DERIVED WORDS IN CHAUCER'S LANGUAGE

by Morton Donner

One of the striking dramatic conflicts in the *Canterbury Tales* begins at the end of the *Wife of Bath's Prologue* when the Friar laughs at her "long preamble" to a tale, enraging the Summoner, who objects not only to his attitude but specifically to his choice of language:

> What spekestow of preambulacioun?
> What! amble, or trotte, or pees, or go sit doun!
> Thow lettest oure disport in this manere.
> (D 837-39)[1]

The Summoner seizes on the word *preamble* as a symbol of the patronizing way the Friar parades his erudition, a trait that Chaucer goes on to develop as thematic structure for the pair of tales which these two pilgrims later tell at each other's expense.[2] To the Summoner, the word evidently seems pedantic, a derived form that he can play the pedant with too, deriving *preambulation* from it, and it in turn from *amble,* but only to dismiss all this pedantry as irrelevant to the pilgrims' storytelling. The Summoner is not much interested in derivational processes. But Chaucer is. He may joke with them, having the Summoner first concoct a derived form with no real meaning and then mistake the meaning of what he thinks is the Friar's own derivation, but the joke itself depends on knowing how derivational patterns of word formation work.

Chaucer's interest in them can be instructive. His own sense of how they work must, after all, reflect his sense of how language itself works. But even though his skill at language, as one of his most admirable qualities, has been analyzed time and again in considerable detail, his handling of derivational processes has not attracted much comment.[3] Yet as George Gordon has shown for Shakespeare, we can learn something useful about a writer's feeling for language by seeing how he exploits its derivational resources.[4] Chaucer, like Shakespeare, exploits them freely, often ingeniously, fashioning them into a vital medium of expression for purposes ranging from simple euphony to complex imagery.

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A substantial number of the words used by Chaucer for these purposes stand as the first recorded citations in English.[5] As a form of innovation different from outright foreign borrowings, they suggest a different form in which to consider the question of how innovation figures in his language. Ordinarily he relied on familiar words, avoiding strange new terms, so that most of the thousand or so French borrowings which first appear in his writings were almost certainly already in colloquial use.[6] Chaucer simply gave them literary currency. But the matter is not so simple with derivations, because they could be new without being strange. Words formed by joining a familiar affix to a familiar root seem familiar the moment they are coined; if nobody has thought of them before, somebody should have. Two such words, used with great power by Chaucer just once each, illustrate the problem neatly. In the *Clerk's Tale,* when Walter turns Griselda out, she wants to leave as naked of possessions as she came, except that she hopes he would not have her go "smockless" out of of his palace (E 871-75); in *Troilus and Criseyde,* at the conclusion of Criseyde's monologue asserting her firm intention to return to Troy, the narrator comments that within two months she would be of a quite different mind and that both Troilus and Troy would slide "knotless" through her heart (V, 766-70). Here are a couple of commonplace native roots combining with a very productive native suffix, but Chaucer's *smockless* is the only citation until the late nineteenth century, and his *knotless* the only one until the late sixteenth. Even if *knotless* is not his own creation, he might have thought it was, and even if *smockless* is his own, he might have thought not. For words like these, innovation is a question not of the deliberate introduction of completely new words into the language, but only of the freedom, freshness, and imagination shown by Chaucer in exploiting the resources of the language of his time.

As a way of emphasizing his command of these qualities, by indicating the range of words he may have formed himself, all but a duly noted few of the illustrative citations in this paper are derivations that first appear in Chaucer's writings. Although the odds are against any majority of the words in this category actually originating with him, a good many, as Chaucer uses them, might well have, while a modest number, perhaps a couple of dozen or so, almost certainly did. Some of the words in this last group are worth a close look, because, like *preambulation,* they reveal not only how readily and easily he would derive new forms, but also the reasons why he needed them.

The most obvious reason is rime. Since derivational suffixes make handy rimes, Chaucer sometimes ends a line with his own derivation

when necessary. A remarkably informative example of this practice occurs in the *Knight's Tale* when, to rime with *registre,* Chaucer produces *divinistre* (A 2811), a word which shows up nowhere else either in French or in English. He uses it here as an agent noun designating somebody who can explain divine matters, but in expressing this same idea elsewhere, he stays with more conventional formations, *divine* or *diviner,* nouns derived either by conversion of a grammatical function or by addition of a standard agent suffix. He probably arrived at *divinistre* by misinterpreting the structure of a familiar French borrowing, *ministre,* taking the *-istre* as an agent suffix and tagging it on to *divine* to get himself a rime.[7] Freedom in handling derived forms could hardly go further. *-istre,* if it was a suffix at all, was at best a very uncommon one,[8] yet Chaucer casually picks it up to replace the standard agent suffix *-er* when he happens to need a rime.

He looks nearly as casual in deriving words for the sake of meter. At one place in the *Second Nun's Tale,* for example, an unusual derivation slips in to make a line run smoothly:

> For pure chaastnesse of virginitee (88).

This is the only citation for *chasteness* before the mid-fifteenth century. The usual word was *chastity,* a French borrowing current from the early thirteenth century on and cited in Chaucer's own writings more than thirty times, twice in the *Second Nun's Tale* itself.[9] He understood *chastity* as a noun derived from the adjective chaste, and, as I will demonstrate next, recognized *-ity* as equivalent to *-ness,* a native suffix very common in his vocabulary, combining freely not only with English but with French roots to form hybrids like this one. Faced with the trouble that using *chastity* would cause in this line of verse, he evidently hit on *chasteness* as a way out of the problem.

Similar problems, and solutions, show up when he tries for grammatical parallelism. As a rule, Chaucer tends to choose parallel morphologic forms for constructions with parallel syntactic functions, sometimes deriving the proper form himself. One that is clearly his own appears in the *Parson's Tale* when, after mentioning "scantness" of clothing three times within a short space (I 414-22), he changes the suffix to fit the pattern set by another sentence a few lines later:

> I sey nat that honestitee in clothynge of man or woman is uncovenable, but certes the superfluitee or disordinat scantitee of clothynge is reprevable. (431)

Scantity is a strange word to find in Chaucer's vocabulary. All other Middle English words derived with *-ity* were borrowed in that form

from French, so that except for this one citation, *-ity* was a wholly unproductive suffix until the sixteenth century; and then it combined only with Romance roots, not forming another hybrid until early in the eighteenth century.[10] Chaucer himself, moreover, while readily producing hybrids composed of a Romance root and a Germanic suffix, like *chasteness,* almost never reversed the process to combine a Germanic root like *scant* with a Romance suffix. *Scantness,* a word he evidently did not mind using repeatedly, is what he might be expected to repeat again in this sentence. But he is so obviously putting together a carefully balanced structure here, with the idea of scantness parallel in function to *honestity* and *superfluity,* that it comes as no surprise when he substitutes *-ity* for *-ness* to get a word that parallels them in form as well. Reading a passage of this sort brings us very close to Chaucer at work.

The closest view of him at work deriving words comes from his translations. In fact, the majority of unmistakably original derivations in Chaucer's writings can be seen there, even if partly because his originality measures out more accurately when his language can be checked against a specific source. What usually motivates him is simply the primary goal of translation, to render meaning. Some of his formations merely demonstrate dogged, clumsy attempts at the goal, like two words from the *Consolation of Philosophy* that turn up once each, only to remain as the sole citations in the language, *witnessfully* (IV, pr. 5, 10; L. *testatius*) and *uneschewably* (V, pr. 3, 120; L. *inevitabiliter*).[11] But he can also fashion derivational materials into instruments for translating gracefully, forming new words for their own force of expression, as when Dante's "Non circonscritto, e tutto circonscrive" (*Par.* XIV, 30) appears in the last stanza of *Troilus* as "Uncircumscript, and al maist circumscrive" (V, 1865). Translating Dante's negative particle with a prefix to form a single word has a power that, to my mind, goes beyond what could have been reached with a *ne* or *nat.* On the evidence, Chaucer seems to have thought so too.

Chaucer's reasons for deriving new words when translating exemplify his attitude whenever he works. Underlying virtually all his own derivations is a writer's natural effort to make his language effective, whether in terms of sound, rhythm, balance, clarity, economy, variety, force, or any of these motives in combination. One place where they do combine, in *Troilus,* provides an apt conclusion to examples of Chaucer's effort by showing him so free with derivational processes that he turns them around to produce a back formation:

> And er that ye juparten so youre name . . . (IV, 1566).

Earlier in the poem the noun *jeopardy,* a French borrowing that first appears in English in Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess,* had already been used by him a half-dozen times, always as the object of the preposition *in* after a make-weight verb, *lie, stand,* or *put* (II, 465, 772; III, 868, 877; IV, 1386, 1512). This time, however, he avoids circumlocution and simply uses the verb from which the noun ought to derive. But there was so such verb. Chaucer's vocabulary did include a number of other originally French action nouns, like *remedy* and *augury,* in which the *-y* (actually *-ie*) is a derivational suffix forming nouns from verbs, but *jeopardy,* though it looks like such a noun, does not derive from a verb.[12] Chaucer evidently either thought it must or felt he could treat it here as though it did. The combination of motives that determines his decision here is obvious enough — considerations of rime and meter, as well as of variety in diction, together with the economy and force gained by putting an action concept directly into a verb rather than into a prepositional phrase dependent on a colorless make-weight predicate. Chaucer's ease in handling derivational processes reaches the ultimate freedom of reversing them.

A similar ease, encouraged by similar motives, shows up throughout his writings. Of course, he also manages other components of his vocabulary with comparable skill, but derived forms stand out in the way they widen his range of choice in language. His actual derivational materials are the conventional ones for his time, mainly native forms of affixation, but the time itself was right. In Chaucer's day, for example, hybrid derivations were just coming into broad use,[13] offering writers a much greater selection in vocabulary than had been available earlier. Even more important, the gerund had finally developed into a universal derivation, formed from any verb, French as well as English.[14] Chaucer himself, as it happens, provides the first citation for more than a hundred hybrid gerunds. He also has a substantial number of first citations in another major category of suffixation, conversions or functional changes, which figure as derivation by a native zero suffix.[15] Prefixation is generally less important to him, a reflection of the decline in this process that occurred in Middle English.[16] Only one native prefix, *un-,* is strongly productive in his language, while words with foreign prefixes were all borrowed in derived form. So were all the words with foreign suffixes, except for a few odd ones, which are interesting enough to warrant a closer look. Other patterns of word formation do not amount to much. *Jeopard* is the sole example of back formation, while word compounding comes close to being moribund, though there are occasional flashes of vitality, like the "japeworthy" prophecies of Tiresias in the translation of

Boethius (V, pr. 3, 132; L. *ridiculo*) or the unforgettably "gap-toothed" Wife of Bath (*CT*, A 468; D 603). Ordinarily, except for the one prefix, Chaucer chooses among native forms of suffixation when he turns to derivation as a means of diversifying his language.

The oddities just mentioned among Chaucer's forms with a French suffix are of two kinds, hybrids and words derived on a French root but apparently created in English rather than borrowed from French. The first kind is straightforward enough, odd only because this sort of hybrid is still uncommon in English at the time and is very rare in Chaucer's own vocabulary, which contains only two words undoubtedly in this category. One of them, *scantity*, has been dealt with already, while the other, *eggement*, turns up in the *Man of Law's Tale* (B^1 842) as a rime word and goes to show how far Chaucer would stretch for a rime, since the verb *egg* seems such an unmistakably native root, which he elsewhere nominalizes in the form of a gerund. There are two more words, *dotard* and *dotage*, that may be hybrid in this way, but the root might have been felt as French rather than English,[17] so that the confusion about their etymology, together with the seemingly offhand way Chaucer uses them (e.g., *CT* A 3898; D 291, 331, 709; E 1253), suggests that they belong with the second kind of oddity. Words in this category combine a French root with a French suffix but are not cited in French and were, according to the *OED*, derived in English on the French pattern. Aside from *dotard* and *dotage*, Chaucer uses a dozen such words, most of them just once each, none of them more than three times. One looks like a translation, *purveyable* (*Bo* III, met. 2, 5; L. *provida*), while the rest all reveal the same sort of characteristics seen in *divinistre*, the most striking of these words. They serve either for rime, mainly, or for meter, usually in preference to a more common form ordinarily used both by Chaucer and by his contemporaries. The kinds of preference illustrated by these words are exemplified by *rehearsal* (*CT* G 852), used instead of a gerund *rehearsing*, by *nortelry* (*CT* A 3967) instead of another derivation *nurture*, by *revelry* (*CT* A 4005) instead of a conversion noun *revel*, by *delicacy* (e.g., *PF* 359) instead of a root noun *delice*, and by *tormentise* (CT B^2 3707), a form like *divinistre* in that it is never cited again in English and is chosen instead of several other possibilities, a conversion noun *torment*, a gerund *tormenting*, or another derivation *tormentry*. *Dotard* and *dotage*, by the way, also represent choices of this sort, since the root was the verb *dote*, which Chaucer knew and from which both a familiar conversion noun and a gerund were available, though neither was used by him. For all these words, what matters to Chaucer is the choice they offer. None of them stands as a distinctively forceful or

imaginative piece of language, but taken together, they bulk as a sign of his readiness to exploit derivational resources. Even though the devices of native suffixation were his usual means, he could turn to foreign ones when necessary.

The kinds of choices shown by these words, moreover, make up a sampling of Chaucer's options in deciding among derived forms, so that they can serve as a starting point for a quick survey of his standard practices. He uses French suffixes, as just seen, as alternatives to a gerund, to a conversion or root form, to another French derivative, or, as in *scantity,* to a non-gerundial English suffix. In his use of English affixes, as seen earlier, *uncircumscript* illustrates his frequent choice of the negative prefix instead of a negative particle, while *chasteness,* which substitutes an English suffix for a French one, emphasizes the fact that the alternatives just described in his selection of French suffixes apply to English ones too. Further, he uses an English suffix on an English root rather than a common French root word, as with *doubleness,* cited five times, and *deceit,* twelve, both of them as rime words on occasion (e.g., *CT* G 1300, 1367). He chooses between two synonymous English suffixes, as with *lustiness* and *lustihede,* which are each cited several times as rime words (e.g., *CT* A 1939; F 288); between gerunds and non-gerundial English suffixes, as with *forgiving,* a rime word cited just once (*LGW* 1852), and the twelfth-century *forgiveness,* cited eleven times in Chaucer's prose; between gerunds and conversion nouns from verbs of whatever origin, as with *slumbering* (e.g., *TC* II, 67) and *slumber* (*CT* A 3816). Conversion nouns from adjectives likewise offer him a choice between zero derivation and an actual suffix, as with *moist* (e.g., *PF* 380), in a line made up of nominalized adjectives in series, and *moisture* (*CT* I 220). Adverbs offer a similar choice, deriving from adjectives either unchanged or by adding *-ly,* as with *secree* (*CT* F 1109), used adverbially as a rime word, and the more frequent *secreely* (e.g., *CT* E 763). Among Chaucer's conversion forms, only the verbs, derived mainly from nouns but occasionally from adjectives, do not replace a specific structural pattern but, like the back formation *jeopard,* serve essentially as a means of avoiding circumlocution.[18]

In the long run, though, the ways taken by Chaucer to avoid circumlocution come nearer to the chief point of interest in his handling of derivation. As a means toward economy of expression, they do, after all, contribute something to the force of his language. The specific patterns of choice just described greatly facilitate the variety and ease he shows in managing sound and rhythm, a service clearly of value to him, but as structural options they function primarily as a mechanical feature of his language, not usually contributing much

in themselves to its expressive power or imaginative reach. To establish the value of derived forms in helping him show these more creative qualities, a closer look at some of the individual devices of derivation as used by Chaucer will give us a sense of the effects he can achieve with them.

The first device is also the first exception to my notion that the structural options offered by derived forms make up essentially mechanical choices. The prefix *un-*, when used with negative meaning, substitutes for a negative particle, but, as seen earlier with *uncircumscript*, the substitution need not be simply mechanical. A more elaborate illustration can be seen in "The Former Age," Chaucer's Boethian lyric praising the good old days. An interesting aspect of this poem, one that deserves more attention than I can give it here, is the way Chaucer thinks of primeval innocence mainly in negative rather than positive terms. What he finds desirable about ancient times is not so much how people lived but rather how they did not live, not so much the things that were done but rather the things that were yet, as he carefully puts it, *un*done. Mills were "unknown" (6),[19] corn sprang up "unsown" (10), the vine lay "uncarved and ungrubbed" (14), armor was still "unforged" (49). By selecting this construction to mention what had become fundamental features of civilization, Chaucer emphasizes, as I read the poem, that such activities were not merely unperformed but were as yet unconceived. And as an illustration of Chaucer capitalizing on this construction for sheer force of expression, there is the line from *Troilus* that an Elizabethan writer found so striking, where Pandarus advises Troilus to inform Criseyde of his love:

> Unknowe, unkist, and lost, that is unsought. (I, 804)[20]

The prefix can also function, with a related though etymologically distinct meaning, as a reversative,[21] a sense in which it substitutes not for a negative particle but for a variety of circumlocutions. In this sense too, Chaucer can turn it toward imaginative force of expression, as exemplified again in *Troilus*, where the lovers' hearts will "unswell" (IV, 1146) as they accept the fact of separation, where death will "unbody" (V, 1550) Hector's soul and "unsheathe" (IV, 776) Criseyde's from her breast, and where, at the end of the story, the inevitability of the tragedy is summed up by Troilus' lamenting that he cannot "unlove" (V, 1693) Criseyde.

The same kind of compacting force for a negative idea marks his use of the adjective suffix *-less*. *Smockless* and *knotless* are the most powerful instances, but Chaucer neatly compresses the ideology of courtly love when Pandarus tells Troilus not to think that Criseyde

will as a matter of course leave him "graceless" (I, 781), although later her promises turn out to be "bottomless" (V, 1431). I could cite more examples with this suffix, but with the directly opposite one, *-ful,* oddly enough, Chaucer shows no imagination. He does, though, with some of the less emphatic positive adjective suffixes, especially in applying them to familiar objects. He works with *-ed* on various parts of the body, so that Blanche is true "tongued" (*BD* 927), Calchas' cunning makes him "eyed" like Argus (*TC* IV, 1459), Absolon finds Alisoun's supposed mouth unexpectedly long "haired" (*CT* A 3738), and in the House of Rumor, Geffrey sees the first "winged wonders" recorded in the English language (*HF* 2118). For greater metaphor with this suffix, Chaucer turns to the kitchen, producing a "sugared" attitude for Criseyde to adopt (II, 384) and a "spiced" conscience for the Parson to avoid (*CT* A 526).[22] With *-ish,* he likes animals and natural phenomena for his metaphors, so that the common people are called "lambish" (*Former Age* 50) or "goosish" (*TC* III, 584), and the irony of the *Merchant's Tale* makes January on his wedding night "coltish" (E 1847), while Criseyde is the first heroine in English literature to have a "snowish" throat and "sunnish" hair (III, 1250; IV, 736). She is also the first one with either a "rosy" or a "teary" face (II, 1198; IV, 821), though elsewhere Chaucer uses this suffix with greater complexity. The imagery is more subtle and the metaphor reaches further in "shadowy" dignities of the world (*Bo* III, pr. 4, 58; L. *umbratiles*), in "gleedy" desire of the spirit (*LGW* F 105), and in a bereaved Palamon's "fluttery" beard and "ruggy, ashy" hair (*CT* A 2883). *Fluttery,* moreover, actually represents a different kind of derivation than all the other adjectives mentioned so far, in that it is formed on a verb rather than on a noun. This form of suffixation is infrequent for Chaucer and uncommon for his time,[23] but it can, by its very nature, supply strikingly vivid adjectives. Boethius' storm clouds become "plungy" (I, met. 3, 8; L. *imbribus*), Criseyde begins to fall in love with Troilus when she sees him coming home triumphant from battle looking "so fresh, so young, so wieldy" (II, 636), and, in comic contrast, the pilgrims struggle so hard to lift the drunken Cook out of the mire because he is so "unwieldy" (H 55).

The vividness and metaphoric reach seen in the way Chaucer deals with these adjective suffixes is generally less in evidence with his noun suffixes, which tend to work toward efficient expression rather than imaginative power. The "mazedness" with which Griselda hears Walter end her trials (*CT* E 1061) is a characteristic handling of the suffix, which gets its best use when Troilus' soul ascends to the "hollowness" of the eighth sphere (V, 1809; translating Boccaccio's

concavita). Similarly, the "likelihood" of Griselda bearing a son (E 448) is more characteristic than the "mistihood" of the workings of love (*Mars* 224), though Chaucer does have fun with this suffix when he comes to the idea of lust, giving us a narrator who loses "all lustihood" from lack of sleep (*BD* 27) and a repentant wife-slayer who apostrophizes his dead spouse as the "gem of lustihood" (*CT* H 274). The range Chaucer can cover with a single form shows up even better with the agent suffix *-er*, which he uses almost too freely. He rivals Wordsworth's notion of Scotsmen as "grave livers" (*Resolution and Independence* 97) with his own conception of Venus both as a "causer of pleasance" (*Mars* 46) and as the "gladder of the mount of Citheron" (*CT* A 2223), and he can dismiss the idea of glory as nothing but a "great sweller of ears" (*Bo* III, pr. 6, 6; L. *auribus inflatio magna*). But his sense of death as the "ender" of all sorrows (*TC* IV, 501) is more like his usual practice, while his portrait of Felony as "the smiler with the knife" (*CT A* 1999) stands with the best that poetry can do.

This sort of range is also possible with the gerund, which Chaucer uses even more indiscriminately. He freely exploits its status as a universal formative for deriving nouns from verbs, applying it to any verb whose meaning he wants to express nominally. It also represented, of course, a handy structural option in his verse, as a choice over a conversion noun or a French derivation. But the choice was not always mechanical. Often enough the gerund seems to be chosen, as in modern usage, for the emphasis it puts on the fact of action, for its verbal force. As an example of verse where rime and meter have nothing to do with the selection of the gerund, there is another line from the portrait of Felony in the *Knight's Tale*:

> The tresoun of the mordrynge in the bedde . . . (2001).

As I read this line, substituting the noun *murder* for the gerund would do the meter no harm, but replacing a concrete action with an abstract conception would certainly do the poetry no good. Chaucer knew what kind of impact gerunds could make for him, as in the memorable passage further along in the *Knight's Tale* when Saturn speaks:

> Myn is the drenchyng in the see so wan;
> Myn is the prison in the derke cote;
> Myn is the stranglyng and hangyng by the throte,
> The murmure and the cherles rebellyng,
> The groynynge, and the privee empoysonyng. . . .
> (2456-60)[24]

The strength of the gerunds massed this way reaches beyond what Chaucer can get with his conversion nouns. Deverbal nouns are inherently weaker, so that he tends to use them essentially as a mechanical option, either when gerunds are ruled out by rime, meter, or parallelism, or when plurality is important to the meaning, as in Troilus speaking "among his sobs and his sighs" (IV, 375). Nouns converted from adjectives are often massed like gerunds, but without the same force, since they still stand for an abstract conception of quality rather than for a concrete action. The conversion form either replaces the ordinary word for the quality, as already seen with *moist* and *moisture,* or else becomes an absolute, designating whatever person, usually, or thing the adjective describes and eliminating the need to tag on *one* or some other prop word.[25] Straightforward replacement is pretty much a mechanical matter, but the absolute construction gains strength from its focus on actual people, so that Chaucer likes to exploit it for rhetorical effect, as when Constance prays to the Virgin Mary who "rues on every rueful in distress" (*CT* B^1 854), Troilus' sudden plunge into love gets the narrator's comment that "caught is proud, and caught is debonair" (I, 214),[26] and, exemplifying the vocative use which Chaucer seems especially fond of, Pertelote reproaches Chanticleer for cowardice with the exclamation "fie on you, heartless!" (*CT* B^2 4098).

While effects of this sort are about as much as he can get with conversion nouns, Chaucer can, as a rule, do more with conversion verbs. He uses them with greater force, partly, of course, because they are in fact verbs rather than nouns, but also because they result from a much greater compression of language. Whether formed from nouns or, less commonly, from adjectives, they go directly to the action that rises out of an object, a concept, or a quality, eliminating at the very least a make-weight predicate, often further excess verbiage as well, and frequently stimulating a more vivid sense of what the action implies. The Parson, for example, protests that he cannot "geste" in the alliterative fashion (*CT* I, 43), while Pandarus recalls to Troilus what wise clerks have "proverbed" (III, 293), and in the *Second Nun's Tale,* Cecilia at one point credits the Holy Spirit with having "souled" human beings (G 329) and then later describes Almachius' mad fury at her steadfast faith by saying that

> He stareth, and woodeth in his advertence! (G 467)

This sense of vivid compression also makes conversion verbs naturally fit for more imaginative use as metaphors. Chaucer puts them to work this way with his usual skill at turning the familiar into something new, with a range of settings that goes from extended figures like the

simile of Jason devouring love as "matter appetites form" (*LGW* 1582) or Anelida's complaint that Arcite's affection for her may "flower" but will not "seed" (*Anel* 306),[27] down to the quick sharp flash in which the Pardoner "saffrons" his sermons with a few words of Latin (*CT* C 345) or Jankin the apprentice "squires" the Wife of Bath around town (*CT* D 305).

Chaucer makes all this look easy, getting the conversion forms to fit so naturally yet vividly into the flow of language. But this sort of ease, as we all know, does not come easily. We can see something of the work that underlies Chaucer's use of derived words from a glance at one last feature of it, the way he develops more imaginative uses for them in the course of his writings. Most of the words cited as examples so far come from the passage where Chaucer first used them. Many of them, in fact, like all the conversion verbs above except *flower,* are used by him only that one time, as though he had hit upon just that form for just that occasion. Some of his derived forms, however, show up several times, starting out in ordinary fashion but then later striking fire, as though Chaucer had finally come to recognize their imaginative potential. One way this happens is through metaphor. The conversion verb *circle* applies in its first use to the boundaries of the world (*Rosem* 2) but in a later poem to the bonds of love with which God the Creator "circles" the hearts of all human beings (*TC* III, 1767). Another way is to move between the general and the particular. *Delicacy* is first cited in the *Monk's Tale* as a particular attribute of Nero, who "burned all Rome for his delicacy" (B^2 3669), but later, one reason for envying the Former Age is that Jupiter, who "first was father of delicacy" (57), had not yet come into the world. Conversely, *womanhood* is used in a general sense from its first appearance in the early complaint poems until the time when Troilus begins rereading Criseyde's letters over and over again, all the while recapturing her "womanhood" in his mind (V, 473). And another form of change in this direction, moving from the abstract to the concrete, offers an apt concluding illustration of Chaucer's work with derived words, because it shows him developing an imaginative use for the idea of imagination itself. He uses the gerund *imagining* in prosaic fashion as an abstraction from his translation of Boethius on, until, in the *Knight's Tale,* he introduces the sinister portrait gallery in the Temple of Mars as "the dark imagining of Felony" (A 1995-96).

Chaucer can be clearly seen in action here improving the effectiveness of his derived words, final evidence for the principle I have been trying to demonstrate all along. No matter what goal he sets for his language, from catching our ears to gripping our minds, much of his

success comes from his sense of how to make derived forms work for him.

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1. All citations from Chaucer's works are taken from F. N. Robinson, *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957). I have modernized the spelling for words cited in the body of my text, but not for inset passages like the one footnoted here.

2. See E. T. Donaldson, *Chaucer's Poetry*, 2nd ed. (New York: Ronald Press, 1975), pp. 1078-80.

3. The most recent monographs on the literary qualities of Chaucer's language are Norman Eliason, *The Language of Chaucer's Poetry*, Anglistica 17 (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1972), and Ralph W. V. Elliott, *Chaucer's English* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1974). Neither of these deals with derived words as such, though Elliott does comment on two specific patterns of derivation found in *Boece* and *Troilus and Criseyde* (pp. 161-64). Jacek Fisiak, *Morphemic Structure of Chaucer's English*, Alabama Linguistic and Philological Series, No. 10 (University of Alabama Press, 1965), pp. 57-73, surveys Chaucer's derivational affixes, but from the viewpoint of descriptive linguistics only, listing each affix, describing its morphological characteristics, citing some words in which it appears, and recording whether or not it is productive.

4. *Shakespeare's English*, Society for Pure English, Tract 29 (Oxford: S. P. E., 1928).

5. I have checked the *Middle English Dictionary* for those words from Chaucer's vocabulary which are included in the sections so far published (*A* through *much*), the *Oxford English Dictionary* for the remainder, but I have based all judgments about precedence of citations on the dates assigned by the editors of the *MED* to the works of Chaucer and other Middle English writers. On this basis, 744 derived words, including 143 gerunds, first appear in English in Chaucer's writings. This is a fact that I think needs to be stated here, but generally I have refrained from counting my materials, since statistics often tend to become an end in themselves. One more figure that does seem desirable, though, concerns the incidence of derived words in Chaucer's total English vocabulary. They fall somewhere between one fifth and one quarter of the whole, 2106 derived words, including 445 gerunds, out of a total of something over eight thousand words. I have distinguished gerunds from other derivations and settled for approximate results because I rely for the total on Joseph Mersand, *Chaucer's Romance Vocabulary*, 2nd ed. (New York: Comet Press, 1939), pp. 39-43, who does not count gerunds as separate words but does include words that appear only in the *Romaunt of the Rose* in arriving at a total of 8072.

6. Even Mersand, who spends a good deal of time emphasizing Chaucer's "contributions" to the English language, admits that this is likely (p. 70). See J. R. Hulbert's review of Mersand, *PQ*, 26 (1947), 302-06; Eliason, pp. 102-05.

7. See *OED*, s.v. *-ister*.

8. Idem. Cf. Hans Marchand, *The Categories and Types of Present-Day English Word-Formation*, 2nd ed. (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1969), p. 310.

9. J. S. P. Tatlock and A. G. Kennedy, *A Concordance to the Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer* (Washington, D. C.: Carnegie Institute, 1927), s.v. *chastity*. My debt to this work will be obvious, if not already so, through the rest of this paper.

10. See Marchand, pp. 312-15.

11. The *OED* has no citation for **witnessful*, which is presupposed by Chaucer's coinage, nor, similarly, does the *MED* or *OED* for **eschewable* or **eschewably*. Chaucer himself does provide one citation a bit earlier in the translation for *uneschewable* (V, pr. 1, 95; L. *inevitabili*). My text for the *Philosophiae Consolationis* is the Loeb Classical Library edition, ed. H. F. Stewart (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1918).

12. See *OED*, s.v. *jeopard*; *-y*, suffix[4].

13. I base this statement on the evidence accumulated by Marchand, pp. 209-355.

14. See the evidence accumulated by F. Th. Visser, *An Historical Syntax of the English Language*, II (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1966), 1064-98. Cf. Joseph Emonds, "The Derived Nominals, Gerunds, and Participles in Chaucer's English," *Issues in Linguistics: Papers in Honor of Henry and Renée Kahane*, Ed. B. B. Kachru ea al. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973) 185-98. The term *gerund* itself is called into question by Visser and Emonds, who both see the need to distinguish between *-ing* forms modified by an adverb as against an adjective, followed by a direct object as against a prepositional phrase object, and so on. They differ, however, on what use should be made of the term, Visser preferring to reject it outright and Emonds reserving it for the form retaining verbal characteristics. Fisiak does not even mention it but simply lists *-ing* among Chaucer's derivational suffixes. I have continued to use the term *gerund* as a matter of convenience, both because it is a handy, recognizable designation that would have to be replaced by a clumsy circumlocution and because the syntactic distinction between the two kinds of *-ing* form has no bearing on my discussion of Chaucer's language. In fact, even though Emonds shows that Chaucer's *-ing* forms should be classed as what he calls "derived nominals" rather than gerunds, my discussion will still focus on their verbal force.

15. I follow Marchand (pp. 359-63) in classifying conversions this way. In contrast, Donald W. Lee, *Functional Change in Early English* (Menasha, Wis.: George Banta, 1948), pp. 5-6, specifically designates functional change as a different kind of process than derivation. And Y. M. Biese, *Origin and Development of Conversions in English*, Annales Academiae Scientiarum Fennicae, 45, No. 2 (Helsinki: 1941), is somewhat harder to interpret. He does not confront the issue head on, like Marchand and Lee, but at one point distinguishes conversions as different from other "types of word-formation, such as derivation" (p. 6), and then later talks about conversions as the "direct derivation" of parts of speech from one another (p. 7) and compares conversion nouns with other formations likewise "derived from the verb" (p. 308). Marchand's classification forms part of a coherent, systematic theory of the linguistic processes underlying word formation in general, while Lee's comes in as something of a aside to his discussion of functional change and relies heavily on the authority of statements by Sweet a half century earlier.

16. See Marchand, pp. 130-31.

17. See *OED*, s.v. *dote*, verb[1].

18. This situation is only to be expected, since Middle English had no distinctive verbal suffix, so that conversion was the normal process for forming verbs out of other parts of speech. See Marchand, pp. 271-73, 363-64.

19. This derivation is first cited early in the fourteenth century.

20. *Unsought* is first cited early in the thirteenth century. "E. K." quotes from this line for his opening words in the Letter to Gabriel Harvey which serves as an introduction to Spenser's Shepherd's Calendar.

21. See Marchand, pp. 201-07.

22. This derivation is first cited in a literal sense earlier in the fourteenth century, but Chaucer is the first writer recorded to use it metaphorically.

23. See Marchand, p. 352.

24. All the gerunds in this passage except *strangling* and *empoisoning* appear in earlier English writings.

25. See A. G. Kennedy, "On the Substantivization of Adjectives in Chaucer," *Nebraska University Studies,* 5 (1905), 251-69. Cf. Cary Bergener, *Conversion Adjectives into Nouns in English* (Lund: Lund University, 1928), pp. 200-04.

26. *Debonair* is first cited as a noun earlier in the fourteenth century.

27. *Flower* is first cited as a verb earlier in the fourteenth century.