

INCIDENT — HISTORY — EXEMPLUM — NOVELLA: THE TRANSFORMATION OF HISTORY IN CHAUCER'S *PHYSICIAN'S TALE*

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Fragment VI or group C of the *Canterbury Tales*, the so-called floating fragment, begins without head link or introduction with an immediate reference to the source of the *Physician's Tale*: Livy's monumental compilation, *Ab Urbe Condita*. The famous Verginia episode to be treated once again by Chaucer, material which had already inspired such authors as Jean de Meung, Boccaccio, and Gower, is found in early form in the third book of Livy's Roman history. Its mediaeval analogues, as well as Livy's original treatment and Bersuire's French translation of it, were at least partially reproduced in Bryan and Dempster's *Sources and Analogues of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales*, providing the textual basis for the study of this relatively neglected tale from the mid-sixties on. In order to account for Chaucer's differently accentuated presentation of the historical episode, scholarship has tried to identify and analyse deviations from and alterations to his probable sources, Livy's history and Jean de Meung's *Romance of the Rose*.¹ The function of Chaucer's additions to the inherited story has been investigated,² the differing characterization of the main participants,³ the narrative development of the plot,⁴ and the relationship between the narrator (that is, the Physician) and his story.⁵ Also, a number of interpretative readings of the tale have been proposed with some of the varying interpretations finding encouragement in the gap that exists between the meaning suggested in the *moralisatio* appended to this tale by its teller and that seen in the *moralisatio* put forth by Harry Baily, the host and leader of the literary

pilgrimage to Canterbury.⁶ Moreover, both moralisations seem to fall short of plumbing the full depth of the story -- a fact recognized by recent scholarship.⁷

In principle, there are, of course, no objections to such approaches to the *Physician's Tale*, provided that the critic proceeds within the framework of clearly established criteria according to which the conception and execution of the Verginia story is to be investigated. In short, the methodology to be used has to be determined first. And one aspect of such methodological consideration must be the generic identification of the various versions of the Verginia story. However, modern critics of the *Physician's Tale*, with the exception of Beryl Rowland and Anne Middleton, have paid little attention to this question. Beryl Rowland, who is aware of the problem, allots only one sentence to its theoretical discussion before launching into a description of the rhetorical strategies employed in the *Physician's Tale*: "*Historia*, in the narrow sense, is *narratio rei gestae*. The Physician turns the account of Appius and Virginia into *fabula*."⁸ And Anne Middleton, who recognizes clearly that in the *Physician's Tale* the "literary limits of the exemplum are themselves held up for inspection by the reader,"⁹ finds it sufficient in the final analysis to stress the "fundamental literary problems of exemplary narration"¹⁰ which Chaucer found himself facing not only here but also in the *Legend of Good Women*. Here my intention is not to suggest a new reading of the *Physician's Tale*; rather, this investigation will concentrate solely on the analysis of the conditions making possible varying treatments of a popular story.

Such a procedure, of course, necessitates the establishment and definition of literary genres; that is, it entails a determination of how one is to arrive at a corpus of texts to be analysed.¹¹ There are basically two different approaches. One can proceed inductively, even though the huge number of texts will never permit us to devise a narrative model by a process of absolute induction. One can also proceed deductively; that is, a hypothetical narrative model will have to be devised, the validity of which will, of course, also defy absolute proof. No matter which system (with whatever modification) one finally chooses, one has to be aware of its limitations. Whether one abstracts constitutive generic elements from literary works regarded as exemplary -- a procedure followed by the literary critics of the rhetorical-poetical tradition with its prescriptive poetics -- or whether one postulates a literary *Urform* produced by a certain innate

capacity of the human mind, as Jolles does,¹² in both cases one leaves oneself open to criticism. Yet, an outright rejection of all literary genres, as seen in Benedetto Croce's works on literary theory,¹³ does not help us in our attempt to group together and consolidate literary texts. In order to do precisely this, I shall adopt the following hermeneutic procedure for the constitution of literary genres: after a survey of the mass of single works, I will set up classes characterized by a certain group of invariant elements and I will then trace the historical development of the resulting text corpora. In this way, the conditions will be met which are necessary for the analysis of the single works in their relationship to the total corpus, as well as for the control of the transformational ability of the genre in regard to the specific forms of the single works. Such a dialectical procedure will facilitate modifications of the previously established model. Beyond this, authorial intention (if stated explicitly), and the conditions of reception (if ascertainable), will also have to be taken into consideration, since a text may either be assigned to a certain genre by its author or be understood as such by its audience. When I refer to literary genres, therefore, in reference to the various treatments of the Verginia story, the methods by which I have constituted these genres should be clear.

Let us first discuss the incident on which the Verginia story is based. It may seem strange, but the incident never took place in the form of a historically verifiable event. We only know that in the middle of the fifth century B.C. the Romans undertook a codification of the existing law. Supposedly, this task was to be accomplished by decemvirs, a political body of aristocrats elected and endowed with special rights. These men were later forced out of office, presumably because they abused the power vested in them. In subsequent Roman historiography a story was invented to illustrate this political event. We know neither the inventor of the story nor if the first annalist reporting the legend believed it to be a historical fact. In any case, the story is believed to have appeared for the first time about the middle of the third century B.C. in Quintus Fabius Pictor.¹⁴ Appius Clodius, one of the ten law-givers, fell in love with a girl of noble origin whom he tried to seduce by means of money. Since the virgin remained steadfast, he sent out accusers to have her wrongfully vindicated as a slave girl. After this had been done, the decemvir proclaimed himself the judge of the case and awarded the girl to the accusers in utter disregard of her father's

vociferous protests. As the girl is about to be led away, her desperate father snatches a cleaver from the block of a butcher's shop -- the site of the tribunal being adjacent to the shops on the north side of the Forum -- and kills his own daughter to prevent her from becoming a victim of the decemvir. Then he rushes out of the town, returns to the Roman troops in the field, and reports the perversion of justice. Thereupon, a spontaneous uprising occurs which leads to the deposition and punishment of the decemvirs.

This fictitious account couched in the form of a brief factual report has thus become a part of Roman historiography. It now belongs to the *res gestae* as they had been collected originally in the records of the magistrate and recorded later in the annals. And as *res gestae*, the story is passed on from generation to generation, to be modified and interpreted by historians to fit their personal view of history. These historians expanded the original report in accordance with their political, legal, and even psychological conceptions. To illustrate this, let us take a look at the version reflecting the Sullan view of historiography.¹⁵ The anonymous persons are not only given names, they are also assigned to different social classes -- Appius Claudius is a member of the aristocratic oligarchy, while Verginius and his daughter are plebeians. The account is dominated by the idea of the conflict of classes. A numerically very small upper class, represented by Appius Claudius, possesses all political power and maltreats the disenfranchised mass of the people. The abuse practised by Appius Claudius and his flagrant violation of the law occasion an uprising by the lower class against the tyrannical upper class. The reasons for such an interpretation of the Verginia story are evident: the author believed that he had discovered in it the conflict of the same political forces shaping the destiny of his own time. Consequently, he interpreted the Verginia episode as typifying this conflict.

Let us now turn to Livy's treatment of the episode,¹⁶ in which the basic facts are not altered. Still, the tenor of the story has been changed radically. At first, Livy reports the general moral decline of the decemvirs -- a moral decline endangering both the external and the internal security of the city, since on the one hand the Roman soldiers campaigning against the Aequi lack all motivation under the leadership of the hated decemvirs and on the other hand the city itself is in a state of agitation and turmoil. He then illustrates this degeneration by citing two examples: the murder of Siccius by the henchmen of the decemvir generals committed outside Rome, and

the Verginia episode which took place within the city itself. Moreover, Livy links this episode with the Lucretia incident in order to localize the spectacular events within the larger context of the Roman history. Verginia is a model of chastity, for which she is loved and esteemed by her bridegroom Icilius. An incarnation of *pudor* and *pudicitia*, she is persecuted by the lecherous Appius. Therefore, when Icilius speaks to the assembled crowd during the first court scene, he does so solely as a defender of morality and not as an advocate of the disenfranchised people. He admonishes Appius: *pudicitia saltem in tuto sit* -- "at least let our chastity be safe."¹⁷ And then he calls upon the *fides* of gods and men. The second court scene is no longer reported in its entirety because Livy questions the truthfulness of his sources. Here, too, Verginia is awarded to the claimant, who is about to lead the girl away when Verginius rushes in from the battlefield and threatens Appius with a raised fist: "I have betrothed my daughter to Icilius and not to you; I have reared her for marriage, not for harlotry"¹⁸ -- which I think would be the proper translation of *stuprum*, actually "dishonour," in this context. Verginius' deed of desperation which now follows is, as was Icilius' appeal, motivated by his sense of ethics: he does not want his daughter to become Appius' mistress. And when Verginius has finally made his way back to his company, he does not incite his soldiers to an uprising of their class, he does not ask the suppressed plebs to rise against the ruling tyrants; rather, he admonishes his comrades in arms to protect their wives and daughters from Appius' unbridled lechery. This long address couched in indirect speech concerns itself only with ethical principles now abused by the decemvirs. In this way the rebellion becomes an act of self-defense, a way of securing the moral values of the Roman family against the immorality of the rulers and thus preserving the ethical foundation of the Roman state.

The accentuation of moral values here is typical of Livy's sense of history. He regards himself as a chronicler of Rome's rise and fall, concentrating his attention on *vita, mores, viri*, and *artes* in the first part, and on *disciplina* and *mores* in particular in the second part. Livy's tribute to his predecessors¹⁹ in the introduction to his *Ab Urbe Condita* and his awareness of Sallust's concept of history demonstrate that he thought of himself as the last link in a long line of historians who shared the same ideas about the function of history. Instead of adopting the analytical-scientific method of a Thucydides, they felt it was their task to

preserve the virtues of the past for the generation to come and to deter their countrymen from committing vices.²⁰ Livy, too, accepts Cicero's *prima lex historiae*, that is, *veritas*, when he declares that no external circumstances will ever deflect him from the truth. But this assertion does not imply that the primary duty of the historian is to discover the exact historical facts; rather, his first question should always concern the usefulness of historiography, to which the answer can only be, a moral use.²¹ The value of historiography for Livy is its capacity to provide examples of proper and improper conduct which man should either imitate or shun.²²

Livy is fully conscious of the normative power of the past, when *mores* and *artes* had combined to form a synthesis between the spheres of moral conduct and political activity. The *artes*, if they were *bonae*, would comprise the principles of religious, political and private life: *pietas*, *fides*, *concordia*, *disciplina*, *clementia*, *prudentia*, *virtus*, *prudicitia*, *dignitas*, *frugalitas*, etc. In Livy, the eminent Romans always embody these principles, while the villains typify their opposites.²³ The two groups function both as incentive and deterrent; that is, history is conceived of as an ongoing process. Moreover, it is not world history but typically Roman history, produced by the unique Roman spirit. To what extent this history is a product of the *fatum* of the city is hard to say²⁴ -- at least this power seems to play a less prominent role in the determination of Roman history than in Vergil's *Aeneid*.

Embedded in this conceptual context is the Verginia story. Like the afore-mentioned Lucretia story, it occupies a special position in the Roman history. Both episodes bring about a change in the form of government. Tarquinius' lechery, i.e. his lack of personal *virtus* necessary for the execution of responsible government, causes the downfall of Roman kingship, and Appius Claudius' same moral failure occasions the deposition of the decemvirs. In the large historical tapestry created by Livy for his contemporaries and for posterity some scenes have crucial importance. They are much more significant than the interminable wars and the internal wrangling reported by the chronicler. These facts accompanying the development of a city state to a mighty empire constitute the framework enclosing an inner history and, finally, reflect the decline of those *mores* which graced the Roman people as an ethnic entity. For Livy, composing his history in the time of the empire, the early Roman republic serves as the ideal form of social community because in spite of the constant conflicts between

consuls and tribunes and between *patres* and *plebs*, both parties were willing, if need be, to uphold the ideal of *res publica* against that of *res privata*.²⁵ This closing of ranks, of course, was only possible because the ethical norms produced by the Roman spirit as a whole were still largely intact. At the decisive moment these virtues became operative, as the Verginia story illustrates. Here, too, *patres* and *plebs* unite in the common endeavour to restore the traditional form of government and the laws inscribed on the Twelve Tables. In spite of its personal tragedy, the Verginia episode has to be viewed positively within the total context of Livy's Roman history, since it is a testimony to the still undiminished potency of the positive qualities inherent in the Roman national character. The episode, therefore, illustrates in an exemplary fashion future possibilities generated by the past and thus exemplifies the historiographic concept especially prevalent during the empire: *historia magistra vitae*.²⁶ The Verginia story was meant to serve as a model for Livy's contemporaries conscious of the meaning of history because, like all events from the past, it still retained its exemplary significance, notwithstanding the fact that the political potency of such a concept of history had been lost. Livy's history no longer provided an impetus towards the restoration of the ancient *res publica* through civil regeneration; rather, the work had become a monument to former Roman grandeur.

As to be expected, the Verginia story is also included in Valerius Maximus' collection of exemplary tales, *Factorum et Dictorum Memorabilia*. After an encomiastic invocation to Chastity ending with the plea "ades igitur et recognosce quae fieri ipsa voluisti" ("appear then and see what you yourself wanted to be done") Valerius cites thirteen Roman and three foreign examples of this virtue with the Verginia story²⁷ following the Lucretia episode: Verginius, full of aristocratic spirit, though of plebeian origin, did not spare the child of his own blood in order to save his house from being contaminated by dishonour. The decemvir, Appius Claudius, relying on his power, persecuted the virgin daughter with lecherous designs, whereupon Verginius led her to the Forum and killed her because he preferred being the slayer of chastity to being the father of a dishonoured daughter. As the employment of this and of other stories proves, Valerius uses Livy's great history as a huge quarry from which he detaches like blocks a number of episodes in order to illustrate certain themes. Moreover, Valerius' handling of the Verginia episode in the *Factorum et Dictorum Memorabilia*

illustrates clearly the generic differences between historiography and *exemplum*, differences of essential importance for the make-up of the late mediaeval versions of the Verginia story composed by Jean de Meung, Boccaccio, and Gower.

In this transition from history to *exemplum* changes in content and form occur. In regard to content, we encounter the dissolution of the net of causal relationships. The presentation of history as process is abandoned in favour of disconnected, self-contained episodes taken at random from the historical process. With the ascendancy of the Christian concept of history, these historical fragments assume the position of *figurae* in a divinely determined history of salvation.²⁸ In regard to form, there are three major changes. First, the individual historical perspective is given up in favour of a perspective striving for universality. Thus, individual views determining the shape and form of history are largely eliminated. Second, the concept of history as *magistra vitae*, that is, the concept of history as macro-*exemplum*, disappears in favour of the idea of history as micro-*exemplum* presented in the form of static episodes with universal applicability. In short, the individual stories do not teach history as a process. Third and last, we encounter the insertion of historical events in a non-historiographical context which determines the selection of events to be included. Such a resetting of events taken from historiography, however, occasions a purely contextual interpretation of their significance because every different context changes their meaning. This sort of interpretability of historical events differs essentially from what we have encountered before in historiography. Whether the Verginia episode is interpreted as the conflict of classes or as a restoration of violated ethical principles, it is part of the fight for a new form of government. In this context it serves as an illustration of different conflicting opinions. The context alone generates an episode which derives its essential meaning solely from the historical situation. However, as soon as the story is taken out of historiography, as we shall see, it is subject to a number of vastly differing interpretations which are determined by the now non-historical context.

In the *Romance of the Rose*,²⁹ Reason tries to convince Amant, the protagonist, that love springing from charity is a greater virtue than justice. In the dialogue of the two disputants, this contention comprises the major theme to which the following minor theme is subordinated: power and virtue are rarely joined together. If all men lived united with each other in

brotherly love, there would be no need for institutions upholding justice, institutions, moreover, which often abuse their authority. In order to illustrate this point, Reason cites the Verginia episode which the author, Jean de Meung, terms "cas,"³⁰ that is, an exemplary explication of his thesis. At the end of the story, the lesson is briefly recapitulated to Amant, who now accepts Reason's teachings.

Boccaccio, the second author to make use of the Verginia episode, employs the story in a totally different context. In the preface to *De Claris Mulieribus*.³¹ the author points out that although the lives of famous men have been penned by his great contemporary and preceptor, Petrarch, no one has hitherto written the lives of famous women. These, however, deserve our praise all the more because of the admirable deeds accomplished in spite of their generic inferiority of mind and body. Especially notable are the merits of pagan women who could not hope to earn the kingdom of heaven through privations and self-sacrifice like the Biblical and Christian heroines. Boccaccio, therefore, restricts himself to the description of the lives of pagan women, both the virtuous and the wicked, in order to stimulate the reader to imitate virtue and shun vice. The moral purpose of the collection of portraits is thus clearly stressed. And it is from this context that the Verginia story takes its general meaning, a meaning specified and particularized at the end of the narration. The story here exemplifies the harm unjust judges can do. It is addressed to the mighty, who should guard themselves against following the contemporary custom of selling justice for money. Thus, the story's very practical application exemplifies Boccaccio's didactic intention voiced in the preface to *De Claris Mulieribus*.

In the *Confessio Amantis*,³² finally, the Verginia story is told by Gower as an illustration of the fifth rule of conduct for rulers: the preservation of chastity and the avoidance of lechery. The larger context is the education of Alexander, used by Genius as an illustration of the education of the ideal prince. Aristotle had supposedly given five rules of conduct to his pupil and lord, Alexander, each of which Genius now illustrates by means of exemplary stories. One of these rules states that justice and lechery are mutually exclusive, and Livy provides an "olde ensample"³³ of this. The adage is repeated once more at the end of the story, before Genius finishes his explication of this rule with one final exemplary tale.

Let me recapitulate briefly: all exemplary versions of the Verginia story take their meaning from their respective contexts. Jean de Meung

uses the story as an illustration of the idea that power and virtue are rarely joined together. Boccaccio employs it to show the damage unjust judges can cause. And Gower, finally, utilizes it to demonstrate that justice and lechery are mutually exclusive. Taken out of its original historical context, the story has lost its former meaning in all three versions. It has now the characteristic features of an exemplum, the functional meaning of which I would like to define in reference to the following five aspects: world picture, figures, *modus dicendi*, authorial intent, and reception.³⁴

As is to be expected, the world of the exemplum is well ordered, typical, and unproblematic; that is, a pre-given order becomes manifest here. In such a world, the figures cannot be but one-dimensional, unindividualized types, because subtle characterization and heterogeneity would break the one-dimensional framework of the exemplum. Since the figures support the exemplary plot, they have to illustrate its action, that is, they have a demonstrative function. The exclusive concentration on the moral message to be conveyed by the story necessitates the deletion of everything not relevant to this message. Thus, the story is told without digression according to the *ordo naturalis*. There is one main plot narrated in the style of the *sermo levis*. Rhetorical ornamentation has no place in the exemplum; rather, its authors use a plain, unadorned style to convey their message: the story's usefulness for the individual, an estate, or mankind in general. The transmission of doctrine is the central concern of the exemplum and determines its authorial intent, an intent to be understood fully and acknowledged by the audience to whom the authorial message is conveyed. The story has a definitive meaning, which should be accepted and not reflected upon. This mode of reception, incidentally, differs essentially from the reception of texts belonging to other literary genres which stimulate the audience to reflection. Since a story's reception by the audience is also determined by its rhetorical situation and the personality of the narrator or author, the exemplum, to be effective, demands positive narrative conditions. The rhetorical situation in which the Verginia story appears in Jean de Meung, Boccaccio, and Gower, conforms to the audience's expectations, and so do the various narrators of the story: Reason in the *Romance of the Rose*, Genius in the *Confessio Amantis*, and Boccaccio, the author of the collection, *De Claris Mulieribus*. The effectiveness of the three exempla is, thus, fully realized.

Let us now look at the narrative conditions determining the reception of the *Physician's Tale*. The rhetorical situation is set within a double frame: an inner and an outer one. The outer frame is constituted by the *Canterbury Tales in toto*; that is, within this larger context, the *Physician's Tale* takes its place next to all the other tales and affects the audience as one part of an aesthetic whole. This larger context will consequently determine the meaning of the individual stories, since an audience's reception of each single tale will surely be guided by the impression it has formed of the collection as a whole. Thus, the concept of structure, theme, narrator, and genre will play an important role contributing to the reader's formation of a total aesthetic impression which will, in turn, influence his interpretation of the individual tales. The inner frame, unaffected by the concepts determining the reception of the outer frame, constitutes itself through the pilgrims, especially Harry Baily, the host. These characters function as immediate audience and as such they comment occasionally on the individual tales. Their comments, therefore, also have to be considered by the reader, because Harry Baily in particular often functions as a sort of *vox populi* in his reaction to the stories told by his fellow travellers. Even though Harry Baily does not distinguish himself by a keen literary sensitivity, his commentaries, in spite of their limitations, still contain something useful and commonsensical.

The Physician, whose character is not defined precisely in the General Prologue, functions as a narrator within the inner frame. We only know that he has profound scientific knowledge and is excellent in his profession. He has obviously accumulated a fortune during the time of the plague, a fortune still increasing because of his fondness for gold. Moreover, the omniscient first person narrator responsible for the portraits in the General Prologue tells us that this practically minded man does not spend much time reading the Bible. The Physician belongs to the solid middle class of the pilgrims in the *Canterbury Tales*, whose representatives tell edifying tales with a moral kernel. Thus, the assignment of the Verginia story to the Physician follows the normal principle of distribution, a fact which precludes any immediate scepticism about the nature of the tale.³⁵ There is no discrepancy between the narrator and his tale as we find it, for instance, in the *The Wife of Bath's Tale*, or in the *Merchant's Tale*, where the literary form of the lai and the romance, respectively, are necessarily distorted by the personalities of their tellers who are unfit for their literary tasks.

The tale proper begins immediately with a reference to its source, Titus Livius. There follows, however, a ninety-nine line digression comprising almost one third of the entire tale, which has nothing at all to do with Livy. The story ends with a ten line *moralisatio*, in which the narrator imparts his interpretation of his story to the audience. In the subsequent link, Harry Baily assesses the *Physician's Tale* and, eager to hear "som myrthe or japes,"³⁶ he effects a transition to the *Pardoner's Tale*.

Let us now return to the opening of the tale. Here, the reader is somewhat disconcerted by the long digression following the Physician's assertion that Virginia has been most excellently endowed by Nature. The *digressio* itself is bipartite. The first part, a loose adaptation of the *Romance of the Rose* (lines 16006-48), depicts Natura's excellence which is superior to any human creation. The second section contains a warning to educators to perform their pedagogical duties diligently. Natura is God's "vicaire general" (line 20) who executes His procreational intent on earth. The divine executrix has created Virginia as a perfect specimen of womanhood, both in mind and body. She is a model of human perfection. The digression, in this way, creates a special context for the subsequent Virginia story, a process resulting in the mutual interdependence of context and story. Virginia, the personification of human perfection, falls victim to male lechery and paternal arbitrariness. She suffers innocently because she has been favoured by Nature. Her fate thus points up the tensions contained in the world picture comprising the philosophical background of the story. Although one expects Natura, God's vice-regent, to arrange the affairs of the world in an orderly and benevolent fashion, the development of the story proper shows that this providential order can take rather curious forms.³⁷ In any case, the order postulated at the beginning of the tale is no longer apparent. Thus, the concept of the world has become complicated and problematic.³⁸

It should not be surprising that in such a world the figures also change. Instead of using mere types, the narrator attempts to create characters whose actions are motivated to some extent. Appius is no longer merely the judge who, captivated by the beauty of the girl, would like to possess her; rather, he is incited to do so by the devil himself. Virginius, acting upon sudden impulse in the three exemplum versions of the tale, is here given ample time to deliberate his action. He tries to convince himself and his daughter by the force of argumentation that death is the only honourable solution to the dilemma. Virginia, finally, becomes the character

of central concern for the narrator, who tries to emotionalize his heroine. In the other versions, the girl is shown to be a passive victim. She has no speaking role. In the *Physician's Tale*, however, she enters into a discussion with her father about her fate. Instead of accepting the paternal decision undisputedly, she tries to dissuade him from pursuing such a rigorous course of action. Only after the discussion with her father has proved to be ineffective does she resign herself to her fate. In short, characters in the *Physician's Tale* have replaced the one-dimensional figures supporting the exemplary plot in the other three versions. Instead of serving a purely demonstrative function, they themselves become the subject of investigation; that is, the conditions under which they act and their motivations are analysed. The action in which they are involved becomes necessarily multifaceted.

This multifariousness is also supported by the *modus dicendi*. The digression at the beginning of the tale has already been mentioned. Besides this, the narrative texture of the *Physician's Tale* is enriched by ample dialogue passages and a multitude of rhetorical figures.³⁹ In comparison with the plain style of the exemplum, the diction of Chaucer's tale is varied and elevated. The Physician uses this rhetorical modulation especially for the arousing of pathos -- a strategy employed by many narrators belonging to the solid middle class of the Canterbury pilgrims, such as the Man of Law, the Clerk, the Second Nun, and the Prioress. Their tales feature passively suffering protagonists, three of whom are women, while the fourth one is a young boy who is foully murdered by the Jews because of his devotion to the Virgin Mary. The Virginia story belongs to this group of tales and shares in their rhetorical strategies designed to arouse compassion and pathos.

While defining the structure of the *Physician's Tale*, I indicated that the story is concluded by a ten line *moralisatio* appended to the tale by its teller:

Heere may men seen how synne hath his merite,
 Beth war, for no man woot whom God wol smyte
 In no degree, ne in which manere wyse
 The worm of consience may agryse
 Of wikked lyf, though it so pryvee be
 That no man woot therof but God and he.
 For be he lewed man, or ellis lered,
 He noot how soone that he shal been afered.

Therefore I rede yow this conseil take:
 Forsaketh synne, er synne yow forsake. (VI.[C.] 277-86)

The narrator thus attributes to his story an exemplary function. His audience is everyman and everyman should follow the advice given by the Physician in the form of the *moralisatio*. Still, the question arises whether or not the teller's conclusions correspond to the concept of his tale. Literary critics have rightfully voiced their doubts, pointing to the discrepancy between the tale and the *moralisatio*.⁴⁰ The Physician's moral applies only to Appius, but Appius is a subordinate character. It certainly does not apply to Virginia, the heroine and protagonist of Chaucer's version of the traditional story. She dies innocently. One can only say: "Here may men see how innocence has its merits." Moreover, it is not clear if Virginius is also included in the moral. It is at least conceivable that he too may be troubled by remorse. In short, the Physician's exemplary conclusion is at best imprecise and at worst partially inappropriate.⁴¹ This imprecision, however, has another more serious effect: it obscures the clear demonstrative character of the story, making it polysemous, as its reception by Harry Baily in the inner frame proves. The host reacts at first angrily towards Appius' abuse of his office before he concludes his lament with his own moral:

Alas, to deere boughte she beautee!
 Wherefore I seye al day that men may see
 That yiftes of Fortune and of Nature
 Been cause of deeth to many a creature.
 Hire beautee was hire deth, I dar wel sayn. (VI.[C.] 293-97)

Although not very profound, since the girl's death is not caused by the gifts of Fortune and Nature alone but also by the moral rigour of an uncompromising father who sacrifices his daughter for an abstract principle, Harry Baily's *moralisatio* applies at least to the heroine. In any case, the discrepancy between two different assessments of the story's meaning charges the recipients of the outer frame, that is, the audience of the *Canterbury Tales*, to reflect also on its meaning. The version of the Verginia story presented in the *Physician's Tale* lacks a definitive significance and thus it becomes subject to individual interpretation.⁴²

The analysis of the tale in reference to the five criteria of world picture, figures, *modus dicendi*, authorial intent, and reception has revealed major differences in all points between Chaucer's treatment of the Virginia story and the three exemplum versions discussed above. Consequently, the *Physician's Tale* cannot be called an exemplum, although the teller stresses its exemplary significance. The essential innovations characterizing Chaucer's rendition of the traditional story remove it from the genre of the exemplum and place it in the context of a new literary form, the novella. In this form, the image of the world becomes highly complex because the changing conditions in which the events take place are of such relevance that typical situations cannot occur. The figures in the novella act as true characters in situations of social and moral conflicts. The stylistic level is variable and corresponds to the needs of the plot, the structure of which can be simple or complex. The authorial intent inherent in the novella is the presentation of the problematic story itself. Each reader is given an opportunity to assess the story for himself since the author refrains from assigning a definitive meaning to it. Consequently, the reception of the novella is necessarily characterized by a reflection upon the conflicting social and ethical norms presented in the story.⁴³

Boccaccio, of course, has traditionally been credited with the invention of this new literary form, derived from the transformation of such older genres as the exemplum, the saint's life, and the fabliau, in his collection of classical and mediaeval tales, the *Decamerone*. Although Chaucer knew Boccaccio's *Teseida*, *Filocolo*, and *Filostrato* -- these works constitute the sources of the *Knight's Tale*, the *Franklin's Tale*, and the *Troilus* respectively -- no evidence has so far been uncovered which proves that he had direct knowledge of the *Decamerone*.⁴⁴ At least none of the tales from the *Decamerone* served as an immediate source or model for the stories of the *Canterbury Tales*.⁴⁵ From this proof *ex negativo* I deduce that Chaucer had no first-hand knowledge of the *Decamerone*, for otherwise he surely would have made use of it in the composition of the *Canterbury Tales*. His treatment of the Virginia story, however, shows all the characteristic features of the novella, and so we may conclude that Chaucer's experimentation with traditional genres in the *Canterbury Tales* resulted in the independent creation of a new narrative form in Middle English literature. Chaucer's artistic act has, of course, an immediate bearing on our understanding of his narrative, because an analysis of the *Physician's Tale* cannot proceed without the identification of its literary genre. Before suggesting any interpretations of

the tale's meaning -- let alone interpretations based on an erroneous generic identification of the tale⁴⁶ --, one should first have investigated its prevailing narrative conditions and analysed the possibilities provided by a new literary form. This essay was meant to serve as an attempt to clarify these conditions by the establishment of what I hope is a plausible and acceptable catalogue of criteria for them.

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NOTES

¹ Thomas B. Hanson, "Chaucer's Physician as Storyteller and Moralizer," *ChauR* 7 (1972-73) 134; 136-37; Lee C. Ramsey, "'The Sentence of it Sooth is': Chaucer's *Physician's Tale*," *ChauR* 7 (1972-73) 190-93; Beryl Rowland, "The Physician's 'Historical Thyng Notable' and the Man of Law," *ELH* 40 (1973) 166-69; Anne Middleton, "The *Physician's Tale* and Love's Martyrs: 'Ensamples Mo Than Ten' as a Method in the *Canterbury Tales*," *ChauR* 8 (1973-74) 11-13; E.R. Amois, "Fruitfulness and Sterility in the 'Physician's' and 'Pardoner's Tales'," *ESA* 17 (1974) 19-22; Sheila Delany, "Politics and the Paralysis of Poetic Imagination in the *Physician's Tale*," *SAC* 3 (1981) 47-54.

² Ramsey (at n. 1) 194.

³ Ramsey, art. cit. 194-95; Anne Middleton (at n. 1) 16-22.

⁴ Middleton, art. cit. 24-25; Rowland (at n. 1) 167-68.

⁵ Richard L. Hoffman, "Jephthah's Daughter and Chaucer's Virginia," *ChauR* 2 (1967-68) 31; Robert Longworth, "The Doctor's Dilemma: A Comic View of the 'Physician's Tale'," *Criticism* 13 (1971) 231-32.

⁶ Barbara Bartholomew, *Fortuna and Natura: A Reading of Three Chaucer Narratives* (The Hague 1966) 46-57; Jeanne T. Mathewson, "For Love and Not for Hate: The Value of Virginity in Chaucer's *Physician's Tale*," *AnM* 14 (1973) 42; Thomas L. Kinney, "The Popular Meaning of Chaucer's 'Physician's Tale'," *Literature and Psychology* 28 (1978) 76-84; Delany (at n. 1) 56-60.

⁷ Ramsey (at n. 1) 195; Amois (at n. 1) 26-27; John P. McCall, *Chaucer Among the Gods: The Poetics of Classical Myth* (University Park & London 1979) 107.

- ⁸ Rowland (at n. 1) 166.
- ⁹ Middleton (at n. 1) 26.
- ¹⁰ Ibid. 27.
- ¹¹ Cf. Klaus W. Hempfer, *Gattungstheorie*, UTB 133 (Munich 1973) 124-91.
- ¹² André Jolles, *Einfache Formen* (3rd ed., Tübingen 1965) 16-22.
- ¹³ Benedetto Croce, *La poesia* (3rd ed., Bari 1971) 159 ff.
- ¹⁴ Erich Burck, "Livius als Augusteischer Historiker," *Die Welt als Geschichte* I (1935) 449. The following account, however, is a paraphrase of Diodorus Siculus, *The Library of History* 12, 24, ed. C.H. Oldfather, in *The Loeb Classical Library* (London/Cambridge 1956) 420-23, which according to Burck corresponds to the original version of the Verginia story.
- ¹⁵ The following brief summary is based on the account by Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *The Roman Antiquities* 2, 28-44, ed. Earnest Cary, in *The Loeb Classical Library* (London/Cambridge 1950) 92-149, which according to Burck (452) represents the Sullan version of the story.
- ¹⁶ Titus Livius, *Ab Urbe Condita* 3,44-49, ed. B.O. Foster, in *The Loeb Classical Library* (London/Cambridge 1953) 142-63.
- ¹⁷ Ibid. 148.
- ¹⁸ Ibid. 156 "Appi, non tibi filiam despondi et ad nuptias, non ad stuprum educavi."
- ¹⁹ Ibid. 2, "Praefatio" 3. Included in the "tanta scriptorum turba" are probably Q. Fabius Pictor, L. Cincius Alimentus, A. Postumius Albinus, M. Porcius Cato, L. Calpurnius Piso, L. Coelius Antipater, L. Cassius Hemina, Valerius Antias, and Q. Aelius Tubero.
- ²⁰ P.G. Walsh, "Livy's Preface and the Distortion of History," *American Journal of Philology* 76 (1955) 369.
- ²¹ A.D. Leeman, "Are we Fair to Livy? Some Thoughts on Livy's Prologue," *Helikon* 1 (1961) 30.
- ²² Titus Livius, *Ab Urbe Condita* 6, "Praefatio" 9.
- ²³ Walsh (at n. 20) 370.
- ²⁴ Cf. Iiro Kajanto, *God and Fate in Livy* (Turku 1957).
- ²⁵ Burck (at n. 14) 454.
- ²⁶ Cicero, *De Oratore* 2, 9, 36, ed. E.W. Sutton and H. Rackham, in *The Loeb Classical Library* (London/Cambridge 1948) 224. See Reinhart Koselleck, "Historia Magistra Vitae," in *Natur und Geschichte*, ed. Hermann Braun and Manfred Riedel (Stuttgart 1967) 196-219 and Manfred Fuhrmann, "Das Exempler in der antiken Rhetorik," in *Geschichte-Ereignis und Erzählung*,

ed. Reinhart Koselleck and Wolf-Dieter Stempel (Munich 1973) 449-52.

²⁷ Valerius Maximus, *Factorum et Dictorum Memorabilium Libri Novem*, 6, 1, 2, ed. Karl Kempf (2nd ed., Stuttgart 1966) 271.

²⁸ Cf. Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis, Dargestellte Wirklichkeit in der abend-ländischen Literatur* (4th ed., Bern and Munich 1967) 18-19; 75-76.

²⁹ Guillaume de Lorris & Jean de Meun, *Le Roman de la Rose*, ed. Félix Lecoy (Paris 1965) I, 170-74, lines 5528-5669.

³⁰ Ibid. p. 171, line 5565.

³¹ Giovanni Boccaccio, *De Mulieribus Claris*, in *Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio*, ed. Vittore Branca (Verona 1967) X, 22-29, 236-43.

³² John Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, in *The Complete Works of John Gower*, ed. G.C. Macaulay (Oxford 1901) III, 377-82, lines 5124-5306.

³³ Ibid. p. 377, line 5130.

³⁴ For discussions on the *exemplum* see Hugo Friedrich, *Die Rechtsmeta-physik in der Göttlichen Komödie Francesca da Rimini* (Limburg 1942) 21-31; Frederic C. Tubach, "Exempla in the Decline," *Traditio* 18 (1962) 407-17; Rudolf Schenda, "Stand und Aufgaben der Exempla-forschung," *Fabula* 10 (1969) 69-85; Hans-Jörg Neuschäfer, *Boccaccio und der Beginn der Novelle* (Munich 1969) 49-54; Karlheinz Stierle, *Text als Handlung*, UTB 423 (Munich 1975) 22-37; Paul Strohm, "Middle English Narrative Genres," *Genre* 13 (1980) 379.

³⁵ Cf. Huling E. Ussery, *Chaucer's Physician. Medicine and Literature in Fourteenth-Century England* (New Orleans 1971) 119-42 and Rowland (at n.1) 178 against critics like Hoffman (at n. 5) 31 and Longworth (at n. 5) 232 who would question the moral integrity of the Physician.

³⁶ CT, VI. (C.), 319. All references are to *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. F.N. Robinson (2nd ed., Boston 1957).

³⁷ This point must be emphasized in view of the odd concept of *Natura* espoused by Barbara Bartholomew (at n. 6) 49-56.

³⁸ See also Ramsey (at n. 1) 197.

³⁹ Cf. Rowland (at n. 1) 166-67, who lists the rhetorical figures and tropes of *prosopopoeia*, *ratiocinatio*, *similitudo*, *tractatio*, *hyperbole*, *repetitio*, *contentio*, *expositio*, *sententia*, *digressio*, *apostrophe*, and *exemplum*. Of these *prosopopoeia*, *similitudo*, *contentio*, *expositio*, and *exemplum* belong to the *ornatus difficilis*. See Leonid Arbusow, *Colores Rhetorici* (Göttingen 1948) 17, 63, 82.

⁴⁰ Hanson (at n. 1) 136-37; Middleton (at n. 1) 14.

⁴¹ See my discussion in *Chaucer's 'Art Poetical': A Study in Chaucerian Poetics, Studies and Texts in English I* (Tübingen 1980) 105-06.

⁴² See also Middleton (at n. 1) 31.

⁴³ For discussions on the mediaeval form of the novella, especially as found in the *Decamerone*, see Neuschäfer (at n. 34); Stierle (at n. 34) 35-37; Joachim Heinze, "Märenbegriff und Novellentheorie: Überlegungen zur Gattungsbestimmung der mittelhochdeutschen Kleincpik," *ZDA* 89 (1978) 421-38.

⁴⁴ For the most recent assessment of Chaucer's knowledge of Boccaccio's *Decamerone* see N.R. Havelly, *Chaucer's Boccaccio*, *Chaucer Studies V* (Cambridge 1980) 12. H.M. Cummings, *The Indebtedness of Chaucer's Works to the Italian Works of Boccaccio*, *University of Cincinnati Studies X*, 2 (Menasha, Wis. 1916) 176-80; W. Farnham, "England's Discovery of the *Decameron*," *PMLA* 39 (1924) 123-39; H.G. Wright, *Boccaccio in England from Chaucer to Tennyson* (London 1957) 114 and n. 3; Edmund Reiss, "Boccaccio in English Culture of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries," in *Boccaccio nella cultura inglese e anglo-americana*, ed. G. Galigani (Florence 1974) 15-17, all have rejected the idea of Chaucer's indebtedness to the *Decamerone*.

⁴⁵ Four of the *Canterbury Tales* have plot outlines analogous to tales from the *Decamerone*: *The Reeve's Tale* (*Decamerone IX*, 6); *The Clerk's Tale* (*Decamerone X*, 10); *The Franklin's Tale* (*Decamerone X*, 5) and *The Shipman's Tale* (*Decamerone VIII*, 1 and 2). The stories in the *Decamerone*, however, are not the sources of these tales.

⁴⁶ Cf. R.M. Lumiansky, *Of Sundry Folk: The Dramatic Principle in the Canterbury Tales* (Austin 1955) 195, who calls the tale "an allegory against lust" and Judson B. Allen and Theresa A. Moritz, *A Distinction of Stories: The Medieval Unity of Chaucer's Fair Chain of Narratives for Canterbury* (Columbus 1981) 158, who maintain "the tale is an exemplum of the unjust judge." That Chaucer, however, knew the literary form of the exemplum very well is proven by *The Pardoner's Tale* which exhibits all the features associated with that genre. Thus, *The Pardoner's Tale*, in addition to illustrating the rhetorical skills of the Pardoner by which he succeeds in soliciting contributions from the parishioners he preaches to, also has a contrastive function. Here, the older literary form of the exemplum is juxtaposed to the newer literary form of the novella used in the preceding *Physician's Tale*.