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Chaucer's Monk illuminated: Zenobia as role model

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Abstract What this article discusses is the unique presence of Zenobia among all the Monk's male case histories, in order to find that she may have been inserted by Chaucer as being remedially relevant to the Monk's spiritual condition and to suggest that it may have been *her* story on which Chaucer intended the *Monk's Tale* to end before the interruptions by the Knight and the Host.

Keywords [Geoffrey] Chaucer · Canterbury Tales · Monk's Tale · Prologue of the Monk's tale · Prologue of the Nun's Priest's Tale · Zenobia

As many students of the *Canterbury Tales* will be aware, the *Monk's Tale* is badly suited to its narrator. The *General Prologue* paints the Monk as a man firmly ensconced in the here-and-now. He is a *carpe diem* type whose liking for the good life is illustrated by his love of hunting, horses, hounds, fine clothes and good eating and finds its physical expression in his rotund figure. He is so fat that there is a greasy sheen all over him. It is easy to see that he exemplifies the sin of *Gula* or Gluttony, though with a substantial bit of Pride thrown in, to be recognized in his love of ostentation.

However, neither the *Prologue of the Monk's Tale* nor his *Tale* itself, with its case studies of the downfall of historical and not-so-historical celebrities (when were Lucifer and Adam ever historical?), conforms to this sketch. It is true that the Host's jocular introduction of the Monk as the next narrator is well-suited to such a man of the world, but his description as a perfect hunk and potential heart-breaker is in marked contrast with his appearance in the *General Prologue.* What is more, the Monk's unperturbed reaction and his choice of histories reveal him as a man of high

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seriousness. The tale that he comes up with is well-suited to a narrator who subscribes to a religious view of life and regards the sound and fury of the secular world with a moral eye, meaning that we are suddenly faced with a *carpe deum* person. Adding to the puzzle is Chaucer's failure to provide a good motivation for the pleasure-loving Monk's volteface. Surely we cannot read him as someone who should simply begin to dissemble and turn pious in the telling of his *Tale*. Thus, the point missed in Paul Beichner's contention that the *Monk's Tale* shows the Monk to be a much more moral man than he appears to be at first sight[1] is that Chaucer made little appreciable attempt to reconcile his secular portrait in the *General Prologue* and the much more contemplative world view to which his *Tale* attests. There is a conflict here that cannot be resolved in such an easy fashion. That the temptation to do so is great, however, is shown by one of the early *Canterbury Tales* manuscripts. As Terry Jones and his co-authors demonstrate, the *Ellesmere* depiction of the Monk, originally showing a rotund face, was painted out and replaced by a darkly veiled and austere portrait. Here the person to commission or receive the book or those preparing to present it were evidently aware of the dilemma and had it resolved in a fashion that was unforeseen by the illustrator.[2]

Where I come closer to Beichner is in believing that Chaucer was ultimately striving for a self-reflecting or self-condemnatory situation, in which the Monk is implicitly or explicitly made to repudiate his fixation on this earthly life through the medium of his own *Tale*. This is strongly suggested by the *Prologue of the Nun's Priest's Tale*, which is really an inter-tale link combining an epilogue to the Monk and a prologue to the Nun's Priest. The Knight's termination of the Monk's histories with his ''*Hoo!* […] *good sire, namoore of this!*'' and the Host's uncivil contribution, together representing the feelings of the top and bottom of the Canterbury company, produce as good a downfall in its own minor way as any in the *Canterbury Tales*. The Monk is chastened and his sense of humiliation is nicely underlined by his pique. He refuses to ''pleye'' and tell something else, an attitude that is typical of moments when pilgrims get angry and obstinate. Much the same choice of word is found at the conclusion of the *Pardoner's Tale*, which marks a fall of almost Luciferian proportions and where we also find Chaucer's device of a narrator's implicit self-refutation corroborated and exposed by his fellow-pilgrims' reaction. What the situation here means is clear: at the hands of the Knight and the Host, the Monk is symbolically and in the mildest of fashions made to undergo the very sort of fate that he has just been expounding so extensively.

On this point, then, the *Prologue of the Nun's Priest's Tale* can be said to apply the lesson that is foreshadowed in the *General Prologue* and is there to be drawn from the *Monk's Tale*. The problem is that the Monk's discomfiture happens entirely outside the bounds of his *Tale* and his own part in its *Prologue*. These two conform well with a straitlaced Monk, the *Tale* itself contributing little more than a reiterated statement of how the mighty are fallen, in illustration of the workings of the Wheel of Fortune. With one exception, to which I shall

[1] Beichner (1959, pp. 60–69).

[2] Jones et al. (2004).

return shortly, the Monk's case histories are self-incriminatory in a general sense only, in their common insistence that worldly pride comes before a fall. This makes him rather difficult to live with, for what can we do with such a contradictory character who is entirely a man of the world in one place and thus a suitable case for a degree of chastening and in another shows himself to be a spiritual person not in need of any such measure?

In this place let me include a small diagram to clarify my point:

GenProl	*Monk's Prol*	*Monk's Tale*	*Nun's Priest's Prologue*
unchastened Monk	straight Monk	straight Monk	chastened Monk

It is a plausible assumption that the contradictory aspects of the Monk's part are bound up with their compositional history. When Chaucer set out upon the *Canterbury Tales* he evidently had in mind a large volume of estates satire, though both the extent and the satire appear to have been pared down considerably in due course. I should like to think that like most of the portraits in the *General Prologue* the Monk's was part and parcel of the original design. I would also hazard that Chaucer's conception of the Monk never underwent any serious change and that the Monk's discomfiture in the *Nun's Priest's Prologue*, which is presumably a late piece of writing,[3] represents his final word. By implication this indicates that he had some idea in mind as to how to deal with the *Monk's Tale* but was postponing a definite go at adapting it. It also implies that the Monk's part in the *Prologue* of his tale was an improvisation, a temporization serving for the moment to introduce a none-too-fitting tale with which it was made to harmonize. Something comparable may still be seen in the way that the Wife of Bath's old tale was parked with the Shipman, in evident anticipation of a better solution or a better adaptation of tale and teller. Thus what we appear to have is a *Tale* that like its *Prologue* is badly, if at all, adapted to the pilgrim whom we meet in the *General Prologue* and in the denouement found in the *Nun's Priest's Prologue*.

The Monk's case histories themselves are partly based on Boccaccio's *De casibus virorum illustrium* (On the Fall of Illustrious Men), though only meagrely indebted to them textually, and for the rest drawn from a number of other sources, such as the Vulgate.[4] The resulting collection is generally thought to have been composed in his Italian period, that is, in the 1370s, well before we generally assume him to have begun work on the *Canterbury Tales*.[5] In the light of Chaucer's limited textual use of *De casibus*, which implies that he had read the book or heard it read (or parts of it) but probably did not possess a copy, and the non-Italian source of several of the other stories this may be regarded as open to doubt. There is certainly a suggestion here of a later composition.

Anyway, its assignation to the Monk was evidently felt to produce too brief a tale: hence the addition of the so-called *Modern Instances*, dealing with the downfall of a number of more or less contemporary rulers. One of these is Bernabo

[3] For the lateness, see Benson (1987, pp. 935–936). He speaks of ''Chaucer's latest intention'' with respect to the *Prologue* and regards the *Tale*'s final form as very late.

[4] Benson (1987, pp. 929–930); Bestul (2003, pp. 410–414).

[5] Benson (1987, pp. 929–930).

of Lombardy, who died in the final months of 1385. This shows that his story and probably all of the other new interpolations date from 1386 or later. This places us within the time of the composition of the *Canterbury Tales*. Quite possibly, the *Modern Instances* were meant to conclude the *Monk's Tale*, but the manuscript situation is unhelpful and to be on the safe side editors such as Robinson and Benson put them immediately after the story of Zenobia, although they admit that they may have come last.[6] Just like the old instances, the new additions exhibit no awareness or hint of the Monk's moral dilemma, of self-reflection or even implicit reference to his spiritual condition. This means that in all likelihood they were interpolated mechanically, without any special consideration of how they were to be applied to the Monk.

It seems to me that there were three routes for Chaucer to pick in order to iron out the various inconsistencies. One was to rewrite the Monk's portrait in the *General Prologue* and replace him by a more pious character. This would have been an easy solution but it is one that he did not take, either because he was adhering to his concept of estates satire or because he never got round to the rewriting. A contributory reason may be that it would have spoilt the moment of the Monk's chastening by the Knight. Another solution would have been to adapt the Monk's part in the Monk's *Prologue* and provide some sort of motivation for him to show himself to be a dissembler, a pious hypocrite. Again this is something that he did not do, although he did probably alter the original *Prologue* to include the Host's ribald description of the Monk.

A final choice was to adapt the various case histories in such a way as to make their applicability to the Monk's own situation more perceivable. Again, this does not appear to have been an option that he exercised. However, there is one exception and this is the story of Zenobia or Cenobia, as Chaucer calls her, which was taken from Boccaccio's *De claris mulieribus* (On Famous Women). The source of Chaucer's *Cenobia* is not in doubt.[7] He generally adheres to Boccaccio's text, which he follows and echoes in many places, but he condenses it and takes several liberties with the tale order.[8] Boccaccio's text, by the way, is in prose. It is also quite obvious that Chaucer used *De casibus virorum illustrium* for two of the story's final stanzas. His conclusion is entirely in tune with this book's markedly different version of the Zenobia story, sharing Boccaccio's moralizing there which also deals with the vicissitudes of Fortune that play such an important part in the *Monk's Tale*.[9]

Less clear is the compositional history of Chaucer's *Cenobia*. It is usually supposed that, like his adaptations from *De casibus*, it was composed at an early date, soon after his Italian period. I have already pointed out that the earliness is

[6] Benson (1987, p. 930).

[7] I have used the italicized spelling *Cenobia* throughout to refer to her story in the *Monk's Tale*, reserving Zenobia for the lady herself.

[8] A good idea of how closely Chaucer follows Boccaccio's text may be gleaned from Brown (2001, pp. 210–215). All further reference to the lines of *De claris mulieribus* is through this translation. This is not to say that I have a problem with the one that Bestul provides but Brown's version, with its numbered paragraphs, provides easier reference (The C used in referring to Zenobia's story represents the Roman numeral, her story being number 100 in the book).

[9] Bestul (2003, p. 421).

none too firmly established. Even if early, there are indications that it may have been revised and adapted at a later date, to which I shall come presently. Unlike his borrowings from *De casibus*, Chaucer's use of this case history from *De claris mulieribus* indicates a good and direct textual awareness. He faithfully follows Boccaccio's account of Zenobia's hunting prowess (*Dcm* C:2–3) in the second and third stanzas of *Cenobia*. However, he subsequently leaves out almost all of *Dcm* C:4–11, a rather substantial part of the story, thus giving these two stanzas much more prominence. The part dropped by Chaucer largely deals with a more precise account of the historical situation. He links up *Dcm* C:5, which is on her marriage to Odenake (a misspelling of Odaenathus, a Syrian prince), with *Dcm* C:11, which is where her abstinent virtues are sung.

For those unfamiliar with the story: Zenobia, who lived in the third century AD, was the warlike queen of Palmyra, little interested in womanly pursuits but a keen huntress and a soldier who had no problems with the rigours of campaigning all over the Near East. She allowed her husband to have intercourse with her solely, and then only once, for the sake of getting pregnant. If this failed to produce a result, he was given another single opportunity. On this point, by the way, Chaucer and Boccaccio are fully agreed. There were, not surprisingly, just two sons. Zenobia was instrumental in extending Palmyra's territory as far as Egypt during both her husband's rule and that of her son Vaballathus whose regentess she was. In the end the Romans under the Emperor Aurelian put an end to her ambitions. She was defeated at Antioch in 372 and brought to Rome where, bedecked in gold and jewels, she was shown in Aurelian's triumph. Roman custom, which was never weak-hearted, suggests that she was executed afterwards, though as we shall see below the *Historia augusta* claims different and allows her to live out her life in Tivoli.

There is no need to detail all the differences, as most have little bearing on the present subject. Chaucer's description of Zenobia's intellectual interests, however, certainly deserves mention. Both he and Boccaccio pay a good measure of attention to her manly qualities, particularly her soldierly ones and her love of hunting. At the same time, they also depict her as interested in ''womanly'' pursuits such as reading and languages. Boccaccio stresses languages. His Zenobia is a polyglot. Chaucer, however, is not so interested in this but pays emphatic homage to her love of books as well as her general learning and virtuousness, attributes reminiscent of how the Virgin is iconographically presented in his day as a modest lady at a lectern:

> … for to entende
> To lerne bookes was al hire likyng,
> How she in vertu myghte hir lyf dispende. [Monk's Tale, 2308–10]

Chaucer also downplays Zenobia's conspicuous wealth, both in the course of the story and in her final humiliation when she is paraded in Aurelian's triumph. Boccaccio's account of how she and her children walk in front of her gold-and-jewel studded chariot and how, ''fettered with gold chains around her neck, hands, and feet and burdened by her crown and royal robes and pearls and precious stones, she was exhausted by their weight and often had to stop, despite her inexhaustible vigor'' is turned by Chaucer into something much less ostentatious. Of course, there are her sumptuous chariot and the gold chains around her neck (hardly her fault or

her choice) but she herself merely wears a crown ''as after hir degree'' and appropriately bejewelled clothes—another iconographic correspondence with the Virgin. Nor is there any mention of such wealth that she can barely stagger along.

Here, as in other places, Boccaccio follows the *Historia augusta*, a historically none too reliable and gossipy fourth-century AD chronicle on the emperors of the third century. This also goes for the conclusion of his history of Zenobia. He tells us that she was not only granted her life but also an estate near Tivoli where she lived with her children until she reached old age. No such happy conclusion is found in Chaucer. He bewails her unhappy fallen state and describes how she now has to earn her livelihood by wielding the distaff, in symbol of which she wears a spinning-woman's cap. Am I mistaken or is there an echo, however faint, to be discerned here of John Ball's famous egalitarian rallying cry, *When Adam delved and Eve span/ Who was then the gentleman?* An echo much like this involves Christ and his mother who, so the Church taught, had come to absolve all of humanity through their suffering. Is not Zenobia a proper *mater dolorosa?*

As it is impossible to deny Chaucer's knowledge of Boccaccio's version, the question is what caused him to diverge from his source on these points. To this we may add a number of other pertinent questions. Why should *De claris mulieribus* have been involved here at all? Why was a woman inserted, why was this Zenobia and why is her story the lengthiest of all? Of all the Monk's case histories hers is the only one to come from *De claris mulieribus*. Why, we wonder, should Chaucer have inserted this single tale from this source, which includes over a hundred histories, some of which are far more heart-rending and tragic than Zenobia's? Even more to the point perhaps is the question why a woman should have been included in a collection of stories that constitute, as the scribe added (at Chaucer's direction perhaps) the Monk's version of *De casibus*: ''Heere bigynneth the Monkes Tale De Casibus Virorum Illustrium''. The reference to Boccaccio is clear but so is the message that the *Tale* is supposed to deal with *men*. To be honest, this same objection holds good for *De casibus* itself, which apparently uses *vir* in the same wide sense that the English language applies to *man.* Here, too, Zenobia crops up somewhat unexpectedly, even if it is perfectly clear that, with the specific exception of two paragraphs (13 and 16), her account is not the text that Chaucer follows.[10]

The most natural explanation is that *Cenobia* was not originally intended for the *Monk's Tale.* This immediately poses the question what it was intended for then. Perhaps there was no such thing: it is a perfectly likely notion for Chaucer to have gone in for collecting tales for potential use at a later date, particularly as the Canterbury concept called for a huge number of tales. The truly wise would probably leave it at that. However, it seems to me, even if I am only hypothesizing here for the duration of a few pages, that Zenobia is excellently suited to the category of ladies whom Chaucer deals with in the *Legend of Good Women.* It is true that she is not mentioned in the ballade *Hyd, Absalon* or the Man of Law's listing but these two exhibit curious gaps and oversights and accordingly do not weigh heavily. It is also true that most of the *Legend* is Ovid-based but this is no solid objection, either. The *Legend*'s opening tale of Cleopatra, for instance, is not

[10] Bestul (2003, p. 421).

from Ovid. Robinson even conjectured that she came from either Boccaccio's *De claris mulieribus*, *De casibus*, or both.[11] Here, however, we are disappointed. As soon as one inspects these versions it is obvious that beyond a shared awareness of parts of the general story, Chaucer's and Boccaccio's accounts are too dissimilar for any specific link with *De claribus mulieribus* or *De casibus* to be entertainable. Apart from this, Boccaccio's Cleopatra is also bad and perverse, while Chaucer's is good but tragic. In fact, she would have been a much better fit for the *Monk's Tale* than Zenobia (Chaucer even refers to the workings of Fortune in her story), were it not for the fact that the Monk's sophisticated rhyming scheme tallies badly with the simple feminine rhyme which is employed in the *Legend.*

If we accept that Chaucer definitively gave up on the *Legend of Good Women* after briefly having another go at it by rewriting its *Prologue*, which seems to be the general view (though Benson feels that new work was forthcoming),[12] it is a reasonable thought that he should have wished to find a new use for its tales and those that he may have had in reserve for it. Since at the same general time he was also engaged on the *Canterbury Tales* for which he was in great need of suitable tales, why not assume that a number of them were redeployed there? Thus, it is widely held that the *Physician's Tale* was originally intended for the *Legend* but afterwards reassigned to its present place.[13] I myself have pointed out elsewhere that the Man of Law's tale of Custance could at one time have been meant for the *Legend.*[14] If this should also hold good for *Cenobia*, the inference from what we have just discussed would be that no effort had as yet been made by Chaucer to versify it. This may be deduced from the fact that, throughout the *Canterbury Tales*, we repeatedly come across indications of a preference for a quick and easy dealing with compositional problems or, to express it differently, a tendency to stave off a final revision until the very latest—an intelligent approach, in my view. A reversification of *Cenobia* would have been out of the question until Chaucer's final and never-to-be overhaul and revision of the entire Canterbury effort.

An interesting aspect here is the dating of *Cenobia.* Let us momentarily stick to the fiction that it belonged to Chaucer's story file for the *Legend*. When would this shift of *Cenobia* to the *Monk's Tale* have taken place? Robinson and Benson regard the discarding of the *Legend* as late and link it to 1394 when Richard's queen Anne died. A date of 1390 is more likely, for reasons which I have outlined elsewhere.[15] Not that this matters greatly here: we are after all speaking of what happened to the *Legend*'s stories and those which Chaucer may originally have reserved for it, once he decided to turn his attention away from the *Legend* in order to concentrate, presumably, on the *Canterbury Tales*.

If there was no link with the *Legend*, which is of course just as good an alternative, there is nevertheless an interesting little slip of the pen in *Cenobia* that also points to a later inclusion than the 1380s. In referring to Boccaccio's account of

[11] Benson (1987, p. 1066).

[12] Benson (1987, p. 1060).

[13] Benson (1987, p. 901).

[14] Lindeboom (2007, p. 80).

[15] Lindeboom (2007, pp. 108–122).

Zenobia's prowess and successes as a warrior princess, both at her husband's side and independently, Chaucer commits a most curious error. He refers the reader ''*unto my maister Petrak* […]*/That writ ynough of this, I undertake.*'' Petrarch, however, has a mere 10 lines on Zenobia and is not Chaucer's source, nor can there be a jot of doubt that Chaucer follows Boccaccio, who, as we have seen does not follow Petrarch either. Hence, also, Richard Neuse's laudable attempt to read the Monk as speaking here *in loco Boccaccionis* and to use the reference to Petrarch as something to ''clinch it'' is patently unfounded and in need of rethinking.[16]

Whatever way we turn the evidence, one thing is clear: in this place Chaucer mixes up Boccaccio and Petrarch. This puts an interesting face upon things. If *Cenobia* should have been an early reworking of Boccaccio's version, say produced in the first half of the 1370s when Chaucer's visit to Italy was still firmly embedded in his memory, his confusion of the two of them would be inexplicable. This holds good the more when we consider how much accustomed Chaucer's age was to committing matters to memory. Thus, the most plausible explanation here is that a truly good deal of time had gone by and the story's manuscript, whether the Boccaccian original or Chaucer's remake, had probably lain fallow all this while, before Chaucer returned to it. If, in good keeping with frequent medieval practice, the manuscript's author was not expressly mentioned, this may be a contributory explanation of Chaucer's lapse. Thus, in brief, the inference here is that *Cenobia* as we know it was dealt with at a late date and is therefore a late inclusion.

Having inspected these compositional and dating aspects, we can now have a closer look at Chaucer's Zenobia herself. Boccaccio, more or less faithful to the *Historia augusta*, paints her as an oriental warrior queen with an oriental love of wealth and ostentation, which to a great extent reflects how the ancient Romans viewed the East. He is not happy with her sumptuous lifestyle but accepts it as an aspect of her royalty. For the rest she is a manly person who loves hunting and soldiering and is perfectly willing to fraternize with the soldiers and share their hardship. She is womanly only in matters such as the conception and bearing of children and her natural part in protecting them. Chaucer, on the other hand, *literally* lionizes her. He may not refer to bestiaries popular in his day nor speak of lionesses, but the picture that he paints of Zenobia is nonetheless clear. She is his Lion Queen. She is a desert princess, a mighty huntress, mightier even than the male, mates only in order to produce a litter, is ferociously loyal to her partner and her brood and ever willing to defend her territory and extend it for the sake of the pride. At the same time but in good harmony with this, she is also very much a latter-day Diana, chaste goddess of the hunt.

This is not where Chaucer stops. He also lionizes her in the usual figurative sense. He *idolizes* her. As I have pointed out, her ostentatious wealth (which would have been understood by his public to signify the sin of Pride) is toned down to a matter of jewels and a crown befitting her royal status. Her unfeminine traits, which would still have raised many an eyebrow in Shakespeare's day, are relatable to her leonine stature. Her excessively chaste marital conduct is precisely the sort of thing that the Church has always advocated. For Chaucer's day and age, try the Parson's

[16] Neuse (2000, pp. 247–277, at 254).

Remedium contra peccatum luxurie for a taste of ecclesiastical prudery on the subject of marital intercourse.

What is left is a woman who is fundamentally a saint but also comes close to the courtly ideal. Her rise and fall as well as her courage, fortitude and other virtues are described sympathetically in a fashion that is entirely reminiscent of saints' lives, both within the *Canterbury Tales* and without. At the same time, her general life style, her outfit, her horses, hounds and love of hunting would have endeared her most earnestly to the Ricardian court for whom Chaucer wrote. She is a very gracious and courtly lady indeed. I need hardly point out that such a fusion of social graces and exemplary virtue is quite typical of the fourteenth century. There is always a strong hint of mariolatry in the courtly love scene and, clearly, Chaucer makes excellent and perhaps somewhat surprising use of this, as it is usually the century's Italian poets who are credited with ''Virginizing'' the courtly love tradition.

It is also clear that Chaucer diverges from *De claris mulieribus* in his conclusion of Zenobia's history. In conformance with the *Historia augusta*, Boccaccio's heroine is permitted to retire and spend the rest of her life in a pleasant fashion on an estate near Rome, signifying that the author is not attempting to infuse any special meaning into her story. In plain contrast to this, Chaucer's Zenobia is reduced from a mighty warrior queen to the humble status of what common women are required to do in order to procure a meagre subsistence. This, too, is something that we find in Boccaccio but this time Chaucer's source is *De casibus*. It is not difficult to see that this choice is linked up with the Monk's theme of tragedy as effected through the Wheel of Fortune, for which theme Chaucer drew on the *Roman de la Rose*. It is nevertheless undeniable that the moralizing *De casibus* is similarly concerned with this. Thus, in concluding Zenobia's history, it outspokenly refers to the working of Fortuna, so that it may well be that here and elsewhere in this work lies the prime inspiration of what is worked out by the Monk as tragedy in motion:

> Ite igitur humane condicionis immemores et scandite celsa ut, aut omnem Fortune spirantis auram timeatis, aut sopiti inpulsu minimo in mortem certissimam corruatis. [*Therefore go unmindful of the human condition and climb the heights, so that you will either fear every breath exhaled by Fortuna or, knocked out by the slightest shock, perish by certain death.*].[17]

Zenobia's story would be pointless within its context if the Monk had added the original ending, as this would have served to suggest that misfortune can also be overcome and the Wheel can lift a person up again. This is not the bleak view that his instances subscribe to: there is just one round, not a succession of them, and it goes up only to come down again. At the same time, her story is also linked to Chaucer's decision to sanctify and paint her as a woman whom it would be hard to fault. The humble conclusion that he sketches for her is so much better suited to such an effort than a return to an easy life. All this goes to show that *Cenobia* cannot be the simple outcome of an early adaptation stemming from his Italian period. It was plainly adapted to the Monk's theme—probably coinciding with his mistake on

[17] Branca (1983, pp. 678–682). The translation is mine.

Petrarch—and there must have been a measure of reworking, even if this need not have been much more than replacing Boccaccio's conclusion as found in *De claribus* with that of *De casibus*.

What this leaves unaddressed is the reason why Chaucer deals with Zenobia in the fashion that he does, which is so different from *De claris mulieribus*, and for the ending falls back upon *De casibus* instead. Naturally, when one condenses a story and interferes with its narrative order, this must result in a somewhat different stress. Yet this is something that a clever author—and Chaucer must surely be regarded as such—can deal with and make to pass more or less unnoticed. This is not what we find here. Thus, the likely view is that these differences are intentional and *Cenobia* was inserted into the *Monk's Tale* because of some singular appropriateness of her story to the Monk's condition.

There are some striking contrasts and correspondences that go to suggest that this is indeed the case. To begin with, there is their common love of hunting, which may well have been the exact reason why Zenobia was made to participate in the Monk's histories. If so, then her example is used to demonstrate that this is something that need not keep one from a celibate life or taking time off for the pursuit and contemplation of virtue. With respect to the Monk, the moral of her story thus becomes a warning at his address. If this mighty huntress, so noble, beautiful, virtuous and courageous could fall so low, let the Monk—as keen a hunter, good-looking and chaste as per his vow, but a slave to his appetites—beware unless he be humbled likewise. As this is precisely what happens when the Knight interrupts him, I am inclined to believe that this is a correct reading. Even such matters as Chaucer's downtoning of Zenobia's conspicuous wealth and the non-fatal conclusion of her story fit into such a reading. The Monk as portrayed in the *General Prologue* is neither extremely rich nor extremely bad: he is venial but not evil, and this is something that ought to reflect back on him in the denouement that is provided by *Cenobia* and effected by the Knight and the Host.

What must further have led Chaucer to include Zenobia is the suitability of her story for presentation as a sort of lay saint's life. Given the inescapable fact that he effected various changes that resulted in a markedly more saintly person, this is what he was probably trying to achieve. It is something that would not have escaped his audience or readers, either. As Helen Cooper notes, ''medieval readers were in the habit of reading intertextually'',[18] and changes in familiar texts are precisely the sort of thing that would have alerted them. With respect to the Monk, the inclusion of a near-virginal counterpart aiming to achieve high goals and ''vertu'' sounds like a formidable corrective of his male microcosmos of pleasure-seeking activity. Saintliness in the *Canterbury Tales* is virtually always feminine, as an implicit yardstick and mirror for the male and frequently errant part of God's creation.

Right or wrong, there is a final point to make and this concerns the dissimilarity of the Monk's portrayal in the *General Prologue* and that of the *Prologue of the Monk's Tale*. We have seen that one paints him as bald, fat and greasy—the other as handsome and a natural womanizer, if he were so minded. Though there is a lot of jocularity in the Host's words in the latter prologue, it is virtually impossible to take

[18] Cooper (1983, p. 3), Benson (1987, p. 1132) note.

his description of the Monk's looks as anything other than literal. Now this change from foul to fair links up well—and this is very interesting—with the presumable fact that the lines where it occurs, VII.1941-62, were not originally part of the *Prologue of the Monk's Tale* but only inserted later, having been taken from the *Epilogue to the Nun's Priest's Tale*.[19] The reason why it was so included could well have been a desire to align the portraits of Zenobia and the Monk more closely, she being a famous beauty and he standing in need of some cosmetic touches if her story were to apply to him effectively. It also suggests that Chaucer was adhering to a satirical approach, as is made clear in the Host's words to the Monk.

Thus, to conclude, it certainly looks as if Zenobia was meant to play a special part in the Monk's discomfiture but it is also plain that no satisfactory over-all solution was reached at any time. There is far too much that remains unresolved with respect to Chaucer's plans for him. This goes especially for the *carpe diem/deum* tension and its attendant need to make these two aspects come together satisfactorily. To this it may be added that the general set-up of the *Monk's Tale* is not particularly conducive to a solution: a reiterated suggestion that the various histories are themselves also applicable to the Monk would have been self-defeating nor is it easy to see that they could ever have been successfully reworded to serve such an end.

It is here that *Cenobia* comes in. And why not assume that she was interpolated by Chaucer for the special purpose of dealing with this question? It is clear that, with a few further touches perhaps, this would have worked very well. To some extent it does so even now. What is missing, however, is some device enabling Chaucer to highlight this particular history, so as to make its application create a resounding effect and contribute to the Monk's chastening. The logical place for this would have been immediately before the ''conclusion'' of the *Monk's Tale* when the Knight comes in and calls for a halt.

Who knows? This may be a stage, which Chaucer reached. Perhaps there exists such a manuscript, though I have not been able to trace any reference to such a state of affairs. But then the manuscript situation is confused here. Benson proposes the insertion (and implicit mix-up) of histories on single sheets by various scribes.[20] If his guess is correct, such a placement at the end of the *Tale* is well within the realm of probability, even if it is not reflected in the manuscripts. Various reasons have been thought up for the Knight's interruption, but one of them could certainly be his irritation at the Monk's wandering off to such pet interests as hunting. A knight might have had strong objections to clerics infringing upon what must fundamentally have been seen as an aristocratic prerogative and perhaps even more so at a time when the nuisance value of the clergy was decried from every side. Just as good a reason or perhaps even better is the Monk's switch to a *woman*'s story when all the preceding ones were about *men*, particularly when this woman proves to be so much better at their office than any of them. Either choice, let it be said, provides

[19] Benson (1987, p. 928, 941).

[20] Benson (1987, p. 1132) note 2375–2462.

a solution that accounts for the *Tale's* termination through the Knight's intervention in a fashion that is as satisfactory, if not more so, as anything that other ordering efforts have come up with.

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