Distentio, Intentio, Attentio:

Intentionality and Chaucer's Third Eye

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In the fifth book of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, Criseyde looks out from the
enemy camp toward Troy and the lover she has betrayed and laments her situation in
terms of great significance for the larger meaning of the poem:

> Prudence, allas, oon of thyne veen thre
> Me lakked alwey, er that I come here!
> On tyme ypassed wel remembred me,
> And present tyme ek koud ich wel ise,
> But future tyme, er I was in the snare,
> Koude I nat sen; that causeth now my care (V, 744-49).[1]

The triocular personification of the virtue of Prudence belongs to an iconographic
tradition that links it to the concept of time, each eye representing one of the phases
of time, one eye conceived as exclusively viewing the present, another the past, and
still another, the future. The philosophic exploration of the concept of time in the
Middle Ages is determined by Saint Augustine's famous meditation on it in the *Con-
fessions* in which he also adopts a triadic structure to analyse the nature of time. Time
presents itself to the human spirit, according to Augustine, in three modes: we seize
the sense of the present through our mind's "attention," the past through "preteri-
tion," and the future through "intention."[2]

The repetition throughout Chaucer's works of the word *entente* signals the con-

ceptual centrality of theories of intentionality in his poetics. In the philosophical tradition from which Chaucer often borrowed, the term had several applications, one of them crucial to the nominalist/realist controversy so vigorously debated in the fourteenth century: "first intentions," William of Ockham tells us, have to do with the way things really are—that is to say, with being—and are the business of metaphysics; second intentions have to do with the way things exist in the mind—that is to say, with concepts and words—and are the business of logic.[3] Before this fragmentation of intentionality, Saint Augustine had developed a theory of intention in order to understand the nature of time, and his formulation of that understanding turned out to be a highly existential one. Conceiving of the three phases of time as experienced according to three operations of the mind *(anima)*, Augustine matched the memory of the past with *praeter-itio*, the anticipation of the future with *in-tentio*, and the experience of the present with *at-tentio*, a term that indicated the human awareness of all aspects of time as a living *praesens* in which both being and its intellectual comprehension were one. When Chaucer has Criseyde address Prudence and lament her lack of one of the Virtue's dimensions, he sets in motion a series of associations that deepen the resonance of the image and widen the thematic concerns of the narrative. The philosophical concept of intention, the Augustinian theory of time, and the metaphor of three-eyed Prudence combine in *Troilus and Criseyde*, it is argued here, to reveal the poem's ultimate meaning as one deeply anchored in the philosophical realism of its author's Christian Neoplatonism.

The early scholastic distinction between first intentions and second intentions seems to have been by and large a formal one behind which abided a concept of world and mind as harmonious entities. First intentions are always about things as they really exist outside of the mind, their being and essence; second intentions are always about things as they are known to the intellect and exist in the mind of the knower, their conceptualisation and representation. Ideally, since the human intellect "adequates" reality, these two intentions correspond, and we can know things as they truly are. William of Ockham's use of this distinction to deepen the separation between metaphysics and logic and to establish the autonomy of the latter for the study of second intentions had the effect of fragmenting a series of former unities into now-familiar binarisms in which, after Ockham's time, the parts became increasingly antagonistic to each other: mind/world, sign/signified, opinion/truth.[4] The very nature of the nominalism which began to dominate in Ockham's day was based on the real existence of particulars opposed to the unreal existence of universals, or the view that only individual, particular things truly possess existence and that the

universal exists only in the mind as an abstract concept, that is, as *nomen*. The divorce of mind from world is obvious in this formulation. The idea that experience is the primary basis of understanding and that universals are merely the mental abstractions of the experience of individual things in the world gave to experience a privileged position in a new epistemological hierarchy. Given the necessary subjectivity of experience, the multitudinous linguistic representations of the "real" tended to relativise human understanding and destabilise truth.[5]

More synthetic is Saint Augustine's employment of the term *intentio* in order to understand how human experience can convey a truth that logic fails to explain—that time is real even though a logical explanation of its simultaneous existence and non-existence is hard to devise: "What, then, is time? I know well enough what it is, provided that nobody ask me; but if I am asked what it is and try to explain, I am baffled" (XI, 14). The essential distinction between Augustine's philosophical approach and that of the scholastics is that he seeks to understand paradox without dissolving it; the dialectics of the scholastics in contrast sought to reduce paradox to logical proposition.

In Book XI of the *Confessions,* Augustine shifts his attention to the specific subject of time, initiating his analysis by using language as a symbol for time: the timelessness of God's creative Word in relation to the temporality of man's mimetic words. He structures the discussion by trying to come to terms with a number of conundrums about time posed by various schools of thought at various moments in history. The first is derived from Augustine's own former allegiance, the Manichean school, which he characterises as the "old man" who asks: *What was God doing before he made heaven and earth?* (XI, 10). Augustine recognises the polemical nature of the question and the series of problems that flow from it, and in response he asserts the important principle that divine time is beyond, but is the matrix of, human time; one is eternity, the other chronology. Human time "participates" in eternal time and contains within it *traces (vestigia)* of its origins,[6] much as the many reflect the One in Neoplatonic thought.

It is this concept of "participation" that helps to reveal Augustine's analysis of time as a realist theory, since it reflects generally the realist notion that particulars are derived from universals and that their existence is a participation in the universals from which they take their existence. Universals are eternal while particulars come into and go out of existence in time; time itself is one of these because it has a beginning and an end. The realist credentials of such a theory are impeccable, since the

idea is taken directly from Plotinus who, in turn, is relying on Plato for his basic ori-
entation: eternity, claims Plotinus in the *Enneads*, is distinguished from time by the
fact that it is of the nature of that which lasts forever, while time is of the nature of
that which comes into existence in the sensible, material universe. Moreover, the best
way to understand time is to begin with its static model, eternity, because eternity is
universal and time is its image.[7]

Descending from this consideration of God's eternity to mundane time, Augus-
tine wrestles, as we have seen, with the contradiction of being able to experience time
but not explain it. This conundrum introduces the dimensions of psychology, the
experience of time, and epistemology, the understanding of time, and through these
secondary considerations Augustine arrives at the primary one, how time *is*, in and of
itself. This he does beginning with the basically spatial metaphor of the locus or con-
tainer, in which time passes from the container of the future to the container of the
present, and finally to the container of the past. These containers are the memory, in
which the past resides, awareness, in which the present is, and anticipation, a kind of
matrix where exists all that is to come.[8] The spatial metaphor leads, however, to
another conundrum, one derived from Parmenides, that of the non-existence of
time:

> Of these three divisions of time, then, how can two, the past and the future,
> *be,* when the past no longer is and the future is not yet? As for the present,
> if it were always present and never moved on to become the past, it would
> not be time but eternity. If, therefore, the present is time only by reason of
> the fact that it moves on to become the past, how can we say that even the
> present *is* when the reason why it *is* is that it is *not to be*? In other words, we
> cannot rightly say that time *is*, except by reason of its impending state of *not
> being.* (XI, 14)

Through the reduction of the spatial metaphor to terms of measurement and dura-
tion, Augustine is able to engage time within the self, and to locate the reality of the
past in the memory: "When we describe the past correctly, it is not past facts that are
drawn out of our memories but only words which are based on our memory-pictures
[*verba concepta*] of those facts" (XI, 18). While demurring from a claim to understand
equally well how the future is known, Augustine nevertheless goes on to explain it in
analogy with his explanation of the past:

By whatever mysterious means it may be that the future is foreseen, it is

only possible to see something which exists; and whatever exists is not future but present. So when we speak of seeing the future, we do not see things which are not yet in being, that is, things which are future, but it may be that we see their causes or signs [*eorum causae sed signa*], which are already in being (XI, 18).

We may note here two important manoeuvres in the development of a solution to the conundrum of time: Augustine moves the discussion from one sustained by the metaphor of space to one characterised by words and signs (*verba concepta, signa*); words and signs being mental events, time begins to manifest itself as an interior reality. This interiorisation then leads to the second manoeuvre, the shift from the logical arena, the origin of the conundrum, to the metaphysical arena; if time is truly an interior reality, Augustine seems to suggest, it inheres in the interior of human beings and is intimately involved in being's existence. His next step is to concentrate the existence of the three dimensions of time in the present, a step which makes possible both the existential reality of time and its unity. This realisation he articulates in a famous definition:

It might be correct to say that there are three times, a present of past things, a present of present things, and a present of future things. Some such different times do exist in the mind, but nowhere else that I can see. The present of past things is the memory, the present of present things is direct perception, the present of future things is expectation (XI, 20).

While such a definition goes a long way to unifying time as a concept, it still does not explain fully how the mind *(animus)* is able to comprehend the dimensions of time as unified in the present while simultaneously distinguishing the present of things past from the present of things future and both from the present of things present. The solution to this problem leads Augustine to a further perception of what time is, and the fact that he arrives at this realisation through a meditation on poetry is, perhaps, especially significant in a discussion of Chaucer's possible inspirations.

To begin to demonstrate how we can experience both the unity and diversity of time at one and the same moment, Augustine, as we have said, moves away from the spatial example—measuring yards by means of feet—and has recourse to the more abstract example of listening to verse: "We use the same method when we measure the length of a poem by the length of the lines, the length of the lines by the length

of the feet, the length of the feet by the length of the syllables." But, as he says, even this is inaccurate since such lengths are subject to variations; however, it is this interiorised example that leads him to muse: "whether time is merely an extension ... whether it is an extension of the mind itself" (XI, 26).

Through the analysis of the experience of listening to St Ambrose's hymn *Deus Creator omnium,* Augustine perceives in part the ontological nature of time. By comparing long syllables with short, the listener measures and realises the longness and shortness of them, but, as Augustine admits, he hears one before and one after the other, necessitating the retention of the first so as to compare it with the second, and the retention of both so as to compare them because they are passed before they can be measured: "I can only do this because they are both completed and are now things of the past. So it cannot be the syllables themselves that I measure, since they no longer exist. I must be measuring something which remains fixed in my memory. It is in my own mind, then, that I measure time" (XI, 27).

The mind, therefore, draws from memory recollections of durations and compares them to arrive at a certain understanding of time. That takes care of the function of memory in the act of comprehension, but what about the future; how is it that as one begins to recite a psalm or a poem that one already knows, the whole of it is somehow already present to the reciter before he actually utters it? This power Augustine calls "expectation" [*expectatio*]. The entire process of recitation is divided between the two operations of memory and expectation, "the one looking back to the part which I have already recited, the other looking forward to the part which I have still to recite." The crucial consideration now suggests itself: "But my faculty of attention is present all the while, and through it passes what was the future in the process of becoming the past" (XI, 28).

Augustine makes the first important breakthrough in his attempt to understand the *aporia* of time when he discovers at this point the concept of *distentio*. This is the global awareness of time, the ability of the mind to hold before it simultaneously past present and future and, while realising their difference, unite them into a single spiritual experience. Paul Ricoeur, whose inclusion of Augustinian time theory in his analysis of narrative affords a profound understanding of Augustine's thinking, takes this passage to be the "crown jewel" of the philosophy of time and perceives in it the essential relationship between *intentio* and *distentio*:

The example of the song, which includes that of the sound that continues

and ceases and that of the long and short syllables, is here more than just a concrete application. It marks the point at which the theory of *distentio* is joined to that of the threefold present. The theory of the threefold present, reformulated in terms of the threefold intention, makes the *distentio* arise out of the *intentio* that has burst asunder.[9]

· At this point Augustine's original Latin is necessary to a clearer understanding of his definition of time and its many philosophical implications. Time, he states, is nothing other than a *distentio* of the soul (*animus*), and this "stretching out" of the human spirit or mind is a motion having its point of departure in the present awareness (*attentio*) and going in two directions at once, toward the past through *praeteritio* of the spirit, toward the future through *intentio* of the spirit. Together these three "tendings" or "tendencies" comprise the "distention" of the human spirit that makes of time an existential, ontological reality: *Nam* [animus] *et expectat et attendit et meminit* (XI, 28).

Distention, attention, and intention as the simultaneous acts of the soul makes possible the reality of time, and this reality in turn enacts the unity of knowing and being: the soul is one with that which it measures, and by the same token, time becomes one with that which measures it, the soul, thus progressing from that which is *known* to that which *is*. It is principally in this sense that Augustine's theory of time is a realist philosophy.

In the chief example that Augustine uses, the "intention" of the intellect (*animus*) is its knowing constituted through its simultaneous awareness (*attentio*) of both past and future. In reciting a poem, Augustine's intention is first directed toward the entire text; then as the verses are spoken memory tends toward them, that is toward the beginning which is now past. This *praeter-itio* is, as its etymology shows, a stretching of intellect to what has "gone by" (*-ire*, to go) and (*praeter-*, before, in front of), a "placing before" the intellect that which has past. As Augustine specifies, the recitation in the example is of a poem already known. Thus the verses being spoken and presently before the mind make possible an awareness of the verses not yet spoken and still to come; this is due, of course, to the rhythms and rhymes already established which direct the intellect toward that which is not yet in an *in-tentio* of the future. This expectation, as Augustine calls it, together with memory and present awareness constitutes the "distention" of intellect that reveals the reality of time.

The example works equally well for the act of reading as for that of reciting. The

reader's "attention" is constant, always present, and through it is drawn what is future (waiting to be read) so as to become what is past (already read). The longer the action lasts, Augustine tells us, the more expectation is diminished and memory increased. This unifying/distinguishing dialectic of "distention" is explained by Ricoeur:

> The theme of this entire paragraph is the dialectic of expectation, memory, and attention, each considered no longer in isolation but in interaction with one another. It is thus no longer a question of impression-images or antici-patory images but of an action that shortens expectation and extends mem-ory.... The *distentio* is then nothing other than the shift in, the noncoincidence of the three modalities of action (I, 20).

Augustine's use of the literary metaphor of poetic narrative provides an analogy to a series of other processes which, as it expands, explains more and more fully the onto-logical nature of time and history. Thus narrative itself undergoes a "distension" to become one with that which it narrates in a way similar to Augustine's description of the intellect's becoming one with that which it measures. In this analysis, narrative becomes a dialectic of parts and whole, particular and universal:

> What is true of the whole psalm is also true of all its parts and of each sylla-ble. It is true of any longer action in which I may be engaged and of which the recitation of the psalm may only be a small part. It is true of a man's whole life, of which all his actions are parts. It is true of the whole history of mankind, of which each man's life is a part (XI, 28).

Augustinian intentionality is grounded in a metaphysics of philosophical realism. Robert Myles, in his study of Chaucer's realist vision, defines this as "intentionalist realism," a view which he describes as widely held in the Middle Ages and which was grounded in "the object-directedness of all being."[10] This question of direction is, as Myles shows, what constitutes the realist nature of much medieval thought, and no more important an influence on the question than Augustine's meditations on inten-tion can be found. Ricoeur, perceiving Augustine's non-reductive way of dealing with paradox, describes the evolution of the idea of intention in these meditations from a means for comprehending temporality to a transcendence of time and being to eternity and Being:

> *Distentio animi* no longer provides just the "solution" to the aporia of the

measurement of time. It now expresses the way in which the soul, deprived of the stillness of the eternal present, is torn asunder: "But to win your favor is dearer than life itself. I see now that my life has been wasted in distractions [distentio est vita mea]" (29:39). It is in fact the entire dialectic of *intentio-distentio,* a dialectic within time itself, that is taken up again in terms of the contrast between eternity and time. While the *distentio* becomes synonymous with the dispersal into the many and the wandering of the old Adam, the *intentio* tends to be identified with the fusion of the inner man (I, 27).

Here Ricoeur cites the critical passage of the *Confessions* in which Augustine passes beyond the logical conundrums of time and by means of them turns toward transcendence. This ultimate movement is signified by an expansion—one might say, in this context, an exaltation of the term *intentio* in which the "distension" of spirit in the world of matter that made possible the understanding of time and being-in-time becomes a bridge to the new "intention" of the soul toward its destiny in God:

> I look forward, not to what lies ahead of me in this life and will surely pass away, but to my eternal goal [*sed in ea quae ante sunt non distentus sed extentus*]. I am intent [*non secundum distentionem sed secundum intentionem*] upon this one purpose, not distracted by other aims, and *with this goal in view I press on, eager for the prize* [palmam], *God's heavenly summons* (XI, 29).

Roland Teske, S.J., has closely examined the origin and meaning of the term *distentio* in Augustine's work. Pointing to its fundamentally negative sense in ancient medicine, as a swelling, a distortion, and a deformation of the body, Teske reveals how Augustine prepares the reader for his turn away from *distentio animi* in time and toward *intentio ad palmam* of eternity. This rhetorical move we learn is also found in Plotinus' description of time as "distention" where the Greek word διαστασις (diastasis), although as in Augustine, initially used neutrally, carries the same negative potential. Augustine, claims Teske, realises this potential at the end of Book XI: "Here the state of distention is a state of being pulled apart into manyness away from God, the One, to whom we are being called and pulled back."[11]

Augustine's debt to Plotinus in this analysis does not, Teske suggests, stop with the play on the word *distentio*. The Neoplatonic idea of a World Soul is also present in Augustine's discussion of time and eternity which he derived from Plotinus; it is through this universal concept that Augustine escapes the problem of the possible

radical subjectivity, or individualism, of his conception of time. What is important in this idea for the present discussion is the extreme realism involved in the theory of the World Soul which, if Teske is right, was imported into Augustine's philosophy of time along with many other influences from Plotinus:

> Toward the end of *Enneads* III, 7, Plotinus spells out, albeit somewhat cryptically, the relationship between this universal soul and individual souls. He asks, "How, then, is time everywhere?" And he answers, "Because Soul, too, is not absent from any part of the Universe, just as the soul in us is not absent from any part of us." He also asks, "Is time, then, also in us?" His answer makes it clear that time is in every human soul (p. 47).

In Teske's analysis we see another manifestation of the basic Neoplatonic realism of Augustine's theory of time and intentionality, one which, it is suggested, we also find in Chaucer.

The personifications of time also preserved time's tripartite nature while expressing it in such a way as to indicate its potential transcendence. The very etymology of the word *prudentia* invited the association of the virtue of prudence with the concept of time, and the personification of the concept in terms of vision followed naturally. A contraction derived from *providentia,* the word is constituted by the verb "to see" (*videre*) and the preposition "before" (*pro*), having the general sense of "foresight." That the personification of Prudence attributes to her three eyes suggests the commonplace idea that the true understanding of the future is made possible through the true comprehension of past and present.

This sense of the interdependency of time's phases is clearly present, although lacking personification, in the *Pseudo-Seneca* of Martinus Dumiensis, known to Chaucer through Albertanus Brixiensis' *Liber Consolationis et Consilii:*

> So that you may carefully examine and prudently conduct matters "intend your gaze to the future and, thus your spirit reaching out, the whole will be displayed before it." And not only future time, but toward the past as well you must intend. For as Seneca has said in his *De Formula Honestae Vitae,* "if you are truly prudent, your spirit will be stretched out to embrace the three modes of time: order the present, foresee the future, and remember the past, for whoever knows nothing of the past will perish, while he who cannot reflect upon the future into all kinds of traps will be ensnared. Dis-

play before your spirit, therefore, both the good and evil that the future holds so that you may endure it and be in control."[12]

This description of Prudence echoes Cicero, who also refrained from personification but who conceptualises the virtue as a tripartite entity: "Prudence is the understanding of those things which are good, those that are evil, and those that are neither. Its parts are memory, awareness, and foresight."[13] The idea that Prudence is constituted by parts which make up a whole, and that this whole is a psychological and intellectual experience of time, brings us closer to the medieval figure of Prudence and the Augustinian formulation of time which I claim Chaucer combines in *Troilus and Criseyde*. The vehicle is likely to have been Dante who, both in the *Convivio* and in the *Commedia*, describes Prudence; the description in the former is abstract and echoes Cicero: "One should therefore be prudent (that is, wise), and being wise requires having a good memory of past experience, a good knowledge of the present, and good foresight of the future."[14]

In the *Commedia*, however, the personified figure is fully and dramatically present; describing the chariot (representing the Church) drawn by the gryphon (representing Christ), Dante depicts four maidens in attendance who represent the four cardinal virtues. Their leader is Prudence:

To the left four made festive,
In purple dressed, following behind
One of their group who had three eyes in her head.[15]

One of the most dramatic visual representations of the same idea comes much later than Dante and Chaucer in the sixteenth-century depiction of Prudence by Titian consisting of three fused male heads—a youth, a bearded adult, and an old man superimposed upon a tricephalic animal—a wolf's head, representing the past; a lion's head, representing the present; a dog's head, representing the future. Underneath the heads is a tripartite inscription, each phrase corresponding to the head above: *Ex praeterito / praesens prudenter agit / ni futuram actionem deturpet.*[16]

The inhering of the dimensions of time in this single, tricephalic figure of Prudence expresses two essential concepts. On the one hand it communicates the universality of time, the individual or particular moments of which are subsumed into a general or universal reality. On the other hand, it expresses the primary ontological nature of time which precedes and supersedes its secondary logical sense. This seems

to be the very sense that Augustine arrives at through his analysis of time in narrative:

> What is true of the whole psalm is also true of all its parts and of each syllable. It is true of any longer action in which I may be engaged and of which the recitation of the psalm may only be a small part. It is true of a man's whole life, of which all his actions are parts. It is true of the whole history of mankind, of which each man's life is a part (XI, 28).

Less than a hundred years after Chaucer had Criseyde bemoan the lack of a third eye, Marsilio Ficino employed the same metaphor but did so in a way that reveals more overtly the conceptual origin of the figure: "Among the wisest men of Greece arose the saying that Plato had three eyes: one with which he looked at human things, another at natural things, and another at divine things. The last was in his forehead while the other two were under his forehead."[17]

As may be easily perceived, this ancient saying directly connects the triocular image with philosophical realism. The fact that it is Plato to whom three eyes are attributed obviously associates the metaphor of triple vision with Platonism as well as with its founder. The superior location of the third eye, "higher up" than the natural position of the other two, further suggests that what is seen with it is, as well, "higher up;" this is precisely what Ficino articulates in his analysis of the metaphor. What are those "divine things" gazed upon by this supranatural eye? Michael Allen answers:

> Ficino has just been discussing the theory of Platonic Ideas and affirming their existence over against such ancient sceptics as Aristophanes, Diogenes the Cynic, and Aristotle. He concludes that: "the universal object of the intelligence must be more true and exist more absolutely than sensible objects to the degree that the intellect is superior to the sense. The objects of the intellect are the rules by which you may distinguish between the truth and falsity of sensible objects, and recognise the defects of existence. Therefore they exist and exist more truly and absolutely than all else" (VII, 171).

As Allen goes on to point out, the rules referred to here are the Ideas perceptible by intellect alone, and thus the third eye is a symbol of intellect itself. Although cognition is involved in all three perceptions, the third eye represents pure intellectual per-

ception; whereas in the triocular metaphor one eye perceives the particular embodiments of forms in material nature, and the second perceives human constructs, including logical predications, the superior eye beholds universals and makes possible a true understanding of particulars through them.

Allen has traced the origin of the figure of Plato's third eye in Ficino to a couple of possible sources; one of them, a sixth-century collection of prolegomena to Platonic studies, renders the anecdote this way: "It is said, in fact, that having found the theory of ideas he dreamt he had a third eye" (VII, 172). The same source explains that while Pythagoras before Plato, and Aristotle after him, considered Ideas to exist in the efficient cause (that is to say, that universals exist in particulars), Plato understood them to exist in the exemplary cause. As Allen explains, the exemplary cause was conceived of as a kind of mean between the formal cause, which Ficino like his medieval predecessors would have identified as the One or God, and the efficient cause, understood to be material. In this realist analysis of causality particulars, produced by material, efficient causes, are derived from exemplary causes—universals that exist as Ideas in the mind of God who Himself is the formal, final cause of all.

The second ancient reference to Plato's third eye occurs in a more polemical context where it is used to refute the charges leveled against Christians of indulging in fairy tales; speaking of fairy tales, thunders Origen in his *Contra Celsum,* we can level the same charge against Plato about whom all kinds of fantastic fables abound, and none more fantastic than the story of "the third eye that Plato prided himself on possessing" (VII, 172). According to Allen, implied in the metaphor of the three eyes is the "triple division of philosophy into physics, ethics (including politics), and metaphysics (i.e. theology), the philosopher looking downwards for the first, outwards and inwards equally for the second, and upwards for the third" (VII, 173).

The directional sense of the metaphor links it with Augustine's temporal triad of *praeteritio, attentio, intentio* in which we look back to the past, forward to the future, and in front of us to the present. The two uses are further linked at a deeper level, for both point to unity through multiplicity. Just as Augustine's synthesis of time's dimensions into an existential Now points to eternity in the One, in the same way the metaphor of Plato's three eyes connotes unity through multiplicity. Again, Allen points out that Plato was admired precisely for his genius in having united the three parts of philosophy—natural philosophy, logic and ethics, and metaphysics—and having incarnated, as it were, the wisdom of his predecessors in such a way as to suggest a philosophical trinity of Pythagoras, Socrates, and Plato. Ficino extends this

hypostasis in an interesting way: "We can therefore speak as if in a way the genius in Pythagoras and in Socrates were only divine, the genius in Aristotle and the other philosophers succeeding Plato only human, but the genius in Plato himself divine and human equally."[18]

Plato alone, according to his admirers, united all aspects of human understanding, the physical, the moral, and the metaphysical, a wholeness that Platonic realism makes possible. Allen's historical analysis of the figure of three eyes makes clear that the image was meant to communicate the extraordinary synthesis of philosophy and human wisdom achieved by Plato, and his identification of each of the eyes may recall for us Chaucer's use of the figure to encapsulate Criseyde's dilemma and Troy's catastrophe: "If the first eye is the Heraclitian eye of *sense perception* and the second the Socratic eye of *discursive reason*, the third is the Pythagorean eye of the *intuitive intellect*."[19]

It is possible, then, to perceive the series of analogies between the triads we have been discussing. In Augustine the operative triad is initially past/present/future; it in turn yields the triple mental structure of memory/awareness/expectation; intellectually this is expressed as *praeteritio/attentio/intentio*. In Marsilio Ficino the triad is first expressed as the natural/the human/the divine, then as efficient cause/exemplary cause/formal cause; lastly in Ficino the triad seems to imply three increasingly fuller forms of understanding, sense perception/logical discourse/intuitive intellection (or abstraction). In Chaucer's use of the image of three-eyed Prudence the presence of these other triads may be gleaned, if not by Criseyde, at least by the attentive audience. Criseyde employs the figure to express her understanding of time in its material, particular, fragmented manifestations, mistakenly attributing her woes to an inability to understand one of these fragments.

. In order for the two images to have echoed the same philosophical meaning, it is not necessary for Chaucer to have associated the three eyes of Prudence with Plato's, although the anecdotal nature of the story and Origen's view that it and other stories about Plato were widespread make that quite possible. Inherent in the figure of triocularity is the idea of transcendent intentionality, be it in Augustine's transcendence of the fragmentation of time into past, present, and future, or Plato's rising above particulars and efficient causes to universals and exemplary causes, or Criseyde's failure to develop the inner life that, as Boethius taught, allows one to rise above the determinism of the past.

In Book II of *Troilus and Criseyde* the poet presents Criseyde in a tableau consti-
tuted by the act of reading; she is listening to the recitation of her own historical past
as contained in the *geste* of the siege of Thebes. Such an introduction augurs well
because Thebes is the immediate mythical and historical moment that precedes Troy
and in its moral turmoil are sewn the seeds of Troy's own tragic history. Thebes is
the mythico-historic past and the context of Troy, while Troy is the present and the
context for Criseyde's personal history. That she is "reading" her past encourages the
expectation that through an understanding of the past she will be able to avoid its
errors, enacting its virtues and eschewing its vices, and thus break the tragic force
that has destroyed civilisations and the individuals who constituted them since the
Garden of Eden. Witnessing this measured act of reading by this particular reader of
her own larger history, we may recall Augustine's analogy, quoted above, between
the measured verses of the narrative, the duration of an individual's life, and the
whole history of mankind.

But, as we know, Criseyde's reading is interrupted before she has got very far,
and given that there is no further reference to the romance of Thebes, we suspect
that she never finishes her study of the past. This lends a certain irony to her later
invocation of three-eyed time to excuse her failure to understand the nature of
things. Recalling that we earlier saw her giving in to Pandarus' insistence to "do wey
youre book" (II, 111), the audience has reason to doubt that Criseyde "on tyme
ypassed wel remembred" (V, 746). There is also the further irony that this progeny
of Calkas—the *gret devyn* who knew all about things to come—should lack, of all
things, foreknowledge.

The far greater irony inherent in Criseyde's lament, one which trumps all others,
is the tragic mistaking of the nature of time and intention that she reveals, a misun-
derstanding that conceives of time as consisting in discrete, individual, and fractured
dimensions of past, present, and future. It is exactly this "pagan" misunderstanding
that Augustine tackles in the *Confessions* when he cites interrogatively the ancient par-
adox of the nonexistence of time, asking "How can two, the past and the future, *be,*
when the past no longer is and the future is not yet? As for the present, if it were
always present and never moved on to become the past, it would not be time but
eternity" (XI, 14).

It is clear from Robert Myles' examination that the essence of the *intentio,* both
in medieval and modern thought, inheres in the idea of *direction toward:*

In classical Latin, *intendere,* in addition to the senses of "to stretch" and "to strain" meant "to aim weapons" such as arrows. The image of the archer nicely contains the idea of directedness: "object-directedness" controlled by the will of the "object-director" (p. 34).

In Augustine, as we have seen, it is the "intention" of the human spirit that directs the self outward to an understanding of the past and outward in another direction to an understanding of the future, and still further outward to a comprehensive understanding of time, self, eternity, and God. Criseyde, however, as we see from the beginning of the text, has no outward direction, just as she has no unified understanding of time. It is this lack of directedness that makes her "starf for feere / So as she was the ferfulleste wight / That myghte be" (II, 449-51). Nor does she have inner substance. Her response to Pandarus' erotic proposition does not arise from moral principle firmly established within, but from crude considerations of banal, external exigencies: her reputation (II, 738), her material welfare (II, 706), her social position (II, 707), and a fear of gossip so great as to suggest the schizophrenic:

> How bisy, if I love, ek most I be
> To plesen hem that jangle of love, and dremen,
> And coye hem, that they seye noon harm of me!
> For though ther be no cause, yet hem semen
> Al be for harm that folk hire frendes quemen;
> And who may stoppen every wikked tonge,
> Or sown of belles whil thei ben ronge? (II, 799-805)

True, the self looms large in Criseyde's preoccupations, but she lacks an inner life and is thus made a prisoner of fear, enclosed within a self that has, paradoxically, no sense of self. Criseyde's lack of philosophical *intentio* (Myles' *object-directedness*) is shown throughout the poem in her lack of guiding values and in her inability to solve the problem of the decision to exchange her for Antenor, as we see in her inability to construct a realistic plan to return to Troilus. She lives wholly in the present instant, consumed with fending off the immediate dangers that she believes threaten her security. Thus she becomes trapped in the present with no direction forward. Her lack of *intentio* (*object-directedness*) parallels exactly her lack of psychological *distentio* (*object-director),* as shown in her misunderstanding of time. It is finally the absence of both of these directional powers that reveals her lack of the ultimate *intentio* of which Augustine speaks and that deprives her of that "prize of a higher calling" (*palmam supernae vocationis* XI, 29).

The scene in which Criseyde listens to a reading of the history of Thebes is one of the major dramatisations of the theme of time in the poem, and it provides a basic structural element of the poem since just as Chaucer's audience, the medieval listeners in England or ourselves, are "reading" their own cultural past in the text of *Troilus and Criseyde*, so, too, Criseyde is encountering her own history in the *Roman de Thebes*, past history which for her, as for us, provides the existential context of our presents. Criseyde's serving as an audience thus functions as a paradigm for audiences in general, a paradigm through which we will see reading go right or go wrong.

Criseyde's reading goes wrong when Pandarus urges her to pay exclusive attention to the present, inviting her to "do wey youre book, rys up, and lat us daunce," urging her to "shew youre face bare" (II, 110-11), and employing every trick to draw her away from the past to the now of "present joys." Pandarus' success in manipulating both Criseyde and Troilus is attributable to his skill with words, as virtually all commentators on the poem have observed. In the more recent discussion of Chaucer's place in the nominalist/realist debate, several commentators have identified Pandarus as a figure of nominalism humorously satirised by Chaucer through his exaggeration of the powers of language.[20]

Many elements of the text support this view, especially the extensive treatment of the subject of language itself through the attitude toward "words" expressed by Pandarus. Less often noted is Criseyde's view of the relation of language to reality, and yet she has much to say on the subject. She sees through Pandarus' sophistical use of words, demonstrated by her matching of his deceptive rhetoric with her own as she tries to get him to tell her the secret he is withholding in their first meeting in Book II:

> Tho gan she wondren moore than biforn
> A thousand fold, and down hire eyghen caste;
> For nevere, sith the tyme that she was born,
> To know thyng desired she so faste;
> And with a syk she seyde hym atte laste,
> "Now, uncle myn, I nyl yow nought displese,
> Nor axen more that may do yow disese" (141-47).

Pandarus is mistaken in his opinion that Criseyde is "tender witted" and that because of her stupidity he can "hire in [my] wil bigyle" (II, 270-71). Criseyde again sees through the rhetorical web of words that Pandarus weaves, which she makes plain

when she has finally learned Pandarus' intent: "Is al this paynted proces seyd, allas!"
(II, 424). She demonstrates her own rhetorical astuteness once again in her accusa-
tions after the sexual consummation of Pandarus' plot:

> "God help me so, ye caused al this fare
> Trowe I," quod she, "for al youre wordes white.
> O, whoso seeth yow knoweth yow ful lite" (III, 1566-68).

Pandarus has, of course, succeeded in manipulating Criseyde, not because she is
weak-witted, but rather because she is weak-willed, and this lack of *intentio voluntatis*
leaves her morally feeble. Criseyde has been complicit in her own duping from the
beginning and has conspired with her nominalist uncle to construct love through
words. We see her throughout the interior monologue of Book II "talking herself"
into loving Troilus:

> What shal I doon? To what fyn lyve I thus?
> Shal I nat love, in cas if that me leste?
> What, pardieux, I am naught religious.
> And though that I myn herte sette at reste
> Upon this knyght, that is the worthieste,
> And kepe alwey myn honour and my name,
> By alle right, it may do me no shame (II, 757-63).[21]

The prohemium that introduces Book II presents an entirely opposite theory of the
relation of language and reality, specifically the reality of love:

> Ye knowe ek that in forme of speche is chaunge
> Withinne a thousand yeer, and wordes tho
> That hadden pris, now wonder nyce and straunge
> Us thinketh hem, and yet thei spake hem so,
> And spedde as wel in love as men now do (II, 22-26).

Robert Myles has cited this passage as evidence of Chaucer's realism:

> The passage from *Troilus and Criseyde* asserts the view that that which lan-
> guage intends, names, reveals, and may even evoke actually precedes lan-
> guage: in this case "love" ... Chaucer, like Dante and Augustine, is a realist
> who believes not only that extramental reality precedes language, but also

that extra-subjective reality can be named, revealed by language, and known
to some degree by the human subject (p. 14).

Criseyde's apparent opinion that reality is constructed by man through language is
expressed not only through her analyses of the all-too-human discourse of Pandarus,
or her calculations about the advantages and disadvantages of love, but also through
her ventures into metaphysics. The "language of the gods," suggestive of the Ideas
that Plato perceived with his third eye, is just a lot of wishful thinking as far as Cri-
seyde is concerned, fairy tales made up by men out of fear of death:

> For goddes speken in amphibologies,
> And, for o soth, they tellen twenty lyes.
> Ek, 'Drede fond first goddes, I suppose' (IV, 1406-8)

And so we see, Criseyde has no time for theology, this science of first intentions.
Like her uncle, she puts her confidence in human discourse and the logic it yields;
indeed, her trust in words is so deep that she contends that it is human discourse that
invented the divine, not the other way round, words that sired Word, we might
say—a view that has much to do with her final myopia.

In the attempts to explain her perspective, not enough has been made of Cri-
seyde's genetic background. She is in many ways a true "chip off the old block:" the
progeny of a prophet who sees the future and betrays the present, niece of a nomi-
nalist dialectician who verbally constructs the present and destroys the future. Cri-
seyde herself ignores the past and thereby deforms the present. In each of the three
family members we see a distortion of aspects of time brought on by a spiritual
blindness that renders each of them monocular.

Criseyde's failure, like her father's and her uncle's, begins as one of *distentio,* that
power of mind that integrates the fragments of the experience of time within a living
human being who, by the very power of intellectual *distentio,* rises above the mutabil-
ity of words and world to a spiritual *intentio* toward the eternal. She is mistaken in
her claim that she has understood the past correctly, and Chaucer prepares us to see
that error in the scene of the interruption of her reading. She is also wrong about the
depth with which she perceived the nature of present time, for she has made all the
wrong choices, guided by her uncle, in terms both of her true self-interest, her *sum-
mum bonum,* and that of Troilus. But the cause and origin of these errors is most
clearly reflected in her profound misunderstanding of the very metaphor she herself

employs, for she implies that it is possible fully to understand the past and the present without understanding the future; that is, that one can understand time in its fragments. This is, of course, the view of those who, according to Boethius, are caught up in the mutability of passing things and fleeting moments, who lack the inner life that Lady Philosophy teaches and the serenity needed to sustain it. It is not the future that such people fail to understand, for Calkas understood Troy's future and still fell short; it is the nature of time as the vestige of eternity that is not grasped, just as the universal absolutes that lie behind particular experiences and truths of one's narrative are not grasped, and in this sense the failure is ultimately one of *intentio*.

Criseyde's failure may also be seen through the metaphor of reading that Chaucer has established in Book II. Just as Augustine used the experience of reciting a narrative to explain how we comprehend time, so Chaucer uses the experience of interrupted narrative to explain how Criseyde does not comprehend time. Adapting the Augustinian metaphor, we may see reading as beginning when the reader holds in mind the part of the narrative already read, a "pre-tending" back through the early verses or chapters, while "attending" to the action of the narrative before him. The reader's "intention" is toward the end, the completion of the elements of the story that he is reading and has already read. The reader's overall comprehension, his possession of the text, occurs when he sees the beginning of the text in its ending and the ending in its beginning. This "distention" of the reading mind makes of the narrative a unified whole, and, like Prudence, the reader "sees" the text all at once, or as in the figure, with three eyes.

In a still wider extension of the metaphor, the text begins when the author "pre-tends" the story, just as Chaucer has "gone back" (*praeter-ire/itum*) to the events of ancient Troy for his tale. The ontology of the text continues when it is read since the "attention" of the audience acts as a catalyst for meaning. Finally, with the union of authorial "pretending" and audience "attending," the text is complete, and both author and audience share the final "intention" that is the meaning of the text. This meaning expands with every reading of the text, with every new audience reading with "good entente," as Chaucer enjoins, but it never excludes authorial intention; it never replaces the text with its own narcissism.

The paradigm of this kind of literature is allegory in which the very structure of the narrative is based on the typological anticipation of the end in the beginning and the fulfillment of the beginning in the end. In this way allegory exemplifies the idea

of the transcendence of time, diluting the linearity of its narrative while unifying its parts in the anagogy of its meaning. Sheila Delany is correct, I believe, in suggesting allegory as the literary expression of philosophical realism; its form is a constant expression of the reality of universals. She is not correct, I think, in describing Chaucer as a poet who had outgrown allegory and who inaugurated an almost modern mimesis of the world as it is and an almost postmodern relativist fashioning of the world as we would desire it to be.[22]

The kind of one-to-one correspondence that we find in Prudentius is not, to be sure, the type of allegory that Chaucer writes, but it is not necessary that narratives to be allegorical must lack a convincing literal level or that their characters be deprived of individuality or the ability to exercise will. Regarding the universe as contingent is not typical of the "poetics of scepticism," nor is it the signature of nominalism, since virtually every Christian poet and thinker understood the contingency of this world and for that very reason strove toward the *intentio* of spirit that would lead beyond it. The foreshadowing of Troy's doom in Thebes' history and the possible mirroring of the drama of Eden in both, are part of what makes the structure of *Troilus and Criseyde* allegorical; Troilus as a microcosm of Troy, Pandarus as devilish word-merchant, and Criseyde as a myopic Helen-Eve are not developed at the expense of the integrity of plot or the individual memorableness of the characters. It is precisely in his ability to create vivid characters who, while individual, are nevertheless universal, and narratives which, while realistic, are nevertheless symbolic, that Chaucer is honoured for creating "best sentence and most solas" (*CT*, 7981).

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Endnotes

1 See Geoffrey Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* in *The Riverside Chaucer* ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), pp. 471-586. All Chaucer quotations hereafter will be from this edition, and indicated parenthetically.

2 See Augustine, *Confessions* trans. with intro. R.S. Pine-Coffin (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984). All citations in English of the *Confessions* are from this edition. When it has been necessary to cite the Latin, I quote from the bilingual edition *Les Confessions* ed. Joseph Trabucco. 3 vols (Paris: Garnier, 1960). Translations of these Latin quotations into English are my own.

3 See Ockham's discussion of terms of first and second impositions and intentions in *Philosophical Writings* ed. Philoteus Boehner, O.F.M., rev. Stephen F. Brown (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1990), p. 58 and his discussion of universals, p. 43.

4 For instance: "neither metaphysics nor philosophy of nature nor mathematics is numerically one piece of knowledge in the same way this whiteness and this heat and this man and this donkey are numerically one" (p. 6).

5 The connection between medieval nominalism and relativism and scepticism can easily be exaggerated (and has been). The slide from nominalism to relativism to scepticism to nihilism alluded to by Martin Heidegger (*Holzwege* Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1977; in French, *Chemins qui ne menent nulle part* Paris: Gallimard, 1962) and described more bluntly by Yannaris (*De l'absence et de l'inconnaissance de dieu* Paris: Cerf, 1971) had not yet occurred in Chaucer's time, and Ockham, for one, was not a relativist.

6 XI, 18: *verba...in animo velut vestigia...fixerunt*; "words...have through the senses left...traces in the mind."

7 Plotinus, *The Enneads* trans. Stephen McKenna (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), *Ennead* III, 7.1.

8 Augustine realises that such ideas are not literally true; he employs such metaphors as aids to arriving at a deeper understanding of the *aporia*.

9 Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer. 3 vols (Chicago: U of Chicago, 1984) I, pp. 19-20.

10 Robert Myles, *Chaucerian Realism* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1994) pp. 4-5.

11 Roland J. Teske, S.J., *Paradoxes of Time in Saint Augustine* The Aquinas Lecture 1996 (Marquette, Wisconsin: Marquette UP, 1996), p. 29.

12 Albertanus Brixiensis, *Liber consolationis et consilii* ed. Thor Sunby for the Chaucer Society (1873) xxvi, 24:

Ad hoc ergo, ut consilium bene examines et negotia tua prudenter per-
tractes, "in futurum prospectum intende et, quae possint contingere, animo
tuo cuncta propone." Et non solum in futura, sed etiam in praeterita inten-
dere debes. Ait enim Seneca, *De Formulae Honestae Vitae*: "si prudens es,
animus tuus tribus temporibus dispensetur: praesentia ordina, futura pro-
vide, praeterita recordare, nam qui nihil de praeterito cogitat, perdit vitam,

qui nihil de futuro praemeditur, in omnia incautus incidit. Propone autem animo tuo et male futura et bona, ut illa sustinere possis, ista moderari."

13 Cicero, *De Inventione* trans. H.M. Hubbell (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1949) II, liii, 160f. I have substituted my own translation of the Latin for Hubbell's since in translating *Prudentia* as "wisdom," he obscures the point I wish to make: *Prudentia est rerum bonorum et malorum neutrarumque scientia. Partes eius: memoria, intelligentia, providentia.*

14 Dante's *Il Convivio* trans. Richard H. Lansing (New York: Garland, 1990) pp. 228-9.

15 *Purgatorio* ed. Lodovico Magugliani (Milan: Rizzoli, 1949), xxix, 130-32: *Dalla sinistra quattro facean festa / in porpora vestite, dietro al modo / d'una di lore ch'aveva tre occhi in testa.*

16 The figure is reproduced by Jean Seznec, *The Survival of the Pagan Gods: The Mythological Tradition and Its Place in Renaissance Humanism and Art* trans. Barbara F. Sessions. Bollingen Series 38 (New York: Pantheon, 1953), p. 116. As Seznec points out, the concept of the three animals representing the three dimensions of time, the *signum triceps* is derived from Macrobius' description of Serapis in the *Saturnalia*. See Seznec, p. 120.

17 *Marsilio Ficino: the Philebus Commentary* ed. & trans. Michael J.B. Allen (Berkeley: U of California, 1975) as cited in Michael J.B. Allen, "Marsilio Ficino on Plato's Pythagorean Eye" in his *Plato's Third Eye* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1995), VII, p. 171.

18 Ficino, *Platonis Opera Omnia* (Florence, 1484) as cited in Allen, pp. 174-5.

19 Allen, p. 178 (emphasis added).

20 See, for example, P.B. Taylor, "Chaucer's *Cosyn to the Dede*," *Speculum* 57 (1982), pp. 315-27 and Laurence Eldredge, "Boethian Epistemology and Chaucer's Troilus in Light of Fourteenth-Century Thought," *Mediaevalia* 2 (1976), pp. 49-75. A most useful guide to the entire discussion of the subject of nominalism and realism in Chaucer is to be found in William H. Watts and Richard J. Utz, "Nominalist Perspectives on Chaucer's Poetry," *Medievalia et Humanistica* 20 (1993), pp. 147-173.

21 Criseyde's pragmatic, not to say cold-blooded, entertaining of the idea of

whether or not to fall in love with Troilus begins several stanzas earlier (II, 701ff). But Chaucer's irony in this passage seems intended not only to expose Criseyde's shallowness but also Troilus' inferiority, for he has Criseyde express her opinion of Troilus as a clear "second-best:" "For out and out he is the worthieste, / Save only Ector, which that is the beste" (II, 739-40).

22 *Medieval Literary Politics: Shapes of Ideology* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1990), especially "The Politics of Allegory in the Fourteenth Century," pp. 42-60.