Encomium" in the *Merchant's Tale*: A Chaucerian Crux', pp. 58-59.

[60]   The language of counsel is again an important point of intersection with *Melibee*. See Blamires, *Chaucer, Ethics and Gender*, p. 67: '"the Merchant's Tale" systematically invokes the same imperatives of prudential counsel by travestying them'.

[61]   On the connections between vision, blindness and the refusal of counsel as something 'familiar and nameable in medieval moral discourse', see Blamires, *Chaucer, Ethics and Gender*, pp. 62-73, esp. p. 69.

[62]   A condensed version of Wallace's broadest argument appears in his essay 'Italy' in *A Companion to Chaucer*, ed. Peter Brown, pp. 218-34. On Milton in Italy see, for example, *Milton in Italy: Contexts, Images, Contradictions*, ed. Mario A. Di Cesare (Binghamton: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1991).

[63]   Wallace, *Chaucerian Polity*, p. 214. Much of my discussion here is indebted to Wallace's account of the *Merchant's Tale* and *Melibee*, which is found at pp. 212-46.

[64]   See for example Edwards' rating of the *Merchant's Tale* in 'Narration and Doctrine', p. 342: 'by all accounts Chaucer's bleakest and most savagely ironic story'. Other critics see it, I think rather blandly, as a light-hearted and knockabout farce. See Martin Stevens, "And Venus laugheth": An Interpretation of the Merchant's Tale', *The Chaucer Review* 7 (1972), 118-31; also John Hines, *The Fabliau in English*, pp. 176-96.

[65]   See in particular Strohm's 'Queens as Intercessors', in *Hochon's Arrow: The Social Imagination of Fourteenth-Century Texts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 95-119 and Carolyn Collette, *Performing Polity: Women and Agency in the Anglo-French Tradition, 1385-1620* (Turnout: Brepols, 2006), esp. chapter 5. Collette differs from Strohm's formative account in arguing that these instances of queenly intercession were—despite their theatrical nature and the obvious benefits that the masculine monarch derived from them—examples of women's ability to tangibly alter the course of political events. This scholarship on queenly counsel intersects with a wider phenomenon of female counsel in the period. See Sharon Farmer, 'Persuasive Voices: Clerical Images of Medieval Wives', *Speculum*, 61 (1986), 517-43. It is worth noting too that marriage in Italian culture frequently had a politicised role, as either socially cohesive or even as a metaphor for political government in a broader sense. See Christiane Klapisch-Zaber, *Women, Family, and Ritual in Renaissance Italy*, trans. Lydia Cochrane (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), esp. chapters 10-11.

[66]   Genesis 2. 24.

[67]   Ephesians 5. 25.

[68]   Ephesians 5. 28-29.

[69]   Ephesians 5. 33.

[70]   Proverbs 19. 14.

[71]   Ecclesiasticus 36. 27.

[72]   I Corinthians 7. 4-5.

[73]   I Corinthians 7. 3.

[74]   Matthew 19. 6; Mark 10. 9.

[75]   I Corinthians 7. 2.

[76]   I Corinthians 7. 9.

[77]   I Corinthians 7. 38.

[78]   I Corinthians 27-28.

[79]   I Corinthians 39-40.

[80]   I Timothy 4. 1-3.

[81]   Matthew 19. 29.

[82]   Peter Alphonsi, *Disciplina Clericalis*, 26. 2.

[83]   Cato, *Distichs*, 3. 12.

[84]   Pseudo-Caecilius Balbus, *De Nugis*, 5. 20 (Chilo Lacedaemonius).

85   Pseudo-Caecilius Balbus, *De Nugis*, 5. 17. 2 (Zenon).

86   Publilius Syrus, *Sententiae*, 429.

87   Cicero, *De Amicitia*, 21. 79.

88   Ecclesiastes 7. 28.

89   Fulgentius, *Mitologiarum*, 1. 22.

90   Peter Alfonsi, *Disciplina Clericalis*, 20. 16-17.

91   Publilius Syrus, *Sententiae*, 108.

92   Publilius Syrus, *Sententiae*, 206.

93   *Ecclesiasticus* 25. 30.

94   *Digest*, 48. 5. 14. 5.

95   Seneca, *Ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales*, 94. 26.

96   *Proverbs* 6. 32-33.

97   Martin of Braga, *Formula vitae honestae*, 2. 32-35.

98   *Ecclesiasticus* 25. 22-23.

99   Cato, *Distichs*, 3. 20.

100 Pseudo-Caecilius Balbus, *De Nugis*, 5. 17. 5 (Pythagoras).

101 Publilius Syrus, *Sententiae*, 384.

102 Publilius Syrus, *Sententiae*, 536.

103 Cato, *Distichs*, 1. 8.

104 Publilius Syrus, *Sententiae*, 365.

105 Walther, *Proverbia*, 3164.