

## Chaucer's "Cosyn to the dede": Further Considerations

**Marc M. Pelen**

Few Chaucerians today would doubt that Chaucer's little critical "essay" at the close of the *General Prologue* of the *Canterbury Tales* has a significance well beyond the brief annotation of Robinson's second edition, and the annotation of the Riverside edition:

Crist spak hymself ful brode in hooly writ,  
And wel ye woot no vileynye is it.  
Eek Plato seith, whoso kan hym rede,  
The wordes moote be cosyn to the dede (I:739-42).<sup>1</sup>

The key words of the passage are probably "cosyn to the dede," which have a peculiar fascination for Chaucer, as they do for Jean de Meun. In Chaucer, the phrase returns on two—and perhaps more—occasions: in Fragment VIII, the host Harry Bailly asks why the canon is so shabbily accoutred:

Why is thy lord so sluttish, I the preye,  
And is of power bettre cloth to beye,  
If that his dede accorde with thy speche? (VIII:636-8).

And, in Fragment IX, in the course of the Manciple's discussion of the wife's apparent infidelity, he notes:

The wise Plato seith, as ye may rede,  
The word moot nede accorde with the dede.  
If men shal telle proprely a thyng,  
The word moot cosyn be to the werkyng (IX:207-10).

Scholars sometimes include in this tally a stanza from "Lak of Stedfastnesse" which may also have reference to the Platonic dictum:

Sometyme the world was so stedfast and stable  
 That mannes word was obligacioun,  
 And now it is so false and deceivable  
 That word and deed, as in conclusioun,  
 Ben nothing lyk, for turned up-so-doun  
 Is all this world for mede and wilfulnesse,  
 That al is lost for lak of stedfastnesse (1-7).

Also relevant here might be the closing passage of the Miller's "Prologue," although the relationship to Plato's dictum is veiled, if it exists at all:

What sholde I moore seyn, but this Millere  
 He nolde his wordes for no man forbere,  
 But told his cherles tale in his manere,  
 M'athynketh that I shall reherce it heere.  
 And therefore every gentil wight I preye,  
 For Goddes love, demeth nat that I seye  
 Of yvel entente, but for I moot reherce  
 His tales alle, be they bettre or werse,  
 Or elles falsen som of my mateere (I:3167-75).

The fuller meaning of Chaucer's Platonic preoccupation has recently occasioned serious study, the most elaborate approach being the dissertation of Jeffrey Alan Hirshberg. Hirshberg concerns himself only with language and rhetoric at the expense of more fundamental consideration of the ontology of the Platonic myth which is central, as will be argued here, to Plato's own meaning. More recently, Rodney Delasanta has commented on the "epistemology of truth-telling in fiction: 'The wordes moote by cosyn to the dede'" (151), and Ralph W.V. Elliot in a chapter entitled "The Wordes Moote by Cosyn to the Dede" does not consider the classical background to Chaucer's allusion. Paul B. Taylor, in the best study to date of the aphorism, examines precedents in an array of classical texts in the Platonic tradition to determine Chaucer's attitude towards language—although Taylor, like Hirshberg, does not consider the mythical traditions concealed in the allusion. Finally, Robert Myles investigates concepts of philosophical realism and nominalism contemporary to Chaucer's cultural context, in connection with theories of a speaker's intentionality in language: the

“wordes” may also be willed *not* to be “cosyn” to the “dede,” for, as he suggests, “the real intention is in the mind of the sign-maker” (29).

These critical approaches have substantial depth and perceptiveness, but there are further considerations involved in the Platonic dictum with which they have not come to grips. In order for us to address these considerations, let us begin by citing the relevant full passage from Plato’s *Timaeus* in Bury’s edition:

Accordingly, in dealing with a copy and its model, we must affirm that the accounts given will themselves be akin [*syngeneis*] to the diverse objects which they serve to explain...rather we should be content if we can furnish accounts that are inferior to none in likelihood, remembering that both I who speak and you who judge are but human creatures, so that it becomes us to accept the likely account of these matters and forbear to search beyond it (29B-D).

Slightly above this passage, Plato also remarks:

Now the whole heaven, or Cosmos...we must first investigate concerning it that primary question which has to be investigated at the outset in every case—namely, whether it has existed always, having beginning of generation, or whether it has come into existence, having begun from some beginning. It has come into existence [*gegonen*] (28B).

On the first cited passage, Janet E. Smith writes:

*Eikotes logoi* (likely stories) or *mythoi*, then, are like the demiurge’s universe: they are good copy of what is real. That is, just as the demiurge makes a good universe insofar as he imitates the Forms, or what is real, so too, the philosopher writes a likely account insofar as he bases his account on what he knows. The accounts, then, are provisional or approximate in the sense that, if one’s knowledge of the divine or of sense particulars were to advance, one would readjust one’s likely account in accord with that knowledge (36).<sup>2</sup>

Smith demonstrates that the Platonic *syngeneis* or word “akin” to deed addresses the issue of the power of language to describe a reality beyond its own capacity for empirical reference: that is to say, language in Plato may well refer to empirical,

physical objects, or experiential concepts, but it must also refer to the Ideal or Good, concepts which are eternal.<sup>3</sup> In this way, the function of Platonic myth expressed in words cousin to the deed is to orient the use of language toward an ideal Form that is not generated, but eternal. Smith writes:

Most, if not all, the myths in Plato are very much a mixture of discussion of the phenomenal world and an attempt to direct attention to the "worlds beyond"; there is a reciprocal effort to use sense particulars (and images) to clarify the nature of a Form or Forms, combined with the effort to perfect one's account of the "world below" by reference to one's knowledge of the Forms (34).

The likelihood of the myth is, then, measured in its appeal to the Ideal, which is ungenerated and eternal, and this is a major theme of Plato's theory of myth.

The widespread influence of Calcidius' Latin rendering of the *Timaeus* is well-known. Plato's *syngeneis* here appears as:

Causae quae, cur unaquaeque res sit, ostendunt, earundem rerum consanguineae sunt (22).

[The causes (myths) that show why each thing has its being are akin to the things themselves].

Thus, Calcidius' *consanguineae* renders Plato's *syngeneis*, and will return in Boethius' *cognatos*, Jean de Meun's "cousin" and Chaucer's "cosyn" (Taylor 323).

Plato's theory of language is compatible with Augustine's classic formulation of the nature of sign and meaning: signs ultimately reveal an ideal meaning, oriented toward the eternity of God. Among many passages in *De doctrina christiana* is the following:

Thus every sign is also a thing, for that which is not a thing is nothing at all; but not every thing is also a sign. And thus in this distinction between things and signs, when we speak of things, we shall so speak that, although some of them may be used to signify something else, this fact shall not disturb the arrangement we have made to speak of things as such first and of signs later (I.2, p. 9 of D.W. Robertson translation).

Boethius' own Augustinian positions on the function of language and concept have been well presented (Starnes). Thus, when Boethius invokes Plato's topic in Book III, prose 12 of the *Consolation of Philosophy*, the context is Lady Philosophy's discussion of Plato's ideal Good:

But if we have dealt in arguments not sought outside but set within the area we were working in, there is no reason for you to wonder, since you have learned under Plato's authority that words should be akin [*cognatos*] to the things spoken about (305-7).

Here Boethius takes a position as an Augustinian interpreter of Plato's likely stories, addressed to the Good, stories that are couched in figurative language. Moreover, as we saw in the *Timaeus*, the world came into being (*gegomen* 28B) and therefore will probably end—being ontologically quite unlike eternity. Thus, Boethius is able to make the crucial distinction between God's eternity in an uncreated order of understanding, and the world's perpetuity (that is, its existence only in a human order of time and understanding), an existence that does not control its own power of reference, but is answerable to a superior order of knowing. In this way, Boethius writes at a central moment of the *Consolation* (V.6):

And therefore those are not right who, when they hear that Plato thought this world neither had a beginning in time nor would have an end, think that in this way the created world is made co-eternal with God...And so if we wish to give things names befitting them, then following Plato we should say that God indeed is eternal, but that the world is perpetual (425-7).<sup>4</sup>

Ultimately, the Platonic topic of cousins to the deed leads us to consider the power of language as a technology of the rational intellect to address ideal uncreated orders of being and understanding in the eternity of God. Plato's use of myth supports, then, this use of language. This is, as will emerge, Jean de Meun's reaction to the relationship of words and things as well.

## **I Jean de Meun and the *Timaeus***

Jean de Meun sees in the *Timaeus* a type of Genesis (Hadot 113), and his poem is concerned with many things; however, one of his major themes is the perpetuation of the physical world, by contrast to the eternity of God—in Boethian and Platonic terms.

It is in this context that the poem includes frequent discussions of castration.<sup>5</sup> Raison speaks:

Joutice, qui jadis regnot,  
 au tens que Saturnus regne ot,  
 cui Jupiter coupa les coilles,  
 ses filz, con se fussent andoilles  
 (mout ot ci dur filz et amer)  
 puis les gita dedanz le mer,  
 donc Venus la deesse issi (5505-11).

[Justice, who reigned in former times, when Saturn held sway, whose testicles Jupiter his son cut off as if they had been sausages, and then threw them into the sea (Saturn had many hard and bitter sons), from which the goddess Venus arose.]

In fact, Jean's Boethian lady is concerned with the loss of the Golden Age, but we know that Amant objects to her use of a discourteous term:

Se ne vos tiegn pas a cortaise  
 quant ci m'avez coilles nomees (6898-9).

[Indeed I do not consider you to be courteous, when a moment ago you named the testicles to me.]

To justify her use of language, Raison invokes the *Timaëus*:

Et ce que ci t'ai recité  
 peuz trover en auctorité,  
 car Platon lisoit en s'escole  
 que donee nous fu parole  
 por fere noz volairs entendre,  
 por enseigner et por aprendre.  
 Ceste sentence ci rimee  
 troveras escrite en *Thimee*  
 de Platon, qui ne fu pas nices (7067-75).

[And what I have here recited to you, you may find in authoritative texts, for Plato could be read in school that we may learn that words were given to use to make our will be known, to teach and to learn. This theme here expressed in rhyme you will find set down in the *Timaëus* of Plato, who was no fool.]

She also has an earlier unmistakable appeal to Plato's cousin to the deed: *ou par mes fez ou par mes diz* (6982). But to Amant's objection to the use of the word "testicles" she responds that God at the Creation (7059-60) left language and linguistic evolution to her:

mes il vost que nons leur trovasse  
 a mon plesir et les nomasse  
 proprement et comunement  
 por craistre nostre entendement (7061-4).

[But He (God) wanted me to find names for them, at my discretion, so that I should name them appropriately and in common parlance, in order to increase our understanding.]

She adds that it scarcely matters what terminology we use:<sup>6</sup>

se je, quant mis les nons au choses  
 que si reprendre et blasmer oses,  
 coilles reliques apelasse  
 et reliques coilles clamasse,  
 tu, qui si m'en morz et depiques,  
 me redeisses de reliques  
 que ce fust lez moz et vilains (7079-85).

[If, when I put names to things which you dare thus to object to and to blame, I had named "testicles" as "relics" and had called "relics" "testicles," you who thus criticise and reproach me for this would retort that "relics" were an ugly word, and base.]

She concludes her argument with a plea for figurative reading in a symbolic interpretation of *coilles*:<sup>7</sup>

En ma parole autre sen ot,  
 au mains quant des coillons parloie (7128-9).

[In my words there is another meaning, at least when I was speaking of testicles.]

This other meaning is the truth beneath the fictive veils of the poets:

La verité dedenz repostee  
 seroit clere, s'el iert epostee;

bien l'entendras, se bien repetes  
 les integumanz aus poetes.  
 La verras une grant partie  
 des secrez de philosophie (7135-40)<sup>8</sup>

[The truth therein hidden would be clear, if it were expounded; and you will learn it well, if you study well the fictive veils of the poets. There you will see a large part of the secrets of philosophy.]

In the end, at work in Jean's poem are two contrasting conceptions of love: Amant's physical interests in winning the Rose and deflowering her (21574-6), and Raison's interest in the eternal presence of God, perceptible in figurative ways through metaphors and fables. Amant, of course, explicitly denies these:

Mes des poetes les sentances,  
 les fables et les methaphores  
 ne bé ja pas a gloser ores (7160-2).

[But as far as the thought, fables, and metaphors of the poets are concerned, I do not now aspire to gloss them.]

Moreover, Jean has other explorations of Plato's aphorism, in connection with the *Timaeus*. Amant, for example, invokes Sallust's *De coniuratione catalinae* 3 in his discussion of the pursuit of love, and of the ways of women. He suggests that words should resemble the deeds they describe:

...li diz doit le fet resambler;  
 car les voiz aus choses voisines  
 doivent estre a leur fez cousines (15160-2).

[...for what one says must resemble the deed. Words that are neighbours to things must be cousins to their deeds.]

However, this topic addresses human history and deeds, and is therefore probably not Platonic, or only so by irony (Taylor 321). On the other hand, Genius, Nature's other self, promises an entry into a physical paradise of natural reproduction if words are cousins to the deed.

Et si vos ainsinc preeschiez,  
 ja ne seroit anpeeschiez,  
 selonc mon dit et mon acort,

mes que li fez au dit s'acort,  
d'entrer ou parc du champ joli (19903-5).

[And if you preach thus, you will not be hindered, according to my words and with my agreement, and that the deeds accord with the words, from entering into the park of the beautiful field.]

Obviously, Genius, like Nature, is interested in applying Plato's figurative aphorism to the physical perpetuation of the world, in Jean's biting ridicule and irony—and in his criticism of Genius' utter degradation of the true Platonic and Boethian power of language to address the eternal Good. Meanwhile, Nature, herself frightened by death (15935-6), seeks to perpetuate the physical world, although she does acknowledge the supreme mystery of the Incarnation, which alone delivers us from death.

Ainz fui trop formant esbahie  
quant il de la Vierge Marie  
fu por le chetif en char nez,  
et puis panduz touz acharnez;  
car par moi ne peut ce pas estre  
que riens puisse de vierge nestre (19127-32).

[Indeed, I was absolutely amazed when He became incarnate in the Virgin Mary for the sake of poor mankind, and was then hanged in the flesh; for by my office it cannot happen that anything can be born of a virgin.]

She remarks that Plato could not understand the Incarnation:

Si n'an pot il assez dire,  
car il ne peüst pas soffire  
a bien parfetemant antandre  
ce c'onques riens ne pot comprendre,  
for li ventres d'une pucele.  
Mes, san faille, il est voirs que cele  
A cui le ventres an tandi  
plus que Platon an antandi... (19089-96).

[Thus he (Plato) could not say enough, for he could not do enough to understand perfectly what never anything can comprehend, except for a virgin womb. But, without doubt, it is true that the virgin whose womb was filled knew more (about human salvation) than Plato.]

While she is correct in saying that Plato never heard of Christ, Jean is obviously mocking her inability to understand that in the *Timaeus* Plato's cousin to the deed and his theory of likely stories that are myths refer to the Ideal Good, compatible, though not identical, with the Christian God. In the end, the climax of Nature's and Genius' materialistic and naturalistic denial of God's saving eternity in favour of the perpetuation of the physical world occurs when Genius triumphantly announces that his Parc of sexual reproduction is eternal:

il n'a futur ne preterit,  
 car se bien la verité sant,  
 tuit li trois tens i sunt presant,  
 li quex presans le jour compasse...  
 car li soleuz resplandissanz,  
 qui tourjorz leur est parissanz,  
 fet le jour en un point estable,  
 tel c'onc au printans pardurable (19986-9, 19997-20000).

[The Parc has neither future nor past, for if I guess the truth correctly, all three tenses are present here, and the present encompasses the day...for the resplendent sun, which is always evident to the world, creates the day in a fixed point, such as in a perpetual spring.]

Thus, Jean has brilliantly inverted the capital Boethian and Platonic distinction between created (human and empirical) time (perpetuity) and God's eternity beyond time, which allows Jean in turn to write ironically about his true interest in invoking Plato's cousin to the deed. His true interest is the Christian God's eternity, as Plato's interest was in the Good, as in the passage from the *Timaeus*. For Jean, Plato's aphorism is therefore an invitation to speculate on the Christian God's saving eternity, which can only be grasped through the figurative use of language and myth.

## II Chaucer's Speakers: Figurative Meanings in the *Canterbury Tales*

Chaucer, or his narrator, opens his views in the *General Prologue* by denying any villainy ("n'arette it nat my vileynye" 726) in his plain speaking, some of which is obscene. This declaration seems to be in accord with Raison's plain speaking about testicles in the *Roman*. Chaucer further points out that he is using sources ("whoso shal telle a tale after a man" 731), and that he has to rehearse these words even if they are "rudeliche" (734). Otherwise, he would distort the truth of his tale ("Or ellis he moot

telle his tale untrewre” 735) for “Crist” spoke figuratively or “brode” in “hooly writ” (739), and thre was no “vileynye” in it (740). Plato, for those who can read him, says that words should be “cosyn to the dede” (742) in such a way that there is a direct analogy between Plato’s use of language and Christ’s—who was able to speak the ideal truth because He spoke in parables (myths) of figurative meaning.

Chaucer therefore understood full well the figurative power of Plato’s myths to speak about an eternal ideal beyond the empirical referentiality of language, and also understood full well Jean de Meun’s major poetic strategy in the *Roman*, which consists in ridiculing his speakers’ attempts to reduce the Platonic eternity and the Christian saving eternity (as expressed in figurative language) to a simple preoccupation with the materialist concerns of a putatively eternal physical world.<sup>9</sup> How Chaucer’s irony is directed against his speakers’ linguistic and naturalistic materialism is food for much thought.<sup>10</sup> Watts and Utz remark correctly that “there is no consensus about how Chaucer’s poetry should be understood in relationship to fourteenth-century nominalism.” Nonetheless, the Platonic topic in Chaucer must refer to his desire that words should be related to Plato’s universal ideals—a realist position—while they “cozen” the natural things to which they refer. Taylor suggests that “Chaucer’s view of language is that of a Christian Platonist, in that he aspires toward a linguistic realism in which intent informs deeds through the ministry of words” (325). Myles also discusses the Platonic topic as reflected in Boethius’ use of it:

Boethius’ understanding of the function of human will in directing the proper ‘cosyning’/cousining or the improper ‘cosyning’/duping of the relationship between word and the thing is also Chaucer’s understanding. Implicit here, for Chaucer, is a linguistic intentionalist realism (24).

Chaucer probably has an ironic attitude toward his speakers’ concerns with the natural world and with the content of their stories—although it might be rash to assume for this reason that Chaucer’s realism or pursuit of the universal Ideal involves a systematic rejection of his speakers’ putative nominalism. It seems enough to argue here that Chaucer’s use of “cosyn” aligns him with a Platonic conception of language.

For example, the topical Boethian providence or “Goddes pryvetee” I.3558, develops in the *Miller’s Tale* in a way that is oddly associated, or contrasted, with human secrecy and privacy expressed repeatedly in the words “privee” (3295) and “deerne” or secret (3200), as the obscene narrative advances. In fact, the secret doings in the dark in the tale as a whole operate under the eye of providence, which cannot

be deceived, and from which nothing can be concealed. Thus, the Miller's fascination with dark secrecies places itself in the perspective of a higher order of providence that he seems to deny in his preference for material acts utterly devoid of any spirituality. The Platonic contrast between human perception and God's ideal order of knowing could not be clearer, as it is also clear that the Miller wishes to degrade providence to the level of being a simple human, and obscene, secret. Similarly, compare the Man of Law's fear (II.90-03) of being likened to the foolish Pierides of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* V, who sang in a materialist poetics of the giants' attempted overthrow of the gods, only to be defeated by Calliope, first of the Muses, who sings of the providential order of Proserpina's and Pluto's marriage decreed by the fates.

Central to this kind of consideration is the linguistic self-contradiction and confusion at the close of the *Wife of Bath's Tale*, when the hag offers the young knight a choice, to have her foul and old but faithful or young and fair but adventurous. She then contradicts herself by promising to be both, that is fair or young and also good or old (III.1241). Obviously, the tale as a whole is about marriage, a sacrament of an ideal religious dimension, degraded by the Wife into a frantic carnival of death and remarriage at the close of the tale. There remain many other examples of Chaucer's search for a figurative meaning beyond the literal-mindedness of his characters, including the possibility that the famous April opening of the *General Prologue* can be linked to the creation of the world (Myles 56-7). However, in the *Nun's Priest's Tale*, which has explicit Genesis material, the world began in March (VII.3187-8), and the tale handles the fall of man ("And made Adam fro Paradys to go" 3258) both comically and ironically in Chaucer's expert irony. Chauntecleer escapes from the fox's jaws and appears to return physically to paradise. However, we have no hope of returning to a physical paradise; rather, we are delivered from death by the Redemption, which is a figurative concept (Rom 6:5).

Chaucer also remodels themes and images from the portrait of Faux-Semblant in the *Roman de la Rose* in his depiction of the wretched Pardoner, who insistently refers to the possibility of Redemption (VI.532, 658, 766, 902) from a fallen world, but with obvious material interests in the gold the rioters sought under the tree. Thus, the Pardoner has downgraded the ineffable mystery of the Redemption into a search for gold that he pretends to condemn, but with which he secretly sympathises given his attempts at hawking his relics at the close. The fullest citation of the Platonic aphorism and the one which most clearly exemplifies Chaucer's Platonic and Boethian irony occurs, however, in the *Manciple's Tale*:

The wise Plato seith, as ye may rede,  
 The word moot nede accorde with the dede.  
 If men shal telle proprely a thyng;  
 The word moot be cosyn to the werkyng (IX:207-10).

The Manciple's apparent strategy here follows the model of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* II.596-632 and attempts to represent Phoebus as a human lover—in other words to reduce the god to a human and empirical status in a materialist order of poetic representation. However, Apollo was unable to have a physical relationship with Daphne in *Metamorphoses* I.452-567, and in *Metamorphoses* XI.165-71, he is the triumphant victor over the materialist poetics of Pan. Moreover, Arachne, in Book VI, attempts to represent the gods in bestial forms, for which Athena defeats her and transforms her into a spider. Also, in Book V, as previously discussed, the Pierides seek to represent Phoebus as a crow (329), for which their punishment results in their being transformed into chattering magpies. Thus, Chaucer's tale involves a silent condemnation of the crow's materialist poetics, in his reporting of the wife's adultery (whether literally true or false at the empirical level), for indeed the crow should be singing about fate and not material events. Like Arachne the spider, the crow is no doubt a former human reduced to the status of an animal—no augural bird—on account of the human's materialist poetics. The figural truth about Phoebus is that he is the god of poetry, president of the Muses, and not concerned in any way with empirical events.

Chaucer's cousin to the deed is therefore a highly-charged comment, comparable perhaps with Chaucer's oft-expressed interest in Macrobian dreams. The "cosyn" comments on the ultimate function of poetry, which is to speak of the eternity (cousin) beyond literal language (deed) that Plato's myths address, and adapts that concept to the Christian doctrines of God's eternity beyond time, an eternity from which humanity is delivered by the Incarnation (celebrated indirectly in the *Pardoner's Tale*). In the end, Chaucer silently rejects the naturalism and empiricism of his speakers, for they often seek, as do the French Amant, Nature and Genius, for the indefinite perpetuation of the physical world in a human order of knowing. This would deny Christ's supreme saving eternity, the focus of the Parson's argument. It follows from this mode of analysis that Chaucer's irony nevertheless forces his speaker to reflect on spiritual meanings, much as Jean forced the French Nature to refer to the Incarnation by which we are delivered both from the empirical and physical world and also from our created order of understanding. This, then, is the central meaning of Plato's

brilliant cousin to the deed, and this is Chaucer's intent in his systematic pursuit of an eternal salvation among the linguistic and iconographic confusions of his speakers in the *Canterbury Tales*.

## **The American University of Paris**

### **Notes**

1 Citations of Chaucer are from the Riverside edition, ed. Benson. Translations from Latin and French texts are my own unless otherwise indicated.

2 See also Callahan on the controverted function of Platonic myth, and more recently Stewart.

3 The meaning of Plato's *Cratylus*, his comic but serious dialogue on the origins and function of language, is often debated, but see Guthrie on the final position of the *Cratylus* that "names do give information by distinguishing between classes of experience of things ('It wasn't a burglar, only a cat'), *but only if the essences are known beforehand*" (438AB, p. 28). Similarly, "[s]o we reach the seriously meant conclusion of the dialogue, that names offer no help in discovering the essential nature of things, though they serve to communicate these natures when known. With cats and burglars this is easy, but not with the supremely important Forms of Good, Beautiful and Just, and others which are the Platonic philosopher's primary concern." See also the section entitled "The Dream of an Ideal Language: the *Politicus*, *Phaedrus* and the *Cratylus*" in Baxter, pp. 80-5.

4 The controversy in late antiquity over the question of whether the world could be co-eternal or not with God is carefully discussed by Courcelle, 221-31. Medieval thinkers close to Jean de Meun and Chaucer were likewise preoccupied with this problem; see Dales "Discussions of the Eternity of the World" and *Medieval Discussions of the Eternity*. Abelard was also fascinated by this Platonic topic; see Moonan.

5 Aside from Raison's intervention on this theme, see Jaloux' discussion of Abelard's castration (8766-8), Nature's reference to Origen's self-castration (17022-3), and Genius' threat of castration for those who do not reproduce (19633-42). Citations of the *Roman* are from Lecoy.

6 This passage is controversial. Fleming argues (correctly, I believe) that Raison's inspiration is Augustinian, in that words should be directed toward teaching us

the figurative apprehension of God (97-135), appealing in particular to Augustine's rhetorical formulations on the significance of words and signs in the *De Magistro*. Other writers, however, see in Jean's attitude toward signs an interest in empirical experience (Poirion 178-9), or "in language's independent expressivity outside the bounds of specific authority or intentionality" (Hult 123). Poirion, and perhaps Hult, seem to be formalists in that they believe that language has the power to control its own meaning, a position specifically contradicted in Guthrie's final assessment of the *Cratylus*.

7 The "coilles/reliques" catachresis probably has to do with Raison's desire to convert an empirical object (a testicle) into a sacramental one (a relic). Amant, of course, objects to the sacramental function of language.

8 "Integument" is related to the term *involutum*, a medieval equivalent of Plato's myths. See the classic discussion with reference to the *Timaeus* in Chenu, with additional comment by Stock and Dronke.

9 It may well be that Raison, Boethian daughter of God, escapes Jean's biting ridicule, but this point remains for me unresolved (see also Kelly).

10 Luria seems justified, in his review of the older work of Fansler on Chaucer and the *Roman*, when he remarks (273n) that there is "no modern study devoted to this important literary connection," that is, the nature of the *Roman*'s impact on the larger structures and organisation of the *Canterbury Tales* (but see Diekstra). Aside from the recent discussion of Chaucerian realism by Myles, the article of Watts and Utz is helpful (cited here from p. 161).

## **Works Cited**

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