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REASON AND REVELATION IN THE CANTERBURY TALES

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By

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* * * * *

The Ohio State University
1965

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To Mike "Milwaukee Fats" Green who thinks that Chaucer was 'real old English,' but whose practical cash register alchemy paid off when I was nearly forced to drop out of school for want of support, I give many thanks. See his handy Redi-Reference summary of the Canterbury Tales, only 69¢.

And thanks also to my wife who, unlike every other scholar's spouse, did not type, edit, or proofread, but who kept me from committing the scholar's most scarlet cardinal sin by threatening to sew me an ankle-length robe and a pointed hat replete with suns and moons and the sign of Saturn should I ever take my scholarship too seriously.

But most important is a debt I owe two men. Like every graduate student I have wondered, as often as the rent falls due, if my efforts have been worthwhile. Professors Francis Lee Utley and Robert Estrich cajoled
me into thinking that mine have been. To their credit goes any contribution I may make; to my shame any error and folly. They alone convinced me that scholarship is a high calling.
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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM OF THE CANON'S YEOMAN'S TALE

Every important work of literature eventually acquires an aggregation of critical cliches; the Canon's Yeoman's Tale is usually said to be Chaucer's stylistic masterpiece, yet, as many recent writers have observed, of all his major efforts it is one of the least discussed and understood.¹ Few of the interpretations which have been offered are satisfying, partly because those writers who have given the matter any thought think the Tale "naturalistic" with no ulterior significance other than an attack on alchemists or their work or both.² Still, this is one of Chaucer's most compact, best written pieces, and probably an effort of his ripest maturity.

In many ways the Tale is an odd one. As the pilgrims move along the road to Canterbury, a Canon and his Yeoman hastily overtake them, their horses sweating as profusely as the riders. After the usual greetings and courtesies,
the Yeoman begins a sales talk designed to get the pilgrims to invest in a marvelous secret known only to his master, the Canon. Harry Bailly is suspicious from the first and questions the Yeoman about his master's "sluttish" attire; quickly the Yeoman breaks down and admits that the Canon could never pave the road to Canterbury with gold and silver as he boasted. The Canon, who has barely spoken since he arrived amongst the pilgrims, now cautions his servant to be still, but the Yeoman is emboldened by the pilgrim's presence and begins to reveal the true character of their work: "to muchel folk we doon illusioun" (l. 673). In anger and fear the Canon races out of the text of the Canterbury Tales.

Part I of the Canon's Yeoman's Tale is not a narrative at all, but a 250-line diatribe against alchemy and alchemists. It has an introduction (ll. 720-749) in which the Yeoman briefly reviews his seven years in the service of the Canon; a body (ll. 750-861) which lists innumerable materials, chemicals, and processes known to the alchemist, and which elaborates on the futility of the experiments themselves with precept and example (ll. 862-961); and a conclusion (ll. 962-971) that all things are seldom what they seem.
In the Tale proper (pars secunda) we learn of a false Canon who visits a priest in his chamber to borrow a mark. After three days he returns it promptly, and to repay the priest's kindness agrees to show him the secret of transmutation. The priest's servant is sent for three ounces of quicksilver, one of which is placed in a crucible which the Canon carries on his person; then the servant is dismissed. The two clerics light a fire under the crucible, the Canon pours some "magic" (though actually useless) powder into it, and after several minutes pretends not to be satisfied with the priest's fire and takes over, for the sake of science. The Canon has prepared a hollowed-out beech coal stuffed with silver filings and plugged with wax. This he puts into the crucible, the fire melts the wax, and the molten silver pours out. The silver is then poured into a chalk mold and placed in a pan of water. 'See for yourself,' he says to the priest, who reaches into the water and emerges with the silver. The priest is delighted and wants to see the experiment repeated. The Canon is ready, for he has prepared a hollow stick, into which he has stuffed more silver filings again plugged with wax. For realism the priest is allowed to stir the coals.
in the crucible with his own hand; the obvious happens regardless of the hand: again the wax melts and again the silver pours out. A successful transmutation! Yet another try is made: an ounce of copper is tossed into the crucible and the transmuting powder on top of it. While the priest has stooped to blow on the fire, the Canon takes the ounce of copper from the crucible and places it in the pan of water. Slyly, he drops an ounce of silver (which he has concealed in the sleeve of his soutane) into the pan, at the same time hiding the copper in the same sleeve. The priest reaches into the pan and withdraws a one-ounce silver ingot. With glee the two men run to a goldsmith who verifies that the Canon's silver filings are really silver.

The priest is beside himself with greed. How much does this marvelous powder cost? Victory belongs to the Canon: "Ye shul paye fourty pound, so God me save" (l. 1361). A buy at twice the cost. Local nobles lend the priest his forty pounds which he promptly deposits with the Canon. The bargain is struck, the priest sworn to secrecy, and the Canon departs, leaving the priest with a handful of dust.
Of this interesting story few critical studies have even been ventured; scholars seem literally to have been distracted, as Muscatine guesses with irony, from the Tale itself to incidents which may have inspired the Tale. Biography has been all, and the work itself a glass in which to catch the reflection of The Great Man in an unguarded moment. Did the vengeful Chaucer insert the Canon and his Yeoman into the Tales as an afterthought? The Canon's Yeoman is the only story-teller in the Tales as we have them who is not a member of the original party of pilgrims and who is not mentioned in the General Prologue, so conceivably his inclusion was not part of the original plan. And even if an eleventh-hour insertion, why did Chaucer refuse to make them part of his original pilgrims? Some think that Chaucer was swindled by an alchemist and that the Canon's Yeoman's Tale is his revenge: what he lost in the crucible he avenged himself for with the quill. Here biography begins and literary criticism ends.

This biographical approach has led inevitably to the question of Chaucer's knowledge of alchemy, the "sacred
science." This knowledge is at the heart of the matter, for if he understood alchemy he would not likely have been the dupe of William Schuchirch--Manly's conjecture of the real alchemist intended in the Tale--or of anybody else. If Chaucer were a mere dilettante he might well have been swindled, much as is the "sely preest" in the story, and he might well have penned the Tale out of personal motives. And thus have we tried to hypothesize this enigma of a Tale as an effect whose cause may have been an incident in the poet's life.

Did Chaucer understand alchemy well? It was a reputable science in the fourteenth century and most educated men knew at least something of its principles. Jean de Meun was alchemically informed and devoted a long passage of the Roman de la Rose to it, and Chaucer's colleague Gower discussed it knowledgeably in book IV (11. 881 ff) of his Confessio Amantis. Damon divined that Chaucer knew the secret well because he placed that controversial passage which seems to extoll alchemy at the end of the Canon's Yeoman's Tale, just where it would have the most importance. And, Elias Ashmole, over two centuries later,
had only to read those last fifty-four lines to "know" that Chaucer was an adept. Finally, Damon reminds us, Roger Bacon, Peter Bonus, Agrippa, and many others had at one time denounced the frauds of alchemy, as does Chaucer, while upholding the authentic workers and the genuine nature of their work.5

Edgar Hill Duncan, an unquestioned authority on medieval alchemy, has found that the Yeoman's seemingly chaotic gush of technical terms, processes, and materials really has some order, and he concludes that Chaucer must have known alchemy thoroughly.6 Others, of course, disagree. Pauline Aiken, I have found, presents the strongest case for those who believe that the poet was ignorant of this art: probably the Speculum Naturale and possibly the Speculum Doctrinale of Vincent of Beauvais are his sources, her argument goes, for those tracts contain lists of materials and processes which are strikingly similar to the catalog in the first part of the Canon's Yeoman's Tale. Chaucer merely copied Vincent's list without really understanding his source.7

While Duncan and Aiken, who are expert in alchemy, cannot agree on what the text shows about Chaucer's knowledge
of the art from internal evidence, others have been baffled in their struggles to understand the **Tale** as literature because they did not at all deal with alchemy. Judith Herz is one of those who reads in this casually cadenced story "little more than a personal anecdote given a fictional guise." The Yeoman grows spiritually from disillusion with technical gadgets to matriculation into the Christian community of the pilgrims. For Judith Herz the ending—that ending which changes its tone to one of high seriousness, abstraction, and erudition—is the **Tale's** flaw. Her position is opposed to Damon who saw that alchemy had its spiritual side which Chaucer knew. Muscatine, who is of the anti-alchemy party, thinks that the profusion of matter, refuse, and excrement in **pars prima** comes only from a "universe of technology" which Chaucer, as a Christian and Englishman of his time, must have loathed.9

These collisions and counter-demonstrations are cited here only to show that understanding the **Canon's Yeoman's Tale** is a very difficult matter, one that has defied the very best critical minds of our century. Like Churchill's description of Russian foreign policy, the **Canon's Yeoman's**
Tale has been a question within a puzzle wrapped up in an enigma; but now the Tale's outlines and dimensions seem to be perceived a bit more clearly. Once the first olives are out of the bottle the rest may come easily. But where to start with the Canon's Yeoman's Tale? Probably with the most intricate enigma of all, its alchemy.
Footnotes--Chapter I


5 S. Foster Damon, "Chaucer and Alchemy," *PMLA*, XXXIX (1924), 782 ff.

6 Edgar Hill Duncan, *The Yeoman's Canon's 'Silver Citrinacioun',"* MP, XXXVII (1940), 241 ff.

7 Pauline Aiken, "Vincent of Beauvais and Chaucer's Knowledge of Alchemy," *SP*, XLI (1944), 373, 387.


CHAPTER II

CHAUCER'S ALCHEMY

The sacred science is a puzzle of itself. Its obscurity and mystery are not only well-earned, as positivists point out, but methodically sought. Taylor gives us two very good reasons why medieval European alchemists went underground. Usually they were lettered men—they had to be to read the Latin alchemical treatises of instruction—whose late hours and esoteric rituals aroused the suspicion and scorn of their philistine neighbors. And, because the alchemists reputedly had the power to make gold, they were much in demand by local nobles who often did not scruple to throw them into deep dark dungeons and demand that they fill their coffers.¹ Later, the Church became officially uncomfortable with an art that seemed to usurp holy offices, made it mildly unpleasant to practice transmutation openly, and thus drove the transmuters further into their dark corners.
But the treadmill toward oblivion was just as forcefully trod from within the alchemical fraternity. The initiated felt that they had, or were imminently to have, the secrets of the nature of nature, and of the workings of God. They were not going to allow such precious pearls to be dissipated before swine. And, they also had or were soon to have the recipe for making gold; if such a formula were controlled by the stupid or worse, the wicked, a world calamity might result, so as a public service, as well as for many personal reasons, the alchemists were sworn to secrecy. That Chaucer's Canon was willing to sell his "secret" is a sure sign of his malevolence, for normally no amount of gold could come between the true alchemist and his formula for making gold. And, after all, the practice of keeping knowledge esoteric was not limited to alchemy: Synesius (370-430?), the African Christian, wanted knowledge to be closeted in a language 'the mob' would never understand.²

This alchemical secrecy often took symbolic forms in the manuscripts, compounding the art's obscurity. Gold was seldom called by that name: it was "Sol," "the King,"
or "the Lion." Silver was "Luna," "the moon," "the Queen," or "Our Lady." Mercury was often a dragon, winged in a vaporous state, wingless as a solid, and Martin Ruland lists for the Prima Materia—the base, elemental substance with which the experiment begins—fifty synonyms. Acids could also be lions, however, probably because of their ravenous qualities; thus, an illustration of a lion consuming a sun, such as that found in the 1550 Frankfort edition of the Rosarium Philosophorum, might be gold dissolving in aqua fortis, though Jung thought that the descent of spirit into matter is intended. Truly, as the Yeoman laments, "Philosophres speken so mystily/ In this craft..." But, examples need not be extended; the profusion and confusion of symbols should be clear.

Finally, the alchemists further confuse us by seldom signing their own names to their manuscripts. Originality was not prized in the Middle Ages, and writers seldom sought praise for their efforts. Instead they signed famous names to their own works—Aristotle, Plato, Hermes, Ramon Lull, or Roger Bacon. St. Thomas and Albertus Magnus were especially popular figures whose names were
put on many manuscripts after their canonizations, supposedly giving those manuscripts authenticity, authority, and the appearance of wisdom. In the last fifty-four lines of the Canon's Yeoman's Tale, the persona cites "Arnold of the Newe Toun," Hermes, Plato, and Senior. Consequently, we do not know the dates or the authors of many medieval scientific documents, further complicating our understanding of alchemy and its genesis.

Nevertheless some grasp of it is possible if we approach alchemy as a deductive, rather than as an inductive, discipline. The alchemist began his experiment with a book in his hand containing the conclusion. The work itself, the opus, was performed to bear out conclusions and principles which the worker already believed true. Probably he knew of Aristotle's Meteorologica, at least second hand, for it contained the crucial theory that all matter was one, but assumed different forms. To change matter from the form of lead to the form of gold, spiritus was needed. Taylor reminds us that the concept of spiritus has evaporated out of the mainstream of Western thought (pp. 7 ff.), but that it once meant "breath," specifically
the "breath of life" which God "breathed" into living creatures and which in fact made them living. Spiritus was that vital power which animated matter. To medieval alchemists, spiritus was also a vapor, a gas, a spirit, even the Holy Ghost. Spiritus, then, the pneuma, pushed the form of metals upward along the Great Chain of Being—Chaucer's "faire cheyne of love"—toward their perfection as gold. All metals, even lead, had the potential to become gold, for it contained within it the seed of perfection—gold. The magnum opus matured that seed. Left in the ground to nurture under the sun, lead's growth to perfection might take centuries. The alchemist sought to quicken the process to a few days.

The Arabian Emerald Table of Hermes is one of the most important monuments of Western alchemy, according to Taylor. This document, translated into Latin and thus made available to Westerners some time before 1200, seemed to say, or was interpreted as saying that the Philosopher's Stone was actually solidified pneuma and consequently had the power to transmute. This was a significant new direction from Greek alchemy, which had no concept of the
Philosopher's Stone, and from that of Egyptian workers who sought primarily to develop new alloys and to tint old ones. The Philosopher's Stone became the quarry which the Europeans hunted because of its ability to transmute impure and debased animal, mineral, and vegetable forms to their respective states of perfection. As with metals so with man: like gold, man could be "perfected," his youth restored, his vitality regained, his life lengthened. As it is written in The Mirror of Alchemy, "alchemy, therefore, is the science which teaches how to make and to generate a certain medicine, which is called elixir, which, when it is projected onto metals or imperfect substances, perfects them completely at the moment of projection."7

This miraculous catalyst was the golden fleece which the alchemical argonauts sought: "Elixir," "Fountain of Youth," "Universal Solvent," and "Quintessence," that fifth "essence" which embodied Aristotle's four.

From I Corinthians xv.35-45 alchemists may have derived another central alchemical notion, that metals,
like all things else in nature, had to die before they could be reborn to perfection:

But someone will say, "How can the dead rise? What kind of a body will they have when they come back?" You foolish man, the very seed you sow never comes to life without dying first; and when you sow it, it has not the body it is going to have, but is a naked kernel, perhaps of wheat or something else; And God gives it just such a form as he pleases, so that each kind of seed has a form of its own... The body is sown in decay, it is raised free from decay. It is sown in humiliation, it is raised in splendor. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in strength. It is a physical body that is sown, it is a spiritual body that is raised.

And, from John xii.24-25 they could obtain further corroboration:

I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls on the ground and dies, it remains just one grain. But if it dies, it yields a great harvest.

The Prima Materia, the base stuff with which the experiment began, be it lead, copper, tin, or iron, or a combination of them, had to die—to be killed in the crucible, had to be "mortified"—before the generation of the perfected Stone was possible.

The process is one of death and rebirth: lead dies so that it may become gold. Carl Jung argued that the "death" of the Prima Materia and its "rebirth" as the Stone
paralleled the death and resurrection of Jesus, and that
the alchemists were aware of this relationship. The name
Jung gave to the phenomenon is the Lapis-Christus parallel.
Nor was the Swiss psychiatrist special pleading for one of
his own pet theories; the fact has been well established
by more dispassionate observers.\textsuperscript{8} Cited by Jung is this
passage from chapter IX of Ramon Lull's \textit{Codicillus}:

\begin{quote}
And as Jesus Christ, of the house of David,
took on human form for the liberation and
redemption of mankind, who were in the bonds
of sin on account of Adam's disobedience, so
likewise in our art that which has been wrong-
fully defiled by one thing is absolved by its
opposite; cleansed, and delivered from that
stain.\textsuperscript{9}
\end{quote}

Here the Stone, "which has been wrongfully defiled," is a
spirit which descended into material form and which has
risen again—as pure spirit. But, the comparison is
cloaked in a simile and is perhaps subject to other inter-
pretation. The \textit{Margarita pretiosa} of Petrus Bonus of
Ferrara, most likely penned before 1340, gives this ex-
plicit comparison:

\begin{quote}
This art is partly natural and partly divine
or supernatural. At the end of the sublimation
there germinates . . . a shining white soul
which flies up to heaven with the spirit. This
is clearly and manifestly the Stone . . . . Thus
Alchemy stands above nature and is divine. . . . The intellect . . . must believe it, like the divine miracles and the foundation of the Christian creed. . . . So also the ancients knew that a virgin must conceive and bring forth, for in their art the stone begets, conceives, and brings itself forth. . . . Now, since no creature except man can unite with God, on account of their dissimilarity, God must needs become one with man. And this came to pass in Christ Jesus and his virgin mother. Therefore Balgus says in the Turba: "O what miracles of nature, that have changed the soul of the old man into a youthful body, and the father has become the son."¹⁰

Arnald (of the Newe Toun), the philosopher whom Chaucer cites at the end of the Canon's Yeoman's Tale, or one of his disciples who may have ascribed the De Secretis naturae to him, equated the alchemical opus with the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus.¹¹ The Exempla, also ascribed to this prodigious scholar, again compares Jesus and the Stone.

Grennen, whose work was done independently of mine, also believes that Chaucer knew of the Lapis-Christus parallel: in the Canon's Yeoman's Tale mercurius is Jesus, and its mortification is His crucifixion. We should thus be suspicious when Chaucer, midway through the Tale, has
his Yeoman address the mysterious canons, in an aside, about Judas:

\[ \ldots \text{ye woot wel how} \]
\[ \text{That among Cristes apostelles twelve} \]
\[ \text{Ther nas no traytor but Judas hymselfe. (ll. 1001-03)} \]

\[ \text{If any Judas in youre covent be,} \]
\[ \text{Remoeveth hym bitymes, I yow rede,} \]
\[ \text{If shame or los may causen any drede. (ll. 1007-09)} \]

The reference to Judas further supports the allusion to the Passion. Grennen has discovered other alchemical manuscripts which make an explicit connection between Stone and God (pp. 194 ff), but the point is already made and may be concluded with one further, and brief, example from the \textit{Aurora consurgens}, a manuscript fragment of the early fourteenth century:

\[ \ldots \text{such as the Father is, such is the Son and such is the Holy Ghost, and these three are one: body, spirit, and soul; for all perfection rests on the number three, that is, measure, number, and weight.}^{13} \]

In yet another sense, the production of the Stone results from the conjunction of opposites--male and female, hot and cold, sun and moon, and many others. On this principle was the sulphur-mercury theory based. Quicksilver was the only known metal which was liquid in its natural state;
it embodied the essence of liquidity. And, quicksilver's
color linked it to the moon, as sulphur's recalled the sun.
Brimstone's ready combustibility seemed to be the essence
of fire. Mercury, which usually changes color in compound
form, was thought to be feminine; sulphur, which frequently
gives compounds its yellow tint, was the masculine principle.
As The Mirror of Alchemy says, "complex metals and all other
mineral substances . . . are procreated from [quicksilver
and sulphur]." Since "complex metals" come from mercury
and sulphur, only these substances can perfect them. All
these opposites, and more—spirit and matter, dry and moist,
gold and silver, and round and square—are embodied within
sulphur and mercury, whose union will generate the Stone.
Norton, Ripley (canon of Bridlington), and the legendary
Flamel all stated that the Stone was the issue of the union
of masculine and feminine elements. Other writers symbol-
ized this Stone-producing conjunction of opposites as the
sexual union of brother and sister, still others as the
joining of King and Queen. Thus alchemy adapted to its
own use one of the most catholic of human beliefs, the
basis for many myths and folktales round the world, and one
which would arise quite naturally from the most perfunctory observation of nature: generation arising from the union of opposites.

By now, we have already strayed too far from the Canon's Yeoman's Tale, and it is time to return. In the last fifty-four lines of the Tale Chaucer curiously alters his style. For over fourteen hundred lines Chaucer's Yeoman has hurled vituperation and spleen upon all of alchemy and all the alchemists of his experience; then, suddenly, the tone softens, and, as though Chaucer himself were speaking, we are given a mysterious formula about 'the dragon and its brother.' No critics I have read deny this change in tone, though they disagree about its significance. Pauli Baum felt the lines "wholly inconsistent" with the character of the Yeoman as otherwise presented, and Judith Herz, as already noted, considered them the Tale's flaw (p. 237). However, I believe that Damon is correct in his assumption that the passage is placed last with the intention of separating the "alchemists"—those who searched for riches only and who
often were swindlers— from the "philosophers"— the earnest men who sought the secrets of generation and of nature.

And, Muscatine's suggestion— that the last lines are a philosophical amplification such as Chaucer wrote for the *Troilus*— is a perceptive one. This fifty-four line "postscript" distinguishes the true alchemy from the false, God's alchemy from man's. I am confident that Damon and Muscatine are correct here because Chaucer's postscript gives the formula for the most sacred alchemical ritual he knew.

The most difficult section of those last lines is that passage about which Neville Coghill admitted in exasperation: "I cannot pretend to explain more of what is said of 'the dragon and his brother' than appears in the text."^17

"Ther may no man mercurie mortifie But it be with his brother knowlechyng." How be that he which that first seyde this thyng Of philosophres fader was, Hermes— He seith how that the dragon, doutelees, Ne dyeth nat, but if that he be slayn With his brother; and that is for to sayn, By the dragon, Mercurie, and noo oother He understood, and brymatoon by his brother, That out of Sol and Luna were ydrawe. (ll. 1431-40)

Now the very little that I have already said about alchemy
and its symbolism makes this passage more understandable.
The dragon is mercury which must not be mortified (solidified under heat in the crucible) without its brother, brimstone, or sulphur. Here are the two basic ingredients, the most popular medieval alchemical ingredients, not only for this but for countless experiments. The dragon should not be mortified alone, of course, because both the masculine principle of sulphur and the feminine of mercury are needed for generation. Thus is the Stone produced. The Canon could not successfully "multiply" even if he were honest, because he tries to "mortifie" the "quyksilver" alone (ll. 1126 ff).

The serpent or dragon is probably one of the alchemist's most popular symbols, and no doubt its graphic possibilities lent to that popularity. Taylor quotes the legendary Zosimus (of the fourth century) for an early example: "A serpent lies before the entry . . . seize him and sacrifice him . . ." (p. 145). The initial stages of the opus seem to be symbolized here. Later, during the sixteenth century, the English alchemist Charnock poetized:

This is the philosophers dragon which eateth up his own taile
The dragon which eats his own tail is the Uroboros, sometimes depicted as crowned, the traditional symbol of perfection and completeness: since it is eating its own tail it has no beginning and no end. The "doungell of glas" is the crucible or hermetic vessel, the "prison Stronge," in which the dragon must be mortified.

One interesting aside; the locus of generation is the crucible whose shape, happily for the alchemists, is suggestive of the womb. When the proper masculine and feminine ingredients are combined in it and heat is applied—the heat of incubation—the miracle of regeneration occurs. What takes place in the crucible, then, is of great import. Chaucer has the Canon take his crucible from out of his bosom where most clerics would carry a crucifix, not without irony in this case since this Canon is hardly holy and less of a "philosopher." The Middle English word for crucible was "crosselet," which may or may not descend from the Latin *crucibulus* (*OED* s.v. "crucible"), but which at least
has suggestions of "cross." Hermetic vessels, moreover, could be used interchangeably with crucibles. They are usually oval to represent the womb or the egg, and, perhaps, by some principle of homeopathic magic, their forms were meant to induce fertility. What, after all, is more suggestive of fecundity than an egg? Just as often the hermetic vase was decorated with emblems of fertility: trees, fish, eggs, water, and infants or crowned adult monarchs joined in intercourse.18

Alchemy, then, was a sacred rite, and Chaucer seems to have known it. The Yeoman hints at this when he says, speaking between his own lines, that "to tellen al wolde passen any bible" (1. 857). During the opus the adept perfected matter and released its spirit, invoked the pneuma which he compared to the Holy Ghost to perform his work as he saw—or hoped to see—the metals moving up the chain of matter toward their divine destinies. The magnum opus parallels the transubstantiation, and Jung tells us that in the sixteenth century Nicholas Melchior wrote that the opus should be performed as a Mass,
including an alchemical paraphrase of the hymn to the virgin:

Hail beautiful lamp of heaven, shining light of the world! Here art thou united with the moon, here ariseth the band of Mars and the conjunction of Mercury.\(^9\)

And, as the priest who officiates at the transsubstantiation is the emissary of God on earth, so, in many ways is the alchemist. What, then, of the Canon who perverts his "holy office" from its intended spiritual resurrection of perfected matter to purposes of his own greed? He is performing a kind of Black Mass and is the emissary on earth—of Satan. Chaucer's Canon misleads 'Christ's people' with his falseness and his lying; his black alchemy Chaucer attacks, or has the Yeoman attack throughout the first fourteen hundred lines of the Tale. But, in the last several lines Chaucer, in his own voice, tells us what the high calling of true philosophical alchemy must perform, and so tells us what kind of creature this Canon is.

Chaucer probably respected alchemy; he revered the Romance of the Rose which contains that long and complementary passage on alchemy. He need not have agreed with every line of his favorite poem; more convincing external evidence
is available: in Book IV of the *Troilus*, when that noble
Trojan's grief over the departure of Criseyde has brought
him once more to tears, Chaucer uses the first of two
alchemical metaphors to describe his favorite hero. The
first comes from Troilus' own lips, telling of the only
condition which would cement his breaking heart: "Thow
moost me first transmeven in a ston,/ And reve me my
passiones alle . . ." (11. 467-68). The stone of which
Troilus speaks is not the Philosopher's Stone, but the
language is alchemical all the same. The other reference
is in the narrator's words: "This Troylus in teris gan
distille,/ As licour out of a lambic ful faste" (11. 519-
520). Certainly, at this delicate moment, so sympathetic
a hero would not be described in the terminology of a
science which Chaucer despised or which he thought spurious.
Another of Chaucer's beloved creations, the clerk of
Oxenford, was a philosopher—in the best Chaucerian sense
of that word, yet had but little gold in his coffer (General
Prologue, ll. 297-98); And in these lines Chaucer estab-
lishes his position—his contempt for the money-seeking
alchemists and his reverence for the truth-seeking
philosophers. The life of the "povre Persoun of a Toun," perhaps the creation Chaucer loved best, is like gold, for if that metal rust, "what shal iren do?" (General Prologue, l. 500).
Footnotes—Chapter II


2Lynn Thorndike, History of Magic and Experimental Science (New York, 1923), I, 543.

3Martino Rulando, Lexicon Alchemie (Frankfurt, 1612), pp. 322-326.


5The Complete Works of Chaucer, ed. Fred N. Robinson (Cambridge, Mass., 1957). All citations in my text are from this edition. This quotation is G 1394-1395.

6Taylor, Alchemists, pp. 88 ff.


8Taylor, Alchemists, pp. 152-153.

9Psychology, p. 344.

10Cited in Jung, Psychology, pp. 358 ff.

11Thorndike, III, 75.


13Cited in Jung, Psychology, p. 373.

14Bacon, p. 1946.


Respect seems to characterize Chaucer's attitude toward alchemy and contempt pervades his alchemical evaluation of the Canon. Now, there is another strange aspect to the Canon's Yeoman's Tale which only lately has been observed, but not yet exploited: the nouns "feend" and "devel" and forms of them appear more often in this Tale than in any other, except the Friar's Tale where the fiend is one of the characters, and in the Parson's Tale, which explicitly attacks Satan and his works. So let me hypothesize that Chaucer's frequent use of such satanic nouns and adjectives is intentional and that with them he is trying to say something to the reader—in his time, the listener.

Nearly the first lines the Yeoman mutters after his Canon has ridden off "for verray sorwe and shame" (l. 702), is the angered plea: "... the foule feend hym quelle!" (l. 705). The Canon is not here called the fiend, it is
true, but this early in the Tale he is associated with him. A little later the Yeoman is talking about his work in the laboratory and, after reciting a particularly long list of alchemical materials, he breaks into a characteristic apostrophe to his audience in which he remarks that he has "toold ynowe/ To reyse a feend . . ." (ll. 860-61). He agonizes over the frustrations of exploding vessels and experiments that continually fail, of tempers as hot as crucibles:

Though that the feend noght in our sighte hym shewe,
I trowe he with us be, that ilke shrewse!
In helle, where that he lord is and sire,
Nis ther moore wo, ne moore rancour ne ire.

(ll. 916-19)

This passage is more to the point because in it the Yeoman says, even though with angered hyperbole, that he swore the "feend" was in the laboratory; but, during the experiments only the Yeoman's Canon would be present. Is he the "feend" the Yeoman means?

In the Tale proper, that part of the Tale which is actually a tale, the Yeoman describes how the Canon deceives the "sely preest," but even the thought of the swindler's
deception breaks the walls containing his temper, and he
bursts forth:

   And while he busy was, this fiendly wrecche,
   This false chanoun—the foule feend hym fecche!
   (ll. 1158-59)

Here again is hyperbole on the Yeoman's part, but also here
again is Chaucer talking to his audience. We have seen
the allusions comparing the feend and the Canon getting
gradually more explicit: First, the fiend should kill the
Canon; then, he seems to be in the same room, though the
only other person is the Canon; finally, 'this false canon'
is this 'fiendly wretch.'

Two more satanic allusions follow this outburst which
are somewhat more oblique. The Yeoman describes how the
Canon bade the priest see for himself the silver in the
crucible and, in still another apostrophe, swears: "What,
devel of helle! sholde it elles be?/ Shaving of silver
silver is, pardeel!" (ll. 1238-39). An interesting aspect
of this oath is the Yeoman's swearing by both God and devil.
And, a few lines later (l. 1273) the servant wishes that
"the devel" would flay his master out of his skin, "I pray
to God."
Finally, as the Yeoman nears the end of his story, he sums up the deceptive appearance of his former master:

He semed freendly to hem that knewe hym noght,
But he was feendly bothe in werke and thoght.

(ll. 1302-03)

The explicitness of the statement makes amplification or explication superfluous.

Nevertheless, calling the Canon a "devel" or a "feend" did not satisfy Chaucer and it should not us. In addition to these direct verbal references, we are given several allusions, more oblique in nature. Shortly after his recitation of materials and processes, the Yeoman describes one of the experimental failures and comments, "But wel I woot greet strif is us' among" (l. 931). The lament is not necessarily devilish by itself, but in this satanic context it becomes a demonic counterpoint. That context includes several quite explicit and direct statements about the nature of the Canon, so explicit, in fact, that one is tempted to hear Chaucer's own voice eclipsing that of his Yeoman:

His sleightes and his infinite falsnesse
Ther koude no man writen, as I gesse,
Though that he myghte lyve a thousand yeer.
In al thiis world of falsshed his his peer;
For in his termes he wol hym so wynde,
And speke his wordes in so sly a kynde,
Whanne he commune shal with any wight,
That he wol make hym doten anonright,
But it a feend be, as hymselven is.
Ful many a man hath he begiled er this,
And wole, if that he lyve may a while;
And yet men ride and goon ful many a mile
Hym for to seke and have his aqueyntaunce,
Noght knowynge of his false governaunce.

(11. 976-89)

This section is repeated here at such length because it contains so many important clues to the Canon's identity. Most important is the superhuman quality of the Canon's evil. Despite the medieval literary tradition of thoroughly wicked villains, no one human's wickedness is indescribably base, even if the describer live for a thousand years—a millenium. And no man's sleights and falseness are infinite; we are confronted here with one of Satan's followers whose evil exceeds even that of man. For falsehood he has no peer in "this world"—Satan's world; he is not a clerk, but "gretter than a clerk, ywis" (l. 617). Like Satan, the "father of lies," his words are so twisted and so sly that he can deceive anyone unless they—and this is most important—unless they be a fiend, "as hymselven is." We have it explicitly once more.
Still, there is more, for Chaucer does not hold back from telling about this Canon:

In this chanoun, roote of al trecherie,  
That everemoore delit hath and gladnesse--  
Swich feendly thoughtes in his herte impresse--  
How Cristes peple he may to meschief brynge.  
God kepe us from his false dissymulyng!  

(ll. 1069-73)

Again the Canon is described in such superlatives that more than a man must be intended: he is the root of all treachery and delights in fiendly thoughts evermore. His heart is gladdened, as a devil's heart should, when he brings to mischief Christ's people; lost souls, presumably, never interest or challenge him. And with a final irony, the Yeoman bids God protect the Christian community from his Canon's dissimulating.

The final passage describing the Canon's extrahuman evil that I have been able to detect follows the Yeoman's protestation to the host that the wicked Canon was not the one he had been working for, an evasion that must await a later page for explanation. The lines rework the demonic description:

It was another chanoun, and nat hee,  
That kan an hundred foold moore subtiltee.
He hath betrayed folkes many tyme;
Of his falsnesse it dulleth me to ryme.
Evere whan that I speke of his falshede,
For shame of hym my chekes wexen rede.

(11. 1090-95)

No new ideas are added here to what has already been pointed out; the old ones of other-worldly subtlety, betrayal, and falseness are presented in a different syntax, but they are presented; surely such repetition by an artist of Chaucer's verbal skill must be meaningful.

Other descriptions of this variety need not take so much time, as they are of themselves brief. We are shown that the Yeoman's man is a 'cursed canon' (l. 1144) and a 'cursed man' (l. 1259) and 'root of all cursedness' (l. 1301). Like a demon, he is here and there, "he is so variaunt, he abit nowhere" (l. 1175). The Yeoman exclaims over his "doublenesse" (l. 1300), compounding his exclamations elsewhere over the Canon's duplicity.

Even the Canon's physical appearance bespeaks of his infernal nature. When he first rides up Chaucer the pilgrim 'deems him some canon'--strangely indefinite language here--because the rider's hood was sewn to his cloak. The detail may be important. Marie Hamilton's research led her to
believe that he was a black canon (a canon regular of St. Augustine) though seemingly an apostate; papal letters of the late fourteenth century mention such apostates frequently. Miss Hamilton also believes that two canons are involved. But, medieval hoods, she finds, were often sewn to the cloak as the dress prescribed for traveling. Yet, another interpretation of the detail of the hood is possible: the gods of the old religion usually become the devils of the new. It is in the personal interest of the new religion to make the gods of the old seem spurious and pernicious. Gregory the Great wisely cautioned his missionary in England, Augustine, against dismantling the pagan temples; instead, he advised that they be converted into Churches and so gradually supplant rather than overthrow Thor and "swich rascaille." When Wodan was displaced by Christianity, his hood, which was sewn to his cloak, became symbolic of his demonic character. Might Chaucer have intended this meaning as well? The rest of his attire—black clothes over a white surplice—can also be explained realistically, but it carries as well the suggestion of duplicity: the black covering the white.
The burdock leaf has, in some areas, been used to reduce body temperature, or so its folklore goes. And its size makes it genuinely cooling. Our Canon must have believed in its efficacy, since Chaucer tells us that he sported one under his hood, "for swoot," but that nevertheless his forehead perspired as though it were a still full of plantains and "paritorie"—a weed of the aster family which commonly grows on walls and cliffs. Burdock is quite bitter and, though it seems useless medicinally, some "healing folk" (Robert Estrich tells me that his great grandmother was one of them) administer its juice for rheumatism. The taste is so vile that even the most chronic cripples in drinking it might well leap up out of their wheelchairs. But the most obvious quality of the burdock is that it is a nuisance: it is a coarse weed common to wastes, it is unattractive, and its prickly burs knot inextricably in clothing—"it "clings like the devil." In Chaucer's time and later the burdock, as well as the plantain and the nettle (whose sting was inevitable even to the gentlest hands⁵) was associated with evil and particularly with the devil; European folk tales commonly refer to
nettles and thistles as the "devil's vegetables." This satanic association is implicit in Troilus and Criseyde (I, 11.946 ff) where the "foule netle, rough and thikke" is thrown in relief against the rose, "swoot and smothe and softe"; the "wedes wikke" are juxtaposed with "holsom herbes." Since the rose is traditionally Mary and more often Christ, its contrary, the 'foul nettle,' may well be satanic. Dunbar's "The Thistle and the Rose" retains just this association for the nettle--another waste weed with stinging leaf-hairs--when he calls it "vyle and full of vyce" (l. 137).

Symbols, like Dijon rouge, are best when aged in the old tradition. The goat was a conventional emblem which men of the fourteenth century would not have to reflect upon to identify; so were the fox and the ram. All were devils, devil surrogates, or familiars at the least, because of the fox's deceptiveness and the licentiousness of goats and rams. Now, the Yeoman, in his diatribe against alchemists in the abstract but really meaning his alchemist specifically, says that "for al the world they stynken as a goot;/ Hir savour is so rammyssh and so hoot . . . ." (ll. 886-87).
Not to be outdone by Crisseyde or the allegorists, the Yeoman calls his Canon a "fox" (l. 1080). If these animal allusions stood alone not much weight could be put on them, especially since the unmerciful overloading of the lone "fox" reference in Troilus, but in addition to all the other allusions and references and explicit descriptions of the devil, they are significant.

Chaucer's concept of the Canon as both symbol and man has forced him to use language that is seemingly paradoxical, if not contradictory. The swindling alchemist is "this feendly wrecche," but his Yeoman wishes him ill by bidding "the foule feend hym fecche" (ll. 1158-59). Can the Canon be both a fiend and yet not a fiend? I think so if we conceive of him as a man who is one of Satan's own (a fiend), but not Satan himself (the fiend). This ambiguity of identity runs throughout the Canon's Yeoman's Tale, enabling us to see in the Canon man and symbol, the concrete and the abstract simultaneously.

Were Chaucer's friends at all the bright people we would like his associates to have been, they would have recognized that the Canon was a fraud by several signs other
than his cheating the priest. No philosopher, regardless of
the acuteness of his poverty, would ever reveal the secret
of the Stone for any amount of money. The Canon's readiness
to talk gives him away. So does his itinerant life and his
use of weird materials in the opus: "poudres diverse, asshes,
donge, pisce, and cley," and "cley maad with hors or mannes
heer" (ll. 807, 812). Such materials appear to have been
used often enough, but they were a sure sign of a hoax.
Ricardus Anglicus once condemned the "trash" with which
many of his acquaintances commonly worked, for if they
sowed filth then they would reap it. The same contempt for
the workers in garbage is expressed by Bacon, or whoever was
the author of The Mirror of Alchemy. That author was sur-
prised that a prudent man would "found his intention" on
"animal and vegetable substances which are remote," especially
when minerals were available. No self-respecting alchemical
philosopher would propound his art in such terms anyway un-
less he were employing a simile.

The essence of the Canon's character is deception.
He is a liar, dissimulator, and cheat; sly, evasive, and
deceitful. He seems to be a holy man but is actually
satanic. He seems to be a philosopher but really is a de­
based alchemist. What he is not, he pretends to be; what
he is, he tries to conceal. Notice how often Chaucer
exploits the disparity between appearance and reality in
the Tale: 'All things that shine like gold are not gold'
(l. 962), platitudinizes the Yeoman, hauling out an old
maxim which has possible alchemical meanings as well.
"He that semeth the wiseste," the Yeoman continues, "is
moost fool, when it cometh to the preef;/ And he that
semeth trewest is a theef" (ll. 967-69). Though the ex­
periments "concluden everemoore amys," when the workers
meet for their post-mortems "every man semeth a Salomon"
(ll. 957, 961). The Canon's whole life is a lie, as we see
at once, but he lies most outrageously in his most reassur­
ing oath to the priest:

Trouthe is a thyng that I wol evere kepe
Unto that day in which that I shal crepe
Into my grave, and ellis God forbede.
Bileveth this as siker as your Crede.
God thanke I, and in good tyme be it sayd,
That ther was nevere man yet yvele apayd
For gold ne silver that he to me lente,
Ne nevere falshede in myn herte I mente.

(ll. 1044-51)

The vow has several ironies besides that of an arch liar
swearing that truth is something he will honor to the grave, else God forbid! He wants it to be said, not necessarily because the deed followed the word, that no man who ever lent him gold or silver was repaid in evil. The subtlety of the Canon and the irony of Chaucer! And the Canon always makes the point to swear or to vow "by God."

Importantly, and not coincidentally therefore, "God" occurs as often in the Canon's Yeoman's Tale as "feend" and "devel." For here is another irony on Chaucer's part and yet another slyness of the Canon's: the nature of demons is deception, and, being essentially evil, everything about them is opposed to the good, the true, and the beautiful. And Chaucer, who revels in irony, continually puts oaths, references, and allusions to God on his fallen characters' lips.

More than thirty such oaths are sworn in the Canon's Yeoman's Prologue and Tale. The Canon's first words to the pilgrims are the most ominous of all: "God save ... this joly compaignye" (l. 583). They will need His grace. The pilgrim Chaucer's reply is equally important dramatically, for it is the initial response of any of the pilgrims to
the strangers: "Freend, for thy warvnyn God yeve thee good chaunce" (l. 593). The Yeoman thereafter bids God help him (ll. 641, 715, 740, 996, 1073, 1274), that God amend "it" (l. 651), invokes God's displeasure (l. 665) and then His authority (ll. 723, 839), swears to Him (l. 865), and bids for God's love (l. 1176). Most of the invocations, by far, are bids for God's aid, whose forgiveness he will sorely need after seven years' service with a devil.

The evil Canon of the Yeoman's story swears by God, Christ, Mary, and 'on his faith' nearly as often: nine times. Only once does he seem to give thanks to God, and that in the already quoted passage in which he lies most outrageously about his devotion to the truth. Nearly every other mention of a holy name is used to invoke authority to support his own acts, words, or life. 'God forbid' he should not keep the truth until he dies (l. 1046), and that he should not "doon a maistrie" (l. 1060). In the name of Christ he begins to "wexe a philosofre" (l. 1122), doubly ironic because of alchemy's sacred nature and the Lapis-Christus parallel. The silver "produced" in the fake experiment will prove good, by the Canon's "feith" (l. 1334);
the recipe is expensive, "by oure Lady" (l. 1354); for it the priest may pay forty pounds, "so God me save" (l. 1361); but he should control his tongue about the formula or, "by God" (l. 1372), other men will slay the Canon in envy. The Canon's other oath bids the priest bend down and see the silver in the crucible, again "by God" (l. 1327), and he swears by "Seint Gile" (l. 1185). Not by accident are nearly all the Canon's oaths used to invoke some sainted name to give an appearance of truth and verity to his lying reality. Again Chaucer proves himself a master of irony.

The priest's oaths are fewer. And if we analyze his character by his swearing, he comes off several degrees better than the Canon—however great those degrees are—but not so well as the Yeoman. Twice the priest asks for aid: for Mary's, that the Canon perform his transmutation (l. 1062), and for God's, that the Canon be spared envious men (l. 1375). Only once does he use God's name in a blessing (l. 1243), and twice as an oath almost without any realization that he is using God's name vainly (ll. 1351, 1357). The Canon is essentially evil; the priest's wickedness lies in neglecting his office and misusing the name of
the holy. He is not the embodiment of evil as is his duper; the priest's mortal evil is his greed, his stupidity, and his inability to accept the condition of his vows.

The last fifteen lines mention "God" and "Christ" four times, but that is to be expected in a retraction of this sort, regardless whom we take to be the speaker, Chaucer or the Yeoman.

Perhaps one more point needs to be mentioned in connection with oaths. They seem to occur most frequently just before and immediately after the rigged opus. Before the experiment, while the Canon persuades the priest of his honesty and knowledgeability, within twenty-seven lines five oaths are sworn and the Yeoman makes reference to 'Christ's people' (ll. 1046-73). Just after the work is completed, while the Canon is setting his price and the priest is in a frenzy of greed, oaths are sworn five times within twenty-one lines (ll. 1351-72). Again, this is no accident; Chaucer is intentionally ironic at just the most effective dramatic moment.
Footnotes—Chapter III

1Herz, 234.


6Taylor, Alchemists, p. 104.

7Cited by Jung, p. 248.

8Roger Bacon, Mirror of Alchemy, 1947.

9Concordance, s.v. "God."
CHAPTER IV

OF ANTICHRISTES MEN AM I

I have tried to show that the Canon had, to use Muscatine's words to my best advantage, something of the "infernal" about him. But what is the precise nature of his infernal character? Who, in a word, is he? Satan is not intended; he is nearly always depicted in medieval art and described in medieval literature with a bestial body, cloven hoofs, and horns. The Canon might be a demon rather than the chief devil; however, according to the Friar's Tale (ll. 1457 ff), demons had the power to shift shapes, so with this ability why did the alchemist choose such "sluttish" attire when its only purpose would be to give him away?

Perhaps the Canon is one of the followers of Antichrist. The Antichrist was of the kingdom of demons, though he was not one of Satan's followers in the way we usually think of devils. He was, according to Adso's
*Libellus de Antichristo*, born of a woman and the Devil and he would get his power to deceive from Satan. *Hippolytus* thought that the Antichrist would come in the form of a man; his authority was probably II Thessalonians ii which warns of false prophets and the embodiment of disobedience, and I John ii.22 which damns the Antichrist as the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Antichrist is not the Devil, wrote Jerome, but "one of men" in whom Satan will reside bodily. In all these passages men are clearly intended. Still the Canon's identity could not be certified on such evidence.

The dramatic situation of the Canon and his Yeoman may be more revealing. Neither man is part of the original group of pilgrims; the pair rides up to the column, but when Harry Bailly's questions prod the Yeoman to confess his master's spiritual impotence, the Canon gallops off. The action is remarkably close to the figure of I John ii.18-19 which identifies the Antichrists:

> My dear sons, the last hour has come; and as you have heard that Antichrist is coming, now many of his works have been accomplished, and from these we know that the hour has come. They have gone out from us, but they are not ours, for if they had been ours they would have, indeed, remained with us, but it is clear that they are not all from us.
The Antichrists are manifest because they have departed the community of Christians; had he been Christian the Canon would have remained with the pilgrims. And as it was the "last hour" for John, so it is for the Canterbury travelers as they near their holy city.

The legend of the Antichrist is at one with those of innumerable rulers of chaos and adversaries of God. Babylonian Tiamat, ruler of the sea of chaos, once rose up against the gods of heaven and earth, but was eventually suppressed by Marduk, chief Babylonian deity and god of the land. The myth was transmitted to the Assyrian Semites, and possibly by them to the Jews who wrote the Old Testament. Especially in apocryphal writings, prototypes of the Antichrist appear in Jewish literature: Levi, Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs, and the Ascension of Isaiah. Belial ("the worthless one") emerges as the prince of this world who shall be slain by the Messiah in the last days. Paul acknowledges that Belial (or "Beliar") is the enemy in II Cor. vi. 15: How can Christ agree with Beliar? What has a believer in common with an unbeliever?

Many of Daniel's prophecies were written with the
Syrian Antiochus in mind; later writers thought the Antichrist was another tyrant, whoever was most oppressive in their time. Nero was for many years so named. What was a political prophecy in early testamental writings became in II Thess. ii, a work crucial to the evolution of the Antichrist legend, a purely abstract conception. The tyrant who opposes God and His people becomes the seductive creature who commands worship which should be properly afforded the Divine by working false signs and wonders. He is the false Messiah, hence the opponent of Christ and not of God. The Antichrist is everything that Christ is not, and he denies all that Christ asserts. We have already seen that John (I John ii. 18, 22) condemns those who deny the divinity of Christ as Antichrists. I John iv. 3 warns of the false prophets who have gone out into the world; they do not acknowledge that Jesus comes from God. The faithful had heard that Antichrist was coming, and already it was in the world. This denial of Christ is the mark of the imposter (II John 7).

By the second century an anti-Jewish caste pervaded apocalyptic thought. John V. 43 quoted the Messiah
attacking the Jews who refused to accept Him as their savior: He had come in His Father's name and they refused to accept Him; if someone else came in his own name, they would accept him. The Antichrist would come from the Old Testament tribe of Dan: Revelation vii. 5 ff does not mention Dan among the tribes to be saved at Armageddon.

To seduce the masses into becoming his worshippers, he will be full of power and pretended signs and wonders (II Thes. ii. 9), bringing down fire from the skies and imparting life to an animal's statue so that all may worship it (Rev. xiii. 2, 13-16). The Jews who believe in him will help him rebuild the Temple, and for their service he will put a mark upon their right hands or on their foreheads (Rev. xiii. 16). Finally, in the bloom of his arrogance and power, he will enter God's sanctuary—presumably the Temple in Jerusalem—and there seat himself, proclaiming that he is God (II Thes. ii. 4).

Such was the basic concept of the Antichrist until Joachim of Flora, that most unorthodox churchman, made him a secular catchword. Whether the years through which Joachim lived were tense with eschatological expectations
and that he simply heightened those expectations, or whether his particular philosophy and personal appeal created an awareness of the long-prophesied Second Coming, is difficult to say. What is certain is that Joachim greatly influenced not only his age, but centuries to come, and despite the safe arrival of several predicted "judgment days," Joachim's forecast of the final age of the Antichrist was seriously considered as late as the sixteenth century.

Joachim argued that history fell into three periods. For him the Old Testament age was analogous to that of the New: I Cor. xiii.10 gives a rather vague and far-fetched hint of this—and Joachim reasoned that a third, and final age was to come. The first period, corresponding to the Old Testament, was that of the Father; the second age, parallel to the New Testament, was that of the Son; and the age to come would be that of the Holy Ghost, when the long hoped-for conversion of the Jews and Saracens would become a reality. Thus did Joachim reconcile Old and New Testaments. Each of these ages was to last forty generations—1,260 years, the number undoubtedly coming from Rev. xi.13 which describes the duration of life of
Jehovah's witnesses, in turn from Daniel vii. 25 and xii. 7 which gives it as the length of the reign of God's adversary. The first age was to be dominated by Law, the second by Grace, and the final by Spirit and Love. 7

Each age was to be preceded by a lesser Antichrist, the mysticus, whose deviltry and turmoil would be limited. Only at the end of the world would man see the Great Antichrist, the ultimus. Joachim is not without Scriptural support here; I John ii. 18 and II John 7 refer to many Antichrists, the liars and impostors, while I John iv. 3 seems to imply only one. Revelation has two: the animal with seven heads and ten horns with blasphemous titles upon them, with a body much like a leopard, feet like a bear's and mouth like a lion's (xiii. 1-2); and his precursor, with two horns like a lamb, but with a dragon's voice (xiii. 11).

Joachim's unorthodoxy soon ran foul of the Church, though he eventually became powerful enough to leave the Cistercians and found his own order. But his trademark, his eschatologically oriented theology, soon became public domain, subject to a thousand uses and abuses. All of his
enemies—political, social, as well as ecclesiastical, were called Antichrists. The charge resounded in all quarters, much as did "Philistine" in the last century and "Communist" in this. Logically, if everyone were the Antichrist, no one actually was, and soon the charge lost potency. Certainly, after 1260, the year the world was to end, Antichrist came to mean much more than the beast who was to come before the end of the world; his power as an apocalyptic figure diminished.

In the fourteenth century, then, "Antichrist" could evoke two responses because he descended from two closely related traditions: he was the apocalyptic precursor of Doomsday and, in popular usage, a human enemy of the Church. Robert Worth Frank thought that by the fourteenth century the Antichrist meant not so much the end of the world as an indictment of evil churchmen. His appearance in Piers Plowman was an attack on present-day evils, and such is usually the tactic of apocalyptic literature.

However, we cannot get rid of the apocalyptic Antichrist that easily. Mathias von Janow declared in the fourteenth century that the Antichrist was so exhaustively
discussed that should he appear even the smallest child
would recognize him. Antichrist plays of Tegernsee (1160)
and Zurich (1353) kept the tradition alive dramatically,
as did the Chester plays which characterized Christ's
traditional adversary vividly. Selecting dates for the
world's end was a thriving avocation; Jean de Roquetaillade,
one of the busier forecasters, chose 1365, 1378, and then
1388 as likely dates for Armageddon. He was intently
followed, and as each date arrived and passed safely into
eternity he moved the last day further back. The popular
Thomas Wimbledon of Merton sermonized widely on the Anti-
christ's imminent arrival in the year of Chaucer's death,
1400. Vincent of Beauvais and St. Thomas wrote about
Antichrist, Wycliff and Purvey attacked the papacy as an
institution of Antichrist, and the Franciscans said that
Pope John XXII was a heretic and the first Antichrist of
Revelation; Armageddon was at hand, after which the Friars
would reconvert the world for Christ. Seen from the other
side of the altar, the Friars in *Piers Plowman* (another
apocalypse of the fourteenth century) welcome Antichrist
(B, XX).
Chaucer’s century had more cause than most to believe in the imminent end of corporeality. Matthew had warned (xxiv. 6 ff) that the harbinger would be wars and rumors of wars, nation rising against nation, famine, earthquakes, and persecution by the heathen; men would betray and hate one another, false prophets would appear, and man's love grow cold. Revelation xvi warned of plagues, and the fourteenth century was racked with epidemics of the Black Death. All came to pass in the fourteenth century, with the possible exception of earthquakes, and more: the peasants revolted in 1381, the papacy was divided, and Wycliff, as we shall see, attacked the Church. John of Bassigny divined for his own time plague, most of the earth shattered, uprisings, floods, earthquakes, the pope unseated—the usual apocalyptic catalogue; for a time a good pope would guide Christendom by peaceful waters, but he would soon be overturned by false prophets, the Antichrist, and the earth’s obliteration.¹⁰

Saturn and Jupiter passed from an airy triplicitas to that of water, Mars left Scorpio, and the moon entered Taurus in 1365; this momentous conjunction signalized to
John of Eschenden terrible events. He thought the destruction of the Saracens might be implied, and the birth of a new sect under Mars and Scorpio which would be by nature wicked, cruel, and deceitful. In 1358, "a certain minorite" within the papal court who Thorndike guesses might be John of Rupescissa, foresaw slaughters, tempests, floods, and the inevitable coming of Antichrist, all to descend upon mankind in the year of that terrible conjunction, 1365. Arnold of the Newe Toun, whom the Yeoman quotes at the end of his Tale, earlier had written of the world's end and the coming of Antichrist, an imminent event discussed also in the final chapter of another of Chaucer's sources, Vincent of Beauvais' *Speculum Naturale*. On the continent Jean Gerson wailed at the gates the same fateful warnings. The Antichrist might well have been expected by a people who knew of him as well as of an often-heard folktale: in the fourteenth century the Antichrist meant an enemy of the Church, but he had by no means lost his association with Armageddon.

Bousset has compiled from numerous commentaries and apocryphal sources a list of wonders that would mark the time of the Antichrist, and it is worth reviewing both to
show how the actual events of the fourteenth century did appear to herald the Last Judgment, and to see some of these apocalyptic signs in the Canon's Yeoman's Tale. The Antichrist's advent will cause the sun to rise at night (in some versions from the West) and the blood-red moon during the day. Like Christ he will perform miracles, but to deceive his followers: the dead will be raised (though several texts deny him this power), lepers cured, the palsied lifted, the blind will see, and he will have the power to exorcise demons. They will not be genuine miracles, but false ones which merely deceive the senses. Like the Messiah, his adversary will have (false) ministers and apostles who will roam the earth to recruit followers—so say Hippolytus and Adso. Not only the Jews but all peoples will be seduced and will flock to his banner. A time of extended drought will come, and with it a great famine. The faithful will be persecuted, and they will flee into the desert. Those whom the Antichrist seduces will bear his mark on their foreheads or their right hands, though only Pseudo-Ephrem, described it: the "mark of the serpent." Enoch and Elijah will come and preach against the
Antichrist, but few will listen, and he will slay them, as usually told, in the streets of Jerusalem. As the very end approaches, the Jews will be converted, the days shortened, and the faithful in the desert will be delivered from the hosts of Antichrist by a divine miracle. Then will Christ come to vanquish His enemy.

The Chester Antichrist plays, "The Prophets and Antichrist" and "The Coming of Antichrist," dramatized this tradition for Chaucer's contemporaries. In the earlier play Daniel sees four beasts in a vision, but is interested only in the last. It has, like the beast of Revelation, ten horns; one horn, however, is greater than the others and has a mouth and eyes. These details are not in Scripture. The expositor announces that the Antichrist shall rule for three-and-one-half years, and Daniel predicts that the beast shall slay three kings, converting seven. John adds the detail of the two witnesses who will come again for 1,260 days, and he foresees that they will be slain by the beast in the holy city of the Crucifixion—Jerusalem. The expositor then notes that Antichrist shall have the devil's power; he is thus not the devil.
In "The Coming of Antichrist" the adversary at once announces to the audience that he is the promised Messiah, Christ. First, he must rebuild the Temple; for assistance he seeks to win four kings to his cause. Them he tells that he will raise the dead and turn trees upside-down so that the fruit will grow on their roots. The dead rise, Antichrist dies and rises again, and the Kings swear allegiance to him, for which he promises the wealth of cities and castles. The Jews are his people, he says, and he will show them pity. Enoch and Elijah come, and discuss how to defeat Antichrist; they challenge him and when the dead whom he has caused to rise cannot eat blessed bread offered them by Elijah, Antichrist is undone and the kings once more come into the fold. Michael descends to the stage and kills the Antichrist, who is carried away by demons from Hell.

Chaucer's Canon has certain points of similarity with this concept of an apocalyptic Antichrist. He will be able to fool most of the people most of the time with his power to simulate miracles; the Canon simulates transmutation, itself a parallel of the miracle of transsubstantiation. In Revelation, Christ was to reign for a thousand
years; in oral tradition, the Antichrist's majority was for a similar period, despite Revelation's specification of forty-two months (xiii.5) or 1,260 days (xi.3). Chaucer has his Yeoman exclaim that though he lived for a thousand years (l. 978), no man could describe the Canon's falseness. Another tradition we have mentioned has the followers of Antichrist known by a mark upon the forehead, though that mark is never described in Scripture; the Canon, we have already noted, wears a burdock, a plant from the devil's garden, under his hood so that it hangs down over his forehead, to keep his head from heat.

The Antichrist is to go to the holy city, Jerusalem, and there seat himself upon the throne of God. The pilgrims meet this Canon on the road to their holy city, Canterbury, "the hooly blisful martir for to seke." But the road to the city of God can never be paved with metallic gold and silver, and the riches which the Canon proffers again recall the gifts of wealth by which Antichrist will seduce Christ's people. An early Irish apocalyptic account also mentions gold and silver, but in a peculiar detail. The Antichrist is born at the end of the world with a grey protuberance
in the middle of his forehead on which is placed his lone eye. He turns trees upside-down and puts fruit on the roots. These details occur elsewhere, but now we learn that he will make gold and silver out of animal dung and other useless things.\textsuperscript{16} We may think, once more, of our Canon and his experiments with "asshes, donge, pisse, and cley" (l. 807).

Yet, another Antichrist plagued the world of the fourteenth century: that of which Frank speaks, the immediate enemy of the Church, a human ally of sin, and a warning against present-day evils. We get this concept in \textit{The Romance of the Rose}; even in that portion which we know Chaucer translated. From this teeming womb of medieval motifs he got much of his conception for the Pardoner, and from this same matrix he may well have conceived some part of the Canon as well. Fals-Semblant, no less of a human than the other character-abstractions, in a rare moment of truth allows that "I am a fals traitour;/ God juggled me for a theef trichour" (ll. 6307-08). Enoch of "The Coming of Antichrist" calls him a thief (p. 410). Again, like the Canon, "unlyk is my word to my dede"
(l. 6360), and on the matter of appearance, Fals-Semblant brags of his shift-shifting prowess: sometimes he is a prelate, sometimes a chaplain, "now monk, now chanoun, now bailly" (ll. 6328-31). He is not Satan, yet Love calls him a "devil" (ll. 6223, 6797), though the most damning evidence comes from his own mouth when he admits to membership in the band of Antichrist:

Of Anticristes men am I
Of which that Crist seith openly,
They have abit of hoolynesse,
And lyven in such wikkednesse. (ll. 7009-12)

These lines prove that Chaucer knew of the popular Antichrist, he whose followers were of his kingdom and yet were mortal, and who were Antichrist's men because they lied and deceived, not necessarily because they heralded the world's destruction. These lines show also that one of Antichrist's followers could properly be called a "devel," and that though they lived in wickedness, they had the "habit" of holyness. Outwardly, the men of Antichrist seemed like children, full of goodness and pity, but inwardly they were greedy wolves (ll. 7013-16). And
finally, in lines that almost seem to have anticipated the
Yeoman's Canon, Fals-Semblant arrogantly claims:

For thou shalt never, for nothing,
Kon known aright be her clothing
The traitours fulle of trecherie,
But thou her werkis can aspie. (11. 7085-88)

This degraded Antichrist who no longer comes before
Doomsday but is a mortal ally of sin and an enemy of the
Church, is the image we have in Wycliff's famous attack,
De Christo et suo Adversario Antichristo. The adversary
is the pope, who is compared unfavorably in several ways
to the Scriptural Jesus. Our Lord clung to poverty, while
the pope accumulates wealth. Christ upheld the truth; the
pope spreads falsehood in writings, words, and in his life.
Jesus was humble, the pope proud; one sought to save souls,
the other damns and excommunicates them. The Son of God
and his disciples went out into the country to preach,
while the pope remains at home and gathers in lucre from
all over the world. Christ pleaded for peace and brother-
hood, but the pope leads armies into battle. And so on.
The picture here is not at all apocalyptic; Doomsday, the
Last Judgment, or the terrible afflictions associated with
it are not even mentioned.\textsuperscript{17} Wycliff's Antichrist is merely a man who is in many ways contrary to Jesus. Specifically, he is an enemy of Christ's Church within the Church.

Such is the concept of the Antichrist Chaucer seems to have in the \textit{Canon's Yeoman's Tale}. If the Canon were the apocalyptic beast of Scripture, we would expect the entire entourage: kings, witnesses, and portents. What we get is a man with many of the attributes of the Antichrist of popular legend, but not a simple equation. If this Canon is the Antichrist of Revelation, what are we to make of the Yeoman? Obviously, such an interpretation has too many difficulties. We are left, then, with one of Antichrist's men who is given a few supernatural qualities by his Yeoman, so that Chaucer may tell us who the master is. The Canon's "infinite falseness," for instance, or his description as "the root of all treachery" should be read as verbal hints to his identity. The Yeoman's language, as we have seen repeatedly, leaps from the merely physical to the symbolic throughout the \textit{Tale}. His words mediate continually between the concrete (the Canon as alchemist and one of Antichrist's men) and the abstract (the
apocalyptic Antichrist), so that the human Canon is perpetually shape-shifting into something beyond his humaness, the spirit of Antichrist. The Yeoman's confession implies that he, at least, is not of the gang of Antichrist. In the end, he achieves a social resolution by rejoining the Christian community. As a man, then, the Yeoman has been the unwitting dupe of the Canon. He knew that his master was a fraud and still he remained with him, but his crime is assisting a swindler, not the direct and immediate overthrow of the Church and the destruction of Christ's people. When the Yeoman tells of his lord's satanic nature, Chaucer is speaking directly to his audience in the tongue of his "lewed" persona who is unaware of the full value of what he is saying.

This malevolent Canon tempts a priest, and that cleric's submission to his greedy impulses is a major part of the story. As in Piers Plowman, where the Friars welcome Antichrist, the Church in fourteenth century England is shown wallowing in its own convetousness. If gold rust, what shall iron do? The Canon's Yeoman's Tale shows us.
For at least one reader, then, the Canon's Yeoman's Tale is no mere afterthought and no mere product of personal revenge. The Canon and his Yeoman had to be dramatized riding up to the pilgrims—the Christian community seeking Christ—to tell us who they were. And, if Chaucer was swindled, by William Shuchirch or anyone else, it does not matter to our understanding of the Tale, for in it we are confronted not with Chaucer's personal but with his spiritual enemy. Consequently, it is not very important to know whether Chaucer knew alchemy well or not; he knew it or of it well enough to know that its perverters were a kind of blasphemer. Finally, Chaucer has not here written a "naturalistic" Tale which stands alone among the Canterbury Tales for its lack of ulterior meaning; the symbolism of the Canon's Yeoman's Tale is executed with richness and skill. It is one of the very few works in which a character can be both man and symbol at the same time, without the aspect of one conflicting with or nullifying the other.

Problems still remain in this troublesome Tale. For one thing, what should we make of the Yeoman's denial in line 1090 that the Canon of his story is not the same
Canon who has been his saddle companion? Fortunately, R. G. Baldwin has solved this problem in a recent article far more persuasively than I could have; consequently, I will use his argument. If Chaucer did intend to create two Canons for this Tale, he has unnecessarily complicated the plot. Were two clerics intended, one could easily have been a priest, a monk, or a friar; why a canon, unless the two were really one? Still, the Yeoman says that they are two and he is an honorable man. To this Baldwin points out what we should have recognized long ago— that Pars Prima is an admission of failure on the part of the Yeoman, but that Pars Secunda is a confession of dishonesty. Naturally, the Yeoman would not want to be associated with a dishonest man, while he would not be morally culpable for his alchemical failures. Thus, he denies that the swindling alchemist is the one the pilgrims have seen, because if they thought that he had been with a swindler for seven years they would realize that he must have been a willing accomplice for at least part of that time.18 No matter how much the Yeoman denies, he has already given himself away by describing "both" canons with the same
demonic adjectives and by injecting the same amount of venom into both. The pilgrim Chaucer observes that this Canon, like the guilty man in Cato's proverb, paranoidally suspects that everyone is talking about him; if he is not the Canon in part two of the Tale, and if the Yeoman is telling the truth; why his overwhelming sense of guilt? For the swindling Canon to be another, rather than a concealed surrogate for the one who rides up to the pilgrims, is a dramatic anti-climax which we would not expect from Chaucer's maturity.

The 'worshipful canons religious' of line 992 need not drain an excess of our energies either. The Canon's Yeoman's Tale may well at first have been written specifically for presentation to some religious house and never completely adapted to the Canterbury Tales; the Knight's Tale and possibly the Shipman's Tale were early works later adapted for use by pilgrims. Certainly the remark does not fit the situation of the pilgrims, but Chaucer's admonition to the canons that they beware a Judas in their midst once more suggests an Antichrist. Lumiansky is not troubled by the passage at all; he thinks it simply a rhetorical device to emphasize a point: the Physician
addresses "ye fadres and ye modres" (l. 93) and the Nun's Priest speaks to "ye lords" (l. 3325). No fathers, mothers, lords, or canons need literally be present.19

Finally, we have the difficulty of the last fifty-four lines; whose voice do we hear? Some believe it is Chaucer's and others, I have already mentioned, think it still the Yeoman's expressing his disillusion. I vote with the former party, but for a reason other than the obvious change of tone and attitude: the Yeoman has already made his apologia.

As the action of the Tale nears the final curtain, the tone of the Yeoman is still that of an outraged servant to seven wasted years. His story is done, but still he rails against the priest:

Lo, thus byjaped and bigiled was he!
Thus maketh he his introduccioun,
To brynge folk to hir destruccioun. (ll. 1385-87)

At this point, and not at line 1428, the tone changes, and the Yeoman's amplification, his philosophical summary, begins. Note, in just the few lines below, how the lines
are suddenly more relaxed, more temperate, and how the at-
tack shifts from vituperation to maxim:

Considereth, sires, how that, in eche estaat,
Betwixe men and gold ther is debaat
So ferforth that unnethes is ther noon. (ll. 1388-90)

When we finally come to that section which Baum calls the
postscript, the tone does not change--it is still fairly
mild and calm--but the whole attitude toward alchemy
alters. These last fifty-four lines are not the Yeoman's
amplification; he has already had his philosophical say.
Now it is Chaucer's turn.
Footnotes--Chapter IV

1French Tradition, p. 216.


3Bousset, pp. xii ff, 13 ff.


5Bousset, pp. 153 ff.

6Hastings, s.v. "Antichrist."

7Morton W. Bloomfield, Joachim of Flora, Traditio, XIII (1957), 264 ff.


10Thorndike, III, 313-314.

11Thorndike, III, 340-342.

12Thorndike, III, 353.

13Thorndike, II, 460, 842.

14Bousset, pp. 175-226.


19 Lumiansky, Of Sondry Folk, p. 228.
CHAPTER V

THE NUN WHO ALSO CAME

The Second Nun's Tale is at the opposite end of the literary pole from its fragment-mate, at least from the view of the academic reader. It has fooled no one, is as guileless as the Nun herself, and what problems of understanding it presents are merely technical and minor. Moreover, while many think it the most spirited telling of the life of St. Cecilia, very few find it interesting. Such is the taste of our times; we find (to our shame) that little is duller than an exemplum of virtue, unless it is virtue itself. The Second Nun's Tale exemplifies both exemplum and virtue.

The Tale is simple and yet not so simple. At least one writer has questioned whether Chaucer ever intended to create such a character as the Second Nun. She is very briefly sketched, so briefly that Manly criticized Chaucer
for not conceiving her more clearly.\textsuperscript{1} Nothing in the text suggests to Norman Eliason that a 'Second Nun' was to be the teller of the Tale--except the manuscript assignation in titles and rubrics.\textsuperscript{2} Even the manuscripts differ in their rubrics: some have only "Nun's Tale" or something similarly indefinite. If, then, the life of St. Cecilia was not designated for a "second" nun, it may have been Chaucer's choice for the second Tale of the prioress. Later scribes could have been fooled by the rubrics they found on the early manuscripts, and they subsequently created a character to match those rubrics, and their misconception, the Second Nun, as the teller. The "chapeleyne" (l. 164) then, who Manly is sure is the Second Nun (p. 220), may have been the creation of error.

In any event, our reading is not much affected because both Nuns are virtuous, pious women whose ecclesiastical positions rather than personalities are contrasted with that of the Canon's Yeoman, and whose Tale--in either case the Tale is unaffected--is set off against a story of greed and evil. St. Cecilia (not the teller), is crucial to the Tale.
Because the Second Nun's Tale is so simple and so guileless, little effort seems to have been expended on its "interpretation." Claude Jones is one of the very few men who have seen in it more than just a traditional saint's life.

He reads in the Second Nun's Tale a "perfect example" of the de Sanctus type of sermon in both form and content. A de Sanctus would normally be preached on November 22, the usual celebration of Cecilia's natale. This sermon has four parts, which Jones sees as corresponding to the following lines of the Second Nun's Tale: Theme, ll. 1-28; Invocation, ll. 29-84; Definition, ll. 85-119; and Body, usually with a history and an account of the location of the relics, ll. 120-553.3

Most likely Chaucer's life of St. Cecile was written as an independent poem, for Chaucer seems to tell us as much in the Prologue to The Legend of Good Women: "And maad the lyf also of Seint Cecile" (F 426). As with the Knight's Tale Chaucer later adapted an earlier poem to one of the pilgrims. Chaucer's adaptation may be faulty because of the Nun's reference to herself as an "unworthy sone of Eve" (l. 62), though Skeat thought "sone" might
still be feminine in Chaucer's time, and others point out that it may mean "child" of Eve, in the way in which we are all God's children, or our Father's sons. The Tale had been in circulation for some fifteen or twenty years before it was copied down in the Canterbury Tales manuscript, and scribes may have gotten "sone" incorrectly; some amended it to "doghter of Eve" despite the violence thus done the meter.

"Simple and uncomplicated" are the cliches that have arisen concerning this Tale, but the history of the legend of St. Cecilia is one of the most obscure and complex of hagiographies. Its study by the distinguished Bollandist Father Delehaye merits mention because it is so seldom cited in the usual Chaucerian sources. The historical chances are that no sainted martyr named Cecile ever lived, and that her legend, as we now have it, is pure fiction. Such facts would never bother the pious, nor should they, for saint's legends are not history and were not intended to be, but are documents of a religious character whose sole aim is edification.

An early writer of the passion of Saint Cecile took
some phrases and his plot from Victor de Vite's *History of the Persecution of the Vandals* (c. 486). Victor's original story was of two slaves, Martinianus and Maxima, who after a few years of service were pressured by their master, a Vandal chief, to marry him. Martinianus was quite willing to serve in the master's bedroom, but Maxima had sworn herself to Christ to maintain her virginity. The owner persisted, but the outcome was that Martinianus was converted along with her three brothers, and Maxima, her converter, entered a nunnery to take holy orders.6

The basic outlines of the legend as we have it today can still be seen in Victor's simple story. Nowhere in the original do we find the rest of the cast of characters who assist Cecilia in her martyrdom for they, husband and all, are later additions. The confusion about Cecile's legend seems to have come from two caskets containing "Urbans," one found in the cemetery of Calliste and the other in the Pretextat--both on the Appian Way. Delehaye believes7 that Cecile, who was probably from a wealthy and influential family, was afforded the privilege of burial near Pope Urban in the catacombs of Calliste, and as a
result drew attention. Later pilgrims to the vault of this Urban saw her name on a near-by tomb and through the legendizing process known so well to folklorists, gave her the aspects of martyrdom and virginity which they borrowed from the common stock of saintly folk motifs. The likelihood that such a martyr ever lived is lessened because neither Ambrose, Jerome, nor Prudence ever wrote of such a person, although all of them praised the virgin Saint Agnes.

The legend, even the existence of a Saint Cecile seems fairly sure the work of a pious hagiographer. The other characters in her drama—Tiburce, Valerian, Maxime, even Almachius—were all appropriated from other times and other places only to give Cecilia a world to conquer. Tiburce, Valerian, and Maxime were probably martyrs who in any event were certainly buried in the cemetery of the Pretextat on the Appian Way. The Hieronymian Martyrology associated them with April 14th. How they became related to Cecile is not clear, but a "later error" brought them all together into a harmonious tale. How her relics came to be translated to the Pretextat during the papacy of Pascal I is
more turbid still, yet by this translation the legend was
given the appearance of historicity. Of the final major
actor, Almachius, almost nothing can be ascertained and
his very existence is the most doubtful element in this
mysterious legend.8

The legends of the saints are of two kinds: Panegyric
and Epic.9 After Constantine I made Christianity lawful
in the early fourth century, the Church came into the
great days of its power. Christianity was not only lawful
but respectable, even fashionable. On the corners men
could speak freely of the martyrs, and their relics began
to attract pilgrims. The Panegyric Passion, a eulogistic
sermon, was developed to inspire worshippers at the sites
of the martyr's relics, and to encourage the visitation of
pilgrims. The Epic legend seems to have come later and
is almost entirely artificial, a literary invention com-
posed long after the saint's demise which takes traditional
narrative elements and stock character types, and from them
molds a saint's life. The Passion of St. Cecilia is unmis-
takably one of these.

The Second Nun's Tale as Chaucer got it (probably
from the *Legenda Aurea*) is a fairly complete hagiographical motif index. We are presented with the "historical" edict which threatens the Christians with death. Almachius declares that whoever will not sacrifice to Jupiter shall have his head lopped off (ll. 364-366). The acts of the martyrs are thus made the more brave. For dramatic effect the martyr, as is St. Cecile, is brought face-to-face with the emperor or prefect, again to heighten the hero's courage. The magistrate is given a complete entourage of guards, executioners, and marshals; for this purpose Maximus is brought from the Pretextat to serve as officer of the guard for Almachius. Often the martyr converts the executioner and many other people besides, even immense crowds. Cecile converts Maximus early in the story, and crowds later from her bath of death, much as St. Callistrate lectured his friends from his prison cell.

The actual trials of the martyrs were short and uneventful. The suspect was brought before a magistrate and asked whether he was Christian or not. Torture was rarely used, not because it was "barbaric," but because it wasn't necessary: the martyrs seldom flinched from death for their faith. Christians usually confessed their faith
and were quickly and quietly taken away to be executed—again as rapidly as possible. The times were brutal enough, but the magistrates seem not to have been any more brutal than most men. The image of them in hagiographical documents, however, is largely fictitious; the necessity for drama and for emphasizing the saint's courage required that the judges be monsters of cruelty, impregnably stupid.

Many saints other than Cecile are brought before a beast of a magistrate, there to argue with him at great length and with great faith, though in vain, and to declare that the gods he worships are merely false idols. Often the martyr's speech to the judge takes the same form: a reply to his charges, a discussion of (Christian) doctrine, and a prayer.

Even in her death, Cecile is one with many of her fellow saints. Actually, torture was seldom used; that was a device of inquisition, not of punishment. But tortures enabled the saints to rise above the station of ordinary men, and to be the recipient of God's favor. Usually the martyrs are physically insensible and endure
great pain: Cecile is burned in a bath for three days and finally dispatched by three sword-strokes in the neck.

In other legends an angel or Christ Himself now comes to comfort the Hero: Cecile's angel appeared earlier and does not come to her in her last days. These miraculous elements are the trademark of Epic Passions, and occur again and again in the lives of the saints. The consecration of the private house (a foundation stone sacrifice) and the odd feature of the execution in a bath are not necessary to Cecile or to her martyrdom, yet they were popular motifs found elsewhere—in the lives of SS. Suzanne, John, Paul, Basilla, and Eugene.¹⁰

The usual dating of Chaucer's version is 1373 or 1374.¹¹ And though Gerould claimed that such dating was simply "impressionistic"¹² there is the persuasive testimony of Chaucer's own words in the Legend of Good Women, and several tags in the verse which betray some loose fat the more mature poet had exercised to muscle:

That is to seyn, by leveful bisynesse . . . (l. 5)
Yet seen men wel by resoun, doutelees . . . (l. 16)
She nevere cessed, as I writen fynde . . . (l. 124)
Sey hem right thus, as that I shal yow telle.
"Telle hem that I, Cecile, yow to hem sente . . .
(11. 175-76)

Other passages take an unconscionably long time to move a
tery short way:

And pryvely to hym she seyde anon,
"O sweete and wel biloved spouse deere,
Ther is a conseil, and ye wolde it heere,
Which that right fayn I wolde unto yow seye,
So that ye swere ye shul it nat biwreye."
(11. 143-47)

The Prologue to the Second Nun's Tale begins with a
four-stanza sermon condemning sloth, followed by an invo-
cation to Mary—a deft reworking of traditional ideas and
phrases—and an etymology of the saint's name. The Nun's
preamble attacking sloth is something of a curiosity; why
begin a life of St. Cecilia with a commentary on this
particular sin? To begin with, she is the opposite of
sloth, called the "bee" of Jacobus' Sermones Aurei. Then,
sloth was closely related to "undevotion" in the Middle
Ages, witness the lazy priest in Piers who knows of no
hymns of Our Lord or Our Lady. Tupper thought he saw
an irony here owing to the infamous reputation of monastics
during the Middle Ages for sloth. The regular orders
did have much spare time, perhaps too much; their light
duties and considerable means often allowed clerics to dabble in alchemy, for instance, and many medieval alchemists had taken holy vows. In contrast, Cecilia was noted for her "bisyness." Tupper conceives of her devotee prodding nuns perhaps less "busy." And then, idleness, after all, recalls Satan, whose easiest triumphs are over the idle:

That is to seyn, by leveful bisynesse,
Wel oghten we to doon al oure entente,
Lest that the feend thurgh ydelenesse us hente.

(ll. 5-7)

That should remind us of the *Canon's Yeoman's Tale*.

The invocation which follows is a cauldron of pious sentiments. It is fluidly blended of phrases and lines from Latin hymns, Dante (St. Bernard's prayer to the virgin in canto XXXIII of the *Paradiso*), St. Ambrose (who may have been the coiner of "palm of martyrdom"), the *Lay Folk's Prayer Book*, and several others. The invocation is not germane to our point here, and the thoroughness of earlier scholars makes it permissible simply to refer the reader to their works.

The only interpretive problem in the *Tale* proper concerns the two crowns. When Valerian returns to Cecilia's chamber after his conversion by Pope Urban, an angel gives
the newly-wedded couple "corones two" (l. 221), of roses and of lilies. Lowes, after years of the agonizing appraisals of other scholars, solved the problem of their meaning when he recognized that the lilies symbolized virginity and the roses martyrdom. Both are certainly central to the Second Nun's Tale. Valerian and Cecile remain chaste in marriage, and both give their corporeal lives for their faith; the virginity of both becomes their martyrdom. Later, scholars other than Lowes pointed out that the rose and the lily were the conventional symbols at once recognizable, thought J. M. Campbell, by anyone who knew patristic literature. But Lowes had led the way.
Footnotes--Chapter V

1Manly, Some New Light, p. 220.


4Summed up in Lumiansky, pp. 224 ff.


6Hippolyte Delehaye, Etude sur le Legendier Roman (Bruxelles, 1936), pp. 78-79.

7Delehaye, Etude, pp. 80-88.

8Delehaye, Etude, pp. 80-82.


10Delehaye, Les Passions, pp. 244-310.


13Frederick Tupper, "Chaucer and the Seven Deadly Sins," PMLA, XXIX (1914), 95, 98 ff, 106 n.

14"Chaucer's Sinners and Sins," JEGP, XV (1916), 87.


No one has seriously questioned that Chaucer intended to link the Canon's Yeoman's Tale and the Second Nun's Tale, even though we know that Chaucer was not responsible for the precise arrangement of the Tales as they are found in any of the extant eighty-four manuscripts. Four documents do have six-line endlinks after the Nun's Priest's Tale which join it to the Second Nun's Tale, but these, like the link between the Canon's Yeoman's Tale and the Physician's Tale in Harley 7335, are spurious. Almost always when the Canon's Yeoman's Tale and the Second Nun's Tale appear together in the same manuscript they are linked only to each other.¹

Linking several of the Tales so that they gain significance in juxtaposition is a frequent employment of Chaucer's. The high seriousness of the Knight's Tale
is parodied in the low bawdy of the Miller's Tale. Alisoun is adored in Nicolas' courtly jargon at the same time that the Miller describes her animality: she is a coltish sweetheart, a lemmen sleek as a weasel. In both Tales two men contend for the love of a woman, and the difference between the lovers and their courtships is the chasm between gentle and common in the Middle Ages. Muscatine sees in the Knight's Tale the polarity of order and chaos, with order presumably gaining a tenuous victory. The Miller's Tale, then, would seem to suggest a win for chaos, at least during those lecherous hours when the carpenter hangs from the rafters and Nicolas has his sweet smell of success. The ultimate triumph belongs to chaos, too, for the carpenter has been cuckolded, Absalom brutally dispensed with, while Nicolas ruptures nature's established order.

The Clerk's Tale of "Patient Griselda" is appropriately followed by the Merchant's Tale of license, fornication, and an amorality which provide an earthy counterpoint to the clerk's idealism. After the Monk has droned on about seventeen "tragedies," the Knight brings him up
short to allow the Nun's Priest to recount the mock tragedy of Chauntecleer and Pertelote. Perhaps the most recently discovered pair of significantly linked Tales is in Robert Frank's reading of the Pardoner's and the Physician's Tale. One Tale is told by a man whose life should be devoted to saving souls, but who is actually more interested in fleshpots, wine, and lucre. The Physician is a healer of bodies, but he tells a story which exalts a girl who saves her soul and incidentally her body from defilement when her father kills her--destroys her body. The Pardoner's Tale is about three scoundrels, sworn brothers whose souls are undoubtedly lost and who die fighting over things of this world--the sack of gold.

Chaucer preferred contraries as a unifying device in his work. That such a technique may be easily discovered in his poetry Frank and the others before him have shown; that Chaucer was aware of a "theory of contraries" may be seen in book I of Troilus and Criseyde, lines 637-45, in which Pandarus speaks:

"By his contrarie is every thyng declared.
For how myghte evere swetnesse han ben knowe
To him that nevere tasted bitterness?
Ne no man may ben inly glad, I trowe,
95

That nevere was in sorwe or som destresse.  
Eke whit by blak, by shame ek worthinesse,  
Ech set by other, more for other semeth,  
As men may se, and so the wyse it demeth.  
Sith thus of two contraries is o lore, . . . 

This passage of Pandarus' has no parallel in the Filostrato; it is one of those sections of philosophical amplification that Chaucer added to his source perhaps, as C. S. Lewis thought, to give his audience its money's worth. It may have "faint echoes" of the Romance of the Rose or other poems, but Chaucer's insertion of it into a major poem shows that a "theory of contraries" was known to him and that even if he didn't subscribe to it completely he at least had it on his mind.

In Fragment VIII Chaucer has once more intentionally linked two Tales together to enable each to lend to the other, through a contrast of opposites, a significance that neither Tale would have alone. The Second Nun's Tale bids us admire and revere, and optimistically to emulate, the life of a woman who gave her life unreservedly to God. While alive she passionately strove for chastity and in death she attained grace. The life of St. Cecilia is a model for men, while the Canon's Yeoman's Tale is a warning against man's deceit, greed, and acts which partake
of the Antichrist. The Second Nun prays for the eternal life and victory over the fiend, but the Canon's Yeoman swears vainly by God. One Tale shows us good and how we ought to act; the other depicts evil and cautions us against our own wickedness. Both Tales advocate the holy life: one explicitly and positively, the other implicitly and negatively.

St. Cecilia's life was the whiteness of honesty (l. 89); Chaucer tells her story directly and openly, using the conventional saint's legend. He contrives no difficult symbolism, no artistic deception, no subtleties of language which might subvert his audience from concentration on its moral. That the code of the Canon's Yeoman's Tale has not been fully deciphered five and one-half centuries after it was written is eloquent evidence of its subtlety. As much as anything Chaucer wrote, the Canon's Yeoman's Tale is charged with symbol, suggestion, irony, and multiple meaning. We are not told explicitly who the Canon is, and very little more is revealed about his Yeoman. The very nature of the Canon fosters concealment, secrecy, and deception. In the Second Nun's Tale, Cecilia sends her
husband and his brother to be converted to Christianity, the true faith, to "han grace/ To knowe the trouthe . . . (ll. 237-38). Faith is supreme: "bileve aright and knowen verray trouthe" (l. 259). In the accompanying Tale the Canon is a man of infinite falseness and the root of all treachery whose delight is to bring Christ's people to mischief.

Dramatically, the contrast between the two Tales is just as striking. St. Cecilia devotes her life on earth to God and loses it in His service; in so doing we may assume that she has saved her soul. The Canon, however, devotes his life to satisfying his covetousness; in his greed he indulges only his flesh, and in riding off prolongs his life, but, with equal assurance, we know that he is damned. Cecilia persuades many other souls into the truth before she dies; the Canon fails to convince any of the pilgrims, and even loses his assistant to them. Only in this context would I agree with Judith Herz's observation that at the end of the Tale the Yeoman achieves a social resolution in joining the holy community.3

Despite the exaggeration, especially of chastity, and because of the miraculous elements, the Second Nun's
Tale shows the Church in the vigor of its youth, with a flaming missionary spirit. The time of St. Cecilia is one of martyrs who do not flinch to sustain hideous tortures in the service of Christ. The Church is growing rapidly and with such warriors of the faith as Cecilia would it conquer the pagan world. But, in the Canon's Yeoman's Tale the Church is in decay. Her priests have succumbed to cupidity, and elsewhere we read of her fornicating friars and indulgence-peddling pardoners. The Antichrist, the enemy of the Church within the Church, rides the land. The crusading Church has finally conquered pagan Europe and, her labors seemingly done, has settled down to a luxurious rest.

Joseph Grennen understands Fragment VIII to be unified in quite another respect, and because he is the only other writer to see such a unity, he requires our attention. Grennen's intensive reading of alchemical manuscripts has enabled him to isolate several recurrent themes, or non-narrative literary conventions—topoi. The old man who appears to Valerian, for instance, Grennen thinks is a double of the often-seen old wise man of
alchemical lore. So, St. Cecilia's talk of the unity of God has its parallel in the alchemists' belief in the unity of their art. Other *topoi* are reversed, Grennen thinks, for the sake of irony. The alchemists wrote that the adepti should embody "temperateness," among other qualities, and they usually had a "trusty assistant." These motifs are inverted in the *Canon's Yeoman's Tale* where the Canon-alchemist rides off in anger at his Yeoman's intemperateness and his untrustworthy behavior (pp. 125 ff).

In both *Tales* fires burn brightly. Fire is the crux of the alchemical *opus*; it burns away the dross and proves the gold which is uncorruptible in fire—it will not tarnish, oxidate, or in any significant way change its form or appearance. Its spirit remains intact. The Yeoman's duty of keeping the fire going at just the proper temperature for the appropriate length of time is vital to the success of the experiment: as he tells us, after every failure some second-guessers would blame it on an overlong exposure to fire, others on blowing, still others thought the blow-up caused by burning charcoal and not beech wood. St. Cecilia is proved by the fire also.
Grennen (p. 227) fancied that she was "tempered" by her love—caritas—to withstand the firebath. But, Cecilia's connection with fire should be pushed much further. Like heaven, "swift and round and eek brennynge" (l. 114), she is "round and hool in good perseverynge, / And brennynge evere in charite ful brighte" (ll. 117-18). And, further like gold—for she is a type of perfection—she will lose her bodily dross in the fire and will be made pure spirit by it. Presumably, Cecilia's soul, like that of the Second Nun herself, is in a prison, troubled by "the contagioun/ Of my body . . ." (ll. 72-73), like the essence of metallic perfection trapped in matter.

Chaucer deemed fire so essential to St. Cecilia's story that he rearranged the etymology of her name as he got it from Jacobus: the lines which speak of her as "brennynge evere in charite" and the heaven "swift and round and eek brennynge" have been moved from the middle of the etymology, where they are submerged, to the end where they will have the most importance. Still more fires burn in the Second Nun's Tale: Tiburce fears that while those he loves seek their God in heaven, "algate ybrend in this world shul
we be!" (l. 318). Here is more irony for the alert mind: his conversion saves him from the fires of hell, just as Cecilia is saved because she is burned on earth. Even Pope Urban would be burned if the authorities ever found him (ll. 313 ff), but he escapes; this Tale concerns Cecilia's martyrdom.

Joseph Grennen finds a pun concealed in lines 1407-08 of the Canon's Yeoman's Tale which may well be of importance, though my interpretation of the lines differs from his:

O! fy, for shame! they that han been brent,
Allas! kan they nat flee the fires heete?

An application may be made not only to the ostensible alchemical meaning, but to the maxim about the burnt child who dreads the fire. The victims of alchemy, heedless, return to their art, presumably for more punishment. But, the "fires heete," according to Grennen, is the combustion of hell as well as of alchemy and, in the Tale's total economy, a warning against damnation. If this is Chaucer's intent, or if such a reading is viable, I would interpret it as a warning for the money-seeking alchemists, not the philosophers, and for the followers of Antichrist. Such
a projection from opus to cosmos, from work to world, is conceivable, as Grennen says, because alchemists often thought their work a microcosm of the workings of the universe—as gold was perfected in the earth, so was it procreated in the crucible. The alchemical macrocosm depicted graphically in many manuscripts resembled the worker's furnace, which made it a "cosmic furnace," a phrase actually coined in the seventeenth century (pp. 230 ff).

But, what happens in this Canon's crucible? In miniature, the same thing that happens when the Antichrist comes: lies, deception, and false wonders.

Cecilia is killed, we have already seen, in a significant way: burned "in a bath of flambes rede" (l. 515). We usually think of water in connection with baths; this one, though, is in fire. Both fire and water are agents of purification, and the bath is shaped something like a crucible or hermetic jar. Whether a tub, much as we think of it today, or a stall in which one bathes, Cecilia's bath is a giant vessel which contains that which will be cleansed. Both crucible and bath are set amidst purifying
flames which, in Cecilia's martyrdom, burn for three days, just as Bacon says in The Mirror that projection is the work of three days (p. 1953). Almachius, who has ordered the saint put in this giant crucible says, in sentencing her, that her wrongs "... I kan suffre ... as a philosophre" (l. 490). In the Canon's Yeoman's Tale fire is used not only to heat the vacuous crucible, but in the lamps which burn both day and night, "to brynge aboute oure purpos, if we may" (l. 803). This purpose is known to us, and the lamp—conventional token of wisdom—is yet another inversion in the Yeoman's tale of perversion. This perverted fire should man withdraw from, the Yeoman tells us in his apologia (l. 1423).

"Rede" flames are specified by Almachius, to match, in an irony unknown to him, the red rose crown of martyrdom which Cecilia has already received. Red is also the color the Yeoman's face should be from all his puffing into the fires and from exposure to the flame. Now, red is the alchemical color of perfection, corresponding to the final stage of the opus when the substance in the crucible is supposed to turn red and when the Stone is
generated; the Yeoman's face, however, is properly of a leaden hue where once it was "bothe fresshe and reed" (ll. 727-28). The Yeoman's cheeks turn red now only when he blushes in shame for the Canon, but redness has he none (ll. 1095-97). Even in the detail of facial color the Yeoman is perverted. He began with the color of perfection but, as man fell in sin, he ends with the hue of the basest metal. Red and white are the crowns given to Valerian and Cecilia for their nobility; and red and white are the alchemical waters—"rubifying" (l. 797) and "albificacioun" (l. 805)—which produce gold and silver, thus crowning the experiment. These colors betoken a perfection in both Tales and bring them yet another degree closer.

Even "stone" comes in for some intricate irony and wordplay. In the scientific world of the Canon's Yeoman's Tale it is the elusive "Elixir" which the malignant Canon can never attain because it is reserved for the faithful and true. The Stone is like Christ: it perfects matter, releasing the spirit from matter—the dragon in the dark dungeon. The first stone mentioned in the Second Nun's
Tale is the one which Cecilia rolls over the cave-tomb of her husband and his brother; they have died 'in the truth' and their spirits too will depart from the dungeon of their bodies. Later, Cecilia tells Almachius that his god is merely a stone:

"Ther lakketh no thyng to thyne outer yen
That thou n'art blynd; for thyng that we seen alle
That it is stoon,—that men may wel espyen,—
That ilke stoon a god thow wolt it calle.
I rede thee, lat thyn hand upon it falle,
And taste it wel, and stoon thou shalt it fynde,
Syn that thou seest nat with thyne eyen blynde."

(11. 498-504)

Unlike the agent of perfection in alchemy, the god of Almachius is merely a stone; it is matter, not condensed pneuma. Matter is what the emperor sees, but he is blind, for the real God cannot be tested with the hand. Almachius, true to his imprisonment in the dungeon of this world, has "bothe power and auctoritee/ To maken folk to dyen or to lyven" (11. 471-72). But, Cecilia's God has power over man's souls. What seems to be divine to Almachius is actually not. What he holds sacred is merely a stone; and, his seeming victory over the recalcitrant Cecilia is ultimately a defeat.

The "werk" of St. Cecilia is played against the
alchemical opus in the Canon's Yeoman's Tale to Chaucer's dramatic and ironic advantage. Usually the Second Nun means by "werk" the task or deeds of her saint. The invocation to Mary recognizes that faith is dead without "werkis" (l. 64), and the Nun asks for wit and opportunity to do her's--and God's work. Elsewhere, the Nun's work means the tale she is to tell (ll. 77, 84), or Cecilia's good and wise deeds (ll. 105, 116, 112, 545). At one point (l. 14) "werche" is opposed to the "ydelenesse" which the Nun attacks, and another time Cecilia exhorts her audience to "cast alle awey the werkes"--the deeds--"of derknesse" (l. 384). In nearly every case "work" means, as we should expect, the wise and holy labors of the saint who converted many to the truth and on whose home-site of martyrdom a church was built: the foundationstone sacrifice motif.

Now, in the Canon's Yeoman's Tale we get just the opposite sense of "work"; this tale of a devil's work gives that word sinister connotations which are compounded by the name of the alchemical experiment: the opus--the work. The Canon is "feendly bothe in werk and thoght"
(l. 1303), all his "werkyng" is fraud and deceit (l. 1367) which is elsewhere simply called his 'working' (ll. 622, 1115). The priest is shown 'working' over the fire (l. 1311) after the Canon has assured him that his own hands shall 'work' all things that will be done (l. 1155). And, because we know "how wel and craftily/ He koude werk . . ." (ll. 603-04), we are alerted when the Yeoman refers innoculously to their 'work' (l. 749) and to the things they work upon (l. 755). We know, too, what Chaucer means when he has the Canon speak of his 'work in philosophy' (ll. 1058, 1139). This genre of 'working' must inevitably be of no avail (l. 780), for it is one of those things which, as Chaucer's postscript has it, is done against God's will (l. 1477).

The will of God is even more important in Chaucer's fuller exploitation of the contrary themes of sight and blindness, or outward appearance and insight, which amplifies that polarity of what seems and what is already mentioned. Cecilia is "wantynge of blyndnesse" because of her 'great light of wisdom' (ll. 100-01). But, surely, a special kind of sight is involved here, for one does not
normally "see" the way St. Cecilia does with one's "outter yen." It is not like the instance of the sight of normal men who "may in the hevene see/ The sonne and moone and sterres . . ." (ll. 107-08). Cecilia is "the way to blynde" (l. 92)—most obstinate phrase—not, we hope 'the way to blindness,' but 'the way from blindness' or 'the path for the blind.' The latter reading is suggested by Baugh's edition of Chaucer's major poetry as a translation of caecis via, p. 503. Martin Stevens, who has helped me work out that confusing line, also noticed that the Second Nun may well have chosen "Lia" as part of Cecilia's (false) etymology with a certain care. Leah, the first wife of Jacob, is best remembered for her weak eyes (Genesis xxix. 17). Ruth (Ruth iv. 11) thought she had insight and credited Rachel and her for founding Israel. Leah's internal vision was 20/20.

Such corporeal sight, that perception of the material, is what Valerian initially seeks when he demands to see his bride's guardian angel (l. 164). Cecilia quickly informs him that only those who believe in Christ and accept baptism and are chaste can attain this spiritual
sight (ll. 170, 182, 230). Yet faith is not the only path
to "knowen verray trouthe," for men may also see "wel by
resoun" (l. 16), though reason is reserved for another
Tale. Valerian soon tells his brother that he and Cecilia
have two crowns, but the eye has no power to see them
until its possessor believes aright, "and knowen verray
trouthe" (ll. 255-59). The crowns, we must assume, have
ultimate reality, yet they are not seen with the outer
eye; what is corporeally seen is transient and ultimately
insubstantial. This seems to be the focus of the sight-
blindness polarity Chaucer develops throughout the Second
Nun's Tale: when Valerian proselytizes Tiburce for Chris-
tianity, he tells him that as pagans they had lived in
dreams—opposed to reality—but now their dwelling is in
the truth (ll. 262-66), the ultimate, yet intangible reality.
Tiburce also wants to "see" proof, but Valerian warns him
that sight will be withheld unless he renounces idols and
'be clean' (ll. 267-69). And, after that, the Second Nun
says that Tiburce was in such grace that every day he saw
the angel of God: "saw" with his inner eye, in "tyme and
space" (l. 355). .
Enter, now, the villain: Almachius saw only with his "outer yën" (l. 498), and so he saw nothing at all. He bade his men bring Cecilia to him that he might see her, and he subsequently tried to force her to renounce the faith for the worship of Jupiter. But, the adamant Cecilia preached to him not only the truth of her faith, but the essential difference between his belief and her knowledge of the truth:

"Ther lakketh no thyng to thyne outer yën
That thou n'art blynd; for thyng that we seen alle
That it is stoon,--that men may wel espyen,--
That ilke stoon a god thow wilt it calle.
I rede thee, lat thyn hand upon it falle,
And taste it wel, and stoon thou shalt it fynde,
Syn that thou seest nat with thyne eyen blynde."

(ll. 498-504)

The passage is not in the Legenda Aurea and may have well been Chaucer's insertion to emphasize the polarity of sight and blindness and the double entendre of "stone." Almachius, like Valerian and Tiburce at first, and like the Canon and the duped priest in the Canon's Yeoman's Tale, sees only material forms: the idol Jupiter. But, in Cecilia's terms he is blind, for what he sees is not divine, but a stone; the divine, the real, is the God who cannot be seen this way—Christ. Hence, the paradox: Almachius
is blind because he sees, blind because he does not see what really is but does not appear.

The Yeoman, the Canon, and the priest he dupes all suffer from this peculiar blindness. While Cecilia focuses her great light of wisdom, the Yeoman's eyes—are bleary (l. 730), with the double sense of "bleared" and fooled. We have another pun with similar meanings when the Yeoman 'pours into the fire'; he both gazes and blunders, with the suggestion that he blunders while gazing. The science which, if properly practiced, should lead him to the truth, has only dimmed his sight. Alchemy perverted distorts all sight: the Canon assures his victim that all will be performed as promised, and as proof the priest will be able to see it with his own eyes (l. 1059), a wondrous thing never seen before (ll. 1105-06). But the Canon's magic powder is meant only to blind the priest (l. 1151), just as this multiplying has blinded so many (l. 1391). The alchemists, thinks the Yeoman, are like Bayard the blind, blundering forth, stumbling against stones (ll. 1413-15). Appearances deceive and the real is often the unseen. One of the
Yeoman's apostrophes warns the priest in his story that covetousness will blind him, and that "ful blynd is thy conceite" (ll. 1077-78). The priest sees the bogus opus performed, but is blind spiritually; he would do well to heed one of the Yeoman's final warnings:

If that youre eyen kan nat seen aright,
Looke that youre mynde lakke noght his sight.
(ll. 1418-19)

Here, in these two lines, is summarized the sight-blindness polarity of Fragment VIII.

Still other striking verbal and thematic similarities pervade both Tales, though they are not as prominent as those I have just detailed. Cecilia, for instance, is white or associated with whiteness or brightness. We should expect as much from a saint. She is "faire Cecilia the white" (l. 115), who burns in charity "ful brighte" (l. 118). She is heaven's lily, "for she whitnesse hadde of honestee" (l. 89). Her soul, like her converts', will glide to heaven with the angels "ful of cleernesse and of light" (l. 403). Like the Second Nun who asked for the power to "be quit fro thennes that most derk is!" (l. 66), Cecilia tells her newly converted flock to "cast alle
away the werkes of derknesse,/ And armeth yow in armure of brightnesse" (ll. 384-85). The Canon, again as we should expect, is a contrast in "clothes blake" (l. 557) whose life is spent "lurkyng in hernes and in lanes blynde" (l. 658).

The pilgrim Chaucer thinks it a joy to see the Canon sweat when first he rides up to the column of pilgrims, and sweat he does, like a still as a matter of fact, an alembic distilling the devil's vegetables. The Canon sweats, but Cecilia, who is burned for three days, does not. However, coolness is not Cecilia's greatest advantage; she has "grete light/ Of sapience" (ll. 100-01). She is 'heaven's lily,' the white, chaste, honest flower, and the Canon has only nettles and burdock. The Canon seems wise—so Harry Bailley comments as he baits his trap (ll. 594-95), but the Yeoman thinks that his master "is to wyse, in feith, as I beleve" (l. 644), and that his wisdom is overdone and will in the end prove a vice (l. 646). The Yeoman, though, as he would have us believe, is "a lewed man" (l. 787). And then the Second Nun sermonizes on the "greet confusioun" (l. 23) that is caused by
idleness, which should prepare us for the Canon’s bringing “this preest to confusioun” (l. 1021).

As I have already mentioned, the life of St. Cecilia is prefaced by a short sermon attacking the deadly sin of sloth, appropriately enough for this saint who was so “bisy evere in good werkynge,” again to be marked against the Canon’s Yeoman’s Tale priest “in his bisynesse” (l. 1270). However, Chaucer may have had another reason for giving the Nun this sermon, for sloth, said St. Thomas is the opposite of the joy of charity, and Cecilia was “brennynge evere in charite.” Sloth was a “sluggishness of the mind” which caused it to neglect deeds of good. A sorrow or displeasure at the spiritual good, or an aversion from the divine, as in the example of Almachius or the Canon, is also sloth. Those who find no spiritual joy resort to pleasures of the body—again like our Canon. Now, the joy of charity may be about our neighbor’s good; its contrary is envy. But, the contrary of this joy when it is about the divine good is sloth (1345–48). The Nun recommends “leveful bisyynesse” lest “the feend thurgh ydelenesse us hente,” for Satan continually lies in wait.
for us with "his thousand cordes slye." Those in idleness he catches easiest.

The Second Nun praises Cecilia, in a passage already cited for other reasons, for "brennynge evere in charite ful brighte" (l. 118). For Augustine, the principle objective of Scripture was the advocacy of charity and the condemnation of cupidity:

Now scripture enjoins nothing except charity, and condemns nothing except lust, and in that way fashions the lives of men.

It is a narrative of the past, a prophecy of the future, and a description of the present. But all these tend to nourish charity, and to overcome and to root out lust.  

Cecilia was an exemplum of charity, the doctrine of which D. W. Robertson finds at the heart of medieval Christianity: it was the New Law which Christ brought to fulfill the Old. Cupidity was the ultimate source of all of man's sins, and the Canon, considered either as a man or as Antichrist, embodies the essence of cupidity in a high concentration. Cupidity brings with it the fear of earthly misfortune; the Canon so fears disclosure that he must continually lurk in the dark, damp alleyways of civilization, and his fear of earthly misfortune spurs him to flee the pilgrims.
Charity, which leads inevitably to wisdom, fears only God: risking her husband’s anger, Cecilia fearlessly informs Valerian that while their marriage must be bodily chaste they may embrace Christ. Later, she defies Almachius on threat of death, refuses to renounce Christendom, and thereby condemns herself to death. Even in the flaming bath, after she receives three strokes on the neck, she continues to preach to those who have come to her.

Robertson further reminds us that the word amor was often used for either "charity" or "cupidity" and that consequently the early fathers frequently exploited its semantic ambiguity. St. Bonaventura, for example, and Gerard of Liege often employed the contrast between amor as sexual love and caritas. St. Augustine observed that the fornicatio of Scripture also meant "idolatry," or a love of any part of the world. That Chaucer was aware of the punning possibilities of amor we know from his description of the Prioress in the General Prologue, line 162. And, something of the sort is working in the Second Nun’s Tale, even though the word "amor" is never used explicitly. Cecilia, who cares nothing for the love of this world, is married to Valerian, though their
marriage is never carnally consummated. Heaven is all; she converts him to Christ—the love of God—and in so persuading him shortens his life in a martyr's fate. He, too, gives up the love of this world for the love of God.

The opposite of charity was, for medieval man, cupidity—the love of creatures, things, or self for their own sakes. It was a turning away from God:

I mean by charity that affection of the mind which aims at the enjoyment of God for His own sake, and the enjoyment of one's self and one's neighbor in subordination to God; by lust I mean that affection of the mind which aims at enjoying one's self and one's neighbor, and other corporeal things, without reference to God. Again, what lust, when unsubdued, does toward corrupting one's own soul and body is called vice; but what it does to injure another is called crime. ¹⁰

These two opposites were the extremes of the medieval moral scale of values and, as with the other extremes we have been discussing, are at the heart of the link between the Second Nun's Tale and the Canon's Yeoman's Tale.
Footnotes--Chapter VI


2An unpublished study read to the Penn State English Colloquium, 1961.


5After I discovered this significant detail I came across the identical finding in Joseph E. Grennen, "Chaucer's Characterization of the Canon and His Yeoman," *JHI*, XXV (1964), 280.


CHAPTER VII

REASON AND REVELATION

The final and most inclusive polarity of Fragment VIII is that of reason and revelation. The major barrier to our understanding alchemy as a science within the realm of reason is our "modern" attitude toward it as foolish, eccentric, and false. Even Thorndike associates alchemy closely with magic and necromancy, and it hinders him from distinguishing sharply between science and nonsense. But, we should begin by heeding Taylor's judgment that the true alchemy ought not to be confused with magicians or with wizards, and that the alchemists sought to understand and employ the laws of nature as God had created them. Rarely did the alchemical philosopher resort to charms or spells or any form of "black" magic. Unfortunately, alchemy's apparent purpose of gold-making easily lent itself to fraud.¹

Contrary to enlightened contemporary opinion, learned
men of the Middle Ages considered alchemy a natural science, and consequently a mode of reason. A "philosopher," informs the OED, was formerly understood in a wider sense than it is now and it encompassed men disciplined in the physical sciences. Also, it included adepts in what are now considered the "occult sciences," especially alchemy (OED, s.v. "philosopher"). Chaucer refers to alchemists as philosophers quite often, so we need not question that he thought alchemy a "philosophy," hence a natural science. Only once does he use "alkamystre," and that pejoratively, when he describes the gold-seeking Canon. Many alchemical manuscripts were ascribed to Aristotle, the Philosopher—over two hundred texts of the Secret of Secrets survive—a further indication of alchemy's reputability and its standing as a "philosophy." Even Albertus Magnus thought the Secret of Secrets to be Aristotle's. Would such a thinker attribute a "black art" to that most illustrious Greek?

Chaucer was not at all unique or even eccentric in his association of alchemy with natural science, for such an opinion had a substantial history. St. Dunstan,
Archbishop of Canterbury, was thought to be a scholar, al-
chemist, and vanquisher of the devil, and had many alchemical
manuscripts ascribed to him. Abelard, who believed that
demons were more privy to the secrets of nature than was
man, advised his fellows to experiment and to use "subtle
ingenuity" to learn those secrets. The De divisione
philosophiae of Archdeacon Gundissalinus listed alchemy
as one of the eight subdivisions of natural science. Daniel of Morley's Philosophia followed the classification
of Gundissalinus but subordinated alchemy to the more
encompassing discipline of astrology. Necromancy was
closely associated with natural science by some, like
William of Auvergne, but he nevertheless allowed that the
adepts were natural scientists. Such major figures as
Robert Grosseteste (in De artibus liberalibus) and Vincent
of Beauvais regarded alchemy as a natural philosophy or a
practical art related to mineralogy. It was from Vincent
that Pauline Aiken claimed Chaucer derived his alchemical
knowledge. And, in Duns Scotus, Thorndike grudgingly
admits, "astrology and alchemy are recognized as reputable
sciences."
Even the greatest and most renowned of the medieval philosophers did not condemn, though they may not have practiced, alchemy. Albert the Great said that he had investigated the transmutation of metals among the alchemists to observe for himself the nature of matter. Regardless of any doubts Albert may have had about the sacred science, he wrote, after his investigation, in *Mineralium* 'that of all the arts alchemy most closely imitated nature.' He believed, finally, with Avicenna, that all metals were compounds of sulphur and mercury and that their transmutation was theoretically possible, though he had not seen it performed. Although Lynn Thorndike says at one point that Albert "seemed" to distinguish between alchemy and natural science, he must admit at another that the tone with which Aquinas' teacher speaks of this art is of respect.  

St. Thomas has little to say about the sacred art, but that little is favorable. The *Meteorology* (III, 9) asserts that it is a 'true art' and it gains its effectiveness because of 'occult forces of celestial virtue.' Magic, on the other hand, deceives the senses, and does
not actually violate the order of matter established by God. St. Thomas reasoned that "the chief function of the alchemist is to transmute metals . . . the imperfect ones, in a true manner and not fraudulently." To this greatest of all medieval thinkers, the sciences of nature and of metaphysics are some of the methods by which the theologian attempts to save man.

The author of The Mirror of Alchemy also thought that man could be saved through his understanding of the art. Alchemy, this man (often said to be Roger Bacon) wrote, was 'really nobler than the other arts': "I wish to explain [experimental science], as it is useful not only to philosophy, but to the knowledge of God, and for the direction of the whole world." The science of alchemy persuaded men to accept the true faith, because "this branch alone of philosophy" can overcome falsehood. Experimental science can detect the illusions of magic; it cannot, therefore be magic but must be opposed to it. The enemies of the Church and of God should be defeated by the sciences, alchemy included, and not by weapons; the Antichrist will conquer with the sword. Consequently,
Bacon urged the Church to use science and its discoveries to prevent "future perils in times of the Antichrist." If princes and prelates so investigated the secrets of nature and of art, many lives of the faithful might be spared at Armageddon.\textsuperscript{13}

That the Antichrist might be destroyed through science was not the exclusive idea of Bacon; Chaucer's contemporary, John of Rupescissa, ultimately revealed the secrets of his labors (in \textit{The Book of Light and Tribulation}), "only in view of the calamities afflicting Holy Church and the approaching tribulations from Antichrist." John, who knew of Arnold and who referred to Arnold's \textit{Lapis-Christus} parallel, thought that the hour of the Antichrist had come round at last.\textsuperscript{14}

The name "experimental science" was first used by Bacon, though modern critics see in this fact an irony, because in modern terms Bacon failed to distinguish between what we would now isolate as science and magic. Yet, alchemy was for him an experimental science which could generate gold from lead and silver from copper.\textsuperscript{15} Gold provided riches and prolonged life; so, that "medicine"--
the Stone—which purified base metals and perfected them could remove impurities (corruptions) from the human body. Whatever we Monday quarterbacks who have had a six century weekend may think of alchemy, Roger Bacon, Albertus Magnus, and St. Thomas thought it at least reputable; and Bacon thought it the means to save the world. Whatever we may think of Bacon, Albert, and St. Thomas consequently, Chaucer, for one, found them honorable men.

This brief history of honorable men favorable to alchemy should not leave the impression that all learned men of the Middle Ages thought it a science, or even found it respectable. Many, perhaps a majority, did not; my point is that enough intelligent and famous men did think so and that, as a result, to hold such a position in the fourteenth century, for instance, was not infamous or illicit.

The most famous of those men who attacked alchemy and its practitioners was Pope John XXII. John Spargo thinks his influence so great that he uses John's bulls to explain the meaning of the Canon's Yeoman's Tale. The shadow of
De crimine falsi--Pope John's decretal--was to have fallen across all fourteenth-century Christendom, turning all of the faithful against what John thought to be a wicked practice. The pontiff held that the alchemists deceived themselves and others; he knew of some who coined money of base metals and passed it off for gold and silver. His decree sentenced anyone making or using alchemical gold or silver to a fine of the same weight of the true metals. Another suitable punishment if the alchemist could not pay was confiscation of all goods of the offender, and, if they were clerics, they were to be permanently stripped of their benefices. Undoubtedly John was particularly bitter towards all alchemists because his reign had been plagued by malevolent workers: his own life had been threatened by them, and his nephew, a cardinal, killed by them.

Whatever John XXII may have felt about the art personally, his judgment never represented a popular or legal consensus. No legal authority before 1500 that Thorndike could uncover even referred to John's Spondet quas non.
exhibent, another decretal which attacked alchemists and counterfeiters. Orlando da Ponte, a consistorial advocate right in the Pope's back garden, claimed that the alchemists, like those who mine metals, are of benefit to the public. Alchemy does not alter the species of the metals, but merely produces one from another, since it is well known that all come from mercury and sulphur. Alchemy is art imitating nature. And, this opinion was echoed by John Andrea—another canon lawyer—and by Alberico da Rosciane of Bergamo. Later commentators on the decrees of John XXII felt, like the alchemist Thomas of Bologna, that the papal documents attacked only the fallacious alchemists, and rightly so. If alchemy were illicit, Gilles de Rais would have been charged with its practice. That this incredible Frenchman was an alchemist was well known, yet his prosecutors in 1440 did not specify alchemy among Gilles' crimes. The English statute of 1403 was one of the first civil measures taken against alchemists, but, as Taylor assures us, it outlawed only fraudulent practices—the adulteration of gold by adding copper, and swindling practices such as our Canon specialized in,
and the serious workers had no difficulty in getting a license to practice.\textsuperscript{21}

The ultimate polarity of Fragment VIII, then, is one of the most important intellectual problems of the Middle Ages: reason and revelation. Although Maimonides tried to reconcile these extremes, Albertus Magnus is usually credited as the first major philosopher to manage the problem. The early fathers, especially Augustine, and such valuable sources as Tertullian, had argued for the primacy of faith and revelation. Later, the balance shifted to the advocates of reason, especially in the pagan Averroes and his Latin followers. Bacon, who was not an Averroist, seemed to feel that logic was overrated and sought other rational methods—mathematics and experimental science—to discover the truth. The Latin Averroists such as Siger of Brabant first formulated the theory of the "double truth," a largely unsuccessful attempt to adapt or reconcile the philosophy of Aristotle—The Philosopher—to their Christian faith. This school, which had its greatest moments in thirteenth-century Paris, argued that the conclusions of philosophy were logically
"necessary," but that the findings of revelation were "true." The conclusions of reason and revelation could be violently contradictory, yet somehow valid.

St. Thomas, a pupil of Albert, quickly saw through the position of the Latin Averroists: a conclusion which was "necessary" but not "true" was meaningless and an insult to philosophy, and he formulated his own theory about the relationship of faith and intellect.22

Something cannot at one and the same time be the object of faith and of reason, for they are separate, Thomas argued. Matters of faith cease to be such when proved; they then become matters of reason. Objects in science, for instance, are matters of perception; hence, not of faith. All science is derived from seen and self-evident principles. Therefore, a thing cannot be the object both of science and belief, because they are not about the same things.23 Thomas also recognized that the same man could have scientific knowledge of and faith in the same object, but only relatively in relation to that object, and not in the same respect. A man may think something, yet know another about the same object:
the Godhead may be demonstrated, but the Trinity may only be known through faith.

Why, then, did God give man the power to reason as well as the gift of faith? Knowledge through revelation is quicker and more sure. The scientist must spend many years before he comes to any understanding of God through His works; faith is quicker. Many men are too stupid or too lazy to apprehend God through the study of science; faith is surer. And, as Thomas must have realized as he looked about him, human reason is deficient and faulty; faith is unfailing, and men must know God surely.24 Now, there was no doubt in St. Thomas' mind that faith was the first and primary truth: it is a "virtue that perfects the intellect."25 Not every truth may be known in the same way, and by faith we know that which surpasses the intellect. Reason sees as through a glass darkly; revelation is unrefracted. One kind of knowledge is of things seen, the other of things unseen; knowledge is thus two-fold. Those truths which faith reveals are greater than those of reason. Consequently, the philosopher and the theologian treat the same creatures differently: the
philosopher argues from the proper causes of things, such as why a fire tends to rise, but the believer has recourse to first causes. Philosophy begins with creatures and proceeds to God. Faith begins with God, and so is the more perfect.  

St. Thomas might arch his brows at the incipient faith of Valerian which needs the promise of the sight of Cecilia's angel to induce him to seek God, yet the young bridegroom finally believes before he sees the angel. But no one would deny that the Second Nun's Tale is involved, in a very important way, with faith. Through it, Cecilia, Valerian, and his brother attain the city of heaven; ironically for Valerian though, since he had been told that if he gained carnal knowledge of his wife, her guardian angel would "right anon . . . sle yow with the dede" (l. 157). Valerian does the right thing: he and Cecilia remain chaste, though the same intensity of faith that kept them chaste and safe from the angel is responsible for his martyr's death anyway. No matter what course Valerian chose he was fated, but with a most important difference: by dying in the faith he saved his soul.
Had he been slain by the guardian angel he no doubt would have lost everything—body and soul.

The *Canon's Yeoman's Tale* concerns the perversion of man's search for truth through science, hence reason. Chaucer does not attack alchemy; the last fifty-four lines show that he realized its potential to lead man to God—"for unto Crist it is so lief and deere" (l. 1467). He attacked only its fraudulent practice and he attacked much more: the practicing Church as it had become in his time. But, in the *Canon's Yeoman's Tale* reason and science are used in the devil's cause, not as God intended.

I do not think that Chaucer linked the two *Tales* in Fragment VIII to make an invidious comparison; he was not a theologian or a philosopher, as we now use that word. Probably his position—if he had a formalized position in the *Tales*—was that of St. Thomas. Faith, for Cecilia and Valerian, and for us, is surer and quicker than the rational search of alchemy, as the Yeoman's diatribe in the first part of the *Tale* copiously illustrates. The *Tales* are juxtaposed, in part, to dramatize the two modes of knowing truth, reason and revelation. In the *Canterbury Tales*
we are not told explicitly which is primary: a poem does not mean—artifacts of eternity elude the temporal.

Linking the Second Nun's Tale with the Canon's Yeoman's Tale was intentional and purposeful for, as with the other linked Tales whose natures are in several ways opposed, Chaucer was able to get far more dramatic and ironic content from each: "Ech set by other, more for other semeth." Fragment VIII, when considered as a unified artistic entity whose parts complement each other through opposition, is concerned with truth and falsehood, the soul and the flesh, the Church's growth and its decay, charity and cupidity, salvation and damnation, and, that which encompasses all of these: heaven and hell. Finally, Fragment VIII is concerned with reason and revelation. When the Tales are read separately, we have only a saint's life and a seeming anecdote about a swindling alchemist.

We should appreciate that yet other influences lay behind Chaucer's use of contraries, besides the conscious darkening of evil against a radiant holy background. The fourteenth century's ordering of reality, an order by
which men unconsciously lived and which informed their perception of the world, may have guided Chaucer's inclination toward literary contraries. Superficially, such a theory would seem to be in battle with D. W. Robertson's description of the hierarchical nature of medieval thought and values; to engage in that battle would be tantamount to landing the Light Brigade ashore at Iwo Jima. Better to break off and redefine the field. Robertson is undoubtedly correct: we cannot think of Pandarus's (or Chaucer's) contraries in the modern sense of conflicting agents which produce Hegel's higher synthesis. In the Middle Ages the contraries were static, not dynamic, and were arranged on the same hierarchical fair chain of love, not in opposition to one another:

Wel may men knowe, but it be a fool,
That every part dirryveth from his hool;
For nature hath nat taken his bigynnyng
Of no partie or cantel of a thyng,
But of a thyng that parfit is and stable,
Descendynge so til it be corrumpable.
And therfore, of his wise purveiaunce,
He hath so wel biset his ordinaunce,
That species of thynges and progressiouns
Shullen enduren by successiouns,
And nat eterne, withouten any lye. (11. 3005-15)

So with the several contraries of Fragment VIII.
Robertson's examples (pp. 24 ff) are happily well-chosen for my own argument. Good and evil, he points out, were not contemplated as the opposing forces of the Manicheans, for all the creations of God are good: evil, rather, is God's privation. Neither is the devil in dynamic opposition to Christ, but in a fallen state from his given goodness. Only in this sense, as Robertson has eloquently defined it, should we see the contraries of saint and sinner, damnation and salvation, and charity and cupidity. On this last polarity Robertson is particularly eloquent (pp. 25 ff). The two loves were the basic concern of medieval morality. Now, Robertson uses the example of the woman who may be loved both concupiscently and charitably, for her physical attraction and for her reference to God. These loves are quite different but they are not in conflict: they are not dissimilar kinds so much as they are qualitatively dissimilar, both occupying places, though at different poles, on the same scale. Such loves could not then be synthesized. Rather, the Christian is implored to ascend that ladder, that great chain, step by step from the baser rungs to the nobler, by the earliest Scriptural writings.
While the *Canterbury Tales* should not be accepted entirely as a production of the fourteenth century's *Weltanschauung*, yet the very tenor and flavor of life in those times also suggests sharp contrast. And, to explain this further I want to select parts of Huizinga's organic description from that chapter which might well comprise all introduction to the later Middle Ages. Every aspect of medieval life, especially the physical as well as the intellectual and moral, was marked by violent contrast. The men of the time, thought Huizinga, experienced life with the agony and exstacy of the child. Illness was in greater contrast with health than it is now, the cold of winter more sharply biting than ours, and riches were the more cherished because of the ubiquitous squalor. With such vivid contrasts all about him, as the donnee of nearly every aspect of his life, might not Chaucer be inclined to think, to react, and to compose in terms of contrasts? And, as Pandarus says, is not sweetness all the sweeter for our having tasted the bitter, whiteness all the more dazzling for the surrounding black, as luxury is the more enjoyed for being in the midst of poverty?
So violent and motley was life, that it bore the mixed smell of blood and roses. The men of that time always oscillate between the fear of hell and the most naive joy, between cruelty and tenderness, between harsh asceticism and insane attachment to the delights of this world, between hatred and goodness, always running to extremes.29

Some variant theories of contraries always arise in the minds of men in each era, Alan Watts theorizes,30 because of the projection of some dark, "evil" rascality within the mind that "shadows" man's awareness. The darkness never swallows up the light, but "is the condition of there being any light at all." If I understand Watts correctly, his theory is nothing that should disturb Robertson, for evil exists not in opposition to good, but merely as another aspect of their mutual oneness. Quoting philologist Carl Abel (who was also quoted by Freud), Watts notes the great number of words with opposed meanings—"cleave," meaning both "to hold to" and "to split," will serve as illustration—indicating, perhaps, that man cannot conceptualize even his most basic reality except in terms of its opposite or contrary.

Any alliance between Robertson and Watts is an uneasy one at best and always tentative. To believe Watts we
must believe that man has an "evil aspect" which he projects, that he makes God and the devil in his own image, and that the devil is just such a projection of our innate darkness. Most medievalists are uncomfortable at the same table with depth psychology; yet I find Watt's theory plausible, though still unproved. And then, Watts assumes a great gulf in the Christian mind between good and evil, a gulf which Robertson bridges by insisting that it isn't there. Both may be right. Robertson undoubtedly is, for he quotes Patristic sources to prove his thesis; Watts may be also, for despite the definitions of the philosophers, in the popular mind good may well have been divorced from evil.

Alan Watts learned much from Jung and Freud, but he never quite escaped the son's affection for the spiritual father. The "evil aspect" which he sees man projecting is Jung's "Shadow" concept—that darker, irrational part of man's psyche which Jung places in the personal unconscious. The Shadow is never adequately explained, but I gather that something like Freud's idea of the id is intended. Jung says that it is the "hidden, repressed,
for the most part inferior and guilt-laden personality" which extends backwards to encompass the "historical aspect of the unconscious." It is not all bad, for it also contains the normal instincts, insights, and impulses for good. Jung sees—conveniently for my interpretation of the *Canon's Yeoman's Tale*—the Antichrist as the Shadow of Christ. If Christ has been created in our conscious, idealized image, the Antichrist certainly has sprung from the womb of the "Shadow Archetype," for he has not even an historical identity. His entire existence is the creation of legend and fancy. The Antichrist is the perverse imitator of the life of Christ: he is the false messiah, the liar, the worker of false miracles, the one who will ride to the temple at Jerusalem and there proclaim himself king, whose reign—despite Scriptural hints to the contrary—is also to be for a thousand years. But, once again we recognize that though Christ and Anti-christ are antagonists, the battle is fought from opposite ends along the great chain of existence, and not from dynamically opposed camps.

The opposed camps, however, seem to have sent forth
those dynamic contraries which generate the Stone. Alchemy, possibly because its origins were from beyond central Europe, utilizes kinetic opposites whose interaction generate a higher resolution and a higher synthesis. Not so, as we have seen, with the contrary structure of the two Tales; that device, at least, was within Chaucer's control.

Almost against my inclination, I have tried to show that my reading perceives Chaucer's intentions, and that this is the way Chaucer meant us to see the two Tales of Fragment VIII. What Chaucer really meant we will never know, though I have tried to ground my interpretation in the known history of the fourteenth century and what little we know about Chaucer himself because an interpretation that takes Chaucer's world into account just seems so much more believable; it tries to avoid the imposition from outside of readings which the diction will not support. No interpretation is the Right One, but some are more right than others; some impart the touch of completeness and therefore satisfy aesthetically.

Intentionality becomes an important factor, whether we like it or not, when we consider the way Chaucer
manipulated his donne in the Second Nun’s Tale. The etymology of Cecilia’s name is rearranged so that the section which Jacobus Januensis placed third Chaucer moved to the last. Probably the shift was for emphasis because the passage now ends with the key words "bisy," "werkynge," "philosophres," "charite," and "brennynge" twice. Had Chaucer kept the original order what is now stanza four would be last, and the only important word in it is "werkes," mentioned but once.

The first four introductory stanzas of the Second Nun’s Prologue have no known source, but in any event are not part of canto xxxiii of the Paradiso which follows them. Then, why did Chaucer choose, or create, this particular four-stanza sermon on sloth? Probably because sloth was applicable to the Canon as it was antithetical to Cecilia. And, this sermon warns about the 'thousand sly cords' of the devil and how through idleness he may easily catch us. Chaucer again departs—so the textual authorities have reasoned—32—from his source when dramatizing Cecilia’s diatribe against Almachius’s blindness, another germane polarity which links the two Tales.
We are vexed as critics by Chaucer's reliance upon alchemy to carry at least part of the Tale's data and much of its dramatic content. Blake and Yeats make us uneasy in their company, but as with other good friends whose understanding we cherish, we forgive, though regret, their fascination with the occult and the obscure. Why should we have to learn about the "Celtomaniacs" and Helena Blavatsky to read a poem? Why should not old critics be made thus mad? But with Blake and Yeats the case may be slightly different: their works are fused in systems which they knew to be obscure and impermanent, while Chaucer was writing in terms of a science which he felt accurately described reality. It was not his fault that alchemy later proved to be unsatisfactory. He also blended his work with the metal of Christianity, again on the assumption that his faith had something of permanence; in this he has not been betrayed.

Such is the interpretation I give to Fragment VIII. What Chaucer meant has been nearly immaterial to such a reading but, if I have read his intentions correctly—or reasonably correctly, then I think we know a little more
about his literary method, his inclination toward philosophy and theology, and a particle more about the *Zeitgeist* of the fourteenth century. A pattern, which might one day reveal the structure of the *Canterbury Tales*, may be emerging with the reading of one more set of *Tales* as purposefully and significantly linked. Then, we may see Chaucer as a man who, more than we realized, reflected upon and was concerned with speculations on charity and cupidity, and on reason and revelation. This does not make him ascetic, for he saw and dramatized these questions in secular terms: nevertheless his concern was there. And, finally, that colossal vault door behind which the secrets of the past are cached, may have been pried open by a solitary microbe more, just sufficient to catch a fleeting and dim glimpse at the eyes of fourteenth-century England as it awaited the day of the locusts and, being good Christians most of them, the Last Judgment.
Footnotes--Chapter VIII

2. Thorndike, I, 773.
5. Thorndike, II, 346.
8. Thorndike, II, 545-568.
10. Alchemists, p. 99.
15. Opus Majus, II, 626.
19 Thorndike, III, 32-33, 48-50.

20 Henry Charles Lea, A History of the Inquisition of the Middle Ages (New York, 1901), III, 482.

21 Alchemists, pp. 124-125.

22 Etienne Gilson, Reason and Revelation in the Middle Ages (New York, 1938), pp. 57 ff., and 74 ff.

23 Summa Theologica, II, 1172.

24 Summa Theologica, II, 1172-73, 1182.


29 Waning, p. 27.


32 Robinson, Works, p. 759.
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Penn State gave me an assistantship in September, 1960, and I received my M.A. eighteen months later. I then worked in Milwaukee as a full-time instructor for one semester at the University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee center. In September, 1961, I received an assistantship from Ohio State, and, shortly after, a graduate school summer fellowship followed by a full-time fellowship for 1963. I was appointed instructor at Ohio State in September, 1964.