THE CLASSICAL AND MODERN CONCEPT OF AUCTORITAS IN GEOFFREY CHAUCER'S *THE CANTERBURY TALES*[1]

> And where as ye seyn that Fortune hath norissed yow fro youre childhede,
> I seye that in so muchel shul ye the lasse truste in hire and in hir wit.
> For Senec seith, "What man that is norissed by Fortune,
> she maketh hym a greet fool."[2]

Chaucer makes use of the *auctoritas* whenever he wants to look for support and evidence. Her quotations are mainly taken from the Bible and the authors of Classical Antiquity are thought in the Middle Ages to be the most reliable references to exemplify "teachings", "morals" and "behaviour". In this essay, we will trace and analyze the concept of *auctoritas* from the Classical point of view, commenting what Latin authors think about the matter, and then we will see what Late Latinity authors hold about this concept. Finally, we will show how Chaucer applies the concept and why he does so.

I

[1] I owe a quite incalculable debt to Dr. Ricardo J. Sola Buil (amico aeterno et magistro doctissimo), for his permanent support and help in everything related to this paper. And also special thanks to Dr. María José Muñoz Jiménez, Lecturer in Latin language and literature at the Faculty of Arts of Complutense University (Madrid), in searching for the appropriate bibliography of this paper.

[2] Larry D. Benson, Ed. *The Riverside Chaucer*. 3rd. Ed. Oxford: OUP, 1987. *The Tale of Melibee*, v.v. 1452-5, p. 230.

In the Old Latin period the concept of *auctoritas* is used in several contexts and with different meanings, depending on the author who uses it. Cicero, for instance, from the juridical point of view, uses *auctoritas* as *usus auctoritas* or *usucapio*, i. e., when someone acquires something after a long possession, which implies the prescription of its old proprietor's rights, either by force or by legal rights. In both cases the authority referred to is the document, written or oral, that regulates social relationships. Relating to husband and wife[1]: "Cum mulier viro in manum convenit, omnia quae mulieris fuerunt viri fiunt dotis nomine" (When a woman comes under the *manus* (legal control) of her husband, all her property goes to the husband under the designation of dowry.) Relating to a foreigner or stranger.[2] "Indicant duodecim tabulae: aut status dies cum hoste, itemque: adversus hostem aeterna auctoritas" (This is proved by the usage in the Twelve Tables: "Or a day fixed for trial with a stranger" (hostis). And again: "Right of ownership is inalienable for ever in dealings with a stranger" (hostis)). It also means guarantee from a tutor"[3]: "si M. Marcelli tutoris auctoritas apud te ponderis nihil habebat," (if the personal authority of the boy's guardian Marcus Marcellus counted for nothing with you). Relating to a public registry:[4]: "Immo vero iis tabulis professus, quae solae ex illa professione collegioque praetorum obtinent publicarum tabularum auctoritatem" (He did report himself; and, what is more, out of all the declarations made at that time before the board of praetors, his alone was supported by documents which possess all the weight of official sanction).

Another use of authority refers to the personal prestige of someone based on knowledge or moral standing. Relating to the lawyers' opinion:[5] "Num destitit uterque nostrum in ea causa, in auctoritatibus, in exemplis, in testamentorum formulis, hoc est, in medio iure civili, versari?" (In these proceedings were not both of us unceasingly occupied with decisions, with precedents, with forms of wills, with questions, in fact, of common law all around of us?). Relating to eulogistic position:[6] "quantam putas auctoritatem

[1] Cicero. *Topica*, IV, 23.
[2] Cicero. *De Officiis*, I, 12, 37.
[3] Cicero. *Contra Verrem*, part II, I, 55, 144.
[4] Cicero. *Pro Archia Poeta*, IV, 9.
[5] Cicero. *De Oratore*, I, 39, 180.
[6] Cicero. *Contra Verrem*, part II, IV, 9, 19. See, also, Cornelius Nepos, *Miltiades*, 8.4; Cicero, *Contra Verrem*, part II, IV, 27, 60; Caesar, *De Bello Gallico*, 7, 77, 3; Ci-

laudationis eorum futuram, si in eum quem constet verum pro testimonio dixisse poenam constituerint?" (how much weight do you expect to be attached to their eulogy of you, after their decreeing the punishment of the man who has admittedly spoken the truth as a witness?)

The authority also deals with the warfare matters, in which certain *illustriores viri* stand out: nothing more brilliant and authoritative concerning warfare:[1] "nihil illustriore auctoritate de bellis, nihil de re publica gravius" (Nothing more brilliant and authoritative concerning warfare, nothing more weighty concerning state affairs). To lead the campaign with great prestige:[2] "Quorum adventu magna cum auctoritate et magna cum hominum multitudine bellum gerere conantur." (Upon their arrival they attempted (to lead) the campaign with great prestige and a great host of men).

Finally, the main element in Roman administration, together with the Roman people, the Senate, was another source of authority: to obey the authority of the senate:[3] "Is qui auctoritati senatus, voluntati tuae paruit, denique is tulit cui minime proderant." (A man who obeyed the authority of the Senate and your wishes, the man, in short, who stood to get least from them.). In disregard of the Senate's authority:[4] "Inde iter Alexandriam contra senatus auctoritatem, contra rem publicam et religiones" (Then he journeyed to Alexandria, in disregard of the Senate's authority, in disregard of the interests of the State, and the sanctions of religion). Through the support of the senate:[5] "quod ex auctoritate senatus consensu bonorum omnium pro salute patriae gessissem" (I had achieved for my country's well-being by the union of patriots and through the support of the Senate).

II

cero, *Brutus*, LII, 221; *Contra Verrem*, part II, V, 32, 84-85; *Pro Rege Deiotaro*, XI, 30; *Pro M. Fonteio*, 1; Caesar, *De Bello Gallico*, 3, 8, 3.

[1] Cicero. *Pro Balbo*, I, 2.

[2] Caesar. *De Bello Gallico*, 3, 23, 4. See, also, Cicero, *Contra Verrem*, part I, 17, 52; *De Officiis*, III, 30, 109; Cornelius Nepos, *Alcibiades*, 3, 1-2.

[3] Cicero. *Pro Murena*, 47.

[4] Cicero. *Philippicae*, II, 19, 48.

[5] Cicero. *De Domo Sua*, XXXV, 94. See, also, Cicero, *Contra Verrem*, part II, III, 7, 17; *Epistulae ad Familiares*, I, 2, 7; *Epistulae ad Atticum*, I, 19, 2; Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita*, IX, 7, 7.

Once we have checked the meanings of the word *auctoritas* in the Ancient times, mainly in Cicero and other Classical writers, let us go to the Middle Ages and revise the uses of the concept of "auctoritas". There are, at least, four groups in which we can divide the meanings of this word: the royal authority: "Rex directa auctoritate praecepit comiti"[1] (The King warned his companion by means of his direct order); "Qui sola faciende pacis intentione regali sola distinatur autoritate."[2] This with the only intention of making peace appointed a gift by his own order); "Coram principe vel his, quos sua princeps auctoritate preceperit."[3] (In the presence of the Prince or others, who the Prince warned with his order).

Another meaning of authority is the established or social order: "Haec omnia studuimus definire, quae praesenti auctoritate vulgamus."[4] (We have studied in order to define all of these things, which we spread with the present order); "Ut auctoritatis cum justitia et lege competente in omnibus maneant stabili firmitate, nec subsequentibus auctoritatibus contra legem elecitis vacuentur."[5] (In order to maintain the mandates in the appropriate justice and law for all the events and with a steady firmness, no resolution will be emptied against the law by subsequent mandates).

Besides, the Church authority is included in this group: "Archiepiscopi nostram auctoritatem (de manumittendis servis in presbyteros ordinandis), suffraganei vero illorum exemplar illius penes se habeant."[6] (The Archbishops in accordance with our mandate (in the case of loosing servants for being ordained as priests), who indeed recommend those should have an issue like this); "Obtulerunt excellentiae celsitudinis nostrae auctoritatem genitoris nos-

[1] Gregorius Episcopus Turonensis. *Historia Francorum*, lib. 9, c. 41. All the translations into English, in this second part, are mine.

[2] *Lex Visigothorum*, lib. 2, tit. 1.

[3] Ib., lib. 6, tit. 1. Vid., also, Concilium Valentinianum a. 585, *Concilia aevi Merovingici et aevi Caronlini*, I p. 163; Chlothovei praeceptum. (a. 511-561), c. 5, *Capitularia regum Francorum*, I p. 19; *Diplomata Merovingica*, no. 33 (ca. a. 657/658); *Lex Visigothorum*, lib. 6 tit. 1, Charta Eligii a. 632, *Scriptorum rerum Merovingicarum*, IV p. 748. Cf. Sickel, *Acta Karolinorum*, I p. 185.

[4] Edictum Guntchramni a. 585, *Capitularia regum Francorum*, I p. 12.

[5] Chlothovei praeceptum. (a. 511-561), c. 9, *Capitularia regum Francorum*; Vid., also, Marculfus, lib. 1 no. 2, *Formulae*, p. 42; *Diplomata Merovingica*, no. 10 (a. 625).

[6] *Capitulum Ecclesiasticum*, a. 818/819, c. 6, I p. 277.

tri, in qua continebatur."[1] (They displayed the mandate of our excellent height our father, in which it was included). The last group is related to any kind of document: "Suas auctoritates ostenderent."[2] (They should show their records).

III

These are the most common meanings of *auctoritas* in certain aspects or fields relating all of them with the official and monastic world. If we have a look at Chaucer's uses of the word, or maybe his characters' uses in the *Canterbury Tales*, the relationship with these meanings is different. We will try to develop these uses, and then explain the possible reasons of them.

In the introduction of *The Man of Law's Tale*, the Host warns the pilgrims not to waste so much time in order to go on with the tales, and intends to exemplify his warnings remembering certain words by Seneca: "Wel kan Senec and many a philosophre / Biwaillen tyme moore than gold in cofre; / For Los of catel may recovered be, / But los of tyme shendeth us, quod he."[3]. In Seneca it is available to find out these teachings: "omnes horas conplectere. Sic fiet, ut minus ex crastino pendeas, si hodierno manum inieceris. Dum differtur, vita transcurrit. Omnia, Lucili, aliena sunt, tempus tantum nostrum est." (Hold every hour in your grasp. Lay hold of today's task, and you will not need to depend so much upon tomorrow's. While we are postponing, life speeds by. Nothing, Lucilius, is ours, except time)[4]

Once she has introduced her story, the Wife of Bath discusses the possibilities women have to conceal a secret. She is not sure of this: "And in o purpos stedefastly to dwelle, / And nat biwreye thyng that men us telle. / But that tale is nat worth a rake-stele. / Pardee, we wommen konne no thyng hele; / Witnesse on Myda - wol ye heere the tale? / Ovyde, amonges othere thyn-

[1] *Diplomata Charles II le Chauve*, no. 61 (a. 845). Vid., also, *Liber Pontificalis*, Liberius, ed. Mommsen, p. 77; Pardessus, II p. 423, no. 2 (a. 565).
[2] Thévenin, *Textes*, no. 89 (a. 857).
[3] *Introduction to The Man of Law's Tale*, v. v. 25-28, p. 87.
[4] Seneca. *Epistulae Morales Ad Lucilium*. Ed. & Trans. Richard M. Gummere. Vol. I. Vol. IV of *Seneca's Works*. *Loeb Classical Library*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1979. I, 1, 1-3, p. 2-5.

ges smale."[1] Following the Wife's advice, the answer to all this mistery is clear: according to Ovid, in his *Metamorphoses*, King Midas was punished severely after the judge in which Pan and Phoebus contested who of them played more beautiful melodies. Obviously, Phoebus was the winner, but Midas did not agree, and that was the reason for the King saw his ears growing overwhelmingly. He tried to conceal his secret, but Fortune tricked him: the servant who used to cut the King's hair dug a hole on the earth and whispered what he has saw in it. Unfortunately the forest where the secret had been buried betrayed the story: "Creber harundinibus tremulis ibi surgere lucus / coepit et, ut primum pleno maturuit anno, / prodidit agricolam: leni nam motus ab austro / obruta verba refert dominique coarguit aures."[2] (But a trick carpet of trembling reeds began to push up on the spot and, at the end of the year, when they were full grown, the reeds betrayed their gardener: for, when stirred by the gentle South wind, they uttered the words that had been buried, and revealed the truth about his master's ears).[3]

In the tale itself, the old lady tries to convince the knight about some doubts he has. And she explains to him that: "Ther shul ye seen expres that it no drede is that he is gentil that dooth gentil dedis,"[4] and so in his life he must endure the neverending obstacles destiny prepares, and even be respectful to poverty, which does not mean feeling shameful: "Thanne am I gentil, whan that I bigynne / to lyven vertuously and weyve synne. / And ther as ye of poverte me repreeve, / the hye God, on whom that we bileeve, / in wilful poverte chees to lyve his lif."[5] These ideas appear in certain authors like Seneca, who advises Lucilius not to behave wrongly with other people: "quem poena putaveris dignum" (Whom you regard as deserving of punishment). Moreover, Seneca disagrees with anyone who boasts richness and oppulence: he will feel happy with his disciple: "si contempseris etiam sordidum panem, si tibi persuaseris herbam, ubi necesse est, non pecori tantum, sed

[1] *The Wife of Bath´s Tale*, v. 945-82, p. 118.
[2] P. Ovidio Nasón. *Metamorfosis*. Ed. & Trans. Antonio Ruiz de Elvira. Vol. III. 4th. ed.. *Alma Mater. Colección de Autores Griegos y Latinos*. Madrid: C.S.I.C., 1994. XI, 146-93, p. 20-2.
[3] Ovid. *Metamorphoses*. Ed. & Trans. Mary M. Innes. London: Penguin Books, 1955. XI, 146-93, p. 250-1.

[4] *The Wife of Bath´s Tale*, v.v. 1169-70, p. 120.
[5] *The Wife of Bath´s Tale*, v.v. 1175-9, p. 120-1.

homini nasci" (When you have learned to scorn even the common sort of bread, when you have made yourself believe that grass grows for the needs of men as well as of cattle).[1]

In *The Merchant's Tale*, and after introducing the ageing knight of Lombardy and his desires of marrying, the merchant discusses about the pros and cons of taking a wife and gives several famous opinions and examples of this: "Ther nys no thyng in gree superlatyf, / As seith Senek, above an humble wyf. / Suffre thy wyves tonge, as Catoun bit; / She shal comande, and thou shalt suffren it, / And yet is she wole obeye of curteisye".[2] Cato's words can be found in his biography. This comment is taken from a Themistocles' writing in which, discussing about women's power, he said that: "Pavntes a[nqpwpoi twn gunaikwn a[pcousin hmeis de; pavntwn anqpwvpon hmwn d' aiv gunaikes." (All men rule their wives; we rule all men; our wives rule us). This argument also helped Cato to defend that: "w guvnai Aqhnaioi me;n apcousi twn Ellhvnwn egw; d Aqhnaivwn emou de; suv sou d' o uiovs." (My dear wife, the Athenians rule the Greeks; I rule the Athenians; you rule me; and our son rules you.)[3]

Later, with his new wife, May, January found happiness. But this happiness would be only fictitious. The girl had met his real love, Damian, and two furtive lovers have always means of tricking and that is something which was easy for them. The merchant remembers the noble Ovid in order to display this universal rule: "O noble Ovyde, ful sooth seystou, God woot, / What sleighte is it, thogh it be long and hoot, / That Love nyl fynde it out in som manere? / By Pyramus and Tesbee may men leere"[4] Pyramus and Thisbe's story is a good example of these typical lovers' tricks. Both of them were the authentic symbols of beauty and, although they did not feel anything to each other, a passionate love began, and they had to fight against their families' lack of appreciation. Their only means to communicate their love was a small crack: "Fissus erat tenui rima" (There was a crack, a slender chink), something

[1] Seneca. *Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium*. Vol. III. Ed. & Trans. Richard M. Gummere. Vol. VI of *Seneca's Works*. *Loeb Classical Library*. London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1971. CX, 2-4, p. 266-7; 12, p. 272-3.

[2] *The Merchant's Tale*, v. 1369-79, p. 155-6.

[3] Plutarch. *Lives: Aristeides and Cato*. Ed. & Trans. David Sansone. Warminster, Wiltshire: Aris & Phillips Ltd., 1989. 35(8), 4-5, p. 106-7.

[4] *The Merchant's Tale*, v. 2125-31, p. 164.

which was unknown to everybody except to the lovers: "primi vidistis amantes" (The lovers were the first to find it), who used appropriately: "murmure blanditiae minimo transire solebant."[1] (By this means their endearments were safely conveyed to one another, in the gentlest of whispers.)[2]

Poor January insists on her wife's demonstrations of love, but May cannot stand thinking about Damian. One of January's treasures, his garden, is the perfect witness of the gods Pluto and Proserpine presence, in a perfect day: "Bright was the day, and blew the firmament;", in which the stars were in a very specific position: "Phebus hath of gold his stremes doun ysent / To gladen every flour with his warmnesse. / He was that tyme in Geminis, as I gesse, / But litel fro his declynacion / Of Cancer, Jovis exaltacion." So, the Gods' presence intends to mistify the place: "And so bifel, that brighte morwe-tyde / That in that gardyn, in the ferther syde, / Pluto, that is king of Fayerye, / And many a lady in his compaignye, / Folwynge his wyf, the queene Proserpyna".[3] And the Merchant tries to memorize the source when he read this: "In Claudian ye may the stories rede".[4] The merchant shows his knowledge about the matter. The tragedy seemed to search for Proserpine while, escorted by his sisters (Venus included) in the fields, collecting flowers, a strange grumble came up from the darkest depths: it was Pluto, and he wanted to rape the goddess who implores the rest of the goddesses: "rapitur Proserpina curru / imploratque deas." (Proserpine is hurried away in the chariot, imploring aid of the goddesses). Pluto behaves like a wild animal: "ille velut stabuli decus armentique iuvencam / cum leo possedit nudataque viscera fodit / unguibus et rabiem totos exegit in armos." (Pluto is like a lion when he has seized upon a heifer, the pride of the stall and the herd, and has torn with his claws the defenceless flesh and has sated his fury on all its limbs).[5]

[1] P. Ovidio Nasón. *Metamorfosis*. Ed. and Trans. Antonio Ruiz de Elvira. Vol. I. 5th ed. *Alma Mater. Colección de Autores Griegos y Latinos*. Madrid: C.S.I.C., 1992. IV, 55-77, p. 124-5.

[2]. Cf., IV, 55-77, p. 95-6.

[3] *The Merchant´s Tale*, v.v. 2219-29, p. 165-6.

[4] *The Merchant´s Tale*, v.v. 2230-5, p. 166.

[5] Claudian. *De Raptu Proserpinae*. Ed. & Trans. Maurice Platnauer. Vol. II of *Claudian´s Works*. *Loeb Classical Library*. London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1972. II, 119-62, 204-13, p. 326-33.

Now, let us discuss the classical mentions in *The Tale of Melibee*. Prudence's reaction after the sordid attack of his husband's foes: "This noble wyf Prudence remembred hire upon the sentence of Ovide, in his book that cleped is the Remedie of Love"[1] means a deep philosophical answer to that horrible disgrace: "quis matrem, nisi mentis inops, in funere nati / flere vetet? non hoc illa monenda loco est; / cum dederit lacrimas animumque impleverit aegrum, / ille dolor verbis emoderandus erit."[2] (Who but a fool would try to stop a mother weeping at her son's graveside? That's no place for advice. When her tears are all shed, when her heartache's had appeasement, then use your words to ease the knot of pain.)[3]

Prudence advises Melibeus not to exceed in pain: "Mesure of wepyng sholde be considered after the loore that techeth us Senek".[4] Seneca's words are definite: although we can be stung with tears: "sed tantum vellicabit." (it will be only a sting). It's better to look for another person than to remember always the lost friend: "quem amabas, extulisti; quaere, quem ames. Satius est amicum reparare quam flere." (You have buried one whom you loved; look about for someone to love. It is better to replace your friend than to weep for him).[5]

Melibee is recommended by Prudence in several ways, following mainly Seneca's and Cicero's teachings. It's better to avoid flatterings and flatterers: "Amonges alle the pestilences that been in freendshipe the gretteste is flaterie. And therfore is it moore nede that thou eschue and drede flatereres than any oother peple."[6]. The applied words are related to the fact that we should only trust in friends, and doing that way: "Isdemque temporibus cavendum est, ne assentatoribus patefaciamus auris neve adulari nos sinamus" (Under

[1] *The Tale of Melibee*, v.v. 975-7, p. 217.
[2] P. Ovidi Nasonis. *Remedia Amoris*. Ed. E.J. Kenney. *Scriptorum Classicorum Bibliotheca Oxoniensis*. Oxford: OUP, 1994. v.v. 127-30, p. 230.
[3] Ovid. *The Erotic Poems*. Ed. & Trans. Peter Green. London: Penguin Books, 1982. *Cures for Love*, v.v. 127-30, p. 242-3.
[4] *The Tale of Melibee*, v.v. 990-2, p. 217-8.
[5] Seneca. *Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium*. Vol. I. Ed. & Trans. Richard M. Gummere. Vol. IV of *Seneca's Works*. *Loeb Classical Library.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1979. LXIII, 1, p. 428-31; 11-12, p. 434-5.
[6] *The Tale of Melibee*, v.v. 1175-6, p. 223.

such circumstances also we must beware of lending an ear to sycophants or allowing them to impose upon us with their flattery).[1]

Another advice is that the power of an emperor is never eternal except he will love his people rather than the pain: "Ther nys no myght so greet of any emperour that longe may endure, but if he have moore love of the peple than drede."[2] And we can find these words in Cicero. People is always searching for just laws, for: "id si ab uno iusto et bono viro consequebantur, erant eo contenti" (If the people secured their end at the hands of one just and good man, they were satisfied with that). And this will be the essence of a key figure in every state: Justice, which is a permanent condition in all situations: "Omni igitur ratione colenda et retinenda iustitia est cum ipsa per sese (nam aliter iustitia non esset), tum propter amplificationem honoris et gloriae." (Justice is, therefore, in every way to be cultivated and maintained, both for its own sake (for otherwise it would not be justice) and for the enhancement of personal honour and glory).[3]

Prudence warns about the horrible wounds a weasel can make, and remembers Ovid: "The litel wesele wol slee the grete bole and the wilde hert."[4]. Ovid changes the comparation, as he uses a viper instead of a weasel: "parva necat morsu spatiosum vipera taurum; / a cane non magno saepe tenetur aper".[5] (The bite of a minuscule viper kills the massive ox, and it's often some lightweight dog that holds the wild boar at bay).[6]

Prudence remembers him about Fortune's tricks: "What man that is norissed by Fortune, she maketh hym a greet fool."[7] And Seneca does it in the same way: he thinks that Fortune helps to anyone who has a complete control on himself: "si qui habet illa, se quoque habet nec in rerum suarum potestate est" (Only if he who possesses them is in possession also of himself, and is not in the power of that which belongs to him). Sometimes, there

[1] Cicero. *De Offficiis*. Ed. & Trans. Walter Miller. Vol. XXI of *Cicero's Works*. *Loeb Classical Library.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1975. I, 26, 91, p. 92-5.
[2] *The Tale of Melibee*, v. 1191, p. 224.
[3] Cf., II, 12, p. 208-13.
[4] *The Tale of Melibee*, v. 1324, p. 227.
[5] Cf., *Remedia Amoris*, v.v. 421-2, p. 243.
[6] Cf., *Cures for Love*, v.v. 420-1, p. 251.
[7] *The Tale of Melibee*, v. 1454, p. 230.

is another enemy when you have a desire for something: that some kind of chance will turn against him. “nihil ex his optabilibus et caris utile esse, nisi te contra levitatem casus rerumque casum sequentium instruxeris” (There is no utility in all these desirable and beloved things, unless you equip yourself in opposition to the fickleness of chance and its consequences).[1]

Prudence also thinks about someone who is extremely fearless, so that he can be considered in this way: “He putteth hym in greet peril that stryveth with a gretter man than he is hymself.”[2] And, at that point, she is expressing a Seneca’s opinion: the external appearance of a man can be a trap for anyone: “hominum effigies habent, animos ferarum” (They have the aspect of men, but the souls of brutes).[3]

To finish with this part of our paper, we will analyze three ideas by Cicero. In the first, Prudence talks against raising our own benefit at the expense of anyone: “No sorwe, ne no drede of deeth, ne no thyng that may falle unto a man, / is so muchel agayns nature as a man to encressen his owene profit to the harm of another man. / And though the grete men and the myghty men geten richesses moore lightly than thou, / yet shaltou nat been ydel ne slow to do thy profit, for thou shalt in alle wise flee ydelnesse.”[4]. Cicero does not want to take advantage of anyone in order to increase his properties: “nec vero rei familiaris amplificatio nemini nocens vituperanda est, sed fugienda semper iniuria est.” (Still, I do not mean to find fault with the accumulation of property, provided it hurts nobody, but unjust acquisition of it is always to be avoided).[5]

The second one holds that one’s house should be open in order to show piety and devotion: “The goodes, of thyn hous ne sholde nat been hyd ne kept so cloos, but that they myghte been opened by pitee and debonairetee”.[6] Cicero remembers the great men who held a property and: “potiusque et amicis impertientes et rei publicae, si quando usus esset”

[1] Cf., XCVIII, 2, p. 118-9; 4-5, p. 120-1.
[2] *The Tale of Melibee*, v. 1487, p. 231.
[3] Cf., CIII, 2, p. 188-9.
[4] *The Tale of Melibee*, v.v. 1584-7, p. 233.
[5] Cf., I, 8, 25, p. 26-7.
[6] *The Tale of Melibee*, v. 1620, p. 234.

(Rather, if ever there were need, sharing it with their friends and with the state).[1]

Finally, Prudence explains that there is nothing more beloved in a noble man than being kind, gentle and appeased: "Ther is no thyng so comendable in a greet lord / as whan he is debonaire and meeke, and appeseth him lightly".[2] Seneca is thinking about three conditions a man should follow: "colendum autem esse ita quemque maxime, ut quisque maxime virtutibus his lenioribus erit ornatus, modestia, temperantia, hac ipsa, de qua multa iam dicta sunt, iustitia" (The more a man is endowed with these finer virtues - temperance, self-control, and that very justice about which so much has already been said - the more he deserves to be favoured).[3]

IV

Once we have discussed extensively the quotes in which Chaucer's characters apply Classical writers doctrines, we will explain briefly what is the meaning of these uses. These *auctoritates* provide a simple and a more complicated background to the environment Chaucer acts. On the one hand, on some of these quotations we can see the influence of several philosophical movements which survived in the Middle Ages, and which was a source of permanent discussion at that time. If we consider Cicero's and Seneca's appearance, the motivations and opinions of the characters in the *Tales* are conditioned by the *auctoritates* personal and philosophical idiosyncrasy. Both the Arpinian and the Spanish philosopher devoted their lives to follow two main streams: Epicureanism and Stoicism, and this is the motivation Chaucer's characters are engaged.

On the other hand, we must understand Chaucer's behaviour in using the Classical *auctoritates*. When summarizing the previous works, Willi Erzgräber[4] defends that Chaucer acts in a "naïvely way" in *The Book of the*

[1] Cf., I, 26, 92, p. 94-5.
[2] *The Tale of Melibee*, v.v. 1859-60, p. 239.
[3] Cf., I, 15, 46, p. 48-51.
[4] Willi Erzgräber. *"Auctorite" and "Experience" in Chaucer*. *Intellectuals and Writers in Fourteenth-Century Europe*. Eds. Piero Boitani & Anna Torti. *The J. A. W. Bennett Memorial Lectures, Perugia, 1984*. Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer eds., 1986.

Duchess, but, later on, we discover how he pretends to make up a poem which means to produce a more practic effect on the reader. Blanche's death could be the excuse "to write a religious consolatio", but, finally, Chaucer interprets the poem as a result of a "Lex Naturalis, a moral law that derives from the Stoa and was a basic element of medieval moral theology." In this sense, Ovid's appearance with his famous Ceyx and Alcyone's tale helps to define the idea that "the good must be done and the evil avoided": after her husband's shipwreck, Alcyone shows an excess of mourning, and this is something against this natural law. Following this, the Black Knight has the intention of beheaving in the same way, and then, he is about to trespass this moral and philosophical law. Finally, his returning to the castle denies the possibility of interfering in the commented rule.

In *Troylus and Criseyde*, the main characters are altered from the original source of the poem, *Il Filostrato* by Giovanni Bocaccio. Troylus laughs at the feeling of love, but when he realizes and discovers what this feeling really means, he is completely isolated and nobody can help him appropriately. Criseyde is also a pure unloyal character, but his personality suffers from an evolution step by step until she is supposed to become a more than an individual woman, deeper psychologically than the Italian model. In both characters, the experience, more than the "auctorite" has a definite influence in their lives.[1]

If we take into account the almost permanent influence of Ovid in Chaucer's works, we must assume that both had common characteristics, as Helen Cooper thinks:[2] "wit, good humour, urbanity, humanness". The *Metamorphoses* was an outstanding source of stories and commentaries for most of Medieval writers, but Chaucer changed the general opinion in contemplating Ovid's works as demystified *opera* to produce a Christian doctrine. Cooper holds that "Chaucer's Ovid is the Ovid of narrative": his borrowings occur within two areas. The first has to do with tale-telling, as "Chaucer takes over not only, for example, the dwelling of Fama but the revealing of the secret of Midas' ears and the crow's punishment for scandalmongering. His other predilection is for stories of women in distress that

[1] Cf., p. 67-87.

[2] Helen Cooper. *Chaucer and Ovid: A Question of Authority*. *Ovid Renewed. Ovidian Influences on Literature and Art from the Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century.* Ed. Charles Martindale. Cambridge: CUP, 1988.

could be developed for pathos". His most striking divergence from Ovid is "his refusal to countenance the idea of human metamorphosis into the less than human". A crow may turn black, but at the conclusion of the stories of, e. g., Ceyx and Alcyone, "we are not told of nothing of the transformations that are Ovid's excuse for telling the stories at all". Even more, in this narrative borrowings, Chaucer uses Claudian's tale of the rape of Proserpine, but both Pluto and Proserpine take up only to witness, as mere spectators, i. e., there is no reference to the rape of Proserpine, while May commits treachery with respect to January, as it could be funny to think about a possible rape of May by Damian. Ceyx and Alcyone story is read by the narrator before he falls asleep, and the overt excuse for the retelling is to give him the idea of praying to Morpheus for sleep. Helen Cooper also says that "the dream itself mirrors in inverted from the story he has just read: it is a dream, not of a wife who has lost her husband, but of a knight, "clothed al in blak", who has lost his lady". The cause for Chaucer's devising the whole poem was the death of Blanche, Duchess of Lancaster, and the poem functions "as an elegy for her and as a consolatio for the bereaved husband". Moreover, there is no more suggestion of an afterlife for the lady White than for Alcyone. All of this means that Chaucer, when ignoring such consideration as the truth of Christian resurrection or about Blanche's ultimate destination, gives the suffering of loss its full weight, "with no attempt to mitigate the grief of the bereaved by considerations of the state of those who have passed to happier things". This can be considered as another *Lex Naturalis*, different from the one discussed above: the one in which, following partially the Pagan literary tradition for which the world and the life beyond should mean a more positive place for the dead, Chaucer makes that "the Christian way to approach death will convey putting man and his sufferings, not God and his Providence, in the centre of the picture". Death is something natural in the human life (that is the obvious *Lex Naturalis*), but there is no reference to a possible salvation, neither from the point of view of using Alcyone's sufferings nor from the more Christian position.

Two special examples in the *Canterbury Tales* (apart from the previous analized one in *The Merchant's Tale*) helps to understand this theory. The Wife of Bath's inset story of Midas and the Manciple's tale of the crow, "take the problem of the unreliability of language further". In both stories, "the tidynges that are being told are true: Midas does have ass's ears, Phoe-

bus is indeed a cuckold". Some things are much safer kept hidden, even if they are true. The Wife of Bath, "with her relish for everything antifeminist, transfers the revelation of Midas' secret from his barber to his wife, so that she can conclude," We kan no conseil hyde". What is provided by the untold "remenant" of the tale is the fact that "it is the reeds that announce the secret to the world; as the Wife has told it, "we wommen" are left with all the responsibility for tattling".[1]

These brief explanations confirm the idea that Chaucer has special and, therefore, personal reasons to use all these Classical authors. We have discussed, in the first two parts of this essay, how the concept of *auctoritas* suffered from an evolution based rather in the different political situations than in the main characters who performed. The Senate was changed by the Monarchy and the Church, the *Tabularum Leges* became the Papal or Royal documents. Although our aim was to analyze the Classical quotations which are closer to literary authorities than to other ones, anyway, we must remember that some of Chaucer's characters display a more accurate behaviour which is not far from certain means of knowledge: the Host assume his role because the pilgrims do not forbid that role. In each case, Chaucer tries to confirm his characters expectations, but, as an overall summary, he obeys his own concerns by withdrawing from the typical behaviours of his contemporaries with respect to those writers, as can be seen when using his favourite source: Ovid.

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[1] Cf., p. 71-81.

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