

The Bane of Flattery

in the World of Chaucer and Langland

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I

In our relativistic age the practice of flattery is not seen as a dangerous societal malaise, let alone as a mortal sin in flatterers and an inducement to sin in their victims. This tolerant view did not prevail in the medieval world. Constant attacks on the social and personal harm wrought by flatterers are made by patristic and scholastic authorities from Augustine's day to that of a near-contemporary of Chaucer and Langland, John Bromyard,¹ whose tone grows especially vehement in his lengthy *capitula* on *Adulatio* in the *Summa Praedicatorum*. Nor did this universal condemnation die out with the advent of Renaissance humanism. In *The Praise of Folly* Erasmus satirises the practice of flattery, saying it reigned in chief at the courts of princes, a charge echoed by his friend Thomas More in *Utopia*. Even before their era, voices were raised against the malaise, notably by Cicero in *De Amicitia*. He quotes Terence as saying "Flattery produces friends; the truth breeds hatred" and then adds:

It is an evil truth if hatred, the poison of friendship, is indeed born from it. Yet flattery is much more evil, indulgent of transgression, allowing a friend to fall headlong to ruin.²

This judgment will be repeated, even intensified, in the condemnation of flattery by patristic and scholastic speakers. In particular, John Bromyard, who sometimes cites Cicero, will insist that the flatterer is always an enemy, never a friend.

As Robert Myles argues in his study of Chaucer's ethical realism, flattery, like equivocation, is fundamentally misuse of speech. He points out that

'Good' and 'bad,' 'proper' and 'improper,' are not relative terms—at least for Chaucer....It was understood in the Middle Ages that, given our free will, signs may be directed or misdirected, used properly or improperly, naturally or unnaturally....Like all human intentional acts, the act of speech is a wilful act directed towards something" (22-3).

That "something" in the flatterer's heart is the opposite of the seeming good his victim assumes from the speech signs.

In the hazardous world of pilgrimage the bane of flattery is depicted by Langland through allegory in *Piers Plowman* and by Chaucer, sometimes ironically, in the *Canterbury Tales*. At the root of their treatment of this omnipresent evil are the references to flatterers in the Old Testament, intensively glossed by the exegetes and by the Franciscan commentator of our poets' own era, Nicholas of Lyra.³ While the Evangelists are silent in the matter of flattery, the books attributed to Solomon and to the Psalmist David, regarded as the pre-eminent prophet, resound with warnings. In four typical examples, Psalms 5, 11, 35, and 77,⁴ we read in Psalm 5:11: *linguis suis dolose agebant*, hence Douai: "They dealt deceitfully with their tongues." This phrase the King James translators will render as "They flatter with their tongue." Jacobean concern over the curial infestation of flattery may account for the explicit terms, yet Jerome's cogent wording brings out the conjunction of flattery with the evils of guile, deception, betrayal, treachery, all summed up in the terms *dolose* and *dolus*. The translation in the Hebrew *Tehillim* reads: "Their tongue they equivocate." According to the Midrashic commentary, this means "They make their tongue smooth and glib," where "tongue" signifies what a man really feels, the message he inwardly communicates to himself. David's insincere foes speak of friendship with their mouths, but "they yearn to entrap me with their smooth tongues."⁵

The words in Psalm 5:11, "Their throat is an open sepulchre" (*sepulchrum patens*), signify in the interlinear gloss that out of greed men lie to other men through flattery (*pro qua adulando mentiuntur*), dragging them into the grave and devouring them (*vel adulatione trahunt homines et devorant*). To read *dolose agebant* as "flatter" makes that term signify, in Jerome's own gloss, the deadliest of actions: the death-dealing treachery of heretics. On this elucidation Nicholas of Lyra's *postilla* expands *sepulchrum* to mean that heretics "wish, if they could, to gobble us up (*deglutire*) alive," and *dolose*

refers to their “first pretending friendship” (*amicitiam simulando*). This interpretation comes to mind when we consider the name Langland will assign to the Antichrist figure at the culminating scene of *Piers Plowman*.

In Psalm 11, “Save me, O Lord,” Jerome’s translation twice uses the phrase *Labia dolosa*, rendered in Douai as “They have spoken vain things every one to his neighbour: with deceitful lips and with a double heart have they spoken. / May the Lord destroy all deceitful lips.” King James diverges only in the key word: “They speak vanity every one with his neighbour; with flattering lips and with a double heart do they speak. / The Lord shall cut off all flattering lips.” Again, the *Tehillim* commentaries reflect Jerome’s translation, or rather his translation may reflect the Hebrew sense: “Each one speaks untruth to his neighbour, equivocal speech; they speak from a double heart. May HASHEM cut off all equivocating lips,” that is, “to utter with the mouth what is not felt in the heart,” “to cover up false insincerity with glib talk and smooth words.” The explanation by Rashi is to the point, for his eleventh-century Bible commentaries seem to have been known to Nicholas of Lyra: “It is as if they have two hearts. They display a heart of peace and friendliness while in reality their heart is secretly full of animosity.” As a gloss on flatterers, the acuity of Rashi’s judgment will be matched by later Christian commentators. On smoothly equivocating lips Rabbi Malbim notes that in Scripture the word “lips” always denotes external communication, the spoken word. The term “equivocation” indicates the intentional misuse of words by the speaker. Hence Augustine’s teaching on intentionality and on questions of signifier and signified speaks to the essence of the sin of flattery. The flatterers described in David’s psalm themselves reveal this essence: “We will magnify our tongue: our lips are our own” (v. 5). The mention in this psalm of what Jerome terms *labia dolosa* is related by Augustine to that duplicity of the “double heart” found on “flattering lips.” Good men, that is, those who do not flatter, are of one heart and one mind. Nicholas of Lyra takes the “deceitful lips” and the “double heart” to signify both Judas *Proditor* and the Pharisees. In his *duplex cor* the man with flattering lips betrays the one he praises.

In Psalm 35, Jerome’s wording marks the deceitfulness of the flatterer in terms that show the offence to be mortal and not merely venial, a point that will be clarified by Aquinas: *Quoniam dolose egit in conspectu eius, Ut inveniatur iniquitas eius ad odium / Verba oris eius iniquitas, et dolus* (35:3-4); thus Douai: “For in his sight he hath done deceitfully, that his iniquity may be found unto hatred. / The words of his mouth are iniquity and guile.” The King James translators are again precise: “For he flattereth

himself in his own eyes; The words of his mouth are iniquity and deceit.” The different treatments of Psalm 77 reveal similar shifts in emphasis. The Vulgate, again without the term *adulatio*, reads: *Et dilexerunt eum in ore suo, Et lingua sua mentiti sunt ei* (77:36); thus Douai: “And they loved him with their mouth: and with their tongue they lied unto him.” Consistently, the Authorised Version (A.V.) has “Nevertheless they did flatter him with their mouth, and they lied to him with their tongues.” In these four extracts, then, the actual term *adulatio* never comes into Jerome’s Latin text, while “flattery” and its variants occurs in all the King James English versions. Can it be that Jerome, for whom the Psalms typically reflect the words or passion of Christ, detected a tone so monitory that for him *dolus* rather than *adulatio* conveyed a truer sense?

The nexus between flattery and deceit, fraud, betrayal, is made clear by the glosses not only on passages from Psalms but also on those in other books of prophecy and wisdom: Job, Ezekiel, and particularly Proverbs. The admonition, “A man that speaketh to his friend with flattering and dissembling words spreadeth a net for his feet” (Prov. 29:5),⁶ echoed by Chaucer in the Nun’s Priest’s warning, is opened out by Nicholas of Lyra: the flatterer who praises his neighbour with deceitful words is contriving snares by which he may fall more easily into peril, and those who themselves sin in this way suffer perpetual damnation. He is following Augustine, who takes the phrase in Psalm 18, “The sinner is praised in the desires of his soul” to mean that “The tongues of flatterers (*adulantium linguae*) bind souls in sin. For there is pleasure in doing those things, in which not only is no reprover feared, but even an approver heard.” On Psalm 37, he declares: “Undue praise by a flatterer is the oil of a sinner” (*Falsa laus adulatoris, hoc est oleum peccatoris*). In these terms Augustine unmistakably links the Vulgate terms *dolus* and *dolose* with those not used in the Vulgate, *adulator* and *adulatio*, in short “Deceit makes for a double heart, flattery for a double tongue.” Elsewhere Jerome himself uses an effective oxymoron: “Flattery is always insidious, crafty, and smooth. And the flatterer is well described by the philosophers as ‘a pleasant enemy.’”⁷

At first glance Aquinas may seem to take a more concessive view of the flatterer’s wiles. Mortal sin being contrary to charity, it follows that flattery may sometimes be only venial, among the “slight sins,” if one flatters “any person of higher standing, whether of one’s own choice, or out of necessity.” But it is mortal if the flatterer “by deceiving him may injure him in body or in soul,” for “nothing so easily corrupts the human mind as flattery” (*Summa Theologica* II-II, q. 115). Intention is the principle.

Augustine's definition, echoed in the *Parson's Tale*, calls sin "a deed or a word or a desirous thought which contravenes the eternal law." On this Myles comments: "Language in the Middle Ages was considered to be an integral and important part of a wider reality, and the misuse of language a serious sin" (26). A cogent, if indirect, definition of flattery comes in Augustine's *De Mendacio*: "That man lies who has one thing in his mind and utters another in words, or by signs of whatever kind" (Myles 28), as for example the weeping of Melibee's "feyned freendes" who then urge him to make war on his enemies and thus fall into sin.

The same principle underlies the denunciations of flatterers made by other authorities of the period, such as Bernard of Clairvaux, Innocent III, Alan of Lille, and John of Salisbury. As for Gulielmus Peraldus, whose *Summa virtutum et vitiorum* was drawn on by Chaucer for his *Parson's Tale*, he had much more to say against flattery than Chaucer was able to adapt. But one mordant phrase Chaucer did not omit. Peraldus' image *Adulatio nutrix est diaboli, filios diaboli lactans lacte adulationis* (f. 152v) the Parson renders as: "Flatereres been the develes norices, that norissen his children with milk of losengerie" (X.613). The proof text is from Proverbs: *Vir iniquus lactat amicum suum*: "An unjust man allureth his friends" (16:29).⁸ Chaucer may have relished the wordplay: *lacteo* means to suck or give suck, *lacto* to allure or entice.

An ever harsher tone comes from the poets' near-contemporary, John Bromyard. In his fifteen lengthy *articuli* on *Adulatio* he directs his considerable powers of rhetoric upon all flatterers. They are akin to the traitor Judas, "creating ruin with a kiss, while with honeyed words as with a kiss they lead the way to perdition." Like Joab, thrusting his sword into Amasa's side while pretending to kiss him, the flatterer pleases a sinner "as if wishing to kiss him, then with honeyed words stabs into his soul the dagger of the sin of vainglory or audacity in evildoing." When a man praises another for his sin this is contrary both to the love of God and to the love of one's neighbour. Flatterers, therefore, are self-homicides (f. 40r).

As for Chaucer's poetic master, and perhaps also Langland's, he put the flatterers below even the suicides. In Canto XVIII of the *Inferno*, Dante tells how he was led into lowest Hell, far below the circles of torment reserved for those guilty of violence against God, themselves, and their fellow men, to a place "called Evilpits," where a well "Yawns wide and deep." Peering down, they see "souls deep submerged / In filthy dung" where there appears a head "so dark beshitten as to hide / If he were clerk or layman." Dante hears him cry out, "The honeyed words / Of fawning flattery my lips poured forth / Have earned for me my station in this spot" (Bergin 62).

Bromyard's reflections and Dante's imagery should perhaps check any tendency on our part to take the specimens of flattery in *Piers Plowman* and the *Canterbury Tales* too lightly.

II

By the time of Langland and Chaucer, close to a thousand years of patristic and scholastic wisdom, grounded in the Old Testament, had been exerted against the vice of flattery in all its guises, to say nothing of humbler moralists. The compilers of the several versions of the *Secreta Secretorum*, such as *Governance of Lordschipes* and *Gouernance of Prynces*, warn the ruler to "gretly drede" the "flostrynge ["swagger," "bluster," etc.] of the losengers ["flatterers"] that the Plesyn," for the mark of the good counsellor is that he never gives flattery.⁹ These warnings against the insidious curial blight echo the situation dramatised in the Lady Mede scenes at the beginning of Langland's *Piers Plowman*, in which Reason and Conscience seem like embodiments of the true philosophers praised by the physiognomists.

Unlike the hortatory tone of the *Secreta*, however, and decidedly unlike the stereotyped treatment of the evils of flattery in John Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, Langland's presentation is vividly personalised. In Passus II and III Will's first dream reveals a world where money wields power and greed dominates society. Lady Holy Church shows him how deceit and flattery are intertwined with betrayal and treachery, bribery and corruption. He observes Lady Mede, daughter of Fals, representing falsehood and falsity, who plans to marry her to Fals Fikel-tonge, representing fraud, deception, deceit, and flattery. Mede's father is aided by Favel, a liar and deceiver, who "thorough his faire speche hath this folk enchaunted" (II.42). The verb echoes the familiar enchanter image for flatterers used by Peraldus and Bromyard, among others. Skeat, citing Occleve, defines "Favel" as "Flattery" and "Fikel" as "Tracherous" (113, 116). Thus "Fikel" describes all three treacherous deceivers, indistinguishable in their quality of social menace.

Langland next allegorises the sin of flattery at the end of the episode when Will, with Pacione and Conscience, meets Haukyn, the "Active Man." He is described as a "mynstral," an occupation condemned by Peraldus and Bromyard, both of whom equate minstrels with flatterers. Warned by Conscience that his "beste cote," signifying his baptismal vows, is badly stained and must be cleansed, Haukyn confesses his sins. When Will the Dreamer sees Haukyn's despair—"into wanhope he worth and wende nought to be saved" (XIII.406)—he reflects on the stubbornness of sinners and on

lords and ladies and legates of Holy Church who maintain licensed jesters—"flateris and lieris"—while refusing food to the poor. He concludes that "flateris and fooles are the fendes disciples / To entice men thorough hir tales to synne and harlotrie" (XIII.429-30), reiterating the accusation a moment later: "thorough hir foule wordes / [they] Leden tho that loved hem to Luciferis feste" (454-5). This again is an echo from Peraldus and Bromyard, for the wordplay on "fool" signifies both jester and sinner, as well as "vicious." Christ himself, in the betrayal scene, tells Judas: "Falsnesse I fynde in thi faire speche, / And gile in thi glad chere, and galle is in thi laughyng" (XVI.154-5)—a phrase that resonates with Augustine's gloss on the "double heart."

The climactic scene depicts the arrival in the Barn of Unity, signifying the refuge of Holy Church, of "Oon Frere Flaterere." Now the poet has brought the narrative to a troubled point in life—after, typologically, the Resurrection, the descent of the Holy Spirit, and the founding of the Church, or, tropologically, stages within the life of Everyman. In the previous passus, at the conferring of the Holy Spirit, the predicted coming of the Antichrist has already been linked with flattery:

For Antecrist and hise al the world shul greve,
And acombre thee, Conscience, but if Crist thee helpe,
And false prophetes fele, flatereris and gloseris,
Shullen come and be curatours over kynges and erles (XIX.220-23).

Now in his last vision the Dreamer sees this predicted evil coming "in mannes forme" to destroy truth and cause "fals" to grow and spread, in every region making "gile growe there as he a god weere" (XX.52-57).

But then instead of a further description of the Antichrist there comes the attack by the Seven Deadly Sins on the Barn of Unity where Conscience has shepherded the people. He orders the porter, Unity, to bar the gates against "alle taletelleris and titeleris in ydel," then calls "a leche, that koude wel shryve / To go salve tho that sike were and thorough synne ywounded" (XX.305-06). The confessor is identified only as a "person or parissch preest, penitauncer or bisshop" (XX.320), pointedly not a friar. With a "sharp salve" he makes those sheltering in Unity do penance to ensure that "Piers [pardon] were ypayed, *redde quod debes*"; this formula is, as John Yunck observes, "demanded by Christ himself as prerequisite" (149). But the condign penances imposed by this true physician of souls are too severe for the insincere penitents, and they ask to have a "surgien" who "softer koude plastre." Sire-Leef-to-lyve-in-lecherie, groaning, recommends one "that softe kan handle...and fairer he plastreth / Oon Frere

Flaterere” (XX.310-16). At first Conscience demurs at Contricion’s plea that this new confessor be let in, but then acquiesces. When Peace asks his name, the friar’s companion blurts out, “Sire *Penetrans-domos*.”

Behind the porter’s outrage on hearing this name lies a complex background. The term alludes to Paul’s warning to Timothy, written from prison in Rome, about false teachers and moral decline when “in the last days shall come dangerous times.” Then will appear sinful men “[h]aving an appearance indeed of godliness but denying the power thereof,” to which the Apostle adds: *ex his enim sunt qui penetrant domos, et captivas ducunt mulierculas oneratas peccatis* (2 Tim 3:1-6). Whether or not “last days” predicts the apocalypse foretold by the prophet Daniel, the poet draws a close link between Friar Flatterer and his alternative name signifying those *qui penetrant domos* in Paul’s warning about false teachers with insidious motives. The link is forged in the phrase “and hise” added to the name of Antichrist in the warning by Grace, the Holy Spirit, to Conscience when the Barn of Unity is established (XIX.220-21).

It is a warning of no avail, for now Conscience calls on Frere Flaterere to “conforte” his “cosyn,” Contricion, who is suffering because the “plastres of the person and poudres ben to soore.” Then, like the friar mocked by Chaucer’s Summoner, the new confessor “gropeth Contricion and gave hym a plastre / Of a pryvee paiement.” Resignedly, the narrator adds, “Thus he gooth and gadereth, and gloseth there he shryveth” (XX.364-69), in short “plays down sin.” The “glosing” confessor, Wendy Scase notes, “flatters penitents, especially by ‘glossing over’ their sins”; the verb “glosen” still had its older meaning as a synonym for “flatter” (82).

As a result, Contricion hadde clene foryeten to crye and to wepe,
And wake for hise wikked werkes as he was wont to doone,
For conforte of his confessor, contricion he lafte (XX.370-72).

The spectacle of the penitent being “comforted” by his confessor rather than being made to shed tears of compunction reflects one of John Bromyard’s strongest complaints against flattery (art. 13). Now Sloth and Pride assail Conscience, who cries for help from Clergy and Contricion. But Peace, the weak doorkeeper, says they lie drowned in torpor:

The frere with his phisyk this folk hath enchanted,
And plastred hem so esily [hii] drede no synne! (XX.379-80).

The poem, as the B-text has it, now ends. As he awakens, the Dreamer hears Conscience vow to become a pilgrim to seek Piers the Plowman, then cry aloud for grace. Almost the last word the Dreamer hears is “enchanted,” the term used by the authorities, Bromyard in particular, to describe the effect of flattery. Bromyard emphasises, as does an earlier Dominican moralist, Jacobus de Voragine in the *Legenda Aurea*,¹⁰ that confessors must make penitents feel the full sense of *contristari*, becoming grief-stricken over their offences against God. If through ignorance or carelessness the confessor absolves too easily, he may be endangering his own soul. Yet Langland, by giving Frere Flaterere the dual name of Sire *Penetrans-domos*, leaves no doubt that the root of his mischief lies deeper than ignorance or carelessness or mere venality.

The connection of *Penetrans-domos* with the cognomen “Flatterer” extends beyond the Pauline text. This the *Glossa* examines closely (VI, cols 743-6). John Chrysostom, for example, condemns the “penetrating” spreaders of false doctrine for their deceit and flatteries (*fallaciam atque blanditias*). In the *postilla* on Paul’s warning the poet may have noted Nicholas of Lyra’s reference to the Antichrist—the Apostle John’s reminder: “Little children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that Antichrist cometh, even now there are become many Antichrists” (1 John 2:18). In the allegory, one of these has indeed been allowed into the Barn of Unity. But in a much earlier prophecy on the coming of the Antichrist may be found an even closer association with Frere Flaterere, an association which points directly to the practice of flattery.

The Book of Daniel tends to be ignored in commentary on Passus XX, an exception being Kathryn Kerby-Fulton’s views on the reformist apocalypticism of William of St Amour, “a latter-day Daniel who interprets the handwriting on the wall for the benefit of the Church” (156). Compared with these warnings, however, the attack of Frere Flaterere, “if such a peaceable and legal entry may be called an attack, is only upon the already wounded.” This comment may go wide of the mark. The friar is called in precisely because his victims *have* been wounded, wounded by the sins he is duty-bound to clean away. The implications of his name of Flatterer are lost in this reading, in part because the scriptural reference is taken only from Daniel 5 rather than also from Daniel 11, where predictions taken by the exegetes as forewarnings about the Last Days seem to fit Langland’s Antichrist “in mannes forme” all too ominously. Frere Flaterere’s mode of entrance is reminiscent of the prophet’s imagery, for the very reason that his entrance is “peaceable and legal.” In part the prophecy reads:

And he shall come privately and shall obtain the kingdom by fraud....And
such as deal wickedly against the covenant shall deceitfully dissemble....And

when they shall have fallen they shall be relieved with a small help: and many shall be joined to them deceitfully (11:21, 32, 34).

Here, as in other texts, the King James wording gets to the heart of the matter, in one place seeming to echo the encounter in Unity between the impenitent sinners and Frere Flaterere:

He shall come in peaceably, and obtain the Kingdom by flatteries. And such as do wickedly against the covenant shall he corrupt by flatteries. Now when they shall fall, they shall be holpen with a little help: but many shall cleave to them with flatteries.

Daniel's prophecy is obscure enough to make translation problematic, but all the versions conjoin to present the mysterious figure in terms of guile and fraud, deceit and intrigue, feigning hypocrisy, and the one consistent term: flattery. The poet would have been aware of the great authority of the Book of Daniel and the extensive glosses on it, for its most ominous prophecy is spoken of by Christ himself in the passage recorded by all three Evangelists that predicts the destruction of the Temple: "When therefore you shall see the abomination of desolation, which was spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place: he that readeth let him understand" (Mt 24:15). Jerome's gloss—that their true salvation is under Christ, but instead they wrongly receive the Antichrist—does not fit ill with the mistake made by those in the Barn of Unity.

To this scriptural and exegetical material Langland has applied all his powers of inventiveness. His treatment of the curse of flattery is many-sided, and nowhere more so than at the conclusion of his allegory. "Antichrist as its end product—a bleak conclusion indeed," writes Mary Carruthers (163). But is that really the conclusion? The flattering friar is only one of the "many Antichrists," and there is, if only for the wise few, escape from him. Conscience recovers and vows to renew the search for Piers the Plowman. The Dreamer has learned his last and binding lesson: nothing can stop the search for Truth, not even the flatterer.



As for Chaucer's treatment of the bane of flattery, it has mockingly comic elements in the *Canterbury Tales*, but by no means only that. In his book, to use the term favoured

by Donald Howard in *The Idea of the Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer portrays the sin of flattery in more direct and explicit ways than are seen in *Piers Plowman*. Was Chaucer, in fact, a reader of Langland's allegory? A number of critics have accepted that possibility. Frank Grady conjectured that Chaucer wrote the *House of Fame* "after his first encounter with the B-version of Langland's poem at the end of the 1370's" (6); it probably "circulated in London, where Chaucer leased the Aldgate house from 1374-86," with a "potential audience" that "certainly included Geoffrey Chaucer" (8-9). Earlier J.A.W. Bennett suggested that Chaucer may have seen a copy between its first publication and the beginnings of the *Canterbury Tales* "at least ten years later." There were probably frequent copyings to be found for sale in the area of St Paul's, the haunt of chantry priests "like Langland himself perhaps, who had little to do but sing prayers, listen to sermons, and read." Bennett believes they "must have passed each other in the street," frequenting perhaps the same bookshops "not far from Chaucer's house" (321-22). F.R.H. Du Boulay adds that the poets "were neighbours in London, acquainted with glittering courts," although there is "no evidence that they knew each other" (1, 16). If all this is true, it is perhaps possible that Chaucer, working through his complex plans for the *Tales*, conceived of different ways by which to explore the societal and personal problems of flattery treated by Langland.

At first glance, Chaucer's treatment of the curse of flattery may appear to be less serious than Langland's. Yet paradoxically, if the *Nun's Priest's Tale* is taken as the poet's last word, along with the *Parson's Tale*, this first impression ceases to hold, for both these priestly contributions to the Host's competition mark an ending. As a structural framework, the pilgrimage, if seen as a Lenten exercise ending at the Cathedral in time for the Paschal feast, can hardly have a conclusion other than the Parson's call to penitence. Yet in another sense, from the maker's point of view, the last word must be truly merry, comic in the sense of the *Divine Comedy*, a lifting up of the heart. Death has been conquered, the devil defeated, the ravenous fox outwitted. The terminal place of the Parson's homily in the proceedings need not on that account make it Chaucer's own last word on the problems of life. The poet may have implanted his own reflections within the narration of a more subtly-introduced and more congenial spokesman, who is given a narration in which the curse—to speak literally—of flattery can be dealt with in the ironic mode of a poet rather than the categorical mode of the Parson.

An obviously well-trained priest, he moves readily in and out of St Raymund of Pennaforte's manual on penitence and that of Gulielmus Peraldus, to say nothing of

other sources that also come into his closely-woven tract. His first mention of flattery acknowledges, as in Aquinas' passing concession, that this sin may be only venial if one should "flaterer or blandise moore than hym oghte for any necessite" (X.376). But when he turns to questions of mortal sin, his material on flattery is drawn from Peraldus, whose *Summa* locates the sin of flattery under *Gula*, gluttony, as one of the "sins of the tongue." In the Parson's list it goes under *Ira*, wrath. The "vice of flateringe, which ne comth not gladly but for drede or for coveitise" (X.612), he treats as part of "Spiritueel manslaughter" (X.565) into which fall lies and oaths as well as flattery. "I rekene flaterie in the vices of Ire," he explains, "for ofte tyme, if o man be wrooth with another, thanne wole he flaterer som wight to sustene hym in his querele" (X.618). Chaucer may have considered Wrath to be a psychologically more pertinent cause for the devices of flattery than Peraldus' Gluttony, for as Benson notes (961), this striking line cannot be traced to another source. That is also true of the Parson's opening words (X.612) and his addition to the "develes chapelleyne" image (X.617a) taken from Peraldus: "that syngen evere *Placebo*" (X.617b). The accusation does, however, seem to reflect a similar kind of scorn on Bromyard's part (f. 39r). The Parson opens his brief discourse on flattery (X.612-18) with the *Summa's* "devil's nurses" image, followed by a difficult attribution: "For sothe, Salomon seith that 'flaterie is worse than detraccioun'" (X.614a). Peraldus did cite Proverbs to support his nurse's milk image, but not in relation to detraction. Nor in the Parson's *remedium contra peccatum ire* (X.654-76) can he pick up the remedies *contra peccatum adulationis* put forth by Peraldus (f. 153r-v): hearing flattery let a man sink down to earth; or let him remember his death; or let him note that the flatterer loses his *facies tristis*, surely a warning about the two-faced deceiver. This wise counsel the Parson has to omit, having treated flattery under the sin of wrath, for which his remedy can only be patience.

From the personal, moral side of flattery the Parson's brief treatment is conventional; from the societal side, by the narrator of the *Tale of Melibee*, it is equally so. Chaucer has kept this allegorical prose treatise, to which flattery is central, for the *General Prologue* speaker, often taken to be himself. In its dependence on the *Livre de Melibée et de Dame Prudence* ("a close translation": Benson 923), it also reflects the kind of scholastic commentaries on flattery surveyed above. The Latin original of 1246 by Albertanus of Brescia came in a period when these were current.

At the behest of Dame Prudence, the "myghty and riche" Melibee summons advisors to hear his case against the enemies who have wounded his daughter Sophie. The advisors include "ful many subtille flatereres" (VII.1007), whose behaviour

confirms the warnings set down by the moralists: their flattery and false friendship conceal their evil intention to bring harm to Melibee. The fact that the narrator brands them as “cunning,” in the bad sense, suggests some awareness on Chaucer’s part that, as Myles writes, “Medieval thinkers understood intentionality or the object-directedness of thought to be a function of the intellect governed by the individual human will” (19). Hence Melibee’s “neighebores ful of envye, his feyned freendes that semeden reconsiled, and his flatereres” pretend to weep, urging him to “wreken hym on his foes and bigynne werre” (VII.1018-20). But just as the king in the Dreamer’s Fair Field of Folk has Conscience and Reason to deter him from allowing corruption, Melibee has Prudence to deter him from taking vengeance: “Trust wel that comunli these conseilours been flatereres....Thou shalt eek eschue the conseillyng of alle flatereres, swiche as enforcen hem rather to preise youre persone by flaterye than for to telle yow the soothfastnesse of thynges” (VII.1150, 1175). Prudence’s remonstrances point to the secret malignity of flatterers no less clearly than do Bromyard’s. If Langland ever did have occasion to examine Chaucer’s *Parson’s Tale* and his *Tale of Melibee*, he would have found himself on familiar ground.

Such would not be the case with Chaucer’s exposure of flattery in a range of activity far removed from the Dreamer’s search for St Truth—the world of so-called “Courtly Love” or “refined love,” the term preferred by Derek Brewer (7-8). Examples of flattery practised by would-be seducers are offered with relish by a number of Pilgrim-narrators. Yet in that typical example of *malattia d’amore*,¹¹ the anguish suffered by Arcite and Palamon in the *Knight’s Tale*, there is no hint of any flattery of Emilye by either of the erstwhile blood brothers. Once only is “Flaterye” spoken of by the Knight, as one of the tapestry-like figures in the Temple of Venus.

At far remove from the idealistic behaviour of the Knight’s courtly lovers is the crudely earthbound behaviour of the rapist knight in the *Wife of Bath’s Tale*. Yet in recounting his search for an answer to the perilous question, the Wife speaks of flattery in tones almost wistful:

Somme seyde that oure hertes been moost esed
 Whan that we been yflatered and yplesed.
 He gooth ful ny the sothe, I wol nat lye.
 A man shal wynne us best with flaterye (III.929-32).

Whether Alisoun is thinking here of adulterous love rather than something more innocent one may doubt. But in Chaucer’s more saturnine examples of *fin amour*, it

does, *pace* Brewer (8), involve adultery. Typically, the importunate lover exerts coercion on the lady in a corrupt kind of flattery, by declaring that he will die if she does not give in and so she will become a murderess. This threat is meant to flatter her not merely with desirability but with power of life or death, a supreme if grotesque compliment. In comic form Nicholas tries this notion on the playfully demurring Alisoun: “Lemman, love me al atones, / Or I wol dyen” (I.3280-81). Less genial is Aurelius’ demand to the truly unwilling Dorigen: “Have mercy, sweete, or ye wol do me deye!” (V.978). The Merchant’s Damyan does not even threaten the unreluctant May with the fatal consequences of refusal, but shows he is already at death’s door because of frustrated desire, the grossest flattery.

Chaucer’s comic counterpart to Langland’s Sire *Penetrans-domos* is the target for even sharper satire of the art of flattery. The Pilgrim Friar is sneered at by his rival the Summoner: “I shal hym tellen which a greet honour / It is to be a flaterynge lymytour” (III.1293-94). The friar invented by the Summoner tells his sick penitent: “Thomas, of me thou shalt nat been yflatered” (III.1970). This is no less than a promise not to hesitate to rebuke the reluctant donor, but it puts flattery in the exact sense of wilful deception. In light of Thomas’ malicious response, the Summoner is reflecting in unconscious ironical reversal the maxim in Proverbs: “He that rebuketh a man shall afterwards find favour with him, more than he that by a flattering tongue deceiveth him” (28:23).

Alone among the flatterers presented to the Pilgrims or observed by Will the Dreamer, Chaucer’s Pardoner candidly admits that flattery and hypocrisy are the two faces of a man’s evil intention:

Som for plesance of folk and flaterye,
To been avaunced by ypocrisyse,
And som for veyne glorie, and som for hate (VI.409-11).

The truism that the flatterer will hate the one he victimises comes out all too clearly in the Pardoner’s boast that he never flinches from despoiling even “the povereste wydwe in a village, / Al sholde hir children sterve for famyne” (VI.450-51).

Yet none of the Pilgrim-narrators gives so grim and, rhetorically, so vivid an image of hatred concealed behind the mask of flattery as does the Sergeant-of-the-Lawe. He describes the arrival of the “Cristen folk,” Constance, daughter of the Roman emperor, and her entourage, in the lands ruled by the “Sowdan of Surrye.” The Sultan’s mother,

secretly abjuring her conversion, conspires against her son and his royal bride. The narrator, a lawyer and judge outraged by treason, the Sergeant levels at this “roote of iniquitee” a torrent of *exclamations* (II.358-64) as if she were the accused in a court of law. No doubt intentionally, he reflects the association of flatterers with Satan, “envious syn thilke day / That thou were chaced from oure heritage,” by branding the Sultanness, “O serpent under femynnytee.” This image, not found in either Gower or Trivet, is rich in signification. The serpent, in Alan of Lille’s commentary *Liber in distinctionibus dictionum theologicum* (PL 210:942C), is said to stand for the devil (as in Isaiah 27:1) but also for Christ (as in John 3:14), an example of the exegetical technique of representing something both *in bono* and *in malo*.¹² In the *Allegoriae in universam scripturam*, incorrectly attributed by Migne (Spicq 38) to the ninth-century bishop, Rabanus Maurus, significations for the serpent include the devil, Antichrist, unbelief, detraction, demons (PL 112:1051C).

No less significant for the Sergeant’s purposes than the serpent is the equally venomous scorpion. He describes how the “blisful hoost” of Christians is watched by

this scorpioun, this wikked goost,
The Sowdanesse, for al hire flaterynge,
Caste under this ful mortally to styng (II.404-06).

Nor is the Sergeant, who has not found any mention of scorpions in either Trivet or Gower, the only pilgrim to identify flattery with the scorpion’s mortal sting. The Pardoner declares, after linking “flaterye” with “ypocrisie,” that he will “styng” his enemy with his “tonge smerte” (VI.413). The Merchant uses the same image as does the Sergeant, although his complaint is not against criminals but against Fortune:

O sodeyn hap! O thou Fortune unstable!
Lyk to the scorpion so deceyvable,
That flaterest with thyn heed whan thou wolt styng;
Thy tayl is deeth, thurgh thyn envenymyng (IV.2057-60).

The scorpion’s sting as a symbol for various evils was well established. In the *Distinctiones* of Alan of Lille the scorpion is defined as standing for sin and for the “crooked deceiving stings of the heretics.” In the *Allegoriae* of pseudo-Rabanus Maurus significations for the scorpion include unbelievers and destroyers, with a warning, not inappropriate to the conspirators who plot to destroy Constance, that the scorpion strikes from behind.

Thus the Sergeant's linking of flattery and hatred with the scorpion's venomous crooked sting belongs to a known tradition. True, while Peraldus in his attack on *adulatores* uses many forceful figures of speech, the scorpion's sting is not one of them. But the translator of Frère Lorens' *Somme le Roi* as *The Book of Vices and Virtues* does make a comparison with "losengeres" that comes close to the Man of Law's linking of the scorpion's sting with the flatterer's deceit:

ther is a manere adde that is cleped saryne [siren] and that renneth fastere than any hors and otherwhile thei flen, and thei beth so venemous that no triacle may saue a man that they enuenymen, for the deth cometh so sodenly after the bityng that a man may not be holpe (59).

It is uncertain whether the manual is still dealing here with flatterers or has gone on to "mysseyeres," backbiters and detractors. One shades into the other. John Bromyard also, in his extensive *capitula* on *Adulantium*, devotes his ninth *articulus* to *detractores*. The Man of Law's metaphor of the scorpion's sting for the "Sowdanesse" therefore has good authority, for it sums up the interfusion of flattery and detraction, hypocrisy and deceit, venomous hatred and ruthless treachery, the Vulgate's *dolus* and the A.V.'s "flattery."

It seems fitting that so severe a verdict on flatterers should come from the mouth of the Sergeant of the Law. But it is not a hopeful judgment. Even though the Emperor of Rome will later exert vengeance on the Sultanesse and her confederates, her treachery does achieve passing success. Many lie dead, even if as quasi-martyrs. The ending of *Piers Plowman* is far from hopeless, yet the battle has not been won but merely renewed. Everyman's quest to save his soul, his search for salvation in *Piers*, the constant effort to achieve contrition against the counter-pull of self-flattery—it must all keep repeating itself. This process Langland depicts both at the personal level, in one representative lifespan, and at the societal level throughout redeemed time. It is, to repeat, not a bleak ending, nor hopeless, but at best hope deferred. But, Chaucer has designed a dual ending to his story that may offer a better hope.

After the Knight has suppressed the Monk's account of historical reversals in fortune, the Host calls to the Nun's Priest: "Telle us swich thyng as may oure hertes glade" (VII.2811). What they are then told is a comedy in the real sense—personal comfort, good cheer, a truly merry account, ending with the much-scrutinised advice from the pilgrim who, in Donald Howard's view, may be "among the most vivid characters in the work" (282):

But ye that holden this tale a folye,
 As of a fox, or of a cok and hen,
 Taketh the moralite, goode men,
 For Seint Paul seith that al that writen is,
 To oure doctrine it is ywrite, ywis;
 Taketh the fruyt, and lat the chaf be stille (VII.4235-40).

These lines have been interpreted in various ways, few unreasonable or even mutually exclusive. One view would equate the Nun's Priest's "goode men" with the "gentils" among the company if this address is made by the pilgrim-narrator, or, to disregard the persona, with the actual court audience if the words are deemed to come directly from the poet himself. Either way, the "fruyt" or "moralite" is a warning not to pay heed to flatterers. It may not seem like the Chaucer we have come to know for him to adopt so blatantly direct a tone; nevertheless, as Howard reminds us, the ending is ambiguous, whether "the simple ironic moral is the priest's words or Chaucer's own, or both" (84).

In my view of this serio-comic beast fable the "moralitee" goes deeper, touching the evil, the *dolus*, the malice and treachery of the flatterer to which Chaucer's—and Langland's—*auctores* give so much attention. Hence the relevance of Paul's dictum (Rom 15:4). This, in the accepted sequence of pilgrim narrations, will soon be reasserted by the Parson at the end of his treatise on penitence.¹³ In that context Paul's reminder refers to the timeless validity of Old Testament prophecies. But in the Nun's Priest's context it refers, I would suggest, not to the Old Testament but to the New—the good news, the "fruyt" of the Gospel.

From that point of view, nowhere in *Piers Plowman* or the *Canterbury Tales* is there a deeper penetration into the curse of flattery than in the beast fable related by the most good-humoured pilgrim on the journey. It has been called "an omnium gatherum of lore and learning that holds up to scrutiny the various means by which man seeks to understand his world" (David 224). Its keynote is an understanding of flattery, here given the most blatant exhibition in either poet's work.¹⁴ Chauntecleer, ignoring his dream warnings, becomes aware of a "col-fox, ful of sly iniquitee" that "lay ful lowe" (VII.3215, 3275). Before he can flee, the flattery begins:

Gentil sire, allas, wher wol ye gon?
 Be ye affrayed of me that am youre freend?
 Now, certes, I were worse than a feend,

If I to yow wolde harm or vileynye!
 I am nat come youre conseil for t'espye,
 But trewely, the cause of my comynge
 Was oonly for to herkne how that ye synge,
 For trewely, ye have as myrie a stevene
 As any aungel hath that is in hevene (VII.3284-92).

All the evils of flattery warned about by the moralists come out here—the deceitfulness and lies, the false friendship masking treachery, the underlying malignity, even the brazenly denied truth: Daun Russell *is* a fiend, for his flatteries echo the archetypal flattery that brought death into the world. In the confidence of the flatterer that no lie can go too far, the fox dwells on the famous singing of Chauntecleer's father:

Now syngeth, sire, for seinte charitee;
 Lat se; konne ye youre fader countrefete? (VII.3320-21).

Predictably, Chauntecleer fails to notice the “traysoun” in the fox's words, “so was he ravysshed with his flaterie” (VII.3324)—an exact term, meaning “entranced” or “enraptured,” hence “enchanted,” the familiar declaration by Frère Lorens and Peraldus, that flatterers are the devil's enchanter.

The Nun's Priest draws his own moral:

Allas, ye lordes, many a fals flatour
 Is in your courtes, and many a losengeour,
 That plesen yow wel moore, by my feith,
 Than he that soothfastnesse unto yow seith.
 Redeth Ecclesiaste of flaterye;
 Beth war, ye lordes, of hir trecherye (VII.3325-30).

Whether regarded as spoken by Chaucer directly to his audience or by the narrator to the “gentils,” the advice is well grounded. The Wisdom books make several references to flatterers and treacherous deceivers, one in particular being especially pertinent: “It is better to be rebuked by a wise man than to be deceived by the flattery of fools” (Ecc1 7:6; Vulg. *stultorum adulatione*),¹⁵ for in the Wisdom books “fool” can signify “sinner” as well as “simpleton.”

But in the unexpected “merry” ending, Chauntecleer comes to his senses and turns the lure of flattery against his enemy:

Thou shalt namoore thurgh thy flaterye
 Do me to synge and wynke with myn ye;
 For he that wyneth, whan he sholde see,
 Al wilfully, God lat him nevere thee! (VII.3429-32).

The narrator's *conclusio* is double-edged: "Lo, swich it is for to be recchelees / And necligent, and truste on flaterye" (VII.3436-37). Light-hearted though this may sound, it encapsulates a discourse on flattery that extends well beyond curial intrigue and treachery and into the realm of salvation itself. They are indeed "recchelees" and "necligent," the Nun's Priest is saying, who let themselves be seduced by the flattery of the fox.

For when authorities from Augustine to Bromyard testify to the diabolical nature of the flatterer's deceits, it is often with the fox as example and in terms that befit Daun Russell. Jerome described flattery as "insidious, crafty, and smooth" and the flatterer as "a pleasant enemy." Gregory spoke of the death of the soul suffered by those who cannot escape from the flatterer's treachery. Bernard, thinking of the warning about foxes in the *Canticum*, called the secret detractor "a most mischievous fox" and "another, just as bad, is the fair-spoken flatterer." John of Salisbury wrote that the flatterer "blunts the sharpness of reason and extinguishes that modicum of light," inflicting injury while pretending friendship. Frère Lorens, in the English version, compares flatterers to "foxes tailes" because of their guile and trickery. Particularly fitting is Bromyard's analogy: flatterers are "dogs of jesters, like foxes": the more beautifully they speak the more quickly do they ensnare or snatch away their prey.

In the significations compiled by bible commentators like Alan of Lille and pseudo-Rabanus Maurus, the links between foxes and the worst of sinners, notably heretics, as well as the demons and the Devil himself, are drawn very closely. One of the most striking connections is made in the twelfth-century *Bestiary* (53-4). The fox is called a "fraudulent and ingenious animal" who deceives birds into thinking he is dead, then "grabs them and gobbles them up. The Devil has the same nature. With all those who are living according to the flesh he feigns himself to be dead until he gets them in his gullet and punishes them." The "fraudulent and ingenious" fox who assails Chauntecleer feigns not death but friendship, as a flatterer always does. The moral drawn by the *Bestiary* compiler is consistent with the "Taketh the fruyt" advice from the Nun's Priest: "Furthermore, those who wish to follow the devil's works perish, as the Apostle says."

That the fox is an obvious choice as predator for a beast fable set in a hen-yard does not vitiate the analogical meanings. It was an age of well-developed “analogical sensibility,” to use Judson Boyce Allen’s phrase in explanation of the medieval ability “to sustain simultaneously belief in definition, and in the existence of an instance of that definition” (177). A preacher as skilled as the Nun’s Priest expects his audience to remember—as his creator expects the real audience to remember—that Chauntecleer is not the first victim of flattery. When the Serpent appeared to his intended victim his verbal guilefulness set the model for all flatterers to come. He knew better than merely to praise Eve’s beauty. As the flattering fox appeals to Chauntecleer’s pride by urging him to surpass even his father’s prowess, so did the Serpent appeal to Eve’s presumption by making her believe she could surpass even her superior human state—she could attain divinity. This archetypal Edenic flattery sets the pattern for all such deceptions to come in its irresistible appeal to the victim’s pride and supposed self-interest.

If the understanding of the Nun’s Priest’s audience—and the poet’s—is to be enriched, something of value must be taught. Chauntecleer has been snatched from the jaws of death. His salvation is achieved, at the literal level, by his own ingenuity, by his last-minute discovery that ultimately the flatterer is his own worst enemy. But what does this signify? Morton Bloomfield took the optimistic view that Chaucer’s fable is concerned with teaching wisdom. This may be subverted but can be, and in the Nun’s Priest’s exemplum is, reinstated. Mankind is blessed with endless ingenuity, Bloomfield reflects, and it can survive and surmount self-deception (70-82).

But is that happy outcome displayed in the Barn of Unity after Frere Flaterere has done the work of Antichrist? Can “ingenuity” be ascribed to the fallen descendants of those primal victims of Satan’s flatteries? Larry Scanlon comes closer to the mark when he suggests that Christians have “the capacity to appropriate the literal chaff of fox, cock, and hen by displacing it with the figural fruit of Christian doctrine” (48). But is the archetypal Flatterer as easily overcome in actual life as in Chauntecleer’s yard? John M. Hill takes this view of the Nun’s Priest’s “fruyt”: “Allegorical readings in an exegetical mold have seen the fox as the devil and Chauntecleer as the good Christian who comes to his senses” (138); the cock’s ruse succeeds “by flattering the fox’s sense that he had the upper hand against his pursuers,” so that he “exults too soon” (144).

Are we reminded here of Langland’s depiction of Satan at the gates of Hell exulting over his supposed victory, only to find he has exulted too soon? Perhaps the

“nucleus” in the Nun’s Priest’s exemplum has nothing to do with ingenuity or ruses. It follows the teachings of St Paul on the conquering of death by death. This conquest the Dreamer in *Piers Plowman* witnesses in his vision of the opening of Hell’s gates:

A vois loude in that light to Lucifer crieth,
 “Prynces of this place, unpynneth and unlouketh!
 For here cometh with crowne that kyng is of glorie” (XVIII.262-4).

An ingenious ruse may have redeemed the cock from the barnyard flatterer whose smiles concealed the jaws of death, but humans, represented by pilgrims listening to a tale designed to make their “hertes glade” (VII.3608), are “bought back” from the death wished on them by the flatterer not by a ruse but, paradoxically, by death. If they have faith in this redemption, they have reason for hope, indeed for joy. They will be truly merry, as the Nun’s Priest himself clearly is. Although only Piers, as Christ the Samaritan, could restore the man stricken to death, Faith and Hope, Abraham and Moses, also were present and, in a sense, essential. These facts of history underlie all that Chaucer and Langland, through their fictions, are bringing home to their listeners. But even this is not enough.

Perhaps Chaucer did indeed study the inconclusive ending to *Piers Plowman* and, mindful of St Paul’s teaching on faith and works, decided to assign the final word on the journey to both the preachers—the one inwardly and outwardly merry, the other inwardly merry if outwardly severe. Surely it is no coincidence that both these priestly contributions end with St Paul’s admonition that all that was written *ad nostram doctrinam scripta sunt*. The one priest, purveying the good news to the pilgrims, is urging them to have confidence in their rescue from death. The other priest, intent on the concomitant requirement of good works, urges them to remember that contrition and penitence are inexorably required of them. *Redde quod debes* is as central to the *Parson’s Tale* as it is to *Piers Plowman*.

But if those who go with Conscience on the new search for Piers and those who follow the two priests on the road to Canterbury fail to heed these exhortations, the painful no less than the comfortable, because they prefer the flatteries of Friar Hubert, the Pardoner of Rouncivale, and Sire *Penetrans-domos*, their story may not end as a comedy after all.

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Notes

• This paper is an expanded version of a plenary address delivered to the Canadian Society of Medievalists/Société canadienne des médiévistes at the Congress of the Social Sciences and Humanities, Université de Laval, Québec, May 2001.

1 The dating of Bromyard's *Summa* has been steadily moved back. Workman was inclined to date it *c*1410, Coulton *c*1390, Owst in the 1380's, though late preferring the 1350's. For the probable date of 1348, see L.E. Boyle, "The Date of the *Summa Praedicatorum* of John Bromyard."

2 *De Amicitia* §89; tr. Edinger, p. 75.

3 Citations from Augustine on particular passages from Scripture are from marginal glosses in the *Glossa Ordinaria*, as are the *postillae* of Nicholas of Lyra, for which see Rhonda Waukhonen, "The Authority of the Text: Nicholas of Lyra's Judaeo-Christian Hermeneutic and *The Canterbury Tales*," *Florilegium* 11 (1992): 141-59, and D.J. Wurtele, "Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and Nicholas of Lyra's *Postilla litteralis et moralis super totam Bibliam*" in *Chaucer and Scriptural Tradition*, ed. David L. Jeffrey (Ottawa: Univ. of Ottawa Press, 1984), pp. 351-70.

4 Psalm references follow the Septuagint numbering.

5 The facing-page translation of the Hebrew *Tehillim* is from the Mesorah Publications edition, Brooklyn, New York, 1999.

6 Douai translation; Vulgate has *blandis*.

7 From the *Dialogus adversus Pelagianos* I:526, tr. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, VI:462.

8 Benson, ed. *Riverside Chaucer*, comments that "Chaucer's 'Salomon' quotation clearly indicates a misreading of Peraldian material" (961).

9 From the *Secreta Secretorum* 3-text edition by Robert Steele. Regrettably, the extensive "Ashmole" physiognomy, in the Manzalaoui 9-text edition, is silent on "losyngerie."

10 The homily for the commemoration of All Souls in the *Legenda Aurea* has a warning for those "who have completed the satisfaction enjoined, *which penalty, however, due to the ignorance or carelessness of the priest, was not sufficient*. Unless the degree of their contrition supplies therefor, these must complete in Purgatory what they did

not complete in this life” (649; emphasis added).

11 On this topic, see Massimo Ciavolella, “Mediaeval Medicine and Arcite’s Love Sickness,” *Florilegium* 1 (1979): 222-41.

12 Chauncey Wood discusses the “medieval habit of defining meanings of things both *in bono* and *in malo*” in “Chaucer’s Use of Signs in the Portrait of the Prioress” in *Signs and Symbols in Chaucer’s Poetry* eds John P. Herman and John J. Burke, Jr. (Tuscaloosa: Univ. of Alabama Press, 1981).

13 Despite Howard’s comment that *NPT* is “the only tale whose ending includes a quotation from Scripture” (181), a case can be made that the opening and closing portions of the so-called “Retraction” belong as epilogue to the *Parson’s Tale*, supplying in part a fittingly sacerdotal benediction; see D.J. Wurtele, “The Penitence of Geoffrey Chaucer” *Viator* 11 (1980): 335-59.

14 In comparison with Marie de France’s *Roman de Renart*, Chaucer is said to intensify the fox’s flattery. See Robert A. Pratt, “Three Old French Sources of the Nonnes Preestes Tale” *Speculum* 47 (1972): 422-44 and 646-68.

15 Editors of *NPT* (Skeat, Robinson, Benson) all note here as the reference Ecclesiasticus (12:10, 11, 16 and 27:56); these citations warn of a treacherously deceitful enemy without, however, specifying him as a flatterer. The citation from Ecclesiastes (7:6) seems to be more pertinent.

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