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Author	工藤, 義信(Kudō, Yoshinobu)
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Chaucer's *Second Nun's Tale* and the Problem of Lay and Religious Self-Formation*

Yoshinobu Kudo

Within the *Canterbury Tales*, the *Second Nun's Tale* seems the most straightforward and unquestionably connected with its narrator. The tale seems to be a conventional form of virgin martyr legend, commonly read in nunneries; and the narrator is not a specifically characterised nun. On this point Helen Cooper succinctly remarks: "It is rhetorically appropriate for a nun to tell of the life and martyrdom of a virgin saint, and thematically appropriate that it should be the anonymous Second Nun."¹ Despite its apparent conventionality, attention must be drawn to the narrative frame: the tale is told by a nun to a mixed audience of the Canterbury pilgrims, including lay people. This should be seen as providing a significant background for the presentation of the tale because saints' legends were often potentially problematic, being able to elicit conflicting interpretations according to audiences' different subject positions as well as different textual and performative contexts;² in particular, the lay and the religious seem to have drawn on different perspectives in interpreting saints' lives.³

Indeed, the *Second Nun's Tale* seems to engage with the communication and miscommunication of religious values between different social estates through the recitation and interpretation of a saint's legend. This essay explores the meaning of the tale both for the narrator and the audience by paying attention to the contemporary religious context in order to elucidate the probable accordance and the gap in interpretation of the same tale between them. The first part of this

essay will seek to show what the Second Nun intends to convey to her pious lay audience through the life of Cecilia by examining the meaning of the tale's articulations in light of the lay people's spiritual aspirations in the late-medieval period.

It is widely admitted that lay people's interest in and desire for meditative devotion seems to have increased in the late-medieval period, especially in the fifteenth century.⁴ Many instructions for meditation addressed to the laity were written in this period, often adapted from those for the religious.⁵ These instructive texts frequently point to pious lay people's ambivalent feelings; that is, to their sense of incongruity between desire for a meditative life and the reality of the worldly duties their social status demanded of them. For example, Walter Hilton's *Mixed Life* was intended to advise a nobleman not to renounce his present status, teaching him instead a way of life which balanced social obligation and meditative activity.⁶ Moreover, the *Abbey of the Holy Ghost*, probably a late fourteenth-century translation of the French *Sainte Abbaye*, is as Hilary M. Carey summarises, addressed to the "many who desire to be in religious life and yet are unable either because of poverty, or because of family difficulties, or because of their marriage vows, to take up their vocation."⁷ These examples indicate that devout lay people in late-medieval England shared a contradiction between their desire for meditation and their worldly status.

This sense of incongruity is affirmed as one of the processes in the pursuit of spiritual truth in the *Second Nun's Tale*. In the first place, the main plot of the legend of St. Cecilia contains elements which are potentially problematic in terms of social self-definition; the most implicit of these is that Cecilia does not maintain her chastity by rejecting the marriage suit like many heroines of other virgin martyr legends, but remains chaste *in spite of* her marital status.⁸ Articulating these elements, the *Second Nun's Tale* as a version of the Cecilia legend focuses on the incongruity between an individual's inner self and his/her social definition.

First of all, Cecilia's unwillingness in her marriage is described as a conflict between her devotion and the community's expectations. In other versions of the legend, the marriage is sometimes described as promoted by Valerian's personal (and implicitly sexual) desire. For example, in the "Roman curia/Franciscan" version, which Sherry L. Reames demonstrates is the main source for the latter part of the *Second Nun's Tale*,⁹ Valerian "in amorem virginis perurgens animum."¹⁰ In such a reading, the conflict in the marriage is understood as one between Valerian's lusty desire and Cecilia's desire for chastity. In contrast, the marriage in the *Second Nun's Tale* is depicted as one put forward according to social custom. Valerian's desire is not specifically stated; and when their first night comes they go to bed together "as ofte is the manere" (8.142).¹¹ Thus Cecilia's conflicting feelings during the marriage ceremony reflect not a simple conflict between virtuous will and sinful desire, but the one between what the community expects of Cecilia as a female member and what Cecilia as an individual pursues in terms of religious ethics.¹²

Cecilia succeeds in keeping her chastity by persuading her husband not to "touche [her], or love [her] in vileynye" (8.155), ultimately leading to his conversion. However, Cecilia's desire to preserve her chastity while sustaining her marital relationship points to a problem in the categorisation of women's status into three estates (maids, wives, and widows) that increasingly came to the fore in the late-medieval period. The problem with this schema is that it assumes a possible accordance between marital status and chastity. As lay women's interest in the pursuit of religious values rapidly increased, married women who sought chastity sometimes encountered a problem. Although Margery Kempe, for example, perfected the vow of chastity, Philip Repingdon, Bishop of Lincoln, did not decide to bestow on her a ring and a cloak.¹³ According to Naoë Kukita, Repingdon hesitated to give them to Margery because she could be categorised neither as a nun nor a widow, i.e. women who could usually receive them as proof of chastity.¹⁴ Thus, Margery's case exemplifies a conflict between devout

women's aspiration and their social categorisation. Cecilia's preservation of chastity within marriage should be seen in this context.

Indeed, the question posed by Almachius to Cecilia when they first meet should be seen as crucial for framing this problem. Almachius asks Cecilia about her identity: "What maner womman artow?" (8.424). Cecilia cannot answer by the terms of the three estates because in that categorisation, the status of wife is not compatible with virginity, which she would ideally claim for herself. Cecilia then answers, "I am a gentil womman born" (8.425). This answer invites another related problem. The word "gentil" (or its noun form "gentillesse") calls for consistency between social status and inner virtue. In Chaucerian texts, ironically, the word tends to be used to point out the inconsistency between them. In the *Wife of Bath's Tale*, for example, when the old woman scolds the young knight for his reluctance to consummate their marriage, she says,

But, for ye speken of swich gentillesse
As is descended out of old richesse,
That therfore sholden ye be gentil men,
Swich arrogance is nat worth an hen. (3.1109-12)

The same concept of "gentillesse" also appears in other Chaucerian texts,¹⁵ and therefore Cecilia's answer can also be seen in this context. Cecilia's claim of "gentil" descent, at least on the surface, does not resonate with her subsequent belligerent and defiant manner of disputing with Almachius (8.426-511). Even though it is certain that her defiant attitude is meant to be seen as a sign of her spiritual intelligence and persistent will to preserve her faith against pressure from the pagan authority, her second response to Almachius ("Ye han bigonne youre questioun folily [...] / that wolden two answeres conclude / In o demande; ye axed lewedly" 8.428-30), as well as her laugh in the middle of the dispute (8.462), to take just a few, sound too insulting and provocative to match what

the word “gentil” expects of her conduct towards others. Alcuin Blamires also remarks: “By answering Almachius’s opening question [...] with ‘I am a gentil woman born’ [...], Cecile raises an expectation of gentil discourse, only to subvert that in her brusque retorts.”¹⁶ Thus, Cecilia readily rejects the customary definition of women’s status, but she is still in the process of properly defining and presenting herself in social terms.

In short, the *Second Nun’s Tale* confirms the sense of incongruity between inner self and social definition, presenting it as a feature in the process of seeking spiritual truth by tracing it through Cecilia’s trajectory. This is one possible meaning of the tale which the Second Nun intends to convey to her lay audience; and if it is, Cecilia’s connection with both the active and contemplative lives, as we will see later, must also be useful for that purpose, because what the pious lay people should have aimed at was, in other words, balancing the active life and the contemplative life, as Walter Hilton recommends to his reader. However, this dimension of Cecilia does not seem to be properly conveyed to the Second Nun’s audience because of her elusive use of the word “bisynesse” as well as the difference in significance of the active and contemplative lives developed in each of the lay and religious cultures. The following section of this essay will demonstrate these points.

First of all, the active and contemplative lives were not mutually exclusive, but complementary, and their meanings were changeable in diverse contexts. However, they came to be treated separately, and in the late-medieval period, as lay piety rose rapidly, a specific distinction even seems to have arisen between religious activity (such as meditative reading) and worldly labour.¹⁷

The legend of St. Cecilia has an inherent relationship with both the active and contemplative lives. Jacobus de Voragine’s *Legenda aurea* provides several etymological explanations for the name “Cecilia” by breaking it into “ceci” and “lia”:

Cecilia quasi celi lilia vel cecis via vel a celo et Lia. [...] Fuit etiam cecis via per exempli informacionem, celum per jugem contemplacionem, Lia per assiduam operacionem. (1-2, 5-6) ¹⁸

Here, we see that the latter constituent “Lia” is associated with Leah, a biblical figure who, as Blamires points out, represents the active life.¹⁹ Several critics such as Blamires and Bruce A. Rosenberg refer to the association between Cecilia and the active life on the ground of this Voragianian etymology,²⁰ yet what the bipartite structure of this etymology implies is that the saint exemplifies *both* the active and contemplative lives in one person. Perhaps this is part of the reason the legend came to be explicitly connected with the contemplative life in the late-medieval period, along with the rise of English meditative texts. In Nicholas Love’s *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, for example, Cecilia’s reading and meditative practice is described in detail:

Amonge o er vertuese commendynges of e holy virgine *Cecile* it is writen at she bare alwey e gospel of criste hidde in her breste, at may be undirstand at of e blessed lif of oure lord Jesu criste writen in e gospele, she chace certayne parties most deuoute. In e which she set her meditacion & her ouht ni3t & day with a clene & hole herte. And when she hade so fully alle the manere of his life ouer gon, she began a3ayne. And // so with a likyng & swete taste gostly chewyng in at manere e gospell of crist; she set & bare it euer in the priuyte of her breste. In e same manere I conseil at ou do.²¹

Here, St. Cecilia is taken as an exemplar of meditative devotion, which the reader was meant to follow. Similarly, the author of the *Longleat Sermons* encourages his reader to imitate Cecilia’s reading practice.²² Regarding Cecilia as a model of meditative practice should have been predicated on the description

of her pious life at the beginning of the legend. In De Voragine's version, it is described as follows:

Cecilia virgo clarissima ex nobili Romanorum genere exorta, et ab ipsis cunabulis in fide Christi nutrita, absconditum semper evangelium Christi gerebat in pectore et non diebus neque noctibus a colloquiis divinis et oracione cessabat, suamque virginitatem conservari a Domino exorabat. (14-18)²³

Even though this might seem to a modern reader a relatively minor aspect of the whole plot, the examples of Nicholas Love's *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* and *Longleat Sermons* show that Cecilia's contemplative devotion continued to constitute a significant part of her exemplarity. In short, St. Cecilia was inherently related to both the active and contemplative lives, and her association with the contemplative life became reinforced in the lay-religious context of the late-medieval period.

If we look on the tale against this shifting emphasis in the exemplarity of St. Cecilia, as well as the transition in the sense of distinction between the active and contemplative lives in the late-medieval lay-religious context, the Second Nun's repetition of "bisynesse" in her *Prologue* and *Tale* may sound somewhat strange as it apparently places singular emphasis on the active life.²⁴ In the first place, the Second Nun's exposition on the etymology of Cecilia apparently associates the concept of "bisynesse" with the active life represented by Leah:

Or elles Cecile, as I writen fynde,
Is joyned, by a manere conjoynyng
Of "hevene" and "Lia"; and heere, in figuryng,
The "hevene" is set for thought of hoolynesse,
And "Lia" for hire lastyng bisynesse. (8.94-98)

Elsewhere, the word describes Cecilia's work in preaching and converting others:

Right so was faire Cecile the white
Ful swift and bisy evere in good werkyng [. . .] (8.115-16)

Lo, lyk a bisy bee, withouten gile,
Thee [Jhesu Crist] serveth ay thyn owene thral Cecile. (8.195-96)

Tho gan she hym ful bisily to preche
Of Cristes come, and of his peynes teche,
And many pointes of his passioun. (8.342-44)

Moreover, the implication of the association between the “bisynesse” and the active life is found outside the text in question. Martha, another biblical figure who epitomises the quality of the active life, is also described by the word “bisy” in *Cursor Mundi*, a text supposedly written around 1300: “Martha was hosewif sik-erly, / Aboute her seruyce ful bisy.”²⁵ The word's relation to the active life rather than the contemplative life can also be seen in Walter Hilton's account of his addressee's aspiration: “to serue oure lord bi goostli occupacioun al holli, wi oute lettynge or trobolyng[e] o[f] wordeli bisynesse.”²⁶ It is, then, not surprising if the audience of the Second Nun assumes, from the last line quoted above, a close connection between “bisynesse” and the active life, just as Bruce A. Rosenberg does: “Leah became a symbol of the active life in this world which strives for the peace of the next; so in her “busyness” as well she anticipates Cecile.”²⁷ The apparent awkwardness of the Second Nun's emphasis on “bisynesse,” however, could be caused by the contrasting understandings of religious value held by the Second Nun and her audience. In other words, what the Second Nun thinks of the

word “bisynesse” can be different from what the audience is likely to perceive by the same word. To reflect on that difference, it will be helpful to examine what the Second Nun believes to be the opposite of “bisynesse.” The persistent emphasis on “bisynesse” is linked to the warning against idleness in her Prologue.

To eschue, and by hire contrarie hire oppresse—
That is to seyn, by leueful bisynesse—
Wel oghten we to doon al oure entente,
Lest that the feend thurgh ydelnesse us hente.
[...]
Wel oghte us werche and ydelnesse withstonde.
And though men dradden nevere for to dye,
Yet seen men wel by resoun, doutelees,
That ydelnesse is roten slogardye,
Of which ther nevere comth no good n’encrees;
And syn that slouthe hire holdeth in a lees
Oonly to slepe, and for to ete and drynke,
And to devouren al that othere swynke,
And for to putte us fro swich ydelnesse,
That cause is of so greet confusioun. (8.4-7, 14-23)

The Second Nun seems to assert that one should work in order to avoid idleness, promoting her storytelling as a form of “feithful bisynesse” for defying that sin (8.24). Thus, she thinks of “bisynesse” as the opposite of idleness.²⁸

The Second Nun’s warning against idleness has not yet been properly examined because it seems to be part of a conventional prologue to a saint’s legend.²⁹ However, it deserves attention because it is comparable to, and can fully be understood in light of, the rule on monastic life. In monastic life, the time for the Office and necessary rest was clearly outlined within a day while the remaining

time of the day yielded anxiety about idleness. The remaining time, however, was also given a positive meaning. The rule on monastic life states that monastic members should devote themselves either to study or labour when the time is neither for the Office nor for rest. At the beginning of the chapter on manual labour and study in a Middle English northern prose version of the *Benedictine Rule*, a version adapted to a nunnery, an assertion quite similar to the Second Nun's can be seen: "Of þe trauaile spekis sain Benet in þis sentence, and sais at vnait sete es il to e saule. For i salle ye trauaile times, And in e times at lescuns, als it es ordaind."³⁰ It is notable that the *Rule* regards *both* labour and study as the opposite of idleness, not labour alone. In the form of study, leisure time has unique value: as private meditation guaranteed within the cycle of communal life. Moreover, in contrast to the contemporary distinction between active and contemplative lives, reading and manual labour are taken as complementary, and even – at least to some extent – substitutable, as the *Rule* also says: "Yef it be ani þat mai noht studie ne rede, Opir labour sal þai do, þat tay ne sitte noht al dom."³¹ It must be remembered that the active and contemplative lives had originally been treated as complementary, not as mutually exclusive. In summary, leisure time (or *otium*) as the opposite of idleness (*otiositas*) has distinctive value in the communal life of the nunnery,³² and in fact situates both labour and reading as compatible activities sharing the same religious value.

This unique understanding of monastic life means that the meaning of the Second Nun's story is elusive to the mixed audience of Canterbury pilgrims. For the Second Nun, who recognises work and reading not as having different values but as complementary, "bisynesse" may include contemplation itself and various kinds of labour which support contemplative activity. In contrast, for the pious lay audience, which clearly distinguishes the spiritual meaning of contemplative life from the active life and struggles to balance these while aspiring to the former, the word may seem here to be merely referring to physical labour, misled by the Second Nun's ostensive association between the word and the ac-

tive life. This difference in understanding leads the narrator and the audience to reach wholly different didactic perspectives on the tale: the persistent emphasis on “bisynesse” as defence against idleness, can, for the narrator, lead to claims for the meaningful use of *otium*; but for the audience, the singular emphasis on “bisynesse” can only mean the need to engage in (manual) work as a means of avoiding useless consumption of time, leading to the denial of leisure itself as a result. The Second Nun does not seem to be successful in presenting to her mixed audience the distinctive meaning of *otium* as preserved in her communal life; in that sense, she has not yet properly defined herself for those outside her own community.

In conclusion, the apparent conventionality of the *Second Nun's Tale* points to the possible gap in interpretive framework for a single literary genre between different social estates. Her choice of the legend of St. Cecilia, as well as her way of telling it, can be seen as directed at her lay audience. The audience can identify the sense of incongruity between the inner self and social definition depicted in Cecilia as their own; however, the Second Nun's seemingly conventional way of narrating the saint's legend may still be unfamiliar to the audience, mainly because her conception of “bisynesse” remains elusive to them. What is common between Cecilia, the Second Nun, and the audience is the problem of self-formation in their community. While the elusiveness of the Second Nun's recital can be seen as her failure, it is also a challenge to her audience: they must reflect on what they should learn from the tale to create a pious way of life appropriate to their respective social positions. However conventional the relationship between the teller and the tale may seem, this exploration of self-formation and narrative in the *Second Nun's Tale* deserves more attention, as it is ultimately comparable to the relationship between narrator and tale seen in other part of the *Canterbury Tales*, such as the Franklin and his *Tale*.³³

Notes

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- 1 Helen Cooper, *Oxford Guides to Chaucer: The Canterbury Tales*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 361.
- 2 Gail Ashton points out the problem in interpretation of saints' legends in terms of gender: see Gail Ashton, *The Generation of Identity in Late Medieval Hagiography: Speaking the Saint*, Routledge Research in Medieval Studies 1 (London: Routledge, 2000), 1-7. Although this essay does not focus on the issues, the *Second Nun's Prologue* has been regarded as showing ambiguity in terms of both gender and textual or performative presentation of the tale. For those issues, see for example Catherine Sanok, "Performing Feminine Sanctity in Late Medieval England: Parish Guilds, Saints' Plays, and the *Second Nun's Tale*," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 32 (2002): 269-303, which discusses the relationship between the performative and textual implications of the *Second Nun's Tale*, as well as the public performance of saints' legends as a form of lay devotion. Karen Arthur investigates the layer or the mixture of different voices of Cecilia, the Nun, and Chaucer in the tale, particularly in terms of gender and power; see Karen Arthur, "Equivocal Subjectivity in Chaucer's *Second Nun's Prologue* and *Tale*," *Chaucer Review* 32.3 (1998): 217-31.
- 3 Karen A. Winstead delineates transition in the nature of heroines in virgin martyr legends during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as related to the change of readers from nuns to the lay. See Karen A. Winstead, *Virgin Martyrs: Legends of Sainthood in Late Medieval England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 64-146. See also her "Sainly Exemplarity," in *Middle English*, ed. Paul Strohm, Oxford Twenty-First Century Approaches to Literature (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 335-51.

- 4 See, for example, Hilary M. Carey, “Devout Literate Laypeople and the Pursuit of the Mixed Life in Later Medieval England,” *Journal of Religious History* 14 (1986-87): 361-81.
- 5 See Nicole R. Rice, *Lay Piety and Religious Discipline in Middle English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).
- 6 S. J. Ogilvie-Thomson, “Introduction,” in *Walter Hilton’s Mixed Life Edited from Lambeth Palace MS 472*, ed. S. J. Ogilvie-Thomson, *Salzburg Studies in English Literature, Elizabethan and Renaissance Studies* 92.15 (Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Universität von Salzburg, 1986), ix-x.
- 7 Carey, 375.
- 8 Karen Arthur points out this uniqueness of St. Cecilia, in contrast to other female saints, from another aspect: “Cecilia’s militancy is not as extreme as that of those women who dressed as men in an effort to completely renounce their sexual identities as females. And unlike other female saints Cecilia marries without protest while intending to keep her vow of chastity, thus transforming the social structure of marriage from within” (Arthur, 220).
- 9 Sherry L. Reames, “A Recent Discovery concerning the Sources of Chaucer’s ‘Second Nun’s Tale,’” *Modern Philology* 87 (1989-90): 337-61.
- 10 Translation: [importunately urged his suit, out of desire for the virgin]. Quotations and their English translations from the Roman curia/Franciscan version are from Sherry L. Reames, ed. and trans., “In festo Sancte Cecilie virginis et martyris,” in *Sources and Analogues of the Canterbury Tales*, ed. Robert M. Corrales and Mary Hamel, *Chaucer Studies* 28 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2002), 1: 516-27, with line numbers in parentheses. Reames’ edition is based on a late thirteenth-century version of the legend collected in Paris Bibliothèque Nationale, ms. latin 3278.
- 11 All quotations from Chaucer in this essay are from *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), with fragment and line numbers in parentheses. The quoted phrase has no correspondence at least in the two main sources of the tale identified by Reames.
- 12 Catherine Sanok points out the “incompatibility of divine and social authority” as a theme repeatedly expressed by virgin martyr legends (Sanok, 274); in the *Second Nun’s Tale*, however, that incompatibility is rendered as a sense of incongruity between social code and religious ideal experienced within an individual.

- 13 *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. Barry Windeatt, Longman Annotated Texts (Harlow: Longman, 2000), 104-109.
- 14 Naoë Kukita, *Maajerii Kempu: Mokusou no tabi [Margery Kempe: A Travel of Meditation]* (Tokyo: Keio University Press, 2003), 81-83.
- 15 See *Boece* 3.6.32-51 and the short poem entitled “Gentilesse.” For Chaucer’s idea of “gentilesse,” see Mana Ono, “On Chaucer’s *Boece* with Special Reference to ‘Gentilesse,’” *Studies in Medieval English Language and Literature* 1 (1986): 93-105.
- 16 Alcuin Blamires, *Chaucer, Ethics, and Gender* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 211; Reames points out that the Roman curia/Franciscan version, which Chaucer seems to select as a main source for the latter part of the Tale, elaborates on the defiant character of Cecilia in her dispute with Almachius much more than Jacobus de Voragine’s version (Sherry L. Reames, “Artistry, Decorum, and Purpose in Three Middle English Retellings of the Cecilia Legend,” in *The Endless Knot: Essays on Old and Middle English in Honor of Marie Borroff*, ed. M. Teresa Tavormina and R. F. Yeager (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1995), 193-94).
- 17 For the diversity in detail and its historical transition linked with Mary and Martha, see Giles Constable, *Three Studies in Medieval Religious and Social Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 3-141. See also Walter H. Beale, “Walter Hilton and the Concept of ‘Medled Lyf,’” *American Benedictine Review* 26 (1975): 381-94.
- 18 [Translation: “Cecilia” is derived from *ceci lilia*, “lily of heaven,” or from *cecis via*, “a path for the blind,” or from *celum*, “heaven,” and “Leah.” [...]] She was also a path for the blind through the guidance of her example, a heaven through her perpetual contemplation, “Lia” through her tireless activity.] All quotations and their English translations from Jacobus de Voragine’s *Legenda aurea* throughout this essay are from Sherry L. Reames, ed. and trans., “*Legenda aurea*,” in *Sources and Analogues of the Canterbury Tales*, ed. Robert M. Correale and Mary Hamel, *Chaucer Studies* 28 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2002), 1: 504-17, with line numbers in parentheses. Reames’ edition is from Cambridge, Trinity College MS B.15.1.
- 19 Blamires, 208.
- 20 According to Rosa Giorgi, “Cecilia, of Latin origin, means ‘blind’” (Rosa Giorgi, *Saints: A Year in Faith and Art* (New York: Abrams, 2005). De Voragine’s analytical etymology should be a later interpretation, yet it

- seems to have been popular throughout the Middle Ages, and Chaucer's Second Nun also follows this etymology (8.98), as will be seen later.
- 21 Nicholas Love, *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ: A Critical Edition Based on Cambridge University Library Additional MSS 6578 and 6686*, ed. Michael G. Sargent (New York: Garland, 1992), 11.
- 22 “And take heed of seyn cecyle at holy maydin whiche as we redin in herte lyf baar alwey e gospel of crist in here brest in here herte & in here mende & cesid ney er be day ne by ny3t for to spekin of god & of goddys lawe & bo e ny3t & day sche 3af here to holy pray3ere. And so leue frend I prey3e 3ou at 3e don” (Longleat MS 4, fol. 1r; quoted from Nicholas Watson, “Censorship and Cultural Change in Late-Medieval England: Vernacular Theology, the Oxford Translation Debate, and Arundel’s Constitutions of 1409,” *Speculum* 70 (1995): 856).
- 23 [Translation: The illustrious virgin Cecilia, who came from a noble Roman lineage and was nourished from the cradle in the Christian faith, always carried the gospel of Christ hidden in her breast. She was always occupied with divine conversations and prayer, both by day and by night, and entreated God to preserve her virginity.]
- 24 While the word “bisnesse” has been referred to as a keyword many times in criticism on the *Second Nun’s Tale*, it has not drawn much focus or substantial study yet, as far as I know. At least one exception is Isamu Saito, *Choosaa: Aimai, Akogi, Keiken [Chaucer: Ambiguity, Playfulness, and Piety]* (Tokyo: Nan’undo, 2000), 225-56.
- 25 Cambridge, Trinity College R.3.8, lines 14088-89; in Richard Morris, ed., *Cursor Mundi: A Northumbrian Poem of the Fourteenth Century*, EETS OS 66 (London: Trübner, 1877), 2: 809.
- 26 *Walter Hilton’s Mixed Life*, 7, lines 74-75. See also Rice, x.
- 27 Bruce A. Rosenberg, “The Contrary Tales of the Second Nun and the Canon’s Yeoman,” *Chaucer Review* 2.4 (1968): 283.
- 28 See Saito, 233.
- 29 See Florence H. Ridley’s “Explanatory Notes” to the *Second Nun’s Prologue and Tale* in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 942.
- 30 *Three Middle-English Versions of the Rule of St. Benet and Two Contemporary Rituals for the Ordination of Nuns*, ed. Ernst A. Kock, EETS OS 120 (1902; repr., Millwood, NY: Kraus Reprint, 1975), 32, lines 22-25. A similar statement is also found in *Ancrene Wisse*: “Ich bidde ow, et 3e ne beon neuer idel, ah wurchen o er reden, o er beon i bonen, ant swa don

- eauer sumhwet et god mahe of awakenin” [as I beg you, never to be idle, but work or read or be in prayer, and so always be doing something from which good may arise] (*Ancrene Wisse: A Corrected Edition of the Text in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 402 with Variants from Other Manuscripts*, ed. Bella Millett, vol. 1, EETS OS 325 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), part 1, lines 397-99; translation from *Anchoritic Spirituality: “Ancrene Wisse” and Associated Works*, trans. Anne Savage and Nicholas Watson (New York: Paulist, 1991), 64).
- 31 *Three Middle-English Versions of the Rule of St. Benet*, 33, lines 19-21. Aelred of Rievaulx’s *De institutione inclusarum* makes a similar prescription: “Illa sane quae litteras non intelligit, operi manuum diligentius insistat” [A recluse who cannot read should devote herself all the more assiduously to manual work] (*Aelredi Rievallensis Opera omnia*, ed. A. Hoste and C. H. Talbot, vol. 1: *Opera ascetica* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1971), lines 298-99; translation from “Rules of Life for a Recluse,” trans. Mary Paul Macpherson, in *Aelred of Rievaulx: Treatises: Pastoral Prayer*, ed. David Knowles (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1971), 59).
- 32 For the concepts of *otium* and *otiositas*, see Nicholas Watson, “Introduction,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Mysticism*, ed. Samuel Fanous and Vincent Gillespie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 18-23.
- 33 Part of this problem in the Franklin and his tale is explored in Yoshinobu Kudo, “Shrewd Negotiation in the Guise of *Gentilesse* in Chaucer’s *Franklin’s Tale*,” *Poetica* 77 (2012): 27-46.