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## PRACTICAL REASON AND MEDIEVAL ROMANCE

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In Chrétien de Troyes's *Le chevalier de la charrete*, a damsel, about to be raped, screams for help. Rather than immediately confronting the six armed men who guard her door, Lancelot stops to think. The twenty-nine lines that intervene between her screams and his rescue provide a typical example of inner debate common to the genre of medieval courtly romance.<sup>1</sup> Narrative time changes. The plot falters, and we are made privy to the workings of a fictional mind.

In his landmark study, *Chaucer and the French Tradition*, Charles Muscatine considered Lancelot's monologue and various other examples from Old French romance to be "as conventional as courtly description."<sup>2</sup> Instead of dramatic verisimilitude, they provide vehicles for the description of a conflicted self and for the proffering of philosophical ideas.<sup>3</sup> Yet in addition to having the general characteristics that he notes, many of the debates occur within a specific context that shapes their contents. Like Lancelot's debate, they occur in moments of moral crises that necessitate action. While they may codify a specific ideology, the debates generally exemplify practical reasoning: the deliberative process about things to be done. As such, they map the relevance of and possible responses to the fundamental question, "What shall I do?" They calculate, as part of their content, and demonstrate, by means of example, doing the right thing.

Twelfth-century scholars commonly considered the secular narratives that they inherited from antiquity as part of practical philosophy. They did so on the grounds that these narratives address behavior. Such a convention might seem intended as a way for medieval Christians to preserve secular classics. Philosophy did more than

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<sup>1</sup>*Les Romans de Chrétien de Troyes*, ed. M. Roques, CFMA 86 (Paris: Champion, 1963), 1097-1125.

<sup>2</sup>Charles Muscatine, *Chaucer and the French Tradition*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1957), 24.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 24-9.

make room for secular narratives, however; it also helped to shape them. As we shall see, both literary introductions and the medieval treatment of prudence, intention, and confession suggest a complex interrelationship between the very conceptualization of secular narrative and practical philosophy. Specifically, the inner debate in medieval romance reflects academic developments in the formulation and formalization of practical reasoning.

The term *ratio practica* first occurs in medieval writings after the translation and dissemination of Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics* and therefore post-dates the early romancers' inner debates. I borrow the term, however, from medieval philosophy to describe a specific but prevalent kind of "conventional monologue" because it addresses the same topic: particular and contingent things to be done. As this essay will clarify, the term alone post-dates the early romances; the learned in the twelfth century already treated the narratives that we now call literature under the category of practical philosophy. The thirteenth-century term *ratio practica* came to describe a syllogistic reasoning similar to the deliberative processes central to both philosophy and romance in the high and late Middle Ages.

So-called courtly romance warrants consideration in terms of practical reasoning for a number of reasons. First, Old French romance comes into being just as the field of ethics comes under academic scrutiny.<sup>4</sup> Second, from then on, the secular matter of romance is framed by moral issues, whether they be Lavine's love for her homeland's enemy in the anonymous *Eneas* or Gawain's acceptance of and failure to disclose the green girdle. Third, romance fosters a language, a rhetoric of practical reasoning different from learned formulations in its tendency to systematize the circumstantial. Finally, its development from the high to the late Middle Ages parallels contemporary discussions of practical reasoning. In short, romance offers a secular field that illustrates the conflicting pulls set out in the various learned attempts to characterize decision making.

Muscatine's "conventional monologue" is thought to derive from rhetorical models in classical literature. Its form was also possibly influenced by the dialectical disputation that came of age in the twelfth-century schools. To some degree, these two models suffice. For example, Lavine in *Eneas* (8663 ff.) and Medea in Ovid's *Meta-*

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<sup>4</sup>The twelfth century witnesses the inclusion of ethics as part of practical philosophy in the liberal arts curriculum. For a summary of the various ways in which it was accommodated, see D. E. Luscombe, ed., *Peter Abelard's Ethics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), xviii.

*morphoses* (6.1 ff.) voice the same conflict in similar language. In addition, the aim of dialectic to present both sides of a question accounts for Lavine's vacillations in perspective as she tries to articulate all she feels. Neither classical models nor medieval dialectic, however, account for the tone and contexts that inform the medieval examples. On the one hand, Lavine's inner debate lacks the Ovidian play of surfaces that problematizes the seriousness of Medea's dilemma. On the other hand, its significance within the *Roman d'Eneas* removes it from the status of an academic exercise.<sup>5</sup> Although rhetorical strategies and disputation influence the form of the inner debate, they fail to address its concerns. Instead, it is under the purview of medieval practical philosophy that conflict and choice are systematically discussed.

As the category under which medieval thinkers address moral choice, practical philosophy conceptualizes moral conflict. This purview is elaborated in terms of mental processes. For example, Philip the Chancellor (d. 1236), describes the practical intellect in terms of its activity: it is "capable of operating in opposite directions."<sup>6</sup> Comparing it to Aristotle's potential intellect with its ability to comprehend pairs of contraries, he attributes to the practical intellect a necessary freedom from the "material constraints." In other words, the practical intellect is instilled with the power of abstraction in order to consider contraries that frequently determine deliberation.

This idea of conflict that practical philosophy lends to inner debates is absent from the prescriptive rhetorical handbooks.<sup>7</sup> Geoffrey of Vinsauf, for example, considers *ratiocinatio* to be the figure of

<sup>5</sup>On the classical rhetorical exercises of *suasoriae*, which consisted of speeches composed for historical characters facing a crisis and deliberating what to do, and of *controversiae*, which consisted of debating speeches concerning a legal or moral issue, see C. D. N. Costa, ed., *Seneca: Medea* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 4.

<sup>6</sup>"Nam sicut dicit Philosophus quod intellectus possibilis potest intelligere contraria, quia est separatus secundum materiam aut separabilis ab utroque, ita erit in practico intellectu quod potest in opposita, quia liberatur ab obligatione materie generaliter" ("For as the Philosopher says that the potential intellect can comprehend contraries, because it is separated from the material, or it is separable from each pair of contraries, so it will be in the practical intellect that it is capable of operating in opposite directions because it is generally free from material constraints"); *Bruges Ville* 236f. 35ra., qtd. in D. Odin Lottin, *Psychologie et morale aux XIIe et XIIIe siècles*, 6 vols. (Louvain: Abbaye du Mont César, 1942-60), 1:73, n. 1. All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>7</sup>On criteria for the idea of conflict, see Michelle Gellrich, *Tragedy and Theory: The Problem of Conflict since Aristotle* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1988), x.

speech wherein the speaker addresses himself in the process of reasoning in questions and answers. But in the *Poetria Nova*, the speaker who exemplifies this figure imagines the biblical Adam, rather than himself, to be his interlocutor. A dialogue rather than inner debate ensues in which the speaker conveys regret over the past rather than conflict within himself. In turn, the figure of thought that Geoffrey calls *sermocinatio* describes dialogue as the adaptation of speech in tone and manner to a speaker, but does not treat monologue.<sup>8</sup> Although both rhetorical figures provide a formal framework easily applicable to the portrayal of conflict in inner debates, no specific figure categorizes it.

The relationship between rhetorical figures and the inner debate parallels that between other literary forms and romance.<sup>9</sup> Although the other forms may influence romance, they fail to account for the peculiar personalization of an ennobling love and heroic quest that mark it. Lyric provides a single speaker who frequently expresses an inner conflict,<sup>10</sup> but without the narrative, that is, without the response of a fictionalized community within which the moral decision signifies. The format of the *débat* or *conflictus*, like the inner debate in romance, presents competing viewpoints, but its model is a dialogue that emphasizes the externalization of conflict. Although it provokes discussion about a problematic issue, resolution is not presented under the duress of having to act.<sup>11</sup> As one of the features that distinguishes romance from epic and *chanson de geste*, the inner debate marks the development of a genre that, in turn, coincides with a reevaluation of practical philosophy.

### The Terms of Practical Reason

Medieval terminologies of practical reasoning vary, since explanations and definitions depend on their specific contexts and sources. Much of the discussion concerning deliberation occurs against the

<sup>8</sup>*Poetria Nova of Geoffrey of Vinsauf*, trans. Margaret F. Nims (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1967), 56, lines 1111-16; 62, lines 1305-25; 66-7, lines 1390-1410.

<sup>9</sup>On the debate poem in relation to other genres, see Thomas L. Reed, Jr., *Middle English Debate Poetry and the Aesthetics of Irresolution* (Columbia, Mo.: Univ. of Missouri Press, 1990). On the medievals' lack of interest in precise categories of genre and for a discussion of their own descriptive terms, see Douglas Kelly, *Art of Medieval Romance* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1992).

<sup>10</sup>R. Howard Bloch, *Medieval French Literature and Law* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1977), 210.

<sup>11</sup>See Reed, pp. 41-96, for a discussion of the influence of dialectic.

background of the better known issue of *liberum arbitrium*. Attempts to locate the connection between the will as "rational appetite" and "freedom of decision" foster differing categories that frequently describe similar mental processes.<sup>12</sup> Among the learned, terms are being worked out to fulfill a theological framework. In the romances, fictional speakers are deliberating and acting without necessarily disclosing the connection between the two. This narrative fissure between deliberation and its enactment both contributes to interpretive possibilities and reflects unresolved intellectual and theological issues.

Practical reasoning is most commonly described as a *habitus*, "a fixed disposition or inclination to a specific kind of activity on the part of some power or faculty," but it is also an *actus*, "an action which itself is the realization of a potency and an activity stemming from habit."<sup>13</sup> It is an aptitude and a skill, applicable to the way one lives a life as well as to momentary decision making. The term *ratio practica* entered learned discussions in the first half of the thirteenth century.<sup>14</sup> Prior to that time, deliberation and action were frequently discussed under the category of *prudentia*, with which *ratio practica* would come to be equated: "*prudentia enim est ratio practica*."<sup>15</sup>

Cicero (*De inventione* and *De officiis*), in particular, supplied the Middle Ages with a moral vocabulary. His definition of *prudentia* as knowledge of things good, bad, and neither good nor bad was only slightly elaborated by the author of the *Moralium dogma philosophorum*.<sup>16</sup> Following the Ciceronian hierarchy in which *prudentia* ranks

<sup>12</sup>See J. B. Korolec, "Free Will and Free Choice," in *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*, eds. Norman Kretzmann, Anthony Kenny, and Jan Pinborg (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1982), 629-641, for the medieval need to determine the connection between the will and *liberum arbitrium* (630).

<sup>13</sup>Michael G. Baylor, *Action and Person* (Leiden: Brill, 1977), 33 ff.

<sup>14</sup>The earliest reference I have found for the conceptualization of *ratio practica* is in William of Auxerre's work which Lottin dates from 1220-25 (*Psychologie*, 1:64-9, 3:143).

<sup>15</sup>"Indeed prudence is practical reasoning..."; Albertus Magnus, *Summa de bono*, qtd. in Lottin, *Psychologie*, 3:266, lines 12-13. For an outline of the development of *prudentia*, see Lottin, *Psychologie*, 3:255-280.

<sup>16</sup>Cicero, *De inventione*, trans. M. H. Hubbell, Loeb (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1949), 2.160, p. 327: "*Prudentia est rerum bonarum et malarum neutrarumque scientia*." ("Wisdom is the knowledge of what is good, what is bad, and what is neither good nor bad.") *Moralium dogma philosophorum des Guillaum de Conches*, ed. J. Holmberg (Uppsala: Almqvist and Wiksells, 1929), A.20-2, p. 8: "*Prudentiam diximus esse discretionem rerum bonarum et malarum et utrarumque. Hec namque virtus discernit bona a malis, et bona ab invicem, mala ab invicem*." ("We say that prudence is the

first among the cardinal virtues, Abelard called her the mother of the virtues, while St. Bernard called her the queen of the virtues.<sup>17</sup> Yet in Cicero's legal contexts, concerned less with knowing than with doing, practical wisdom focused on knowing about doing. Like Roman rhetoric, its vocabulary was sustained but substance altered by the institutional contexts in which it survived in the Middle Ages.

The permutations of Cicero's definitions map, first, the reconciliation of classical virtues (prudence, temperance, forbearance, courage) with Christian (faith, hope, and charity), and, second, the increasing emphasis on cognition as the basis of human behavior no matter whether one locates choice in the will or in the reason. Deriving *prudentia* from the Greek "*phronasin*," Cicero defines it as "*rerum expetendarum fugiendarumque scientia*."<sup>18</sup> Augustine, echoing Cicero at various points in his writings, Christianizes *prudentia* when he aligns it with love of God: "*Prudentia est amor ea quibus adiuuatur ab eis quibus impeditur sagaciter eligens*."<sup>19</sup> His adaptation radically alters Cicero's meaning in that practical wisdom derives from God. Although mortal reason provides a means of knowing God, man's "good" actions ultimately issue from His reason. Writing nearly one thousand years later, St. Thomas still defers practical wisdom to God, but under the influence of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, *prudentia* is now "right reason about things that can be done."<sup>20</sup> The definition moves from Cicero's "scientia" which implies a general, experiential knowledge to St. Thomas's "ratio" which implies a studied, formalistic logic. For St. Thomas, Cicero's definition of *prudentia*—"the pur-

discernment of things good and bad and things both good and bad. For this virtue discerns good from bad, and good from good, bad from bad.")

<sup>17</sup> Abelard, *Dialogus inter philosophum*, in *Patrologiae Latinae cursus completus*, gen. ed. J. P. Migne (Paris, 1844-60), vol. 178, col. 1652A: "Nonnulli vero prudentiae discretionem matrem potius sive originem virtutum quam virtutem nominant" ("Some say the discernment of prudence is the mother or the source of virtues rather than a virtue itself"). Bernard, *Sermones in cantica* 49 in Migne, *PL* vol. 183, col. 1018D: "Est discretio non tam virtus quam quaedam moderatrix et auriga virtutum" ("The discernment [of prudence] is not so much a virtue as a certain queen and director of virtues").

<sup>18</sup> "Practical knowledge of things to be sought and of things to be avoided"; Cicero, *De officiis*, trans. Walter Hubbell, Loeb (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1975), 1.153, p. 157.

<sup>19</sup> "Prudence is love wisely choosing that which helps over that which hinders"; *De moribus ecclesiae catholicae* 1.cap.15 in Migne, *PL*, vol. 32, col. 1322.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, gen. ed. Thomas Gilby, 60 vols. (New York: Blackfriars and McGraw-Hill, 1964-76), 2a2ae, 47.2.8: "*prudentia est recta ratio agibilium*."

suing of good and avoiding of evil"—constitutes the first command of natural law.<sup>21</sup>

As the examples above suggest, the idea that the exercise of prudence, and by extension practical wisdom, depends on knowing what is to be sought and what is to be shunned endures throughout high and late medieval discussions. Debates range over whether this exercise is affective or intellectual. Differences arise over its parts. But the basic dualism forms the foundation of all subsequent discussions of practical reasoning. Nonetheless, as the definitions from St. Augustine and St. Thomas suggest, its emphasis changes, and the change is reflected in fictionalized practical reasoning. In the twelfth-century romances, the inner debate hinges on conflict expressed in dualistic terms; Lancelot resolves his conflict in terms of what is to be shunned, cowardice, and what is to be sought, honor. Just as the reception of Aristotle's *Ethics* alters the emphasis of Cicero's definition, fictionalized practical reasoning becomes less prone to present conflict in terms of radical dualism; Chaucer's *Criseyde*, for example, presents two equally problematic options in deliberating about whether or not to encourage Troilus in his love for her.

In the process of renegotiating Ciceronian terminology, medieval theologians redrew the boundaries of *prudentia*. Cicero had ranked the virtue alongside wisdom (*sapientia*) in the discovery and search for truth. Roland of Cremona (Dominican, c. 1230), however, separated wisdom from prudence in terms of superior and inferior reason.<sup>22</sup> Superior reason, located in *sapientia*, chooses only between competing good actions; inferior reason, located in *prudentia*, chooses between both good and evil actions. In other words, the division explains incorrect choice, which belongs to the inferior or prudential reason. Aquinas basically addresses the same issue of *prudentia*'s relationship to truth but resolves it differently. For St. Thomas, *ratio practica*, because it deals with the particular and contingent, is subject to error and stands in contrast to the speculative reason that addresses the universal and necessary.<sup>23</sup> In this division, *ratio practica* and *prudentia*'s role in it depend on speculative reason in that one must know how the world is in order to know what to do about it.<sup>24</sup> Fictionalized practical reasoning, in turn, not only portrays moral wis-

<sup>21</sup>*Summa Theologiae* 1a2ae, 94.2: "Hoc est ergo primum praeceptum legis, quod 'bonum est faciendum et prosequendum, et malum vitandum.'"

<sup>22</sup>Lottin, 1:106-108.

<sup>23</sup>*Summa Theologiae* 1a2ae, 94.4.

<sup>24</sup>Vernon J. Bourke, *Ethics* (New York: Macmillan, 1951), 130-1.



dom overcoming instinct, as in the example of Lancelot, but also the rationalization of erroneous judgment, as in many of the debates that occur in the *Lais* attributed to Marie de France. In the later romances, practical reasoning is often correlated with a description of the universal and necessary; speculative colors practical reasoning in Dorigen's inner debates in Chaucer's *Franklin's Tale*.

Many theologians who treat *prudentia* in terms of its role in human behavior find it necessary to divide it according to its functions.<sup>25</sup> On the one hand, *prudentia* is a moral science that reigns over the judgment of what ought to be done and not to be done. On the other hand, it is a virtue that reigns over the judgment of what is and is not to be done in a given situation. In other words, they divide the functions of *prudentia* by means of its relation to action. While the moral science accounts for that which constitutes moral principles in theory, the virtue accounts for the choice of correct action in a real situation. Deliberation may occur in theoretical formulations, but the exercise of prudence demands that it occur before the performance of a specific action. While the former concludes with a judgment, the latter concludes with an imperative. For example, in William of Auxerre's (c. 1140/5–1231) formulation, *ratio practica* differs from speculative reason in that *ratio practica* entails a "consequent imperative to do one thing rather than another."<sup>26</sup> In Albertus Magnus's formulation the two modes can be distinguished in terms of causality: while theoretical reasoning is "caused by a thing" ("causata a re"), practical reasoning "causes a thing" ("causa rei").<sup>27</sup> While learned discourse and didactic literature primarily address the moral theory of prudence—what ought to be done, the virtues, and what ought not to be done, the seven deadly sins—secular literature provides examples of deliberation that leads to action in a specific situation within the framework of those general moral principles.

Scholastic analysis of practical reasoning became focused in the format of the practical syllogism. Since it derives from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, the basic components of the syllogism were

<sup>25</sup>Lottin, 3:257-270.

<sup>26</sup>Lottin, 3:258, n. 1: "Hoc modo differt prudentia a scientia morali, quoniam moralis scientia demonstrat quid faciendum, quid non; prudentia vero diffinit et imperat aliquid fieri vel non fieri" ("In this way, prudence differs from moral science, since moral science teaches what ought and ought not to be done; but prudence determines and commands something to be done or not to be done").

<sup>27</sup>Nathan Rotenstreich, *Theory and Practice: An Essay in Human Intentionalities* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1977), 20-21.

standard, but came to stand for different ideological concepts. The major premise consists of a moral principle, the second premise consists of the particular application of that principle, and the conclusion consists of a command, an action, or a judgment, depending on the philosophical system and then depending on the circumstances.<sup>28</sup> For example, St. Thomas's syllogism is applicable to the moral science of *prudentia* as well as to the exercise of the virtue. The conclusion can therefore be a judgment about how to live as well as about what to do. For William of Ockham, however, the conclusion consists solely of a judgment about the action under consideration. The conceptualization of the syllogism clarifies the aim of practical reasoning to categorize, define, and interrelate the separate components entailed in decision making. The logical steps formalize self-reflection as a mental act relevant to physical acts.

Although intended to resolve conflict, the syllogism also suggests a potential conflict in its progression from the precepts of moral law to the individual demands of conscience: "The inevitable disparity between a universal moral law, no matter how particular, and its application in a concrete situation creates a potential conflict between the claims of the law and the wishes of the person making a moral decision."<sup>29</sup> While philosophers and theologians attempt to circumvent this problem by means of their definitions of conscience and its relation to authority, the romances dramatize the individual's sense of conflicting authorities. The speakers of fictionalized practical reasoning strive to do the "good" and to fulfill the basic impulse for practical reasoning, but they demonstrate that determining this "good" is yet another matter.

### The Evidence of the Accessus

The boundaries between rhetoric and moral philosophy overlap in part because of their Roman heritage. Even Horace's *Ars poetica* neatly unites the two disciplines because it presents the rhetorical aim of poetry as both edification ("utile") and pleasure ("dulce").<sup>30</sup> Against

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<sup>28</sup>I take the overall format from the formulations of Aquinas and the analyses of Bourke as well as the examples provided by Lottin (3:273 n. 1). See Baylor, *Action*, for a comparative analysis of Aquinas's and William of Ockham's moral thought.

<sup>29</sup>Baylor, 63.

<sup>30</sup>See Gellrich, 166-9, for the effect of this conflation in the Middle Ages and its effect in the Renaissance. In *Accessus ad auctores*, ed. R. C. B. Huygens, Collection Latomus, vol. 15 (Berchem-Bruxelles: Latomus, 1954), one medieval scholar expresses confusion

this general background, medieval academic introductions to textbooks, known as *accessus*, provide a historical basis for considering literature in the context of moral philosophy. Although neither uniform nor universal, the *accessus* suggest an extrinsic relationship between ethical behavior and secular literature in that they perfunctorily classify classical literature under the philosophical category of ethics or practical philosophy. Recent scholars such as A. J. Minnis and J. B. Allen have sought in them a basis for the understanding of medieval concepts of authorship and literature.<sup>31</sup> While the effect of the *accessus* on literary production remains obscure, they attest to a habit of thought, at least among the learned.

In a sampling of *accessus* gathered from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, a common reason, when one is supplied at all, for classifying literature as a branch of ethics is that literature deals with behavior: "Ethice subponitur quia de moribus tractat."<sup>32</sup> On one level then, this vague notion of ethics accommodates the disenfranchised pagan literature inherited from antiquity and preserves it as a grammatical and rhetorical model.<sup>33</sup> On another level, however, the *accessus* borrow the terminology of moral philosophy and therefore evidence a similar polarization of moral outlook. For example, Ovid's *Epistles* illustrate the kind of behavior to pursue and the kind to shun: "Bonorum morum est instructor, malorum vero exstirpator."<sup>34</sup> This explanation echoes the basic precept of practical reason. The *accessus* answer the question "How shall I read?" in the same way practical reason answers "What shall I do?"

After this particular form of the *accessus* gives way to the so-called Aristotelian criteria, the relationship between literature and ethics continues to be a topic, but takes up different ground. Praise and blame, truth and right, come to influence discussions of poetry. In his twelfth-century commentary on the *Poetics*, translated into Latin in the middle of the thirteenth century, Averroes begins by

over whether the *Ars poetica* should be classified under ethics because it addresses customs ("mores") or under logic because it teaches composition (19).

<sup>31</sup>A. J. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship* (London: Scolar, 1984); J. B. Allen, *Ethical Poetic of the Later Middle Ages* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1982).

<sup>32</sup>Huygens, ed., 20, line 9 and 23, line 13: "It is classified under ethics because it treats behavior."

<sup>33</sup>Philippe Delhaye, "Grammatica" et "Ethica" au XII<sup>e</sup> siècle, *Analecta Mediaevalia Namurcensia*, Hors Serie 2 (Louvain: Editions Nauwelaerts), 17. Reprinted from *Recherches de Théologie ancienne et médiévale* 25 (1958):59-110.

<sup>34</sup>"Accessus Ovidii epistolarum II" in Huygens, ed., 25, lines 13-14: "It is a teacher of good behavior, but an uprooter of bad behavior."

attributing to Aristotle the classification of all poems and poetic speech as either "blame" ("vituperatio") or "praise" ("laudatio"). Commenting on this supposed classification, Averroes holds that not only are these categories clear in the "examination of poems," but "especially in those poems that are about voluntary things, that is, things that are virtuous or shameful."<sup>35</sup> In other words, Averroes transfers to literature the critical categories that Aristotle applies to human action.<sup>36</sup> To the extent that the commentary was at all influential, it confirms medieval assumptions about poetry rather than introducing an Aristotelian interpretative framework.<sup>37</sup> Virtues and vices of character, not action, present moral lessons.<sup>38</sup>

Whether or not influenced by the Arabic interpretation of Aristotle's *Poetics*, scholastics also discussed poetry as a branch of logic. In his commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Jean Buridan (c. 1300–58) claims that knowledge imparted by the *Rhetoric* and *Poetics* "is not simply logic, nor simply moral science, but moral logic."<sup>39</sup> Poetry completes logic because it "teach[es] the method whereby the faculty of desire might be guided by reason, in relation to both [oneself] and others."<sup>40</sup> Although the criteria treated in the *accessus* have changed, the ethical function of poetry continues to assert itself. Now, however, poetry is less generally a model for behavior and

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<sup>35</sup>O. B. Hardison, "Place of Averroes' Commentary on the *Poetics* in the History of Medieval Criticism," *Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 4 (1970): 79 n. 19: "et hoc patet per inductionem poematum et proprie poematum ipsorum quae fiunt de rebus voluntariis id est honestis et turpibus."

<sup>36</sup>Hardison writes, "Praise and blame are rhetorical techniques, explained at length in Books I and III of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*" (63); but they are also the terms used for voluntary behavior in Book III of the *Nicomachean Ethics* where notions of virtue and vice are also discussed.

<sup>37</sup>This point has been made, with differing emphases, by Hardison, Gellrich, and Allen, as well as A. J. Minnis and A. B. Scott, eds., *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism c. 1100–c. 1375: Commentary Tradition*, revised ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991). Minnis and Scott note that manuscript evidence suggests a wider circulation of the commentary than William of Moerbeke's accurate translation of the *Poetics* (279).

<sup>38</sup>Hardison, 69.

<sup>39</sup>Minnis and Scott, 281. See Hardison (63–6) on the "rival theories" of poetry: on the one hand, poetry belongs to logic following Horace's *Arts*, and on the other hand, poetry belongs to practical philosophy following Cicero's *Rhetoric*. Logic addresses the techniques of poetry, and practical philosophy addresses the content. As Hardison notes, the two theories "exist side-by-side" in Averroes's commentary (64). Buridan's "moral logic" conflates these points of view.

<sup>40</sup>Anonymous, *A Question on the Nature of Poetry*, qtd. in Minnis and Scott, 309.

more specifically equated with the *raison d'être* of fictionalized practical reasoning: reason's consideration of desire.

In summary, the *accessus* and literary commentaries evidence an intellectual development along the same lines as that of practical reasoning. Just as the increasing emphasis on cognition in the development of practical reasoning led to the practical syllogism, a similar emphasis on logic in the consideration of literature led to the formulation of an imaginative syllogism. According to Giles of Rome (c. 1243/7-1316), the imaginative syllogism governs poetry, as opposed to rhetoric, because poetry appeals to and issues from the individual's imaginings and desires while rhetoric seeks the good of the entire populace.<sup>41</sup> His explanation attempts to account for production as well as reception. It suggests an attempt to systematize private concerns under the category of poetry just as the scholastics attempt to systematize personal decision making under the category of practical reasoning. While the imaginative syllogism provides "a technique of manipulating language," the practical syllogism provides a technique of manipulating thought.<sup>42</sup>

### Abelard and Intention

Abelard's *Ethics, or Know Thyself* (c. 1130s) offers a counterpoint to the *accessus* because it suggests a more complicated and extensive relationship between literature and ethics than the *accessus* outline. It also marks a turning point in discussions of ethics because it focuses on mental states as the determination of sin. Rather than observable action, rather than evil will (in the sense of longing), internal consent to evil constitutes sin. Intention delineates the ethical field: "Non enim quae fiunt, sed quo animo fiunt pensat Deus, nec in opere sed in intentione meritum operantis vel laus consistit."<sup>43</sup> While Celtic confessional manuals, which were taken up on the continent around 600, emphasized notions of intention and circumstances in determining sin, and while theologians, most notably at the school of Laon, had concentrated on the mental aspects of sin, Abelard's formulation insists on personal accountability for mental processes, and therefore,

<sup>41</sup>Minnis and Scott, 281.

<sup>42</sup>See also Hardison, 61, for a brief discussion of the imaginative syllogism as it occurs in Dominicus Gundissalinus's twelfth-century treatise "On the Division of the Sciences."

<sup>43</sup>"For God thinks not of what is done but in what mind it may be done, and the merit or glory of the doer lies in the intention, not in the deed"; trans. Luscombe, 28-9, lines 9-11.

on an awareness of what happens between impulse and action. Unlike Augustine, he assumes man's capacity to judge himself and to know divine law.<sup>44</sup> Thus Abelard validates the endeavor of practical reasoning even before the term occurs in learned discourse.

Among other issues, Abelard addresses conflicting wills. Augustine had already treated this "disease of the mind" (*aegritudo animi*), most famously in his *Confessions* (8.9). In revising it, Abelard focuses on the relation of the will to necessity. In short, sin cannot be located in the will because we sometimes commit sins unwillingly.<sup>45</sup> In other words, necessity causes us to do what we do not "will" to do. For example, the person who kills his lord out of self-defence both wills not to kill and yet kills out of will: "Nam et si ille qui coactus dominum suum occidit, non habuit voluntatem in occisione, id tamen ex aliqua commisit voluntate cum videlicet mortem evadere vel differre vellet."<sup>46</sup> Likewise, Abelard outlines the degrees of sin involved in one man loving another man's wife: one man would prefer the woman to be unmarried while the other is drawn to her precisely because she is married to a powerful man. Furthermore, some can be so prey to the weakness of the flesh that they "velle coguntur quod nequaquam vellent velle."<sup>47</sup>

In discrediting the will as the location of sin, Abelard's examples suggest a number of distinctions pertinent to literature. First he broadly delineates character on the basis of ethical motivations. No physical description, no details of circumstance, but simply intentions separate the adulterers, and that is enough. Secondly, Abelard locates conflict not between duty (to have to) and desire (to want to) but between two mutually exclusive wills: the will to kill and not to kill, the will to love and not to love, the will to desire and not to desire. In so doing, he does not differentiate between internal and external compulsion. For those who fall prey to the weakness of the flesh, desire (to want to) is treated as necessity (to have to). In part, this conflation is caused by his insistent and consistent repetition of

<sup>44</sup>Luscombe, xxxiii-xxxv.

<sup>45</sup>Luscombe, 16-17, lines 1-2: "Cum autem voluntas peccatum non sit et non numquam inviti...peccata committamus..." ("Now, although will is not sin and...we sometimes commit sins unwillingly...").

<sup>46</sup>"For even if he who killed his lord under constraint did not have the will to kill, yet he did it out of will, since in fact he wanted to avoid or to defer death"; trans. Luscombe, 16-17, lines 30-2.

<sup>47</sup>They "are forced...to want what they by no means want to want"; trans. Luscombe, 16-17, line 24.

*velle* where *cupere* is implied. While it serves a limited rhetorical purpose, this conflation of desire with necessity also bespeaks the central psychological predicament of the romances. Not only is amorous desire commonly taken to be a necessity at least as demanding as fealty, but it also comes with its own sense of duty and ennoblement. Fictionalized practical reasoning offers the means to elaborate and define the conflicting "wills." Even more important, it locates choice as a way out of a double-bind in which the discriminating categories are not hard and fast.

However controversial, Abelard's focus on intention parallels the literary emphasis on practical reasoning as definitive of character and fundamental to narrative. What happens in the plot becomes secondary to what happens in the mind contemplating action and reacting to the given circumstances. For example, in the lay of *Eliduc* attributed to Marie de France, fictionalized practical reasoning articulates the terms of conflict and ambivalence that the plot portrays. Being torn between his love and duty toward his wife and first lord, on one hand, and toward his new love and new lord, on the other hand, Eliduc enacts the ambivalence suggested in Abelard's discussion of conflicting wills. Eliduc by no means wants to do what he wants to do. Duty and desire are not considered to be neat antitheses. Christian ethics and romance ideology share authority; they assert conflicting claims upon him and seek accommodation within the lay.

In locating sin in internal consent instead of action or will, Abelard weaves an idiosyncratic argument fraught with ethical problems. Although he seeks just punishment for the mother who accidentally smothers her infant, he excuses Christ's crucifiers on the grounds of their ignorance.<sup>48</sup> By way of corrective, Peter Lombard, in his much commented upon *Sentences*, emphasizes intention but counts all action known to be evil as evil.<sup>49</sup> Even much later in St. Thomas's *Summa Theologiae*, with its emphasis on cognition, "guilt stems from, and conscience concerns particular sinful actions, not the person."<sup>50</sup> Nonetheless, Abelard's *Ethics* figures into a more general trend that considered mental states in the assessment of sin. In particular, it has been taken by a number of scholars to look forward to the obligatory annual confession decreed for every Christian by the Fourth Lateran Council (1215).

<sup>48</sup>Luscombe, 38-9, lines 5-22; 54-7; 62-3, lines 5-10.

<sup>49</sup>Anthony Kenny, ed., *Anatomy of the Soul* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1973), 137-8; Lottin, 2:422-4.

<sup>50</sup>Baylor, 69.

### Confession

The implications of the Fourth Lateran Council have been thoroughly explored by modern scholars. Their studies consider it in light of: issues of intention and the legal determination of guilt; a shift in confessional handbooks from standardized punishments to considering individual cases; the replacement of an outmoded feudal system with citizenship. These studies note with differing emphases a shift in the awareness of the individual especially evident in artistic expressions such as portraiture, autobiography, lyric, romance, and satire.<sup>51</sup> Such political, economic, and religious developments have suggested, in turn, an underlying psychological cause rooted in self-esteem.<sup>52</sup> The year 1215 also saw, among other events, the Magna Carta signed and the University of Paris chartered. Although Baldwin's study on Peter the Cantor suggests that these events were to some degree instigated by the same circle of people,<sup>53</sup> obligatory confession makes the seemingly academic discussions of practical reasoning relevant to every Christian. It paves the way for the fashioning of a syllogism for action that is also a means for evaluating that action.<sup>54</sup> In theory, at least, tracking one's thoughts becomes a moral responsibility; each Christian needs to know what he thinks and feels when he does what he does.

In literature, confession becomes a motif. It is a representable event. It provides a model for dialogue. According to Braswell, the necessity of annual confession suggests a means by which people considered themselves as part of a plot. They might, for example, consider the consequences of their envy by imagining events their envy could set in motion.<sup>55</sup> Not only is self-reflection accountable, but choice—whether it is Abelard's internal consent or necessitated

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<sup>51</sup>Bloch; Thomas Tentler, *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation*, (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1977); Colin Morris, *The Discovery of the Individual, 1050-1200* (London: SPCK, 1972); Walter Ullman, *Individual and Society in the Middle Ages* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1966).

<sup>52</sup>John F. Benton, "Consciousness of Self and Perceptions of Individuality," in *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century*, eds. Robert Benson and Giles Constable (Oxford: Clarendon), 294.

<sup>53</sup>John W. Baldwin, *Masters, Princes and Merchants: The Social Views of Peter the Chanter and His Circle*, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1970).

<sup>54</sup>Daniel Brudney distinguishes between fashioning and evaluating action in "Knowledge and Silence: The *Golden Bowl* and Moral Philosophy," *Critical Inquiry* 16 no. 2 (winter 1990): 420-1.

<sup>55</sup>Mary Flowers Braswell, *The Medieval Sinner* (New Jersey: Associated University Presses, 1983), 42.



action—is envisioned in terms of a narrative of consequences. Yet as the early romances suggest, fictionalized practical reasoning anticipates this type of narration. When Lancelot debates the means to his end, his reasoning logs the relevancy of ethical issues. It does not expediently address the problem of being outnumbered. That is, he analyzes the moral implications of his possible actions rather than the details of a plan of attack or retreat. Answering the question, “What shall I do?” entails an awareness of himself that extends beyond the imperative of simply getting something done. It is a choice about the kind of person he wants to be as much as it is about the action he is about to perform.

In Muscatine’s study, the conventional monologue such as Lancelot’s provides a stylistic contrast to the “naturalism” of the idiomatic monologues we find in fable and fabliau.<sup>56</sup> That is, with some historical qualifications, Muscatine reads fourteenth-century as he does twelfth-century examples of the conventional monologue. Their differences lie outside the scope of his study. The philosophical context of practical reasoning with its emphasis on codifying cognition as the basis of ethical behavior suggests a concomitant change in the scope of the monologues. Lancelot and Criseyde literally and figuratively speak different languages, even if given allowance for the development of romance under the influence of itself and other medieval forms, even if given allowance for the virtuosity of individual authors. Although the same classical models supply the rhetoric of self-conflict, the romances exhibit differing conceptualizations of the moral world. As the philosophical discussions increasingly attempt to cover all the logical bases, fictionalized practical reasoning progressively tends to stress the difficulty of holding on to any moral position.

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<sup>56</sup>Muscatine, chap. 3 and esp. 153-8.