

CHAUCER PICTURES THE COSMOS:
MATERIALITY, SCIENCE, AND ASTRAL POETICS

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ABSTRACT

Geoffrey Chaucer's works glow with dozens of poetic cosmic passages. He mentions the stars, planets, spheres of the cosmos, and the zodiac signs throughout his works, sometimes in unexpected places. Studies in the last hundred years have often applied today's fuller, post-Ptolemaic knowledge of the solar system to expose alleged 'hidden schemes' underlying Chaucer's poetry, but I argue that aesthetics and poetics should be prioritized over scientific accuracy when reading his works. I demonstrate how Chaucer manipulated astronomical settings to suit his poetic outcomes as much as they may have reflected realities. Sometimes his astral passages are scientifically viable, but often playfully misleading. He tweaked his sources, manipulated motifs, invented constellations, bent the rules, and made the stars his own.

The foundational data for this thesis is presented in the appendix where I identify each cosmic passage across Chaucer's published works. This reveals larger patterns, specifically five distinct literary modes. These modes provide structure for the chapters, which I identify as chronographia (depictions of time), adornment (rhetorical decoration and ekphrasis), corporeality (bodiliness and the cosmos), play (instances of inventive creativity), and direct translation. I offer a fresh study of Chaucer's astral poetics through close reading, art historical contextualization, new perspectives on famous passages, and historical research.

Astronomy and astrology in Chaucer's time were more expansive, accessible, and present than is often recognized, which I demonstrate through a materialist approach. Cosmic imagery in the material world, in the form of church portals, book illuminations, public sculptures, paintings, astronomical instruments and even table games, were part of everyday life in London at the end of the fourteenth century. How did prevalent cosmological theories and physical representations of these theories manifest in Chaucer's works? Artists and craftsmen worked together with astronomers to create objects, and in a similar way Chaucer's cosmic poetry presents a combination of craft and astronomy, and is the heart of this thesis.

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Brussels: Koninklijke Bibliotheek van België (KBR), MS 9961-2, *Psalter of Peterborough Abbey* (before 1317)

Cambridge, Cambridge University:

- Trinity College MS 1109 (14th century)
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Lambeth Palace Library: Lambeth 233, *Psalter of Bardolf-Vaux* (1310-1320)

London, British Library:

- MS Harleian 3017 (10th century)
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- Latin MS 6382 *Codex Latinus Monacensis, Supputatio Esdrae* (11th century)
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New York:

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INTRODUCTION

One need not venture deeply into Chaucer's works before coming across a creative take on the cosmos. His masterpiece, *The Canterbury Tales*, indeed opens and closes with the equinoctial zodiac signs, Aries and Libra.¹ Chaucer's characters escape earth's gravity, soar among the constellations, laugh at a miniscule earth spinning in the middle of a geocentric cosmos, and carry planetary marks in secret places on their body.² Magicians carve illegal zodiac signs on stones to enact forbidden magic, and manipulate astrological powers to make all the rocks on a beach disappear.³ Tricksters collect astrological manuscripts and use their knowledge to fool their housemates.⁴ An exceptional rooster is a natural astrologer, in tune with the mechanics of the earth and skies, able to detect the hour through instinct.⁵ Chaucer's characters curse the ancient 'pagan rites' of judicial astrology, while ironically using the correct technical language to do so.⁶ Lovers obsessively track the phases of the moon moving through the zodiac with anxiety and hope.⁷ Fictional walls are painted floor to ceiling with astrological murals, presenting

¹ Aries opens *The General Prologue* in line 8; *The Parson's Prologue* lines 2-12 mentions the moon's exaltation in Libra. All quotations are taken from Larry D. Benson, ed., *The Riverside Chaucer* (Oxford University Press, 2008), lines given parenthetically.

² Troilus dies and his soul leaves the earth, *Troilus & Criseyde* V.1807-1813; Chaucer as dream-narrator flies through the starry spheres on the back of an eagle, *House of Fame* lines 586-1010; The Wife of Bath claims to have the mark of Mars on her face and another private place: *The Wife of Bath's Prologue* lines 619-620.

³ A necromancer uses illicit astral image-making in *The Squire's Tale*, lines 129-130; in *The Franklin's Tale* the Clerk of Orléans appears to make all the rocks along the shore of Brittany disappear in lines 1261-1296.

⁴ This trickster is Nicholas in *The Miller's Tale*, see lines 3190-3298 and 3513 – 3518.

⁵ Chaunticleer, the rooster, in *The Nun's Priests Tale*, lines 2851-2858.

⁶ The Franklin as narrator in *The Franklin's Tale* decries the work of the Clerk, lines 1261-1266.

⁷ Troilus watches the moon wax and wane in fearful anticipation of Criseyde, Book V.1016-1020 & 1190.

stellar stories and planetary powers.⁸ Chaucer even invents phony constellations.⁹ Horoscopes are cursed or blessed, and Fate is always questioned.¹⁰

This creative wellspring drew primarily from the groundwater of medieval astronomical knowledge and the strong intellectual currents of Chaucer's day, fed by tributaries such as the surge in scientific work and manuscript production in the fourteenth century, literary conventions and precedents, fashionable fascinations with the occult, and presumably, Chaucer's own personal interests. I argue in this thesis that it was not only intangible concepts feeding these tributaries, but that the visual, material world constituted a critical current. This thesis situates Chaucer's poetry within its material ecology, which necessitates visual theories considering iconography, art history, visual culture and most importantly, materiality. I bring attention to the products, objects, and art which formed Chaucer's context, such as scruffy astronomical manuscripts, erroneous brass quadrants, large and small astrolabes, zodiacal church portals, and popular pamphlets with quack horoscopes.

Chaucer's astral poetics are some of his most inventive, challenging, beautiful, and curious of all his oeuvre. Across the entirety of his known works, there are one hundred and twenty-one passages describing an astrological or astronomical image or allusion, as I have organized in Appendix 1.¹¹ There is very little mathematical astronomy in these examples, the scales tip heavily toward mythology and astrology. Some of these images

⁸ These walls are featured in *The Knight's Tale*, as part of Theseus's amphitheater, see Part II.

⁹ His 'stellification' of Alceste in *The Legend of Good Women* is an excellent example: *The Legend of Good Women Prologue* lines 525-526.

¹⁰ Criseyde has a cursed nativity horoscope (*Troilus & Criseyde* IV.745) as does Hypermnestra (*Legend of Good Women*, lines 2576-2597).

¹¹ Appendix 1 provides this comprehensive list.

are borrowed from other sources, some follow established conventions, but many are entirely Chaucer's own literary invention. Even when Chaucer reworks his sources he uses them creatively, and these images often present the reader with an intriguing puzzle.¹² Naturally these puzzles have incited much curiosity, and all of Chaucer's one hundred twenty-one passages have been the variable focus of scholarly work. This thesis considers the whole of Chaucer's oeuvre and how astrological and astronomical imagery function as a significant poetic tool. How did Chaucer picture the cosmos?

The primary research questions are expansive rather than exclusive, and decidedly interdisciplinary. How did Chaucer use cosmic imagery, and why? How does this reflect his historical moment? How precisely did Chaucer innovate a poetic approach to astronomy? What syntax and words did he choose, and how do they operate in context? How do Chaucer's cosmic images function in his poetry? What do they *do*?

Before venturing into the first chapter, some scaffolding is necessary. In the following sections I provide an overview of critical frameworks, the foundational scholarship in the field, and briefly introduce theories of materiality. Then I broadly outline the cultural context in which Chaucer was living and writing, specifically concerning astronomy and astrology. Finally, I discuss astrology as an imaginative system and my approach to Chaucer's astral poetry.

¹² This is a more nuanced view than Chauncey Wood's argument, who wrote: 'Insofar as astrology is concerned, Chaucer did not break any new ground in using astrological material artistically without putting credence in the material per se. We have already seen that the age old Boethian pattern, in which the planets are both given power over earth and yet made servants of the providential order, was a powerful artistic stimulus in the Middle Ages, and lasted into the Renaissance.' Chauncey Wood, *Chaucer and the Country of Stars: Poetic Uses of Astrological Imagery* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), p. 52. I suggest that Chaucer did in fact break new ground using astrological material artistically, and that matters of 'credence' or belief are relatively insignificant, which I show in different ways throughout the thesis.

Critical frameworks: Chaucer and the stars

As a particular vein of research in Chaucer studies, Chaucer's astronomy and astrology were first systematically studied nearly one hundred years ago with Walter Curry's *Mediaeval Sciences* of 1926.¹³ This seminal work still offers scholars an array of fundamental information and contexts which enrich and explain many of Chaucer's allusions, and it serves as a starting point for all later scholarship. John North built considerably upon this foundation with his prolific astronomical publications, and his name is attached to almost all the astral passages in *The Riverside Chaucer's* explanatory notes. Many of his articles published in *The Review of English Studies* contribute significantly to the astronomical background necessary to comprehend allusions in specific tales more fully.

North approaches Chaucer's work as an astronomer first and follows Curry's precedent by privileging a scientific reading, and his scholarship predominates the field. North introduced his seminal work, *Chaucer's Universe*, this way: 'No other poet has ever turned astronomy to such account as did Chaucer. In making allegorical and structural use of what in literary circles is now almost a lost art, he was following well-trodden paths, certainly, but he so transformed them that the end result was virtually unrecognizable.'¹⁴ Throughout this thesis I challenge North's interpretations of Chaucer's 'structural use' of astronomy and astrology and the decision to prioritise a scientific reading.

¹³ Walter Clyde Curry, *Chaucer and the Mediaeval Sciences* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1926).

¹⁴ J. D. North, *Chaucer's Universe* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p. viii.

North's mastery of mathematical detail and familiarity with the complexities of medieval scholastic sciences provided him a distinct entry point to analyse Chaucer's works. About *Chaucer's Universe*, Charles Burnett summarized North's primary contribution to Chaucer studies: 'Here he showed, by detailed comparison with contemporary astrological texts, almanacs and horoscopes, how the plots of Chaucer's stories were determined by astrological considerations, which also led him to establish dates for their composition and sometimes to propose emendations to the text.'¹⁵

Burnett's summation here encapsulates what I reconsider in this thesis. First, North often looks for hidden astrological schemes in Chaucer's texts and considers them the skeleton upon which the tales are built around. I argue that the opposite is true: the narrative is the skeleton that astronomy and astrology serve.

Often Chaucer's astral passages are interpreted as evidence for certain dates. However, there is not enough evidence that Chaucer's astronomy was based in observable phenomena or scientifically accurate knowledge to support this. In many ways Chaucer's cosmic passages function as his other literary allusions: they are inspired by established authorities but refashioned to his own ends, without completely reinventing their makeup. It is a question of priorities when weighing the value and meaning of Chaucer's cosmic passages, and I suggest that literary success outweighs astronomical accuracy.

¹⁵ Charles Burnett, 'John David North, 1934-2008.' *Biographical Memoirs of Fellows of the British Academy* XI (2012): 493-499, at 496.

North's publications in the last two decades of the twentieth century were a bulwark, and accompanied by other scientifically-minded scholars.¹⁶ Sigmund Eisner's exemplary work on *The Treatise on the Astrolabe* and *The Kalendarium of Nicholas of Lynn* provide an even greater understanding of Chaucer's intellectual contexts.¹⁷ Chauncey Wood is another significant contributor to the subject, with his book of 1970, *Chaucer and the Country of Stars*. Curry, North, Eisner and Wood are all critical reading, but the questions they pose read like a stern cross-examination of Chaucer in a witness box: Did you believe in astrology?¹⁸ When was the Wife of Bath born?¹⁹ Did you read Albumasar? If so, when? Did you witness the actual transit of the planets between February 14 and early May (or possibly September) of 1385?²⁰

For instance, through complicated calculations drawn from astrological passages in *The Franklin's Tale*, North suggests that the Orléanais magician could have timed an illusion so that the rocks along the shore of Brittany 'disappeared' precisely on Christmas Day of 1387, because of distinct solstitial tides, although this is an impossible triangulation of presuppositions.²¹ This kind of careful scientific analyses were influenced by processual

¹⁶ See for example: Johnstone Parr and Nancy Ann Holtz, 'The Astronomy-Astrology in Chaucer's "The Complaint of Mars."' *The Chaucer Review* 15/3 (Winter 1981): 255-266.

¹⁷ Sigmund Eisner, *The Kalendarium of Nicholas of Lynn* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980). Eisner, 'The Ram Revisited: A Canterbury Conundrum.' *The Chaucer Review* 28/4 (1994): 330-343. Eisner, 'Chaucer as a Teacher.' *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 23/1 (1998): 35-39. Eisner, *A Treatise on the Astrolabe* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002).

¹⁸ Frank D. Gilliard, 'Chaucer's Attitude Towards Astrology.' *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 36 (1973): 365-366. Eisner, 'Chaucer as a Technical Writer.' *The Chaucer Review* 19/3 (Winter, 1985): 179-201. Hamilton Smyser, 'A View of Chaucer's Astronomy.' *Speculum* 45 (1970): 371-72.

¹⁹ B. F. Hamlin, 'Astrology and the Wife of Bath: a Reinterpretation.' *Chaucer Review* 9 (1974): 153-65. Hamlin posits 6 Feb 1342, North argues for 1343.

²⁰ Parr & Holtz, 'The Astronomy-Astrology,' 255-266.

²¹ From North, *Chaucer's Universe*, p. 435: 'We are in something of a dilemma, for here are two truly excellent solutions to the problem of dating the Clerk's operations. No matter which of the two we accept, however, we shall be left with the double ambiguity relating to Aurelius' prayer: if the rocks were removed on

archaeology (or ‘New Archaeology’) of the last century, guided by the concept that scholars can only reveal objective realities through the scientific method, but nothing more.²² This is a kind of mechanical objectivity which rendered Chaucer’s poetic units into data points.

There is a further strain of scholarship which seeks to ‘determine the plots’ (in Burnett’s words) and use astrological allusions to uncover ‘hidden’ organization, such as William Spencer’s overwrought ‘Are Chaucer’s Pilgrims Keyed to the Zodiac?’²³ There were also efforts to use North’s precise calendar calculations to correlate his ‘veiled allusions’ to contemporary historical or cultural events. New Historicism exerted sway here, which considers relatively small slices of history and political power, sometimes with a Marxist bent.²⁴ This can be seen in the work of Peter Brown and Andrew Butcher in *The Age of Saturn*, which relies on astrological imagery in *The Merchant’s Tale*’s to argue that January and May had direct correlations with courtly affairs.²⁵

Christmas Day 1387, was the prayer of 6 May in 1386 or 1385? If the rocks were removed on New Year’s day 1386, was the prayer of 6 May in 1384 or 1383? In any case, was the opposition one with the Sun or the Moon in Leo? We have no option but to consider all the alternatives.’

²² See the works of Lewis Roberts Binford and Kent Flannery: Lewis Roberts Binford, ‘Archaeology as Anthropology.’ *American Antiquity* 28/2 (1962): 217-225. Kent V. Flannery, ‘The Cultural Evolution of Civilizations.’ *Annual Review of Ecology and Systematics* 3 (1972): 399-426.

²³ William Spencer, ‘Are Chaucer’s Pilgrims Keyed to the Zodiac?’ *The Chaucer Review* 4/3 (Winter 1970): 147-170. He wrote that there was a ‘hidden ground plan of the *General Prologue*’ that could be decoded with astrology. See also: Sheryl P. Rutledge, ‘Chaucer’s Zodiac of Tales.’ *Costerus: Essays in English and American Language and Literature* 9 (1973): 117-143.

²⁴ This was influenced by the work of Michel Foucault and Stephen Greenblatt. See: Sarah Maza, ‘Stephen Greenblatt, New Historicism, and Cultural History, or, What We Talk about When We Talk about Interdisciplinarity.’ *Modern Intellectual History* 1/2 (2004): 262.

²⁵ Peter Brown and Andrew Butcher, *The Age of Saturn: Literature and History in The Canterbury Tales* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), p. 247: ‘And at every stage of the narrative there is the thinly veiled presence of the relationship between Edward III and Alice Perrers, a relationship whose contemporary meaning had become so emblematic of social and political crisis that it might be incorporated within the *mentalité* of late fourteenth-century England.’

Work by Marijane Osborne emphasizes the impact of the astrolabe in Chaucer's texts, both as an instrument and as a philosophical tool.²⁶ She argues that the structure of the *Canterbury Tales* was deeply influenced by the astrolabe, and that the frame of the poem was intended to reflect an astrolabic pattern of an ideal day, but that Chaucer's vision was never fully completed. She further interprets the amphitheatre in *The Knight's Tale* as designed according to an astrolabe, and the magic steed in *The Squire's Tale* as a disguised astrolabe, and her work heightened the awareness in literary criticism of the significance of medieval technology in Chaucer's art. Alastair Minnis and others explore the antagonistic aspects of astrology in the medieval church and assess Chaucer's use of pagan gods and judicial astrology but often focus too much on generalising religious beliefs and deciphering Chaucer's personal views.²⁷

The history of science, literary analysis and visual culture have enjoyed a renewed relationship in the scholarship of the last decade. Authors such as Seb Falk, Tom McCleish, and Alexander Boxer have produced compelling work revising views of science and ancient and medieval astrology, demonstrating how interdisciplinary approaches to medieval history produce new knowledge.²⁸ Kara Gaston publishes exciting new work in the field of Chaucerian science, literature and astronomy, and Shazia Jagot's current scholarship fills gaps that are crucial for understanding the profound influences of Arabic

²⁶ Marijane Osborn, *Time and the Astrolabe in the Canterbury Tales* (University of Oklahoma Press, 2002).

²⁷ Alastair Minnis, *Chaucer and Pagan Antiquity* (Boydell & Brewer, 1982).

²⁸ Seb Falk, *The Light Ages: a Medieval Journey of Discovery* (New York: Penguin, 2020). For a full list of Falk's remarkable work, please consult the Bibliography. Tom C. McCleish, 'Before Science and Religion: Learning from Medieval Physics.' *Modern Believing*: 124-135. McCleish, *The Poetry and Music of Science: Comparing Creativity in Science and art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019). Alexander Boxer, *A Scheme of Heaven: Astrology and the Birth of Science* (Profile Books Limited, 2021).

learning in fourteenth-century science and literature, and Chaucer in particular.²⁹

Increased scholarly attention in this area has resulted in new research and the time is right to rethink each instance of Chaucer's literary relationship with the medieval universe, which is the primary objective of this thesis.

Critical frameworks: Art History and Materiality

Visual art and objects provide critical context in this thesis, which relies on visual theories, specifically influenced by the work of V. A. Kolve. Kolve introduced new avenues of Chaucer studies by taking iconographic, semiotic and literary approaches, and argues that the images in Chaucer's poetry and their counterparts in the material world act as partners in the medieval language of sign. He defines images as modes of knowing, and instrumental to some of the deepest and most searching purposes of Chaucer's art.³⁰ He states the aims of his first book this way: 'My interest instead is in the visual context of *The Canterbury Tales* - most especially, in how a knowledge of the symbolic traditions current in the visual arts of the later middle ages can clarify and deepen our response to his

²⁹ Kara Gaston, 'The Place of Poetry in Sacrobosco's *Sphere*: Astronomy and Interpretation.' *Speculum* 98/2 (2023): 421–446; 'Dante's True Constellation: Writing the Stars in Aratus, Ovid, and *Paradiso* 13.' *Modern Philology* 120/2 (2022): 139–160; *Reading Chaucer in Time: Literary Formation in Classical Antiquity, England, and Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020); 'Forms and Celestial Motion in Chaucer's Complaint of Mars.' *PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 133/2 (2018): 282–295; 'The Poetics of Time Management from the *Metamorphoses* to *Il Filocolo* and *The Franklin's Tale*.' *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 37/1 (2015): 227–256. Shazia Jagot, 'Islamicate Fictionalities and Transcultural Inter/Connections.' *postmedieval: a journal of medieval cultural studies* 13/3–4 (2022): 621–624. Jagot, 'Chaucer and Ibn Al-Haytham (Alhacen): Perspectiva, Arabic Mathematics, and Acts of Looking.' *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 44/1 (2022): 27–61. Jagot, 'Averroes, Islam, and Heterodoxy in the Spanish Chapel "Triumph of St Thomas Aquinas." *Interfaces (Milano)* 6 (2019).

³⁰ V. A. Kolve, *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative: the First Five Canterbury Tales* (Stanford University Press, 1984), p. 64: 'If we would train ourselves in it, we may go still to the same school as his first audiences, to the manuscript illuminations, wall paintings, carvings and stained glass of the period, along with the sermons and treatises and literary text that shaped, and themselves continued to transmit - as verbal images - these traditions of symbolic meaning.' Kolve, *Telling Images: Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative II* (Stanford University Press, 2009).

narrative poems.³¹ He explores the multiple and shifting relationships between image and poem, and how poetic tools evoke concepts, settings or philosophical ideas in the mind of the audience.

Importantly, Kolve argues that Chaucer's descriptive passages are not merely rhetorical ornaments, rather they are used with precision at vital points in the text. Kolve draws on a wide variety of visual traditions, which generates much discussion in the field. However, from an art historical standpoint, I suggest that Kolve's chronological range is too expansive - some of the artworks that serve as contextual examples date as late as c. 1550 CE. My scope is narrower which allows for greater specificity. I am careful to make 1400 CE a hard stopping point, since artworks created after this reflect a different cultural situation, even if they were formed in similar intellectual traditions.

Since Kolve's landmark publications, visual and material approaches to Chaucer's poetry have been fruitfully expanded by scholars such as Susanna Fein, David Raybin, Peggy Knapp, Kathryn McKinley, Jessica Brantley, and many others in recent years.³² In the introduction to his first book, Kolve mentions that art historians are practiced in trafficking between art, image, and literature, but that literary scholars are not.³³ One methodological pathway to effectively cross the bridge between image and text is materiality. This is a

³¹ Kolve, *Imagery of Narrative I*, 1.

³² Susanna Fein and David Raybin, eds. *Chaucer, Visual Approaches* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2016). Peggy Knapp, *Chaucerian Aesthetics* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008). Kathryn L. McKinley, *Chaucer's House of Fame and Its Boccaccian Intertexts: Image, Vision, and the Vernacular* (Toronto, Ontario: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2016). Jessica Brantley, 'Venus and Christ in Chaucer's Complaint of Mars: The Fairfax 16 Frontispiece.' *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 30/1 (2008): 171–204. Jessica Brantley, 'Vision, Image, Text.' Chapter in: Paul Strohm, ed., *Middle English* (Oxford 21st Century Approaches to Literature; Oxford University Press, 2007).

³³ Kolve, *Imagery of Narrative I*, 3.

social theory with a focus on the material vehicles of perception, emotion, and understanding.³⁴ It advocates for a connection between theory and praxis and explores the relationship between the material base of society (such as trade networks and technological developments) and the superstructure (such as ideology and culture). How do material conditions shape human thinking and creative processes? How do material conditions shape ideologies?

Material theory is part of what Dan Hicks terms ‘new ecologies of history writing,’ which ‘take place in living landscapes, at sites of excavation, in the built environment, with objects or images, whether on display or in archives and storerooms.’³⁵ This theory insists on the circular process between subject, object, and creativity as inseparable, and this concept is fundamental to this thesis. Materiality as a methodology integrates the documentary value of texts with the ‘real stuff’ of history, the artifacts, images, and works of art that structured the material and cultural matrix of a time and place.³⁶ Culture, both widely considered and on an individual scale, is the producer of material objects and the product of material objects.³⁷

Materialist theory is thus the counterbalance to processual archaeology of the last century, in which objects remained a secondary focus of study to uncover the system

³⁴ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (Basic Books Inc., 1973), p. 408.

³⁵ Dan Hicks, ‘Glorious Memory.’ Chapter in: Helen Carr and Suzannah Lipscomb, ed. *What is History, Now? How the Past and Present Speak to Each Other* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2021), p. 107. See also: Frank Trentmann, ‘Materiality in the Future of History: Things, Practices, and Politics.’ *Journal of British Studies* 48 (2009): 283–307.

³⁶ Finbarr Barry Flood and Beate Fricke, *Tales Things Tell: Material Histories of Early Globalisms* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2023), see introduction. See also: Ruth M. van Dyke, ed., *Practicing Materiality* (University of Arizona Press, 2015), p. 4.

³⁷ David Morgan, ‘The materiality of cultural construction.’ *Material Religion*, 4/2 (2015): 228-229. See also: Alex Preda, ‘The Turn to Things: Arguments for a Sociological Theory of Things.’ *Sociological Quarterly* 40/2 (1999): 347–366.

behind the artefact.³⁸ Theoretical knowledge is not seen as neutral in materialist methodologies, but as potentially transformative when applied to the material conditions of society. In other words, the prevailing theories and ideas about the cosmos in Chaucer's time were directly impacted by theoretical learning as well as the surrounding objects and materials in the real, tangible world.

The cosmos as an all-encompassing concept is, naturally, intangible, but one way it is explored in the human mind is through creative products. At the most elementary level the constellations of the zodiac are groups of stars moving in a predictable manner across the night sky, but they were also objectified as signs representing months of the year in manuscripts and churches, discussed actively in universities, and reproduced on tools and instruments. I take this materiality into account in each chapter of this thesis, and thus present new arguments concerning Chaucer's language, poetics, and versecraft with close readings. I am interested in breaking up this process to consider each element – celestial bodies and cultural products – in Chaucer's oeuvre. This involves a comprehensive view of Chaucer's astral poetics, which I address next.

Thesis Structure

As shown in the Appendix, I have scrupulously noted every instance of Chaucer's cosmic passages across his works in *The Riverside Chaucer*. From this collation, larger patterns emerge. Specifically, five primary modes that Chaucer utilizes for astral passages, and nearly all one hundred twenty-one passages can be categorized as operating in one of these. A 'passage' here is defined as a complete idea or sense unit,

³⁸ van Dyke, *Practicing Materiality*, 4, 6.

whether that is an allusion to a constellation as part of a couplet, or extended stanzas building powerful cosmic imagery. I must further qualify this statement with ‘nearly’ because these categories are not hard and fast, but rather share osmotic boundaries, and some passages do not fit at all. The categories are identified as follows: chronographia, adornment, corporeality, and play.

The fifth category, instances of direct translation, account for approximately 10% of the total passages. Direct translations will be considered contextually, particularly in the second chapter, but they will not be the focus of a single chapter in this study because they are fundamentally different from the rest. When Chaucer translated Boethius into Middle English for example, he strayed little from his Latin and French sources; these astral passages are nearly identical to the Boethian texts. Rather, this study focuses primarily on Chaucer’s fiction and poetry, but does not exclude Chaucer’s non-fiction, such as his guidebook to ‘Litel Lowys,’ the *Treatise on the Astrolabe*. Chaucer’s *Treatise* indeed involves a great deal of cosmology and accounts for 21% of the total astral passages, but because they are, again, quite different in nature than the rest of the examples, they serve as reference points but are not a primary focus for a chapter.

Instances in which Chaucer uses cosmic imagery as part of a poetic description of a time, season, or place, following a conventional literary pattern, are termed ‘chronographia,’ and this form of imagery accounts for 13% of astral passages. The opening of *The General Prologue* is a perfect example of this, and it is certainly the most studied category by past scholars. Beginning this thesis with chronographia is to begin where Chaucer chose to begin his masterpiece, *The Canterbury Tales*, and it highlights

Chaucer's complex relationships with other authors, another critical starting point.

Chaucer's poetic 'timestamps' are readily identifiable, frequent, and often redolent with astrological lore. In the first chapter I further explore a specific example in *The Franklin's Tale* with a close, careful reading. At a juncture in the narrative, the Franklin describes a lyrical picture of winter, with the sun in Capricorn, and a vision of the Roman god Janus feasting before a fire. Why is it situated at that point? I unpick each of the various working parts in the passage and then analyse its place in the tale.

While art, objects, and manuscripts are important in each chapter, the second chapter ('Astral Adornment') is the most literary with an emphasis on language, poetics, and rhetoric. 'Adornment' is perhaps the broadest category because all of Chaucer's astral passages could be technically interpreted as a type of rhetorical ornamentation. This is why I narrow the focus to specific modes of ornamentation – rhetorical adornment, orientalism, and ekphrasis. Like chronographia, Chaucer's rhetorical devices are formed in part by precedent and convention. The second chapter thus considers astral imagery as ornamental, taking the view of adornment as a rhetorical device defined by classical poetic theory. Ekphrasis is a formal stylistic tenet of rhetoric, and orientalism is a marked ornamental discourse or system of representation, and both appear in Chaucer's astral poetry.

Adornment accounts for an equal number of passages as chronographia, at about 13%. In chapter two I explore the boundaries between visual arts and poetry through conceptualizing ornamentation, drawing on leading theories in French art history. Specifically, I analyse the contrasting astral adornment in *The Squire's Tale* and *The*

Knights Tale. These tales exemplify two ways that Chaucer uses astral imagery: as frivolous ornamentation or as weighty with ominous meaning.

I also explore how the Squire uses astral language as a way of compressing adornment and Orientalism in a method described as ‘ornamentalism’ by Anne Anlin Cheng.³⁹ Chaucer’s astral language in *The Squire’s Tale* is decorative in style and purpose, which comes to the fore with a close reading of his language. With my analysis of *The Knights Tale* I offer a new look at the astral murals in the amphitheatre temples, considering ekphrasis as an ornamental mode. Lastly, I scrutinize the origins and Chaucer’s use of the verb *depeint* and argue that it has been misinterpreted in the past.

In the third chapter I take a close look at bodies, both human and celestial, which account for about 19% of the astral passages. Arguably, Chaucer was the first medieval writer to use astrological ideas to build his characters into his literary universe, and this innovation is best seen in the *Wife of Bath’s Prologue*. I contextualize Chaucer’s works with Ptolemaic cosmology and medical theories ideas about the human body and soul, with particular emphasis on images of the Zodiac Man. Some of Chaucer’s characters have ‘birthdates’ and thus astrological influences affect their habits, complexions, and bodies. I present a new study of the natal horoscope offered by the Wife of Bath, and rethink aspects of her speech. I also write about the interaction of texts, tools, and bodies with *A Treatise on the Astrolabe*, and include a nuanced discussion of astrolabes.

Chaucer’s greatest use of astral imagery, and the most numerous (~30%), are instances with no obvious sources or direct analogues, where Chaucer playfully invents

³⁹ Anne Anlin Cheng, *Ornamentalism* (Oxford University Press, 2018).

star lore, makes sophisticated astrological jokes, or introduces new words or ideas into the English language. This is ‘Astral Play,’ and ‘play’ is an intentionally open term here. There is nothing in the canon of Middle English literature quite like *The Complaints of Mars and Venus*, for example. I demonstrate how Chaucer reinvents the *jeux partis* of French poetry using complex astrological and chivalric registers and creates something new. This chapter applies theories of play and analyses how Chaucer invented or played with astral symbols and signs. I consider the broad field of ‘play,’ from haptic play with items such as game pieces and table games, to dramatic, role-playing modes of play. I take a deep dive into *The Complaints of Mars & Venus* and make an argument that these poems were part of a domestic disguising, drawing on supporting manuscript evidence and language analysis.

David Wallace argues that while Chaucer was writing *Troilus and Criseyde* Boccaccio’s *Il Filostrato* ‘never left his desk.’⁴⁰ Similarly, astronomical tools such as an astrolabe and calendar tables likely never left Chaucer’s desk, but this was only the beginning. Astrology saturated the material world of the fourteenth century, in games and ivory pieces, in stone church portals and stained-glass windows, folded in pocket almanacs, engraved into miscalculated quadrants, and clearly abounded in the popular imagination.⁴¹ This is manifest in numerous artefacts in museums, libraries, and churches across Britain and greater Europe, and contradicts many assumptions made in the twentieth century.⁴²

⁴⁰ David Wallace, ‘The Making of *Troilus and Criseyde*.’ Chapter in: Alan T Gaylord, ed., *Essays on the Art of Chaucer’s Verse* (Routledge, 2001), pp. 297-338, at 298.

⁴¹ Matthew E. Bunson, *Encyclopaedia of the Middle Ages* (New York: Facts on File, 1995), p. 50-51.

⁴² For example, see: Theodore Otto Wedel, *The Medieval Attitudes toward Astrology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1920), p. 90. Wedel wrote that there were few astrologers in England in the Middle Ages, based on the literature of Rolle, Chaucer, Langland, and Wycliffe. Keith Thomas wrote that astrology in

In the fourth chapter I thus consider Chaucer's work as fully immersed in the living, breathing world of cultural life. In this way, then, this thesis progresses from the first chapters which are highly engaged with the literary world of convention and precedent and Chaucer's response to them toward a more material view of Chaucer's living landscape, considering his contributions to an era of innovations and how his poetry may have been enacted through drama.

Astronomia versus Astrologia

At different times of the year the sun appears to be within the boundaries (or 'house' or 'domicile') of a zodiac constellation as they traverse the sky together along the ecliptic.⁴³ This is most visible at sunrise and sunset. As the sun shifts its relative position in the sky through the year from the perspective of earth, it moves by degree through each zodiacal house. In other words, at any given moment the sun appears in a zodiacal constellation at a certain angle or degree. Chaucer describes this in *A Treatise on the Astrolabe* II.7 this way: 'But the day natural, that is to seyn 24 hours, is the revolucioun of the equinoxial with as much partie of the zodiak as the sonne of his propre moeving passith in the mene while.' The planets and the moon also traverse the ecliptic and appear to be 'in' zodiacal constellations through the year. Planets appear to move from west to east relative to the fixed stars, while the zodiac rotates from east to west, and each planet moves at its own pace in its orbital path. At any moment in time then, the planets and the constellations

England was primarily imported from abroad, and at a 'low ebb' by the sixteenth century: Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978), p. 338-41. Laurel Means offered an excellent rebuttal: Laurel Means, 'Electionary, Lunary, Destinary, and Questionary: Toward Defining Categories of Middle English Prognostic Material.' *Studies in Philology* 89/4 (1992): 367-403.

⁴³ To see a working model of this movement, I recommend the planetarium software 'Stellarium', available: < <https://stellarium.org/> >

appear to be in a highly specific arrangement, and while these movements are predictable, they are deeply complex.

The dates when the sun ‘enters’ or ‘exits’ the house a zodiacal constellation do not coordinate with the beginning and end of calendrical months, and neither do the dates correspond to the observable ‘sun stays’ within the houses of the zodiac.⁴⁴ For example, the sun appears to be ‘in’ the constellation Scorpio from 23-29 November (seven days), and then Ophiuchus 30 Nov-17 Dec (eighteen days), and then Sagittarius from 18 Dec-18 January (thirty-two days).⁴⁵ But these boundaries are artificial, since the grouping of stars into constellations is relatively arbitrary and dictated by tradition.⁴⁶ The sun ‘enters’ more than strictly the zodiacal constellations as well, at times appearing in the constellations of Cetus, Corvus, Auriga, Orion, and others. Despite the observable discrepancy of the number of ‘sun stays’ within the space of a constellation, this system of ordering the ecliptic is an elegant way to read the dome of heaven. It breaks the ecliptic into twelve equal parts of 30° relative to the zodiac constellations. It is an efficient method to find celestial bodies and chart the movement of planets, which is partially why it survived.

While these phenomena are observable, measurable, and follow predictable patterns, the astrological ‘sun signs’ are mostly dictated by convention. Below are roughly

⁴⁴ Lee T. Shapiro, ‘The Real Constellations of the Zodiac.’ *Planetarian* Spring (1977), p. 17-18.

⁴⁵ Because of the tilt of the earth’s axis (or axial precession), alterations to the Gregorian calendar, etc., these dates are not firm through time, they fluctuate plus or minus a day from year to year.

⁴⁶ The allegorical personification of Astronomy in Martianus Capella’s *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii* writes that the constellations are recognized as such because they are ‘very conspicuous’ / ‘duodecim signa admodum clara circumagi’: William Harris Stahl & Richard Johnson, eds. & trans., *Martianus Capella and the Seven Liberal Arts: volume II, The Marriage of Philology and Mercury* (Columbia University Press, 1977), VIII.835.

the dates in western astrology when the sun ‘enters’ and ‘exits’ the signs of the zodiac, although these have altered through time:

- Aries (March 21 – April 19)
- Taurus (April 20 – May 20)
- Gemini (May 21 – June 20)
- Cancer (June 21 – July 22)
- Leo (July 23 – August 22)
- Virgo (August 23 – September 22)
- Libra (September 23 – October 22)
- Scorpio (October 23 – November 21)
- Sagittarius (November 22 – December 21)
- Capricorn (December 22 – January 19)
- Aquarius (January 20 – February 18)
- Pisces (February 19 – March 20)

This is according to the modern, post-1582 Gregorian calendar. The sun signs in the Julian calendar, however, had different dates, and these are important to keep in mind when reading Chaucer.⁴⁷ The sun signs in the Middle Ages were generally thus:

- Aries (March 12 – April 11)
- Taurus (April 12 – May 12)
- Gemini (May 13 – June 12)
- Cancer (June 13 – July 14)
- Leo (July 15 – August 14)
- Virgo (August 15 – September 14)
- Libra (September 15 – October 14)
- Scorpio (October 15 – November 13)
- Sagittarius (November 14 – December 12)
- Capricorn (December 13 – January 10)
- Aquarius (January 11 – February 9)
- Pisces (February 10 – March 11)

Popular astrology today puts great emphasis on birthday sun signs, but this is an extremely simplified take on ancient astrology and partially devised as a scheme to sell newspapers.

⁴⁷ See the preface to: *The Kalendarium of Nicholas of Lynn*, Sigmund Eisner, ed., Gary Man Eoin and Sigmund Eisner, trans. (University of Georgia Press, 1980).

Along with palm reading and Ouija boards gaining popularity in the early twentieth century, a ‘Zodiac Craze’ swept through society in London and New York, and thence throughout both countries.⁴⁸ Including horoscopes was a nimble marketing ploy for publications and a robust practice thriving to this day in new technological forms.

The first step in bridging the historical and imaginative gap separating our time and Chaucer’s is to consciously erase this misleading perception of astrology. Monthly sun signs were only one part of astrological readings in the Middle Ages, and not the most important one. Noting the reigning planet per hour and zodiacal house and calculating the aspectual relationships between the planetary positions were more meaningful indicators for election horoscopes and complex work.⁴⁹ Human health was also inextricably united with celestial movements, and thus noting the position and phase of the moon was believed to be critical knowledge for the best medical care. If bleeding was done improperly or medicine administered at the incorrect time it could be ‘extremely dangerous’ to the patient, as Nicholas of Lynn warns.⁵⁰ Astrological information was important in other ways too, such as deciphering the phases of the moon to plan for the most auspicious moment to embark on a voyage, or to consider the positions of the sun and moon to plan a wedding. This is ‘high’ astrology, the astrology produced at intellectual centres such as Merton College in Oxford, the University of Paris, or the universities at Padua or Salerno. But as we will also see in this thesis, there was equally a market demand

⁴⁸ See the Library of Congress’s research guide to this topic: ‘Zodiac Craze: Topics in Chronicling America’: < <https://guides.loc.gov/chronicling-america-zodiac-craze> >.

⁴⁹ See Nicholas of Lynn’s canon tables, such as the table of ruling planets, Eisner’s *Kalendarium*, beginning p. 176.

⁵⁰ Nicholas of Lynn, *Kalendarium*, beginning section 11, p. 206.

for ‘low’ or popular astrology (the distant ancestors of today’s newspaper horoscopes), and both have valence to Chaucer’s texts.

Reading Chaucer’s works thus presents the reader with an astrology that is mostly foreign to us, one that was more closely linked with empirical astronomy and scientific inquiry, with much greater intellectual and spiritual significance. Alexander Boxer writes about it this way: ‘Astrology was the ancient world’s most ambitious applied mathematics problem, a grand data-analysis enterprise sustained for centuries by some of history’s most brilliant minds, from Ptolemy to al-Kindi to Kepler.’⁵¹ This is certainly true, and in the Middle Ages the terms for astrology and astronomy were often used interchangeably. This is not to say that there were no perceived differences between the two. Isidore of Seville (c. 560-636) famously delineated the terms in his encyclopaedic enterprises.⁵² His definitions informed later writers such as Hugh of St. Victor (d.1141), who expands on this in his

Didascalicon:

‘Concerning the Term “Astronomy”’: “Astronomy” and “astrology” differ in the former’s taking its name from the phrase “law of the stars,” while the latter takes its from the phrase “discourse concerning the stars” – for *nomia* means law, and *logos*, discourse. It is astronomy, then, which treats the law of the stars and the revolution of the heaven, and which investigates the regions, orbits, courses, risings, and setting of stars, and why each bears the name assigned it; it is astrology, however, which considers the stars in their bearing upon birth, death, and all other events, and is only partly natural, and for the rest, superstitious; natural as it concerns the temper of “complexion” of physical things, like health, illness, storm, calm, productivity, and unproductivity, which vary with the mutual

⁵¹ Boxer, *Scheme of Heaven*, 2.

⁵² Isidore of Seville, *De natura rerum*, 612-615; *On the Nature of Things*, Calvin B. Kendall, Faith Wallis, eds. (Liverpool University Press, 2016). Isidore of Seville, *Isidori Hispalensis episcopi Etymologiarum sive originum libri xx*, Wallace Martin Lindsay, ed. (Clarendon Press, 1911), 3. 27. *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, J. A. Beach, Oliver Berghof, Stephen A. Barney, W. J. Lewis, eds. (Cambridge University Press, 2006).

alignments of the astral bodies; but superstitious as it concerns chance happenings or things subject to free choice.⁵³

According to Hugh of St. Victor then, astrological forces shape or govern bodily wellness and proclivities, as well as natural events like tides or storms, and the success of certain ventures or activities. Astrology also provided possible explanations for plagues, failed marriages, and plain bad luck.⁵⁴ What is condemned is pervasive folk superstitions related to fortune-telling or divination. Vitriolic animosity is aimed at those who would make a profit by selling fortunes and deliberately duping believers with quack astrology, as expressed in the writings of Raymond of Marseilles (fl. 1150s).⁵⁵

Following Hugh's logic then, if *nomia* means law and *logos* means discourse, then astronomy is concerned with uncovering the mathematical and observable laws governing the movement of celestial bodies.⁵⁶ Astronomy is calculations, what Chaucer called 'of acontynge in astronomy.'⁵⁷ It is astrology that makes it relevant to life on earth through

⁵³ Hugh of St. Victor, *The Didascalicon of Hugh of Saint Victor*, Jerome Taylor, ed. & trans. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), II.10, p. 68. 'De astronomia. Astronomia et astrologia in hoc differre videntur, quod astronomia de lege astrorum nomen sumpsit, astrologia autem dicta est quasi sermo de astris disserens. nomia enim lex et logos sermo interpretatur. ita astronomia videtur esse quae de lege astrorum et conversione caeli disserit, regiones, circulos, cursus, ortus et occasus siderum, et cur unumquodque ita vocetur, investigans. astrologia autem quae astra considerat secundum nativitatis et mortis et quorumlibet aliorum eventuum observantiam, quae partim naturalis est, partim superstitiosa; naturalis in complexionibus corporum, quae secundum superiorum temperantiam variantur, ut sanitas, aegritudo, tempestas, serenitas, fertilitas et sterilitas; superstitiosa, in contingentibus et his quae libero arbitrio subiacent.'

⁵⁴ In 1348 the King of France asked astrologers at the University of Paris to explain the origins of the great plague, which they ascribed partially to a malefic conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter, for example. See: Michelle Pfeffer, 'Astrology, plague, and prognostication in early modern England: a forgotten chapter in the history of public health.' *Past & Present* 263/1 (17 Feb 2023; May 2024): 81–124.

⁵⁵ Raymond of Marseilles, *Opéra Omnia: Traité de l'astrolabe, Liber cursuum planetarum*, Marie-Thérèse d'Alverny, Charles Burnett & Emmanuel Poulle, eds. (Paris: CNRS edition, 2009), p. 85-87, 141, 149, 153. It is important to also note that he also condemns those who disregard the magnificent organization of the heavens and the correspondence between zodiac signs and the changing seasons, warning that they 'ignore God's law' (p. 39).

⁵⁶ Boece I.2: 6-26.

⁵⁷ Boece I.2: 14-15.

logos or discourse, and this is often achieved through stories. Boxer comments, ‘Astrologers were the originators, and for most of history the sole cultivators of a tradition that transmuted numbers into stories[,]’ and it is these stories which artists and writers in the Middle Ages often found the most interesting.⁵⁸ Artists energetically reproduced zodiacal figures on all sorts of visual media (which is explored in detail in chapter 1), and the catasterism myths about the transformation of heroes into constellations were an endless supply of inspiration. Vast networks of connections grew from the Greco-Roman and Arabic worlds uniting cosmic forces with terrestrial phenomena, and prompted vigorous discourse in the medieval west.

The Hellenistic zodiac and its lore (which persists with astonishing tenacity) was complimented with Arabic, Indian, and African influences in the twelfth century particularly. It is difficult to underestimate the significance of the influx of Arabic astronomy on medieval learning in the Latin west.⁵⁹ With the Arab conquest of Persia (661-651 CE) and the subsequent Umayyid (661-750) and Abassid (750-1258) Caliphates, a new era of astronomical learning began. New centres of power and learning combined Persian, Indian and Greek astrological practices, including keeping court astrologers for royalty. Muhammad ibn Musa al-Khwarizmi (محمد بن موسى خوارزمی or simply Al-Khwarizmi, 780-850) introduced a magnificent advancement in mathematics with algebra, and this

⁵⁸ Boxer, *Scheme of Heaven*, 7.

⁵⁹ For more see: Charles Burnett, *Arabic into Latin in the Middle Ages: the Translators and their Intellectual and Social Context* (Ashgate Publishing, 2009; 2024). Paul Kunitzsch, *Stars and Numbers: Astronomy and Mathematics in the Medieval Arab and Western Worlds* (Ashgate Publishing, 2004). George Saliba, *A History of Arabic Astronomy, Planetary Theories during the Golden Age of Islam* (New York University Press, 1994). David C. Lindberg, ed., *Science in the Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978). Francis J. Carmody, *Arabic Astronomical and Astrological Sciences in Latin Translation: a Critical Bibliography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1955).

revolutionized the way mathematics could be applied to astronomy. He was part of the preeminent and prolific ‘House of Wisdom’ in Baghdad (بَيْتُ الْحِكْمَةِ *Bayt al-Hikmah*), a powerhouse for learning and research.

This knowledge passed on to early medieval al-Andalus during the reign of Abd al-Rahman II (821-852, عبد الرحمن الأوسط) and evolved with Islamic Spain. Jewish astronomers such as Abraham ibn Ezra (1089-1164, אַבְרָהָם בֶּן מֵאִיר אֶבְרָהָם) and Abraham bar Hiyya Ha-Nasi (אֲבָרְהָם בֶּר חֵיִיא הַנָּשִׂיא) d. 1136) also contributed greatly to this intellectual growth.⁶⁰ From here a critical corridor developed between Muslim and western religious centres. Adelard of Bath (fl. 1116 – 42) and Michael Scot (1175 – c. 1232) among many others were responsible for the transmission of this learning to Britain and the Latin west through translations. This inheritance is evidenced especially in star names which begin with ‘al-’ such as Aldebaran, Alnath, Alphecca, etc., which were named by Arabic astronomers and transliterated in the west. These rich cross-linguistic influences infused astrology and astronomy with a sort of exoticism which Chaucer exhibits specifically in *The Squire’s Tale* and is discussed in chapter 2.

Chaucer was interested in both astronomical numbers and astrological stories, but I suggest that the scales tip heavily toward stories. Surveying the numerous passages concerning the cosmos across Chaucer’s works as organized in the appendix to this thesis, there are clearly instances of mathematical astronomy, typically in the form of

⁶⁰ Yuval Ne’eman, ‘Astronomy in Sefarad.’ Entry in: *Astronomy and Judaism*, Digital Resource (Mortimer and Raymond Sackler Institute of Advanced Studies, Tel Aviv University, Israel).

astrolabic readings.⁶¹ The rest, however, are stories, which Chaucer uses freely and vibrantly. When scholars attempt to apply mathematics to these stories, as many have done, it ignores the underlying impetus and the difference of *nomia* and *logos*.

Astronomy, learning, and devices in Chaucer's era

Astronomical learning was evolving at a fast clip in the fourteenth century, which was manifest in observable ways for all of society. The way time was experienced changed with the invention and building of mechanical clocks and the 'clockwork revolution.'⁶² The earliest verge-and-foliot mechanical clocks appear around 1280-1300 and the invention spread rapidly, especially in England.⁶³ As major centers of time-keeping and religious life, cathedrals were the first to build clocks in their buildings, and soon, 'No European community felt able to hold up its head unless in its midst the planets wheeled in cycles and epicycles, whilst angels trumpeted and countermarched at the booming of the hours.'⁶⁴ The sixty-minute hour was adopted and the way time was recorded changed forever, as explored in Jacques le Goff's publications.⁶⁵ This made room for new ways of

⁶¹ *A Treatise on the Astrolabe* II.40; Supplementary Propositions 46; introduction to the *Man of Law's Tale*, lines 1-15.

⁶² Falk, *The Light Ages*, 55. See also Marion Turner's discussion in her chapter 'Milky Way': *Chaucer: a European Life* (Princeton University Press, 2019).

⁶³ C. F. C. Beeson, *English Church Clocks 1280-1850* (London: Phillimore Antiquarian Horological Society, 1971), p. 13.

⁶⁴ The first clock built with an escapement is recorded in 1283 in the *Annals of Dunstable Priory* in Bedfordshire. Clocks were installed at Exeter Cathedral in 1284, old Saint Paul's in 1286, Merton College Oxford c. 1288, Norwich Cathedral Priory in 1290, Ely Abbey in 1291, and Canterbury Cathedral in 1292. G. J. Whitrow, *Time in History* (Oxford University Press, 1988). L. White, *Medieval Technology and Social Change* (Clarendon Press, 1962), p. 124-5.

⁶⁵ Jacques le Goff, 'Church time and Merchant Time in the Middle Ages.' *Social Science Information*, 9/4 (1970): 151-167. Also: *Time, Work & Culture in the Middle Ages* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980).

thinking about day, night, and the movement of celestial timekeepers.⁶⁶ Time and temporality are inexorably linked to astronomy simply because charting celestial bodies is the purest way to track the passage of time, and temporality is a well-studied theme throughout Chaucer's texts.⁶⁷

The thrilling era of astronomical advancements went hand in hand with the vernacular revolution in literature.⁶⁸ There was a growing desire for scientific knowledge accessible beyond academic Latin. Falk describes late fourteenth-century London as a city with a broad intellectual network, in which blacksmiths and academics could collaborate in the invention of new astronomical devices, and 'a world in which pleasurable and useful knowledge was traded freely and lowly clerks might mingle with nobility.'⁶⁹ A new scientific vocabulary was being written, significantly in English and not Latin. Russell Peck discusses the shift in the sense of the word 'science' in this era, indicating that it began to reflect a kind of orderly investigation. He explains that science

⁶⁶Jeffrey R. Wigelsworth, *Science and Technology in Medieval European Life* (Bloomsbury, 2006), see the chapter 'The Passage of Time: Calendars and Clocks.' Richard W. Pfaff, 'Telling Liturgical Times.' Chapter in: Nancy van Deusen, ed., *Processions, Performance, Liturgy and Ritual: Essays in Honor of Bryan R. Gillingham* (Ottawa: The Institute of Mediaeval Music, 2007), p. 44.

⁶⁷ Kathleen Dubs writes that Chaucer's time is cyclical and works on several levels: literal, metaphorical, allegorical, and tropological. Kathleen E. Dubs, 'Marking Time in The Canterbury Tales.' Chapter in: Tibor Fabiny, ed., *What, then, is Time?: Responses in English and American Literature* (Pazmany Papers in English and American Studies, no. 1; Piliscsaba, Hungary: Pazmany Peter Catholic U, 2001), pp. 71-81. See also: Stefania d'Agata d'Ottavi, 'Between Astronomy and Astrology: Chaucer's "Treatise on the Astrolabe" and the Measurement of Time in Late-Medieval England.' Chapter in: Rahel Falconer and Denis Renevey, eds., *Medieval and Early Modern Literature, Science, and Medicine* (Swiss Papers in English Language and Literature, no. 28; Tübingen: Narr Verlag, 2013): 49-66. Paul Strohm, *Social Chaucer* (Harvard University Press, 1989), see 'Time and the Social Implications of Narrative Form,' beginning p. 110. Also from Paul Strohm & Gillian Adler, *Alle Thyng Hath Tyme: Time and Medieval Life* (Reaktion Books, 2023).

⁶⁸ Lynn Arner, *Chaucer, Gower, and the Vernacular Rising: Poetry and the Problem of the Populace after 1381* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013).

⁶⁹ Falk, *Light Ages*, 254, 259, 267. 'An English-speaking craftsman could read the instructions – or have them read to him – and follow the step-by-step method.' See also: Michael B. Schiffer, *The Material Life of Human Beings: Artifacts, Behaviour, and Communication* (Routledge, 1999).

was a ‘relatively new concept in fourteenth-century vernacular usage and reflects a significant reordering of intellectual possibilities, as ideas, previously a part of a Latin scholastic tradition, infiltrate a new playing field of what might be called – especially in England – the beginning of the scientific revolution, spearheaded by advancements in empirical thought that reach even into vernacular literature, especially through the writings of Gower and Chaucer.’⁷⁰ The potential of vernacular literature and the frontiers of scientific knowledge were pushed forward in this era, and Chaucer’s poetry exhibits both movements.

Evidence of significant exchanges of materials and dialogues between medieval universities across the continent and England is only now being fully uncovered.⁷¹ Groups of scholars in Paris and Oxford were revising the Alfonsine Toledan Tables, which developed a lively exchange of instruments, ideas, and individuals specializing in particular theories.⁷² At Merton College in Oxford specifically there was Simon Bredon (1330-1341) and William Reed (1344-1357), who glossed Ptolemy’s *Quadripartum* and produced the *Almanak Solis* (1341-44), witnessed in MS Digby 178.⁷³ There was also John Ashenden (1337-1340) who wrote eclipse tables and horoscopes, as seen in Digby 176 fol.

⁷⁰ Russell A. Peck, ‘Gower and Science.’ Chapter in: Ana Sáez-Hidalgo, Brian Gastle, and R. F. Yeager, eds., *The Routledge Research Companion to John Gower* (Routledge, 2017), pp. 172-196. See also: Edward Grant, *The Foundations of Modern Science in the Middle Ages: Their Religious, Institutional, and Intellectual Contexts* (Cambridge University Press, 1966). A. C. Crombie, *Robert Grosseteste and the Origins of Experimental Science: 1100-1700* (Oxford University Press, 1961).

⁷¹ See the work of Laure Miolo, specifically: ‘La Scientia stellarum entre la France et l’Angleterre.’ In : C. Denoël, F. Siri, eds., *France et Angleterre : manuscrits médiévaux entre 700 et 1200* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020), pp. 389-412.

⁷² On Chaucer’s connections with Oxford, see: J. A. W. Bennett, *Chaucer at Oxford and at Cambridge* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974).

⁷³ Russell Peck states that Oxford ‘was first and foremost the place where the methodological revolution that led to modern science,’ in ‘Gower and Science,’ 179.

13v-14r. Work continued at Merton College with Reginald Lambourne between 1353-63. It is also crucial to note of course Nicholas of Lynn (b. 1330), a Carmelite friar working in Oxford, mentioned by name by Chaucer.⁷⁴ Lynn published astronomical tables in 1386 at the request of John of Gaunt, who was also one of Chaucer's primary patrons.⁷⁵

Developments in the design and use of clocks, astrolabes, and updated astronomical calendars were only the flagship advancements of the fourteenth century - there was much more. The brilliant Richard of Wallingford (1292-1336) designed many new tools, experimented with established scientific ideas and pushed the boundaries of astronomy.⁷⁶ His 'rectangulus' was a mechanically ingenious system with graduating rods and plumbines designed to make mathematical equations related to astronomy quicker to calculate.⁷⁷ Around the same time (1326) Wallingford also invented the 'albion,' with sixty-seven engraved component scales and pieces, meant to observe the angular altitude of the planets at any moment of time.⁷⁸ North describes its significance, 'because it made astronomers look at certain mathematical questions in new ways, for many generations to come, to the benefit of western mathematical science beyond the mere realm of computation.'⁷⁹ The term 'albion' may furthermore reflect a certain 'Britishness,' as pointed out by North, since this is the term that both Pliny and Ptolemy use to refer to

⁷⁴ *Prologue to the Treatise on the Astrolabe*, line 86.

⁷⁵ Nicholas of Lynn, *The Kalendarium*, Sigmund Eisner, ed., Gary MacEoin, trans. (The University of Georgia Press, 1980). C. D. Benson, 'The Astrological Medicine of Chaucer's Physician and Nicholas of Lynn's *Kalendarium*.' *American Notes and Queries* 22 (1984): 62-66. On the significance of Chaucer's relationship with John of Gaunt, see: Turner, *Chaucer... Life*, 120-44, 155-56, 174.

⁷⁶ J. D. North, *God's Clockmaker: Richard of Wallingford and the Invention of Time* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2007).

⁷⁷ North, *God's Clockmaker*, 60-62. See also: Jean Gimpel, *The Medieval Machine* (Pimlico, 1976; 1992).

⁷⁸ 'Tractatus Albionis', in J. D. North, ed., *Richard of Wallingford: An Edition of His Writings* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), volume 1, pp. 248-401.

⁷⁹ North, *God's Clockmaker*, 62.

England.⁸⁰ It also neatly refers to the abbey, St Albans, where it was created.⁸¹ The new astronomy was thus homegrown, and chimes with Chaucer's choice to write in English in *The Treatise on the Astrolabe*.

Advancing the study of astronomy requires such expert tools, and in the fourteenth century many new texts were written as accompanying operation manuals. They do not resemble operation manuals today, but they function in a similar way: the text and tool must be to hand while reading. This is straightforwardly stated in the first line of a fourteenth-century equatorium treatise from Merton College, Oxford: 'The very noble science of astronomy cannot be well understood without the appropriate instruments[.]'⁸² Wallingford's treatises are only one example of a larger trend of tools and instruction manuals, such as Ptolemaic primers or *Theorica planetarum* texts which describe instruments and their use, which I explore in chapter three.⁸³ Chaucer's *Treatise on the Astrolabe* is another example of this kind of 'kinetic' text, requiring body and mind together to imagine the celestial spheres.

Both Wallingford's *rectangulus* and the *albion* 'make great demands on the user's ability to visualize what is going on,' and this is a critical point.⁸⁴ The way the universe was

⁸⁰ Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, vol 1, book IV, chapter 30. Pliny the Elder, *The Natural History of Pliny*, John Bostock & Henry T. Riley, eds. & trans. (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1855), p. 350. Ptolemy's *Geographia*, book II. Ptolemy, *Ptolemy's Geography: an Annotated Translation of the Theoretical Chapters*, Alexander Jones & J. Lennart Berggren, eds & trans. (Princeton University Press, 2002).

⁸¹ North, *God's Clockmaker*, 64.

⁸² 'Quia nobilissima scientia astronomie non potest bene sciri sine instrumentis debitis.' Translated by Seb Falk, 'A Merton College Equatorium: Text, Translation, Commentary', *SCIAMVS*, 17 (2016): 121–59, at 136–137.

⁸³ Francis S. Benjamin and G. J. Toomer, eds, *Campanus of Novara and Medieval Planetary Theory: Theorica Planetarum* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1971). The corpus of known *Theorica Planetarum* is available at 'The Sphere: Knowledge System Evolution and the Shared Scientific Identity of Europe': < <https://sphaera.mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de/collections/theorica> >

⁸⁴ North, *God's Clockmaker*, 61.

visualized was changing. Obviously, the Ptolemaic spheres and geocentric model remained in place, but methods for reading the heavens, calculating time, and observing celestial movements were undergoing monumental change, and material creations were inventive vehicles propelling this change.

Not a single *rectangulus* from the Middle Ages survives, only Wallingford's treatise on it. Like most outmoded technology from times past, these marvellous inventions may be nearly invisible to us, but it is important to remember them when considering Chaucer's material world because they certainly existed.⁸⁵ We have lost innumerable planispheres, *volvelles*, equatoriums, armillary spheres, etc., but Chaucer may have read the time from a Wallingford clock, or made calculations with a *rectangulus*, or found the position of Jupiter with an *albion*. Like Wallingford, Chaucer invented new 'devices' in poetry and introduced new ways to visualize the heavens that directly influenced generations to come. He blazed new ground in an England buzzing with the metaphysical hum of the celestial spheres.

Astrology at the end of the Fourteenth Century

Richard II was born on 6 January 1367, coinciding with the Feast of Epiphany, the Christian holiday which commemorates the arrival of the Three Magi with gifts for the infant Jesus and marks the last day of the Twelve Days of Christmas. The Magi from the East (*magi ab oriente*) are nebulous characters in the New Testament.⁸⁶ The term *magi* indicates the priestly class in Latin, and because they followed a new star to the nativity of the living God, they are traditionally identified as astrologers. Richard II found great

⁸⁵ North, *God's Clockmaker*, 61. Seb Falk, 'Copying and Computing Tables.' Not every device described or designed in a manuscript was built, of course. Some designs were aspirational or purely imaginative.

⁸⁶ Matthew 2:1, from the Vulgate edition. *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. 'magus (n.), Etymology.'

meaning and purpose in this, and it influenced the way he presented himself and the works he patroned. He is imagined in the company of three kings offering gifts to the Virgin and Child on the *Wilton Diptych* (c. 1395–1399), for example.⁸⁷

The royal association between astrology, Epiphany and Richard's birthday may be one of the reasons for Richard's fixation with astrology, and his interest extended to the occult. As the biographer Nigel Saul comments, 'Richard appears to have paid a considerable amount of attention to astrological predictions.'⁸⁸ Richard was given astrological texts as gifts, appears to have read widely on the subject, and commissioned astral instruments.⁸⁹ Francis Young states boldly that 'No medieval English monarch has been associated with the occult arts more than Richard II.'⁹⁰ It is possible that historians and writers after his death exaggerated Richard's involvement with magical practices - did Richard exile Henry Bolingbroke because of a soothsayer's warning against toads?⁹¹ Probably not. The extent of Richard's interest and the influence of the occult arts in his decision making will always be unknown – but what is certain is manifest in the material

⁸⁷ Dillian Gordon, 'The Wilton Diptych: an Introduction.' Chapter In: Dillian Gordon, Lisa Monnas and Caroline Elam, eds., *The Regal Image of Richard II and the Wilton Diptych* (London 1997): 189–96.

⁸⁸ Nigel Saul, *Richard II* (Yale English Monarchs. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), p. 325.

⁸⁹ John Thorpe gifted the *Libellus Geomande* in 1391; Richard commissioned a fine horary quadrant (Oxford, Bodleian Lib., MS 581 and London, British Library, Royal MS 12 C.V.); Richard's mother, Joan, Countess of Kent, commissioned a set of astrological tables from John Somers. Richard also hired astrologers in 1397, for instance. J. Hughes, *The Rise of Alchemy in Fourteenth-century England: Plantagenet Kings and the Search for the Philosopher's Stone* (Contium, 2021), p. 197. See also: Hilary M. Carey, *Courting Disaster: Astrology at the English Court and University in the Later Middle Ages* (St Martin's Press, 1992), ch. 6.

⁹⁰ Francis Young, *Magic in Merlin's Realm: a History of Occult Politics in Britain* (Cambridge University Press, 2022), p.109.

⁹¹ A. Grandsen, *Historical Writing in England: c. 550-1307* (Routledge, 1996), p. 223.

record.⁹² It is also true that fascination with astrology was not exclusive to the king – the evidence suggests that his courtly and social circles participated as well.⁹³

London was a particularly excellent playing field for occultism and astrology because it was a crucible of cutting-edge technology, manuscript production, and productive social mingling.⁹⁴ There was a spectrum of interest in astronomy and astrology which was not exclusive to the educated elite. Then, as today, the technical, hard science of astronomy was undertaken by a trained few, but interest in the celestial heavens and their relationship to earth naturally knew no bounds.⁹⁵ It piqued the curiosity of the educated and the lay, and ‘great’ and ‘little’ culture, to use Peter Burke’s social model of history.⁹⁶ This is the world in which I situate Chaucer’s astral poetics: one brimming with new ideas and collaborations, where astrology was fashionable at court, the reigning monarch patroned the study of astrology and its trappings, and new scientific ideas were grounds for literary experimentation and lively intellectual discourse.

Chaucer and Gower

Chaucer was not alone in his poetic exploration into astronomy and astrology, of course. John Gower (1330-1408), a fellow poet and friend of Chaucer’s, wrote an overview of

⁹² Katharine Breen, ‘A Different Kind of Book for Richard’s Sake: MS Bodley 581 as Ethical Handbook.’ *The Chaucer Review* 45 (2010): 119–68.

⁹³ See Young’s section, ‘The Monarch as Magus: Richard II’: *Magic in Merlin’s Realm*, beginning 109. Hilary M. Carey, ‘Astrology at the English Court in the Later Middle Ages.’ Chapter in: Patrick Curry, ed., *Astrology, Science and Society* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1987), pp. 41–56.

⁹⁴ On London in Chaucer’s lifetime, see: Turner, *Ch...European Life*, chapter 11. Paul Strohm, *The Poet’s Tale: Chaucer and the Year That Made The Canterbury Tales* (London: Profile Books, 2014), chapter 2. Alec Reginald Myers, *Chaucer’s London: Everyday Life in London 1342-1400* (Stroud: Amberley Publishing, 2009). On the relationships between patrons and artists: Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: an Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁹⁵ Nicolas Weill-Parot, ‘Astrology, Astral Influences, and Occult Properties in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries.’ *Traditio* 65/ 65 (2010): 201–230.

⁹⁶ Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, 3rd edition (Ashgate, 2009), p. 55-56.

prevailing astrology and astronomy in *Confessio Amantis*, Book VII.⁹⁷ In rhyming couplets Gower conveys an enormous amount of information about the stars and planets and the vast network of connections they were believed to have with the natural world on earth. However, Gower would not be an ideal candidate for a materialist study. Falk assesses Gower's interest as narrowly theoretical, with no sense of astronomical observation, computation, or instruments.⁹⁸ This provides a stark contrast to Chaucer's poetry, which is infused with the practical culture of the sciences.⁹⁹ Gower's work is thus a helpful touchstone for comparison with Chaucer's, which will emerge throughout this thesis.¹⁰⁰

Beyond their stylistic differences, Gower includes information that is relatively commonplace and drawn from any number of sources.¹⁰¹ Scholars have long thought of Gower's cosmic writing as generalizations of long-established traditions, which is true about most, but not all, of his texts. New scholarship of the last decade has brought Gower's astral poetry to better light. For instance, his account of the 'Twelve Signs of the Zodiac' is indeed highly conventional in *Confessio Amantis* Book VII, but he strays from tradition when he lists the numbers of stars in each constellation. As Seb Falk has shown, Gower may have drawn this information from a text referred to as the *Benedictum sit nomen Domini*, attributed to 'Alchandrus,' (who may or may not have been a living

⁹⁷ John Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, Russell A. Peck, ed. (University of Toronto Press, 1966; reprint 1994). Kimberly Zarins, 'Writing the Literary Zodiac: Division, Unity, and Power in John Gower's Poetics.' Doctoral dissertation, Cornell University (2009).

⁹⁸ Seb Falk, 'Natural Sciences.' Chapter in: Stephen H Rigby and Siân Echard, eds. *Historians on John Gower* (Publications of the John Gower Society. Boydell & Brewer, 2019), pp. 491-525, at 498.

⁹⁹ Falk, 'Natural Sciences,' 499. He continues: 'The most notable absence from Gower's presentation of scientific practice is instrumentation. Where Chaucer's poetry is replete with references to clocks, dials and astrolabes, such details are largely absent from Gower's writing.'

¹⁰⁰ George Rufus Wyatt, Jr. 'A Comparison of the Uses of Astrology in the Works of John Gower and Geoffrey Chaucer.' University of Richmond Master's Thesis, no. 1273 (1952).

¹⁰¹ Falk, 'Natural Sciences,' 502.

astronomer), the source of ‘Alchadrean’ texts.¹⁰² Its origins are Arabic, spread north from Catalonia in the late tenth century, and exists in several Latin translations.¹⁰³ That Gower chose to incorporate a relatively obscure astrological text into his poetry speaks to the variety of materials available in monastic libraries and the culture at large.

Gower may not have been as interested in astronomical tools or astrological experimentation as Chaucer, but he was demonstrably interested in visual representations of the cosmos.¹⁰⁴ Gower’s description of the Sun in lines 801-847, adorned with the crown ‘With brighte stones environed,’ is an atypical allegorical image with no obvious textual sources.¹⁰⁵ The description of the sun’s accoutrements is long and strange. In fact, it has stumped scholars for years, but they were looking in the wrong places for context. Gower claims to report the description from the ‘olde bokes as I finde’ (828), but the sun’s crown bedecked with gemstones (824-847) is not recorded in the texts which have come down to us. It is possible, of course, that we are simply missing these ‘olde bokes,’ but it is equally possible that he does not mean the *text* from a book, but rather an *image*. The sun in illuminated versions of Michael Scot’s *Liber introductorius* could have inspired Gower’s sun (see for example Oxford: Bodleian Library MS Bodley 266 f. 49r, 116r [Fig. 1]).¹⁰⁶ This is

¹⁰² David Juste, *Les Alchandreana primitifs: étude sur les plus anciens traités astrologiques latins d’origine Arabe (Xe siècle)* (Leiden: Brill, 2007). Charles Burnett, ‘King Ptolemy and Alchandreus the Philosopher: the Earliest Texts on the Astrolabe and Arabic Astrology at Fleury, Micy and Chartres.’ *Annals of Science* 55/4 (1998): 329–68.

¹⁰³ Bodleian Library MS Digby 147 has descriptions of stars identical to Gower’s. Falk, *Natural Sciences*, 506.

¹⁰⁴ J. Allan Mitchell, ‘John Gower Illustrated: the Archer Images, Astronomical Science, and Poetic Identity.’ *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 53/2 (2023): 287-321. Amanda Gerber argues that Gower’s astronomical digressions are pedagogical in nature: ‘The Mythological Sciences of John Gower, Medieval Classicists, and Morgan MS M. 126.’ *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 40 (2018): 257-288.

¹⁰⁵ George L. Hamilton, ‘Some Sources of the Seventh Book of Gower’s “Confessio Amantis.”’ *Modern Philology* 9 (1912): 323–46. H. C. Mainzer, ‘A Study of the Sources of the *Confessio Amantis* of John Gower’ (Unpublished University of Oxford D.Phil. thesis, 1967), p. 335-7.

¹⁰⁶ Falk, ‘Natural Sciences,’ 510.

a highly symbolic representation of the sun, figured as a man riding in a chariot drawn by four horses with a crown, surrounded by text and even geomantic dots. Here is an instance of how material conditions (a drawing in a manuscript) may have shaped Gower's thinking and creative process.¹⁰⁷



Figure 1. Bodleian Library MS. Bodl. 266, fol. 116r, 15th c., Italian.

The point is this: Gower's astral poetry will frequently be held in comparison with Chaucer's precisely because Gower's is fairly conventional and encyclopaedic, but even Gower's works reflect the creative crucible in fourteenth-century London and the productive interplay of visual art and poetry. Chaucer was embedded in a world in which cosmic imagery abounded but his use of it is exceptional. Chaucer's texts are radically experimental in many ways, but perhaps this is most clearly seen in his astral poetics,

¹⁰⁷ Another instance of Gower's creative process involving visual art and astral imagery is in three manuscript copies of Gower's *Vox clamantis* [San Marino, California: Huntington Library MS HM 150; London: British Library MS Cotton Tiberius A.iv; and University of Glasgow Library MS Hunter 59]. They are prefaced with exceptional archer portraits and a short poem that J. Allan Mitchell defines as a text and image that form an integrated design, 'making a composite, synthetic 'imagetext': Mitchell, 'John Gower Illustrated,' 292.

which is why his work is an excellent prism through which to view his material surroundings and culture, and why his work merits renewed research with this thesis.

Astrology as an Imaginative System

It is easy to forget that before Galileo Galilei's first refracting telescope in 1609 the appearance of the planets' surfaces was unknown. Saturn's rings, Jupiter's Great Red Spot, and even the moon's ridges of dusty craters were unseen by human eyes. For all the millennia before Galileo, the night sky presented humanity with an enormous connect-the-dots panorama which humans managed by defining shapes and grouping them into constellations.¹⁰⁸ These constellations accrued mythological figures and stories, and underwent yet further metamorphoses when represented in cultural products such as poetry, paintings, carvings, stories, etc. This is a significant process of visualization and translation, and it reflects how the human mind functions. Visualizing nonverbal objects or ideas is a primary step in processing information for the mind, and semiotic signs are necessary to make social meaning for a group of people.¹⁰⁹

Therefore, constellations (especially those of the zodiac) and their stories are what the visual anthropologist Clifford Geertz would define as a 'complex conceptual structure,' with 'bundles' of meanings.¹¹⁰ Chaucer explores many of these 'bundles,' from

¹⁰⁸ Bradley Schaefer has argued that 'the Great Bear [*Ursa Major*] is possibly one of the oldest inventions of humanity: 'The Origin of the Greek Constellations.' *Scientific American* 29/5 (2016): 96-101, at 98. Alexander A. Gurshtein, 'The Origins of the Constellations: Some provocative hypotheses link the origins of the constellations to the precession of the earth's axis and the symbolic imagery of ancient peoples.' *American Scientist* 85/3 (1997): 264-273, at 272. See also Alexander Boxer's wonderful first chapter in *A Scheme of Heaven*.

¹⁰⁹ Allan Paivio, *Mental Representations: A Dual Coding Approach* (Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 55.

¹¹⁰ Geertz defines complex conceptual structures as ideas and symbols 'superimposed upon or knotted into one another, which are at once strange, irregular, and inexplicit, and which he must contrive somehow first to grasp and then to render.' Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 10.

observations of the moon phases in zodiacal houses and the angle of the sun against the horizon, to the most fantastical, such as *The Complaint of Mars*, a narrative in which personified planets carry out a love affair. Stars and planets are thus pre-objectified forms that require ‘thingness’ to have meaning, and in the Middle Ages this was frequently accomplished through visual art.¹¹¹

Because its visual vocabulary grew from Greco-Roman precedents and not Biblical or Christian iconographies the zodiac specifically offered a fertile creative space for medieval artists. Hundreds of objects and monuments from the 12-15th centuries survive with images of stars, planets, the Ptolemaic spheres of the cosmos, and especially the constellations of the zodiac in the Labors of the Month tradition.¹¹² The two most significant artforms in this area are sculpted church portals and Books of Hours, which will be discussed in chapter one. There were also, however, untold numbers of other artforms featuring cosmic imagery, such as baptismal fonts carved with the signs of the zodiac, liturgical vestments, ivories, textiles, jewellery, stained glass, and mosaics.¹¹³ Astrolabes and quadrants were often as much works of art as they were useful tools, and they proliferated in Chaucer’s time and beyond.¹¹⁴ Seasons of sowing and harvesting were

¹¹¹ Bill Brown, ed., *Things* (University of Chicago Press, 2004), see chapter titled ‘Thing Theory,’ p. 1-16.

¹¹² For categorical lists of examples, see: Colum Hourihane, ed., *Time in the Medieval World: Occupations of the Months and Signs of the Zodiac in the Index of Christian Art* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007). James Carson Webster, *The Labors of the Months in Antique and Mediaeval Art to the End of the Twelfth Century* (New York: AMS Press, 1970).

¹¹³ Examples include: the baptismal font at the parish church of Hook Norton in England, 12th century; the ‘Star Mantle’ of Henry II which began as an imperial vestment in 1020 and declared a relic in the twelve century, eventually cut down for a liturgical vestment; the stained glass cycle at the cathedral of Chartres presents most of the calendar year in signs and labors, bay 28a (Delaport 17); mosaics evolved from the Roman tradition into the art of both synagogues and churches, such as the choir mosaic at the Cathedral of Aosta, Italy, 13th century.

¹¹⁴ See the list of instruments in the Museum of the History of Science’s Astrolabe Catalogue: < <https://www.mhs.ox.ac.uk/astrolabe/catalogue/> >. Also: Jonathan Powell, ‘The Astrolabe.’ Chapter in:

depicted next to their monthly sun signs in books and churches, vividly painted and relatively prolific. Even small churches far from pilgrimage routes or city centres were decorated with zodiacal imagery, such as the twelfth-century church in Kencot, Oxfordshire and its Sagittarian tympanum, or the rural church of Saint Georges, Ydes, France and its zodiac cycle on the west porch.¹¹⁵ In other words, visual representations of the zodiac and its attending astrological nexus of meanings were present in nearly every sphere of daily life – at home, at church, in the marketplace.

One of the primary tenets of this thesis is that astrology was foremost an imaginative method of sympathetically ordering all things in the universe, and this is how Chaucer uses it in his poetry. The term ‘sympathetically’ specifically refers to the Platonic framework of *sympatheia*, in which the macrocosmos of the universe exerted influential powers over the events in the microcosmos of earth.¹¹⁶ It was not a purely mathematical system and not a system of beliefs. Conflating astrology with mathematical astronomy or religious beliefs leads to a misrepresentation of astrology in the Middle Ages (and confusion about Chaucer).

As we have seen with Gower’s poetry, considering astrology primarily as an imaginative and particularly visual system provides new avenues of scholarship. Another

Jonathan Powell, ed., *From Cave Art to Hubble: a History of Astronomical Record Keeping* (Springer, Cham, 2019).

¹¹⁵ Arthur Stanley Theodore Fisher, *The History of Kencot, Oxfordshire* (Burford: Bear Court Books, 1971), p. 4-20. Shelley M. Williams, ‘The Zodiac on Church Portals: Astrology and the Medieval Cosmos.’ *Peregrinations: Journal of Medieval Art and Architecture* 7/3 (2021): 59-115, at 75-80.

¹¹⁶ This is found in Plato’s *Timaeus* 41 and expanded in Stoic philosophy. For more on this see: Eric Schliesser, ed., *Sympathy: a History* (Oxford University Press, 2015), especially chapters 1 and 2. For consideration on how this philosophy may have informed daily life in the Middle Ages, see: Roberta Gilchrist, *Medieval Life: Archaeology and the Life Course* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2012), p. 32-33.

example comes from the work of Thomas Bradwardine (d. 1349), but his astrological art functions in three dimensions rather than two.¹¹⁷ He is noted in Chaucer's *Nun's Priest's Tale* (lines 3241-42) along with Augustine and Boethius as great minds tackling the problem of divine foreknowledge and human agency.¹¹⁸ In Bradwardine's text, 'On Acquiring a Trained Memory' (*De memoria artificiali adquirenda*) one of his principal examples centers on the twelve signs of the zodiac.¹¹⁹ It is a demonstration of how to link images in sequence in one's memory, traveling through the signs in vivid (and surprisingly violent) language. He begins with Aries and ends with Pisces, connecting one imaginary sign to another through physical contact. The second sequence (described as 'to the left of Aries') designates the second half of the year with Leo, described thus: 'To the left of the ram a dreadful lion might be placed, who with open mouth and rearing on its legs attacks a virgin, beautifully adorned, tearing her garments.'¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Bradwardine was a Fellow of Merton College working on mathematics and physics, chaplain and confessor to Edward III, and the Archbishop of Canterbury.

¹¹⁸ Scott Mandelbrote, 'Calculators in Divinity: Henry Savile and Thomas Bradwardine.' *Erudition and the Republic of Letters* 6 (2021): 116-137.

¹¹⁹ As recorded in Appendix C of: Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: a Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge University Press, 1990, 2008), p. 361-368, at 364. From her earlier work and translation: 'Thomas Bradwardine, 'De Memoria Artificiale Adquirenda.' *Journal of Medieval Latin* 2 (1991): 25-43.

¹²⁰ 'Ex parte sinistra arietis ponatur leo horribilis qui aperto ore erectisque pedibus virginem pulchre ornatam vestes eius lacerando invadat.' Lines 106-108 from Carruthers 1991 translation.



Figure 2. Prior's Door at Ely Cathedral in Cambridgeshire, outside jambs on the west side and detail of jamb sculpture, c. 1135.

Mary Carruthers considers this passage as part of a greater intellectual dialogue about memory and architecture.¹²¹ She writes that Bradwardine's zodiacal figures do not occupy a flat plane but are impressed memorially in the manner of a three-dimensional carved relief. They arch in the mind like a buttress or archivolt sculpted with these images,

¹²¹ Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, 138, 167.

just as the zodiac signs were carved into dozens of ecclesiastical sites across Europe in the Middle Ages.¹²² Bradwardine's passage reads like the unfurling roundels featuring the creaturely zodiac and the occupations of the month carved into the Prior's Door at Ely Cathedral in Cambridgeshire [outermost jambs on the western side, c. 1135, **Fig. 2**], for instance. Here the signs of the calendar year scroll from top to bottom in a chain, just as linked information could be stored using Bradwardine's visualization techniques. Indeed, this kind of sculpted portal may be exactly what he had in mind for his treatise on memory.

That Bradwardine chose the zodiac signs as the *imagines* or loci for memory storage in an architectural mode speaks to the ubiquity of the imagery in his time.¹²³ This was a visual system readily available and familiar to his audience. The signs of the zodiac were like an alphabet, a series of symbols in sequential order semiotically representing abstract concepts. This example is evidence of the kind of complex interaction between materiality, images, and texts that lie at the heart of this thesis.

The Aesthetics of Space

Astronomers have always made aesthetic choices in presenting their data and conclusions to a wider audience, and this includes collaboration with artists. This is as true for metallurgists, blacksmiths and astronomers building astrolabes or Nicholas of Lynn's *Kalendarium* (1386) as it is for astronomers working six hundred years later with the Hubble Space Telescope, which we will briefly turn to as a useful modern analogue before

¹²² For a map of such sites, see: Williams, 'The Zodiac on Church Portals,' 60.

¹²³ Edith Wilks Dolnikowski, *Thomas Bradwardine: A View of Time and a Vision of Eternity in Fourteenth-Century Thought* (Brill, 2021). Beryl Rowland, 'Bishop Bradwardine on the Artificial Memory.' *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 41/1 (1978): 307–312.

returning to Chaucer's period. Starting in 1997, the image specialists at the Hubble Heritage Project and the Space Telescope Science Institute embarked on a project which transformed the data sent from the Hubble Space Telescope into photographs meant for public consumption. These astounding images earned instant acclaim and offered a new way to imagine the universe, and in turn influenced cultural products such as science fiction films.

Taken at face value, these photographs are often considered something like snapshots of space, a sampling of what one might 'see' if it were possible to travel to the distant reaches of faraway galaxies. But these images were not direct photographs of deep space. The data that Hubble relayed to earth were black and white measurements of light, often taken over multiple exposures. Hubble sent indexical records of physical properties that exceed the limits of vision and representation. To render this information visually image specialists applied filters for specific wavelengths of color, assigned hues to multiple exposures, and used light and color to convey a sense of depth.¹²⁴ The process of expressing the initial data into pictorial form thus required translation, and this translation relied on aesthetic choices.¹²⁵

These images were manipulated in a way to make them appeal to the greatest possible audience, and present an idea of the cosmos as awesome, glorious and sublime. Elizabeth Kessler argues that the Hubble images share formal similarities with Romantic-

¹²⁴ On this method, see: W. Miller, 'First Colour Portraits of the Heavens.' *National Geographic* 115/5 (May 1959): 670–679, at p. 679.

¹²⁵ Elizabeth A. Kessler, *Picturing the Cosmos: Hubble Space Telescope Images and the Astronomical Sublime* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), p. 14.

era paintings and American photography, such as those by Albert Bierstadt and Ansel Adams.¹²⁶ Kessler wrote, ‘Although not a programmatic choice, the reference to the sublime landscape so evident in the Hubble images ensures that we too view the distant reaches of the universe with a sense of wonder and a sense of familiarity, which suggests that we know how to explore these places.’¹²⁷ The astronomers and image specialists (artists?) involved with turning raw data into ‘pretty pictures’ desired to impart a sense of mankind’s smallness in the vastness of the universe, a sense of wonder and mystery, and perhaps some existential anxiety.

These images were crucial to marketing as well. Publicising discoveries accompanied by these jaw-dropping photographs was an effective method to gain public support. These images were printed and sold to fund continued scientific research. Therefore, they are primarily of aesthetic (and not scientific) value. Hubble images are thus complex hybrids of medium and message, a combination of numerical data and visual representation, indexical aspects and symbolic attributions.

¹²⁶ Kessler, *Picturing the Cosmos*, see the first chapter, ‘Astronomy’s Romantic Landscapes.’

¹²⁷ Kessler, *Picturing the Cosmos*, 8.

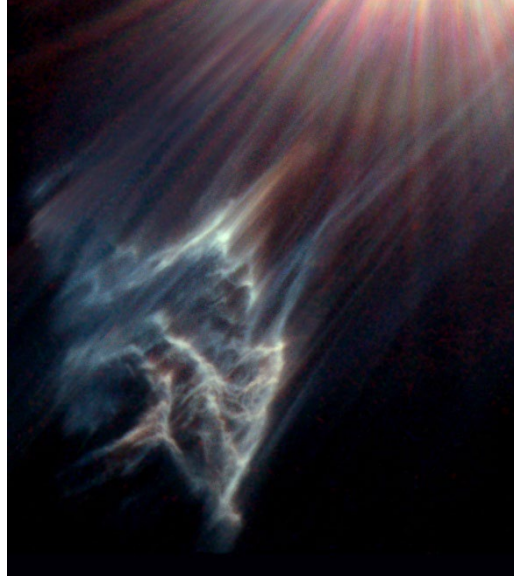


Figure 3. Photo of IC 349, taken by NASA and The Hubble Heritage Team (STScI/AURA) 19 September 1999. This is a reflection nebula, also named Barnard's Meroppe Nebula, in the constellation Taurus.

To illustrate this point, consider the Heritage Project's image of Barnard's Meroppe (IC 349), a reflection nebula in the constellation of Taurus [Fig. 3]. It is important to remember that this image is doubly mediated. This is a polished product manipulated to convey ideas using aesthetic tools and visual language.¹²⁸ Colours were chosen to represent specific wavelengths, variations of tones provide texture and depth, and it is even framed with an artifact of the telescope - the diffraction spikes in the right corner. This demonstrates that to make the cosmos legible, it must be rendered visually, and visual language requires semiotic layering and relatively arbitrary aesthetic choices.

Similarly, Chaucer's astral poetics are crafted products, manipulated to address aesthetic and poetic needs, and thus require more than mechanical objectivity to appreciate fully. Chaucer's cosmic subjects indeed have aesthetic and scientific value,

¹²⁸ On aesthetic tools and visual language in theory, see: Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: an Anthropological Theory* (Clarendon Press, 1998).

and both need consideration, but they are not snapshots of a time and place. They do not necessarily reflect phenomena that Chaucer witnessed firsthand. Somewhat like the Hubble pictures, Chaucer's cosmic images are primarily aesthetic representations with symbolic attributes. Genuine astronomical phenomena appear throughout Chaucer's work, and he made deliberate choices about the rhetorical colours, language, placement, and poetic configuration with which to present them. Like the diffraction spikes from the telescope, Chaucer's images are inflected with specifically fourteenth-century technology and art, and Chaucer's creative choices carry meaning.

An example of a passage inflected with fourteenth-century technology and Chaucer's aesthetic choices occurs in the introduction to *The Man of Law's Tale*.¹²⁹ Lines 1-15 are a surprisingly complicated headlink connecting Fragment II to the frame narrative:

'Our Hooste **saugh wel** that the brighte sonne
 The ark of his artificial day hath ronne
 The ferthe part, and half an houre and moore,
 And though he were nat depe ystert in loore,
 He wiste it was the eightetethe day
 Of Aprill, that is messenger to May;
 And **saugh wel** that the shadwe of every tree
 Was as in lengthe the same quantitee
 That was the body erect that caused it.
 And therefore by the shadwe he took his wit
 That Phebus, which that shoon so clere and brighte,
 Degrees was fyve and fourty clombe on highte,
 And for that day, as in that latitude,
 It was ten of the klokke, he gan conclude,
 And sodeynly he plighte his hors aboute.'¹³⁰

¹²⁹ For a general overview of interpretations on this passage see Burnett's comments in the introduction to his edition of Nicholas of Lynn's *Kalendarium*, beginning p. 30.

¹³⁰ Emphases in bold are mine.

Here Chaucer writes an introduction in the narratorial voice describing Harry Bailey's reckoning of time. It is a chronographic description of a moment in time with a strong astrolabic flavour.¹³¹ Harry may not be far advanced in learning ('nat depe ystert in loore'), but clearly he knows how to find the hour with an astrolabe, a process described in *A Treatise on the Astrolabe* II.1-3.

This passage has garnered much scholarly attention, with many efforts to reconcile the constituent elements: the ark of the artificial day in the 'ferthe part,' the date of 18 April, the equal length of shadows, the sun 45° in ascension, and 10 o'clock. It is not clear from the text alone how these elements should work together precisely. Osborn makes a convincing argument that there are two separate processes described here that are confused because of the punctuation in *The Riverside Chaucer*.¹³² North states that the confusions in the passage force scholars to 'accept that Chaucer himself made a mistake.'¹³³ Burnett counters this and states, 'It is, I think, a mistake to charge Chaucer with errors made by his characters. If anyone offers a faulty computation here, it is the Host himself [.]'¹³⁴ And because an astrolabe is not mentioned explicitly, Smyser notes that the Host appears to make these observations 'off-hand and empty handed,' but this depends on how one interprets 'saugh wel.'¹³⁵

¹³¹ On the technical terms, see Marijane Osborn, *Time and the Astrolabe in The Canterbury Tales* (University of Oklahoma Press, 2002), p. 64-6, 74-87.

¹³² Osborn, *Time...Astrolabe*, 70-74.

¹³³ North, *Ch's Universe*, 124. See also: Wood, *Ch...Country of Stars*, 273. J. C. Eade, "'We ben to lewed or to slowe": Chaucer's Astronomy and Audience Participation.' *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 4 (1982): 53-85.

¹³⁴ Nicholas of Lynn's *Kalendarium*, 31.

¹³⁵ Hamilton Smyser, 'A View of Chaucer's Astronomy.' *Speculum* 45 (1970): 359-373; at p. 360, 362-3. See also J. C. Eade, *The Forgotten Sky: a Guide to Astrology in English Literature* (Clarendon Press, 1984), p. 125, 138. *A Treatise on the Astrolabe of Geoffrey Chaucer*, A. E. Brea, ed. (London: John Russell Smith, 1870).

To ‘see’ time well in the late fourteenth century meant to have basic astronomical knowledge and practice with an astrolabe. As I demonstrate later in this thesis, the astrolabes in museum display cases often exemplify exquisite showboats and not the workhorses. A simple quadrant or astrolabe was easily portable, relatively inexpensive, and enabled the user (especially a traveller) to measure the height of celestial bodies against the horizon and draw helpful conclusions such as the hour of the day.¹³⁶ None of Harry’s ‘calculations’ require extraordinary ‘astronomical virtuosity’ to calculate, as Smyser states.¹³⁷

Chaucer almost certainly used Nicholas of Lynn’s tables to include the specific details in the passage above, such as the perfectly equal length of shadows. In this way the passage participates in Chaucer’s marvellously complex intertextuality, in which he uses sources of all kinds to augment his poetry. Like the diffraction spikes in the image of Barnard’s Merope, this passage refracts astrolabic technology with phrases such as ‘ark of his artificial day,’ ‘Degrees was fyve and fourty clombe on highte,’ and ‘And for that day, as in that latitude.’ I suggest that an astrolabe in hand is implied, and even the final phrase, ‘he plighte his hors aboute’ is a sophisticated pun, as noted by Osborn.¹³⁸ It describes the Host on his horse turning to address his fellow Canterbury pilgrims, but it could also cleverly imply that he had turned his ‘hors’ on an astrolabe. This is the ‘litel wegge, which

¹³⁶ Such as the ‘Canterbury Quadrant,’ which I discuss in chapter 3.

¹³⁷ Smyser, ‘A View... Astronomy,’ 360. Also, North, ‘Kalenderes Enlumyed Ben They: Some Astronomical Themes in Chaucer.’ *Review of English Studies* 20/78 (1969): 129-154. I disagree with Osborn’s assertion that by using Nicholas of Lynn’s *Kalendarium* to write the Host’s chronographia Chaucer demonstrates ‘his concern with astronomical realism.’ *Time...Astrolabe*, 78.

¹³⁸ Osborn, *Time...Astrolabe*, p. 67-87, esp. 77-78.

that is clepid the hors,' that keeps the pin in place through the astrolabe's womb.¹³⁹ This is the kind of punning that Chaucer excelled at and perfected in the *Complaint of Mars*.

This chronographia in the headlink is certainly not a technical reading, either. Harry's process is not accurate. There is simply not enough evidence in the text itself to extrapolate a specific calendrical date in real time as several scholars have attempted, and neither is there a reason to do so. These are fictional characters on an imaginary journey with no direct correlation to real time.¹⁴⁰ Rather, it is important to remember the ornamental aspects of the headlink passage. It features elements of classical chronographia, including epithets such as 'Aprill, that is messenger to May' and personifications of natural phenomena with 'That Phebus, which that shoon so clere and brighte.' Not only are the technical data points relevant in this passage, therefore, but the mythopoetic points as well.

Like one of NASA's 'pretty pictures' which combined cutting edge technology and artistic, aesthetic enhancements to present a celestial configuration at a moment in time (as experienced on earth), Chaucer's poetry presents the reader with an image of April 18 on the road to Canterbury. Neither Chaucer nor his editors necessarily made 'mistakes' because perfect accuracy was not the goal; this is an aesthetic product. Many of Chaucer's astral passages share similarities with this introduction to the *Man of Law's Tale*, with similarly contradicting phrases and conflicting literary criticism. Organizing the whole of Chaucer's astral passages into 'modes' or 'types' as I have done, with a

¹³⁹ *Treatise on the Astrolabe* l.14.

¹⁴⁰ As Kolve notes, 'Chaucer's concern was to create the fiction of a chronology, not a realistic chronology per se.' Kolve, *Chaucer...Narrative I*, 474.

materialist methodology, provides a new approach which prioritizes aesthetics. I thus endeavour to offer new perspectives on Chaucer's cosmos, so that we may also 'see well,' or at least a little better.

I. ASTRAL CHRONOGRAPHIA

Most readers are introduced to Chaucer's work with the first lines of *The General Prologue*, a grand cinematic opening which describes the English landscape in spring. These lines are lyrical and evocative, situating the audience in time, space, and feeling. They also epitomize Chaucer's favourite way to tell time in his poetry - chronographia. This is a poetic device indicating a location in time and space with two elements: cosmological or mythical language and a description of the weather or season.¹ This is also the most easily recognizable way that Chaucer uses cosmic imagery, and it is relatively common throughout his works, comprising about 13% of the survey. However, this type of cosmic imagery rarely receives singular focus. In scholarly works Chaucer's chronographiae are typically noted in relation to their immediate literary context and used to extract calendrical dates but not held in comparison with one another or studied as an artform. In this chapter I offer a close look at Chaucer's chronographic passages, thinking about them in relation to conventions and materiality, with special attention to *The Franklin's Tale*.

This first chapter introduces Chaucer's cosmic imagery on a relatively small scale with a primary focus on how Chaucer built upon or reacted against established literary tropes. The final chapters of this thesis consider Chaucer's wholly original cosmic imagery, where he has left conventions behind. Showing exactly how Chaucer responds to established literary and artistic conventions contrasts with instances in which Chaucer is more freely inventive, and therefore it is essential to lay the foundations with

¹ Sometimes this is confused with periphrasis, or astronomical periphrasis. For clarity, I use 'astronomical periphrasis' when there are no mythological or zodiacal figures associated with the description of time, and 'chronographia' when there are. See Chauncey Wood's discussion here: Wood, *Ch...Country of Stars*, p. 78.

chronographia. It is also significant to note his range and flexibility - the chronographiae in *The Franklin's Tale* do not operate precisely as they do in *Troilus and Criseyde*, and again they are different in *The General Prologue*. The formula is the same but used to different ends, and by comparing the device with literary precedents and imagery from the material world I offer new interpretations.

Each of Chaucer's fictional works has its own 'timescape', which Gillian Adler and Paul Strohm define as: 'a distinctive modelling of time that is created as a consequence or byproduct of its own narration.'² This can be rudimentary or complex, it may reflect the way time unfolds in reality or otherwise, and provides a temporal framework. Chronographiae are critical 'timescaping' tools as they not only indicate the time or season in poetic language and respond to classical precedents, but they also segue to an astrological or astronomical register with expansive mythological or folkloric associations to build on. Chaucer routinely adds chronographiae to his source material and each instance reflects, moulds, or alters the 'timescape'.³ This is the primary focus of this chapter: how does Chaucer use chronographiae? How do they relate to the internal 'timescape' of each work, and to what effect? To begin I provide a brief outline of the literary history of chronographia from Greco-Roman foundations to Chaucer's time.

Classical Conventions

Associating a season with a mythic figure (often anthropomorphized) and a zodiac constellation is an invention of the antique world. It is a way to put into form the formless

² Adler and Strohm, *Alle Thyng Hath Tyme*, 103.

³ See fn I.155-8, and IV.1590-95 for *Troilus & Criseyde* in *Riverside Chaucer*.

concept of time.⁴ This method of visualizing time was materially expressed across the classical world in public timekeeping devices such as *parapegmata* or *menologia rustica* (public, carved calendar almanacs with zodiac signs, moon phases, and sundials), and literarily expressed in poetry such as Ovid's *Fasti* and Virgil's *Aeneid*, which we will briefly consider in turn.⁵

Parapegmata were more than public calendars, they could be used to predict the weather and unite the community with communal time reckoning.⁶ Daryn Lehoux describes them this way: 'The idea is that the annual risings and settings of the fixed stars can be used as indicators of weather, seasons, winds, storms, and more.'⁷ Public stone calendars were relatively widespread in the Roman Empire, and there is evidence that in Chaucer's era some classical parapegmata remained *in situ* in Rome and elsewhere, and others were unearthed in the 14-15th centuries.⁸ Time and seasons were thus publicly marked in the physical landscape of the classical world and this helped to establish the zodiac signs across the Empire far after its decline.

⁴ Andrew Cole discusses how artistic figuration comes to the rescue when concepts fail: 'figures get concepts unstuck.' Andrew Cole, *The Birth of Theory* (University of Chicago Press, 2014), p. 160.

⁵ See for example the *Menologium Rusticum Colotianum*, first century CE, or the *Menologium Rusticum Vallense*, of similar date.

⁶ The earliest records of parapegmata for which we have good reports date to around 430 BCE, about the time that the Hellenistic world absorbed Mesopotamian astrology and zodiacal lore. D. R. Dicks writes that the ancient Greeks and Romans used parapegmata for the business of everyday life: *Early Greek Astronomy to Aristotle* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970), p. 85. See also the calendars associated with Geminus's *Isagoge* and Ptolemy's *Phaseis*.

⁷ Daryn Lehoux, 'The Parapegma Fragments from Miletus.' *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* Bd. 152 (2005), p. 125. See for an example the Thermae Traiani parapegma.

⁸ The *Menologium Rusticum Vallense* was uncovered before 1480 in the Circus Flaminius area of Rome. Kathleen Wren Christian, 'Instauratio and Pietas: the Della Valle Collections of Ancient Sculpture.' *Studies in the History of Art* 70 (Symposium Papers XLVII: Collecting Sculpture in Early Modern Europe. Washington: National Gallery of Art): 32–65.

These distinctive artforms demonstrably survived and evolved in the Middle Ages, resulting in a great variety of medieval interpretations. In visual art, the Labours of the Month motif cycle (which matches months with zodiac signs and labours or occupations), was carved into church portals and painted in calendar folia profusely between c. 1050-1500 CE. In many ways these portals are the distant inheritors of *parapegmata*, as they are prominently placed in public areas of vital spiritual importance. Religious imagery and ritual action combined to mark seasonal changes and celebrations at these crucial portal sites, and on a grander societal scale, unite the community in religious feeling and understanding.⁹ Portals thus acted as symbolic structures for defining community time by visualizing Christian cosmology at a highly visible exterior location, and often included the classical signs of the zodiac.¹⁰

In the written word, *chronographia* was considered an aspect of rhetorical periphrasis as defined by Quintilian.¹¹ The most relevant examples for comparison with Chaucer and his contemporaries come from Ovid and Virgil, and particularly Ovid's poetic *Fasti* (written 8 CE, unfinished).¹² Ovid renders the 'painted calendar' (*signantia fastos*) in

⁹ Margot E. Fassler, *The Virgin of Chartres: Making History through Liturgy and the Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), p. 316: 'Spaces outside churches became the setting for liturgical drama in the twelfth century, drawing texts and music out to the portals, where there may have been interaction between drama, music, and sculptural programs.' On the origins of liturgical processions, circumambulation and church architecture, see Roger E. Reynolds, 'The Drama of Medieval Liturgical Processions.' *Revue de Musicologie* 86/1 (2000): 127-142. For theories related to strategies of depiction, religious rituals and visual structures, see: Camille Wingo, *Picture Making Beliefs: a Cognitive Technological Model for Ritual Efficacy* (Carolina Academic Press, 2012), p. 128.

¹⁰ Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*, 406.

¹¹ Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, H. E. Butler, trans., (Harvard: Loeb Classical Library, 1921-22), VIII.3-4; III.241-337. Also: Aristotle, *Art of Rhetoric*, John Henry Freese, trans. (Loeb Classical Library, 1926), III.2-3, p. 359-365.

¹² This is only one example of this genre in ancient Roman texts; see also: Columella, *On Agriculture*, Harrison Boyd Ash, trans. (Harvard: Loeb Classical Library, 1941). On medieval receptions of Ovid: Jeremy Dimmick,

elegiac couplets.¹³ The narrator acts as a *vates*, a type of poet-prophet who converses with Roman deities, and through question and answer defines each month and its significant holidays. The constellations are mentioned in conjunction with the seasons, specifically the zodiac signs. Ovid aetiologizes the months and fundamentally confirms the visual associations of season, sign, and activity, and his description of January features later in this chapter. Ovid's work is a Latin descendant of Hesiod's *Works and Days* (early seventh century BCE), which in turn was a type of Hellenized version of Babylonian wisdom literature, all of which laid the foundation for later almanacs.¹⁴

Virgil's chronographiae are ideal examples of the form as a poetic device for storytelling. In the *Aeneid* Book I, after Dido's feast honouring Aeneas in Carthage, a bard begins a tale with a description of the wandering moon, the cold rains of winter, and the constellations of Arcturus, Hyades and the Great and Little Bears:

'...Then Iopas,
long-haired bard, strikes up his golden lyre
resounding through the halls. Giant Atlas
had been his teacher once, and now he sings
the wandering moon and labouring sun eclipsed,
the roots of the human race and the wild beasts,
the source of storms and the lightning bolts on high,
Arcturus, the rainy Hyades and the Great and Little Bears,
and why the winter suns so rush to bathe themselves in the sea

'Ovid in the Middle Ages: Authority and Poetry.' Chapter in: Philip Hardie, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Ovid* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 264–287. Ralph J. Hexter, 'Ovid in the Middle Ages: Exile, Mythographer, and Lover.' Chapter in: Barbara Weiden Boyd, ed., *Brill's Companion to Ovid* (Leiden, 2002), pp. 413–42. Dorothy M. Robathan, 'Ovid in the Middle Ages.' Chapter in: J. W. Binns, ed., *Ovid* (Routledge Revivals, 1973), pp. 191–209.

¹³ Ovid, *Fasti*, James G. Frazer, trans., revised by G. P. Goold (Harvard: Loeb Classical Library 253, 1931), lines 11–12, p. 2–3.

¹⁴ Tamsyn Barton, *Ancient Astrology* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 21. Hesiod, *Hesiod's Works and Days: a Translation and Commentary for the Social Sciences*, David W. Tandy and Walter C. Neale, trans. & ed. (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996). Virgil's *Georgics* also grew from this branch of literature: Virgil, *Georgics*, Janet Lembke, trans. (Yale University Press, 2005).

and what slows down the nights to a long lingering crawl....'¹⁵

This is a type of invocation that lifts the mind of the reader from the situation of the characters to a grander viewpoint. Dido's fate is changing course inalterably during the telling of Iopas's tale; she may be hosting a welcome party for Aeneas and his companions but much larger mechanisms are at work as she falls in love. The passage also demonstrates how *chronographiae* operate as part of a fictional narrative rather than in a strictly calendrical setting. This passage perfectly exemplifies how *chronographiae* are used in classical literature: they mark beginnings, the scope is grand and eloquent, and the style is high-minded, even courtly. Lyrical descriptions of constellations, seasons, and cosmic imagery are thus suitable fare for the most ambitious of epic tales.

The classical genealogy of literary *chronographiae* and poetic calendars is evident very early in medieval British texts with the *Old English Metrical Calendar (or Menologium)* written c. 1040s, which follows classical precedents but with Christian saint's days in highly localized language.¹⁶ Kazutomo Karasawa explains the structure of the work thus: 'The months and seasons are personified as they leave their "dwelling places" or "come to town" and there follow short cameo narratives akin to the poem *Fates of the Apostles*

¹⁵ Virgil, *The Aeneid*, Robert Fagles, trans. (Penguin Books, 2006), l.891-896, p. 72. Latin text: H. Rushton Fairclough, trans. G. P. Goold, ed. (Loeb Classical Library 63. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1916), lines 740-746: '...cithara crinitus Iopas / personat aurata, docuit quem maximus Atlas. / hic canit errantem lunam solisque labores, / unde hominum genus et pecudes, unde imber et ignes, / Arcturum pluviasque Hyadas geminosque Triones; / quid tantum Oceano properent se tinguere soles / hiberni, vel quae tardis mora noctibus obstet.'

¹⁶ *The Old English Metrical Calendar (Menologium)*, Kazutomo Karasawa, trans. & ed. (D S Brewer, 2015). Karasawa explains the structure of the work thus: 'The months and seasons are personified as they leave their "dwelling places" or "come to town" and there follow short cameo narratives akin to the poem *Fates of the Apostles* commemorating the apostles, martyrs and confessors of the Church' (xi). This is noticeably like the *Fasti*, although converted to a Christian calendar.

commemorating the apostles, martyrs and confessors of the Church.¹⁷ This is noticeably like the *Fasti*, although converted to a Christian calendar.

Centuries later in Chaucer's time, John Mirk, canon and prior of Lilleshall in Shropshire, compiled his *Festial* c. 1380, which also moves through the calendar year in this tradition.¹⁸ However, in relation to Chaucer, the best example of a Middle English inheritor of the classical tradition is John Gower's poetic calendar in *Confessio Amantis* Book VII.¹⁹ He essentially provides what Ovid did not – a complete poetic calendar with each month, its associated zodiac sign, and prominent activity. And as mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, Gower's is a wonderfully complete and mostly conventional presentation of the entire calendar and thus provides excellent comparison.

Beyond English shores, Virgilian chronographiae echo in continental medieval literature most notably with Dante.²⁰ The first canto of *La Divina Commedia* begins appropriately with the sun in Aries and allusions to the beginning of time and the creation of man (*Inferno* I.37-41). Other examples are the glorious description of the stars given by the aged Cato of Utica (*Purgatorio* I.1-42), and the beginning of *Purgatorio* canto II is prefaced with a lengthy chronographia.²¹ The topic of Dante's cosmic imagery is clearly beyond the scope of this chapter, but these serve as examples of how Dante drew inspiration from classical conventions in his celestial poetry.

¹⁷ Kazutomo Karasawa, trans. & ed., *The Old English Metrical Calendar (Menologium)* (D. S. Brewer, 2015). xi.

¹⁸ Susan Powell, ed., *John Mirk's Festial: edited from British Library MS Cotton Claudius A.II*, vol. 1 (Oxford University Press; The Early English Texts Society, 2009).

¹⁹ See Peck's edition of Gower's *Confessio Amantis*.

²⁰ Bocaccio also uses chronographia or periphrasis in his work, notably in the *Teseida*, but not to the extent that Chaucer does.

²¹ On Dante's cosmic imagery, see: Alison Cornish, 'Planets and Angels in *Paradiso* XXIX: the First Moment.' *Dante Studies* 108 (1990): 1-28.

Chaucer was engaged in a deeply critical response to Dante and influenced by his works, but as Karla Taylor notes, ‘Chaucer’s vision of the world differs enormously from Dante’s.’²² More than that, Chaucer’s celestial imagery differs significantly from Dante’s. Across the thirty-four instances of cosmic imagery in the *Commedia* for instance, Dante does not deviate from classical rhetorical conventions. In short, when it comes to the signs of the zodiac, descriptions of the seasons, stars or constellations, Dante is classical with a vernacular twist.

Chaucer’s Chronographiae

Chaucer reflects the Virgilian or Dantean style of chronographiae frequently in his own epic *Troilus and Criseyde*. There are ten chronographic passages in this tale of ancient Troy, and each conforms to classical standards. They mark the beginning of new sections and move sequentially, beginning in April’s Aries (I.155-161), then May’s Taurus (II.50), July’s Cancer (III.617-630), and August’s Leo (IV.31-2). Chaucer is diligently true to his ‘timescape’ even in small details. For instance, in *Troilus & Criseyde* only ancient timekeeping methods are mentioned (i.e., tracking celestial bodies through zodiacal houses and the movement of the sun and stars), nothing like the astrolabic contortions in the introduction to *The Man of Law’s Tale* (1-15).

Chaucer enhances the classical tone even further when he borrows the Latin term ‘signifer’ in *Troilus & Criseyde*. Criseyde is late, she has not appeared after ten days as she had promised, and this moment is described in lines V.1016-20 in which the moon has

²² Karla Taylor, *Chaucer Reads ‘The Divine Comedy’* (Stanford University Press, 1989), p. 2.

whirled out of the house of Leo. The passage is grandiloquent, matching the high pitch of Troilus's anguish, and Chaucer gilds the passage with aureation:

The brighte Venus folwede and ay taughte
 The wey ther brode Phebus down alighte;
 And Cynthea hire char-hors overraughte
 To whirle out of the Leoun, if she myghte;
And Signifer his candels sheweth brighte
 Whan that Criseyde unto hire bedde wente
 Inwith hire fadres faire brighte tente,
 V.1016-10222

There are no recorded instances of the term 'Signifer' in English before this instance.²³ This is likely Chaucer's invention in which he shortens the Latin term *signifer orbis* (or *signifier circulus*, *signifer polus*, 'the sign-bearing ecliptic'), to simply 'Signifer.'²⁴ Even here in Chaucer's most classical work, he inventively responds to his sources by personifying the zodiac as a type of male figure, carrying aloft his constellation 'candels.' This is a subtle - and new - kind of image.

While Chaucer is often innovative with chronographic conventions, sometimes he conforms entirely to expectations, such as the beginning of *The General Prologue*, as mentioned before. Like the *Commedia*, *The Canterbury Tales* begin in spring with Aries the Ram, Zephyrus and springtime in the *Prologue*. Another important primary source for Chaucer's opening is Guido delle Colonne's *Historia destructionis Troiae* (written 1287), which describes Aries and the new life of spring, which 'entice[s] eager mortals into the

²³ The term does not appear again in available sources until James I's *The Kingis Quair*. See *The Kingis Quair*, W. M. MacKenzie, ed. (Faber & Faber, 1939), 45-101, at 76. See entry for 'signifer' in the *Middle English Dictionary*, Robert E Lewis, ed. et al. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1952-2001). Online edition in *Middle English Compendium*, Frances McSparran, ed. et al. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Library, 2000-2018).

²⁴ See entry for 'Signifer, N., Etymology.' *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford UP, July 2023).

pleasant air.’²⁵ Chaucer rearranges the content to more closely resemble the hexameral order of creation in Genesis, however.²⁶ Aries is the first zodiac sign of the solar calendar in the western tradition, due to the vernal equinox in March. A ram is a fitting symbol for the month when ewes are lambing, and according to biblical lore, God created Adam.

In Macrobius’s horoscope of the world, the *Thema mundi*, the star of Bethlehem was also believed to have appeared in Aries.²⁷ He wrote that this sign was in midheaven on the world’s birthday, and thus Aries was held to be the first of all the signs, the ‘head of the world at the beginning of light.’²⁸ Aries is joined with the west wind Zephyrus to arouse the feeling of awakening springtime, fresh and new. This is a *reverdīe*, a re-greening, an invocation of the arrival of spring and open roads.²⁹ Arguably, there could be no better way to begin a literary journey.

The *Canterbury Tales* also close with an appropriate zodiac sign, the Scales of Libra in *The Parson’s Prologue* (10-11).³⁰ Libra is the opposite of Aries as the sign of the autumnal

²⁵ Guido de Columnis, *Historia Destructionis Troiae*, N. E. Griffin, ed. (Cambridge, 1936), p. 34-5: ‘incipit tempus blandiri mortalibus in aeris serenitate intentis.’ Guido delle Colonne, *Historia Destructionis Troiae*, M. F. Meek, trans. (Indiana University Press, 1974), p. 33-4.

²⁶ J. C. Nitzsche, ‘Creation in Genesis and Nature in Chaucer’s “General Prologue,” 1-18.’ *Papers on Language and Literature* 14 (1978): 461-3.

²⁷ Michael Molnar, *The Star of Bethlehem* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1999), p. 5.

²⁸ Macrobius, *Commentariorum in Somnium Scipionis*. Liber Primus, l.21, 23ff. James Willis, ed., *Volume 2 Commentarii in somnium Scipionis* (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 1994), p. 89: ‘Arietem in medio caelo fuisse, et quia medium caelum quasi mundi vertex est, Arietem propterea primum inter omnes habitum, qui ut mundi caput in exordio lucis apparuit.’ Similar ideas are expressed in Julius Firmicus Maternus’s *Matheseos*, III.1: Jean Rhys Bram, ed. & trans., *Ancient Astrology, Theory and Practice: Matheseos Libri VIII* (Park Ridge: Noyes, 1975). See also: Bede’s *De temporum ratione: Bedae opera de temporibus*, Charles. W. Jones, ed. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Mediaeval Academy of America, 1943), CC(SL), CXXII B.

²⁹ This is a medieval literary idiom with roots in classical literature, particularly Virgil, *Aeneid*, lines 887 – 895, Fagles’ edition p. 72.

³⁰ John North and Marijane Osborn, among many others, have used this chronographia to attempt to extract a calendrical date for the ending of the Canterbury pilgrimage. See her discussion of Libra in: *Time and the*

equinox, and the balanced scales refer to the balance of hours between night and day. The narrator's chronographia tells the reader that the sun is setting, only 29° against the horizon, and even shadows are 'equal of proporcioun' with his body (9).³¹ As a preface to the *Parson's Tale*, Libra also connotes the Scales of Justice and the weight of souls as overseen by the archangel Michael.³² These cosmic images work seamlessly to underscore the Parson's message about of the glorious final pilgrimage to celestial Jerusalem in lines 48-51.³³ The end of the pilgrimage is thus a time of reckoning, to consider sins and repent.³⁴ The characters are only on the edge of town, nearing their ultimate destination, which is a sort of allegory for the human condition in the Christian paradigm. In a more immediate and more playful context, the idea of judgement reminds the reader of the frame narrative: at the end of the pilgrimage, which tale was best?

These bookends to Chaucer's masterpiece thus fall in line with literary chronographiae generally. Ovid, Virgil, and Dante would applaud them. But Chaucer also entirely subverts expectations by placing chronographiae at unexpected points in a tale or by creating unusual combinations. He tweaks, customizes, and turns chronographiae

Astrolabe, chapter 10: 'Libra and the Moon.' Also, 'Chaucer's Dantean presentation of time in *The Canterbury Tales*: Libra and the Moon.' *Vistas in Astronomy* 39/4 (1995): 605-614. About the 'error' in Chaucer's temporal reckoning, I agree with the argument made by Krista Sue-Lo Twu, who writes: 'I would suggest that the symbolic eclipses the scientific.' 'Chaucer's Vision of the Tree of Life: Crossing the Road with the Rood in the 'Parson's Tale.' *The Chaucer Review* 39/4 (2005): 341-378, at 373.

³¹ Richard Peck, 'Number symbolism in the prologue to Chaucer's *Parson's Tale*.' *English Studies* 48 (1967): 205-215.

³² Jessica Savage, 'The Iconography of Michael the Archangel at the Feast of Michaelmas.' Princeton's Index of Medieval Art, Princeton University and the Department of Art & Archaeology, digital resource: < ima.princeton.edu/2019/09/30/the-iconography-of-michael-the-archangel-at-the-feast-of-michaelmas >.

³³ See Chauncey Wood's discussion of Libra and the Parson: *Ch...Country of Stars*, 272-97.

³⁴ About this passage Peter Travis writes: 'Whereas Harry's provides a secular measurement of quotidian time *in media res*, Chaucer's vision of time is numinous with signs of finality, judgement, and death.' Peter W. Travis, *Disseminal Chaucer: Rereading the Nun's Priest's Tale* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), p. 280.

upside down. How does subverting norms serve Chaucer's poetry? Defying readerly expectations marks deliberate choices, so what does this tell us about Chaucer's aims? In *The Franklin's Tale*, it tells us that Chaucer was remarkably sensitive to the geography of his settings, that visual art creatively impacted Chaucer's imaginative writing in demonstrable ways, and that chronographia need not only begin or end a tale but can provide a pivotal middle space, and it is thus to *The Franklin's Tale* that we turn to next.

Chronographia in *The Franklin's Tale*

An excellent instance of Chaucer's subversive chronographiae is at the dead centre of *The Franklin's Tale*, at lines 1243-1255. The passage merits special attention for a few reasons, partly because it interrupts the narrative flow as it changes the pace from hasty action to lyrical digression. It is an example of what Marion Turner calls Chaucer's 'threshold poetics': poetics comprised of two elements in tension with one another - haste and digression.³⁵ The focus shifts from the actions of the characters to a grander view of time and seasons, and the reader's imagination is invited to 'see' representations of wintertime. The central position of these lines in the tale is not an accident - they are as deliberately placed as Aries, Zephyrus and springtime in *The General Prologue*. I argue that they perform an important function to specify the time of year as the Twelve Days of Christmas, which carried significantly different connotations than it does today.³⁶

³⁵ Turner, *Ch...European Life*, 472.

³⁶ Helen Cooper, *Oxford Guides to Chaucer: The Canterbury Tales* (Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 235.

These lines are also distinctively visual. V. A. Kolve describes the passage as an ‘insistently visual verbal icon,’ much like a brightly painted roundel on a calendar page.³⁷ This imagery bridges the gap, as it were, between literary and material visions of time by drawing inspiration from the visual tradition, as will be shown. The passage describes winter in wonderfully vivid language, using astrological, alchemical, and mythological registers:

And this was, as thise bookes me remembre,
 The colde, frosty seson of Decembre.
 Phebus wax old, and hewed lyk laton,
 That in his hoote declynacion
 Shoon as the burned gold with stremes brighte;
 But now in Capricorn adoun he lighte,
 Where as he shoon ful pale, I dar wel seyn.
 The bittre frostes, with the sleet and reyn,
 Destroyed hath the grene in every yerd.
 Janus sit by the fyr, with double berd,
 And drynketh of his bugle horn the wyn;
 Biforn hym stant brawen of the tusked swyn,
 And ‘Nowel’ crieth every lusty man.
 (Lines 1243-1255)

My analysis of this passage will develop in two parts: first, I will provide a close reading of the text and show how it acts as a hinge in the narrative. Why does Chaucer specify the time between December and January at this point in the tale? Why does it matter that the Clerk of Orléans performs his magic at this time of year? How does it relate to temporality in the tale generally? Second, I consider the imagery of Capricorn, December and Janus as

³⁷ Kolve, *Telling Images II*, 107. See also: Derek Pearsall and Elizabeth Salter, *Landscapes and Seasons of the Medieval World* (London: The Garden City Press, 1973), p. 129–39. W. K. Wimsatt, *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (University Press of Kentucky, 1964, 1982), p. 25. Wimsatt’s definition of an icon is: ‘a free-standing artefact with its own inner coherence, a structure complete in itself which had within it all the linguistic signs needed for the contemplation of its meaning.’ David Lawton wrote that this passage is the ‘most extraordinary visual emblem’ in *The Franklin’s Tale: David Lawton, Voice in Later Medieval English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 160.

elements of a distinct visual icon. Rosemond Tuve was the first scholar to make the connection between Chaucer's verbal icon and the Labours of the Month motif (at least in modern print).³⁸ However, in the Labours of the Month tradition it is unusual to find the zodiac sign Capricorn paired with December and Janus in this way anywhere, and this has not been noted before. I therefore investigate Chaucer's rendition with a comparative survey of contemporary visual art of the Labours of the Month.

Ultimately, pursuing these questions in tandem illuminates unnoticed nuances of Chaucer's craft, exemplifies his creative use of chronographia, highlights the intermedial relationships between textual and visual images, and offers a different understanding of how magic operates in *The Franklin's Tale*. I argue that the Clerk of Orléans performs his magical feat along the Brittany coast during the Twelve Days of Christmas not because of certain tides or to produce a manufactured display as has been argued before, but because the time is right for inexplicable magic. Furthermore, I argue that Chaucer's visual icon reflects a very specific regional variety of Capricorn/December/Janus, and that this adds geographic specificity.

Oppositions and temporality in the tale of Dorigen and Aurelius

The Franklin's Tale revolves centrifugally around the characters Aurelius and Dorigen, who seem to be on opposite sides of Fortune's Wheel. When Dorigen is light and smiling, Aurelius is sick for love. Dorigen makes her rash promise on the 6th of May (906), and Aurelius succeeds in its fulfilment in the opposite season of winter. At the prospect of success through the clerk's 'magik natureel' (1125), Aurelius is ecstatic, and Dorigen is

³⁸ Rosemond Tuve, *Seasons and Months: Studies in a Tradition of Middle English Poetry* (Librairie Universitaire, 1933), p. 186.

plunged into despair.³⁹ Poetically, Aurelius' bleak December contrasts with Dorigen's playful May, when the garden was 'ful of leves and of floures' (906-8), which is a dichotomy sourced from Boccaccio's *Il Filocolo*.⁴⁰ The opposing tension of binaries is a recurring element throughout *The Franklin's Tale*, and it serves to increase the dramatic suspense. It further renders the domino-effect of releases at the resolution more satisfying.⁴¹

When the Franklin identifies his tale as a Breton *lai* (709-715), he is aligning it with a specific poetic genre of romance set in misty Celtic lands, usually 800-1200 lines long, such as those written by Marie de France (*fl.* 1160–1215).⁴² Concerning the 'timescape' in Breton *lais*, they mostly exist in a vaguely folktale time of legend and do not mention numerical days or specific months. Time is fluid rather than precise in these tales; heroes are gone for many years, events occur 'upon a day,' for example, the unfortunate twin in *Lay le Freine* is deposited at the convent on one 'winterlong night.'⁴³ This is one of the

³⁹ Concerning the promises made in the tale, see: Alan T. Gaylord, 'The Promises in *The Franklin's Tale*.' *ELH* 31 (1964): 331-65.

⁴⁰ Dominique Battles, 'Chaucer's "The Franklin's Tale" and Boccaccio's "Filocolo" Reconsidered.' *The Chaucer Review* 34/1 (1999): 38-59, at 54. John Finlayson, 'Invention and Disjunction: Chaucer's Rewriting of Boccaccio in the *Franklin's Tale*.' *English Studies* 89/4 (2008): 385–402. Kenneth A. Bleeth, 'The Rocks and the Garden: The Limits of Illusion in Chaucer's *Franklin's Tale*.' *English Studies* 74/2 (1993): 113–123. Douglas A. Burger, 'The *Cosa Impossibile* of *Il Filocolo* and the *Impossible* of the *Franklin's Tale*.' Chapter in: Leigh A. Arrathoon, ed., *Chaucer and the Craft of Fiction* (East Lansing: Solaris Press, 1986), p. 165-78.

⁴¹ Harry Berger, Jr. 'Pleasure and Responsibility in the *Franklin's Tale*.' Chapter in: Lee Patterson, ed., *Geoffrey Chaucer's The Canterbury Tales: a Casebook*, (New York, 2007): 137-60. Britton J. Harwood, 'Chaucer and the Gift (If There Is Any).' *Studies in Philology* 103.1 (2006): 26-46.

⁴² A. C. Baugh, ed., *A Literary History of England*, vol. 1 (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1948), p. 196. John B. Beston, 'How much was known of the Breton *lai* in fourteenth-century England?' Chapter in: Larry D. Benson, ed., *The Learned and the Lewed: Studies in Chaucer and Medieval Literature* (Harvard University Press, 1974), pp. 319-36. John Finlayson, 'Form of the Middle English Lay.' *Chaucer Review* 19 (1984-5): 352-68. Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury, *The Middle English Breton Lays* (TEAMS, Western Michigan University Press, 2001), see introduction. Kathryn Hume, 'Why Chaucer calls the *Franklin's Tale* a Breton Lai.' *Philological Quarterly* 51 (1972): 365-79. Leo M. Carruthers, *Reading the Middle English Breton Lays and Chaucer's Franklin's Tale* (Neuilly: Atlande, 2013).

⁴³ *Lay le Freine*, in: Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury, eds., *The Middle English Breton Lays* (Medieval Institute Publications, 1995; TEAMS online edition), line 149. This is a Middle English translation of Marie de France's late twelfth-century *Lai le Fresne*.

constituent elements of this genre of fiction, which Laskaya and Salisbury explain this way: ‘The fairytale beginnings disrupt ordinary perceptions of time and allow the audience to re-perceive the present by removing it from the events of the moment.’⁴⁴ This disruption of ordinary time is one of the defining aspects of the ‘enigmatic style’ of French romances in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.⁴⁵ Marie de France even addresses this style of intentional rhetorical, discursive, and interpretive obscurity in the prologue to her *lais* - she writes that ‘old authors’ speak ‘somewhat obscurely in their books.’⁴⁶

Breton lays thus rely on a general sense of atemporality, or at least a removal from perceived time into a realm of ‘fairy time,’ but Chaucer takes a different approach.⁴⁷ Indeed, Chaucer does not let the audience forget the time or season by placing hyper-precise temporal indicators throughout the tale.⁴⁸ Chaucer’s ‘timescape’ of *The Franklin’s Tale* is thus deliberately demarcated, and lines 1243-55 are its lengthiest signpost.

⁴⁴ Laskaya & Salisbury, *The Middle...Lays*, 6.

⁴⁵ Jeff Rider refers to the enigmatic nature of French romances as ‘a taste for, an aesthetic of, enigma, which was a central part of the twelfth-century French literary tradition.’ Jeff Rider, ‘The Enigmatic Style in Twelfth-Century French Literature.’ Chapter in: Lucie Dolezalová, Jeff Rider and Alessandro Zironi, eds., *Obscurity in Medieval Texts* (Krems 2013), pp. 49-62, p. 51. Michelle Sweeney, *Magic in Medieval Romance from Chrétien de Troyes to Chaucer* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000).

⁴⁶ ‘Custume fu as anciens,...Assez oscurement diseient.’ Marie de France, *Lais*, Jean Rychner, ed. (Paris: Champion, 1971), prologue 9-22, p. 1-2.

⁴⁷ Boccaccio has a similar overarching temporal framework in *Il Filocolo*, but Chaucer’s is more specific. Helen Cooper comments on this, ‘Winter is also placed at the centre point of the tale, whether for reasons to do with such a cycle or simply as a leftover from Boccaccio’s midwinter garden; that Chaucer both keeps and elaborates the seasonal reference indicates that its presence is not mere chance. His winter, moreover, looks both ways.’ *Oxford Guides to Chaucer*, 235. For a different take on temporality in *Franklin’s Tale*, see: Seeta Chaganti, ‘Terpsichorean Form: Geoffrey Chaucer’s *Franklin’s Tale* and Robert Smithson’s *Spiral Jetty*.’ Chapter in: Robert J Meyer-Lee and Catherine Sanok, eds., *The Medieval Literary: Beyond Form* (Boydell & Brewer, 2018), pp. 185-211.

⁴⁸ The closest analogue in a Breton *lai* that I have uncovered appears in *Sir Orfeo*: ‘Bifel so in the comessing of May / When miri and hot is the day, / And oway beth winter schours, / And everi feld is ful of flours, / And blosme breme on everi bough’ lines 57-61. *Sir Orfeo*, in Laskaya and Salisbury, *The Middle English Breton Lays*. Chaucer’s consistent experimentation with temporality in his narrative forms also urge close attention to indicators of time in his texts, see: Strohm, *Social Chaucer*, 112. Also: Adler & Strohm, *Alle Thyng Hath Tyme*.

As mentioned earlier, our passage occurs in the exact middle of the tale and presents an abrupt change of pace in the text. At this point, Aurelius has made his own rash promise of a thousand pounds due to the magician if he can clear the rocks from the shore. Aurelius and company make a brisk departure from Orléans in lines 1239-1242:

Upon the morwe, whan that it was day,
To Britaigne tooke they the righte way,
Aurelius and this magician bisyde,
And been descended ther they wolde abyde.

In this instance, *righte* means ‘direct’ or ‘immediately,’ reflecting Aurelius’s confidence and haste.⁴⁹ Rather than straightway proceeding to the events in Pedmark, Chaucer chooses to engage the audience in meticulous mental imaging, or what Mary Carruthers calls ‘mental painting...a feature of trained recollection, even when one may be ‘recollecting’ an experience recorded in someone else’s words.’⁵⁰ Specifically, this mental painting is chronographic. Two Roman deities are mentioned, Phebus and Janus, as well as the zodiacal goat-fish Capricorn, and a description of the bitter cold of winter. This chronographia is what D. P. Fowler terms a ‘set-piece description,’ the type ‘regularly seen by narratologists as the paradigm example of narrative pause.’⁵¹ This passage can thus be identified as a chronographic set-piece description creating a narrative pause which activates the reader’s sensual imagination. With this in mind, in the following section I

⁴⁹ See definition 1a of ‘right(e)’ in: *Middle English Dictionary*.

⁵⁰ Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: a Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge University Press, second edition 2008), p. 75.

⁵¹ D. P. Fowler, ‘Narrative and Describe: The Problem of Ekphrasis.’ *The Journal of Roman Studies* 81 (1991): 25-35, at 25. Also: Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (University of Toronto Press, 2009), pp. 35-41.

analyse each line in the passage in turn, considering how they relate to overarching themes in the tale and why they matter for the ending.

Astrology and alchemy in the Franklin's language

Reflecting the underlying dichotomies throughout the tale itself, lines 1245-55 are weighted with oppositions.⁵² 'Phebus wax old, and hewed lyk laton, / That in his hoothe declynacion / Shoon as the burned gold with stremes brighte.' Here the sun is at its lowest point at winter solstice in December, opposite the summer solstice in June when the sun is at its highest declination in the sign of Cancer. The mention of 'laton' and 'burned gold' introduces ideas of metals and alchemical changes, since 'lato(u)n' is an alloy of copper and tin (the 'dross of gold,' almost worthless), and gold is associated with the most auspicious masculine powers, to Jupiter and the life-giving sun.⁵³ This simile recasts the disc of the sun in reflective metals, which elegantly describes the sun's actual appearance in the sky in summer and winter and the quality of its light. This touches on ideas of transmutation, of cyclical annual movement, and natural processes which alter the appearance of things. This also chimes with a subtheme of transformation running through *The Franklin's Tale*, first introduced by the Franklin himself in his preamble about the nature

⁵² Steele Nowlin writes about the 'key conceptual binaries' in FranT such as social and moral *gentillesse*, earnest and play, word and deed, reality and illusion: 'Between Precedent and Possibility: Liminality, Historicity, and Narrative in Chaucer's 'The Franklin's Tale.' *Studies in Philology* 103/1 (2006): 47-67. See also Gillian Rudd's discussion of gender dichotomies in the tale: Gillian Rudd, 'Making the Rocks Disappear: Refocusing Chaucer's Knight's and Franklin's Tales.' Chapter in: John Parham, ed., *The Environmental Tradition in English Literature* (Routledge, 2002), pp. 117-129, at 126-129.

⁵³ From Revelations 1:15; in the Wycliffite Bible c. 1385, 'His feet lijke to drosse of gold, or latoun.' Alchemical associations are recorded in texts such as the pseudo-Aristotelian Arabic treatise *Kitab Sirr Al-Asrar* (The Book of the Secret of Secrets) of the tenth century, later translated in the mid-thirteenth century by Philip of Tripoli as *Secreta secretorum*. William Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature: Books of Secrets in Medieval and Early Modern Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 45-53.

of love. He speaks of changing complexions through ‘ire, siknesse, or constellacioun’ (781), alluding to Galenic theories of the humors.⁵⁴

There is also the spectre of alchemical themes in the vocabulary in the tale, especially with colour symbolism. Alexander Gabrovsky offers an alchemical interpretation in which the black rocks are the *prima materia* which must be fundamentally altered to achieve certain ends.⁵⁵ He writes, ‘Like the four known essential attributes of alchemical theory – “Sun and Moone, Erth and Water” – the Franklin’s *Sun* (Apollo) and *Moon* (Lucina), *Earth* (the black rocks) and *Water* (the tidal flood) all equally constitute the raw materials required for transformation, and Chaucer connects these by a complicated process of celestial influence and alchemical change.’⁵⁶ He further sees Dorigen as the catalyst that initiates true change of the rocks, drawing from instances when Chaucer’s register takes on an alchemical hue. For instance, Dorigen’s physical complexion changes when she learns that the shore has been cleared of rocks, she turns white with astonishment and fear: ‘In al hir face nas a drope of blood’ (1340). Alchemy and its sister art, astrology, provide rich vocabularies for Chaucer through which he explores time and transformation, as our passage also shows.

⁵⁴ It was generally believed that an individual’s temperament or physical state could be altered invisibly through celestial influences. Edward Grant, ‘Cosmology.’ Chapter in: David C. Lindberg, ed. *Science in the Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp. 265-302. Jack Hartnell, Jack, *Medieval Bodies: Life, Death and Art in the Middle Ages* (London: Wellcome Collection, 2018, 2019), p. 13.

⁵⁵ For more on the ‘grisly feendly rokkes blake’ (868), see: Kellie Robertson, ‘Exemplary Rocks.’ Chapter in: Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, ed., *Animal, Vegetable, Mineral* (Punctum Books, 2012), 91-121, at 105-6. Also: Warren Ginsberg, ‘Gli scogli neri e il niente che c’e’: Dorigen’s Black Rocks and Chaucer’s Translation in Italy.’ Chapter in: Robert M. Stein and Sandra Pierson Prior, eds, *Reading Material Culture: Essays in Honor of Robert W. Hanning* (Notre Dame Press, 2005), pp. 387-408. John B. Friedman, ‘Dorigen’s ‘Grisly Rokkes Blake’ Again.’ *Chaucer Review* 31 (1996): 133-44.

⁵⁶ Alexander N. Gabrovsky, *Chaucer the Alchemist: Physics, Mutability, and the Medieval Imagination* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 105-6.

The binary oppositions continue and intensify in line 1248: ‘But now in Capricorn adoun he lighte, / Where as he shoon ful pale, I dar wel seyn.’ Capricorn is a feminine, cold and wet sign of the winter solstice, and while it may be calendrically opposite of Cancer, they share some iconographic similarities. Both Cancer and Capricorn are associated with the sea and sailing fleets, because the signs for both relate to the ocean: a crab and a goat-fish.⁵⁷ This astrological coordination serves to emphasize the opposing outcomes that Dorigen and Aurelius desire from the sea. Dorigen desires the safe return of her husband (852-854), and Aurelius prays to Apollo to slow the course of the moon so that high tides will cover the rocks for two years (1058-61).

Aurelius seems to believe that if only the moon could remain in opposition to the sun, the tides will remain at maximum volume (1065-1070). The desires of Dorigen and Aurelius are thus opposed, and their internal desires externalized in the zodiac signs Cancer and Capricorn and their astrological associations. The first lines of our passage accomplish two things, then: they establish the time of year as December, and they contrast the characters’ irreconcilable desires with seasons and signs.

In the next lines, 1250-1, Chaucer’s mental painting describes the natural world and recalls a feeling of cold darkness. ‘The bittre frostes, with the sleet and reyn, / Destroyed hath the grene in every yerd.’ Appropriate to its cold zodiac sign, when the sun is in Capricorn, northwestern Europe is drenched in freezing sleet and rain. Nothing remains of summer’s green; in fact, it has been ‘destroyed.’ The message is clear: this is no time to

⁵⁷ Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, II.7, p. 172-173.

frolic in a love garden in the sunshine, but a dark time, the midnight of the earth's annual day.

Then the imagery shifts from rain to fire, from outdoors to indoors, and we are introduced to Janus, 1252-3: 'Janus sit by the fyr, with double berd, / And drynketh of his bugle horn the wyn.'⁵⁸ By including Janus, the narrative's action is not squarely in December, but rather in the liminal period *between* December and January. January is indeed named after Janus, the Roman god of beginnings, gates, transitions, time, duality, doorways, passages, and endings.⁵⁹ He has a 'double berd' for his doubled face, one looking to the future and one at the past. Since the Roman era, he was imagined as presiding over mid-wintertime between calendar years. Janus is described by Ovid in his *Fasti* as sitting at heaven's gate, monitoring the movements of the gods and of time, the porter at the threshold and guardian of all.⁶⁰

Not only is the time then established as between December and January, but the festive call 'Nowel!' (1255) can further specify the time as the Twelve Days of Christmas,

⁵⁸ There are even visual parallels between bearded Janus and his feasting table and the Franklin himself, as he is described in the *General Prologue*. He is a landowner, a 'vavasour' (360), whose hall is always open to others, where 'It snewed in his hous of mete and drynke' (345). Cooper, *Oxford Guides*, 45. Henrick Specht, *Chaucer's Franklin in the Canterbury Tales: the Social and Literary Background of a Chaucerian Character* (Publications of the Department of English, University of Copenhagen, 10, 1981). Roy J. Percy, 'Chaucer's Franklin and the Literary Vavasour.' *The Chaucer Review* 8 (1973-4): 33-59. Jill Mann, *Chaucer and Estates Satire* (Cambridge University Press, 1973), p. 29, 152-9.

⁵⁹ There was no Greek equivalent of this god, Janus was a Roman creation. Traditionally, it is believed that the Roman king Numa Pompilius revised the Republican calendar to replace March with January as the beginning of the year, and this reform continued through the Julian and Gregorian calendars. In the Middle Ages, the liturgical year began in January because it comes after Advent. Until 1753 in Britain, the numerical year date did not change until March 25, called the 'Lady Day Style' of calendrical reckoning. C. R. Cheney, *Handbook for Dates for Students of English History* (M. Jones, 1945; 2000). A. Tikkanen, 'Why Does the New Year Start on January 1?' *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (December 28, 2018) online resource. Kolve includes more information on Roman traditions of January and Janus in *Telling Images II*, 97-101.

⁶⁰ Ovid, *Fasti*, l.117-127.

the holidays between Christmas and Epiphany.⁶¹ The senses are aroused with scents, tastes, and sounds in the lines 1253-5: sizzling boar's meat is presented upon a great table with red wine in a bugle-horn, in a room full of cheerful folk. 'Biforn hym stant brawen of the tusked swyn, / And 'Nowel', crieth every lusty man.' The whole passage of 1243-1255 reflects how Yuletide celebrations themselves unfolded: the sun enters Capricorn, the weather is bitter, and summer's green is destroyed, so it is time to move indoors to celebrate the holidays.

Nicholas Orme describes medieval English festivities as operating under 'Christmas Rule,' a special time of year for food and games, singing, drama, and dancing.⁶² On the elite end of the social spectrum, wealthy households spent lavishly on Christmas festivities, particularly in the court of Edward III. Despite the plague's ongoing rampage across Europe in December 1348, Edward held magnificent Christmas festivities in Otford. Fully spangled in silver, Edward wore new armour for himself and his horse, and his many guests dressed in costumes with lion and elephant heads, along with 'wodewoses' (wildmen of the woods) and bat wings.⁶³ Fantastical tales of chivalric deeds, wild mythical creatures, and battles won in shining plate armour were thus all anticipated fare during Edward III's Twelve Days

⁶¹ Steele Nowlin sees this passage as presenting specifically Christian imagery: 'If Janus looking both backwards and forwards is to be read as a symbol for potential rebirth, then the Christmas imagery - Janus, the 'bugle horn,' the 'tusked swyn,' and the cry of 'Nowel' - implied in this passage initiates that rebirth. Because Janus looks simultaneously to the past and to the future, the Christian symbolism in the tale works at a temporal level.' Nowlin, 'Between Precedent and Possibility,' at 62. Chauncey Wood takes a negative stance on this chronographia, writing: 'But the worst feature of the periphrasis is that it is temporally indistinct, for whereas the Merchant's periphrasis defined the time of year within a few days, this passage refers to the sun's entrance into Capricorn (December 12), to the month of December by name, to the month of January by implication, and to Christmas (December 25) or perhaps to the whole Christmas feasting period, which lasted into January, with the cry of Noel.' Wood, *Ch...Country of Stars*, p. 95.

⁶² Nicholas Orme, *Going to Church in Medieval England* (Yale University Press, 2021), p. 258.

⁶³ Ian Mortimer, *The Perfect King: the Life of Edward III, Father of the English Nation* (Random House, 2010), p. 262. The National Archives E372/207, m.50; E101/391/15.

feasts.⁶⁴ Richard II continued with such traditions, holding courtly feasts and festivities during the Christmas season, granting lavish gifts and preparing spectacles.⁶⁵ These stylish *entremets* with costumes and music were considered marvels themselves and popular across Europe.⁶⁶

The Twelve Days of Christmas were a time of year in which the aesthetic, the social, and the mythic were conflated, when ghost stories were told and the barrier between the natural and supernatural was thinnest.⁶⁷ It was also a particularly powerful time to make weather forecasts. Many Latin, Anglo-Saxon, and French manuscripts written between the 10-15th centuries record astrometeorological predictions according to the weather during this specific time of the year, drawing on older Roman solstitial traditions.⁶⁸ This was the time for making prognostications based on dominical Sundays and feast days for the coming year, and for identifying which days would be auspicious or otherwise for certain activities. In his study of pre-Reformation holiday practices, Eamon Duffy stated that during Twelve Days celebrations ‘Even astrology, within certain limits, was permitted and

⁶⁴ See the Christmas chapter in: T. K. Hervey and Renee Ward, *King Arthur’s Court; or, The Feasts of Camelot: with the Tales That Were Told There*, part of The Camelot Project, 2013, online resource.

⁶⁵ Saul, *Richard II*, 231, 344-6, 338-9.

⁶⁶ Christina Normore, *A Feast for the Eyes: Art, Performance, and the Late Medieval Banquet* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015), see p. 124-126. On the reception of ‘marvels’ and their perceived ‘realness’ in medieval literature, see: Michelle Karnes, ‘The Possibilities of Medieval Fiction.’ *New Literary History* 51/1 (2020): 209-228. Jacqueline Arnaud and Xavie Garnier, *Le réalisme merveilleux* (Paris: Harmattan, 1998).

⁶⁷ Elizabeth D. Kirk, “‘Wel Bycommes Such Craft Upon Cristmasse’”: the Festive and the Hermeneutic in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.’ *Arthuriana* 4/2 (1994): 93-137; at 108, 111.

⁶⁸ Several manuscripts contain predictions about the weather for winter and summer depending on the day of the week upon which Christmas falls and Lent begins: London: British Library, MS Harleian 3017, fols. 63r-64v (10th century); Munich: Latin MS 6382 *Codex Latinus Monacensis, Supputatio Esdrae*, fol. 42 (11th century); Vatican: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana MS 235, fol. 39 (10th-11th centuries); London: British Library, MS Egerton 821, fol. 1r (12th century); Munich, Latin MS 9921, *Codex Latinus Monacensis* fol. 10r-21r (12th century); London: British Library, MS Sloane 475, fol. 217r (11th century); Cambridge: Cambridge University, Trinity College MS O.2.5, fol. 148 (14th century); Cambridge, Emmanuel College, MS 70, fol. 78v-79, fol. 65v, 74v (15th century).

endorsed.⁶⁹ This is evident in manuscripts which make predictions based on meteorological events of the Twelve Days of Christmas, sometimes called *Supputatio Esdrae*, the signs which God revealed through Esdras.⁷⁰

The ties between astrology and the Twelve Days of Christmas may not be as obvious now as they were in the Middle Ages, so it is worth mentioning the role of the three Magi and the Star of Bethlehem. The Feast of Epiphany and Twelve Days of Christmas had astrological dimensions from their earliest inception into the Latin Christian calendar because they evolved from Roman solstitial celebrations, and were later influenced by Byzantine services.⁷¹ The story of the Magi may only appear in a handful of verses in only one of the four Gospels (Matthew 2), but the Feast of Epiphany became a star (so to speak) of the religious calendar, eclipsing Christmas in its splendour.⁷² The Magi were not only kings but astrologers, following a star to the nativity of the living God.⁷³ The related liturgical rites, *Officia Stellae*, vary by location and period but share some similar festive structures

⁶⁹ Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars* (Yale University Press, 1992, second edition, 2005), see 'Seasons and Signs,' p. 49.

⁷⁰ Predictions made based on the weather of the Twelve Days of Christmas are recorded in the following manuscripts: Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France nouv. acq. 1616, fol. 12v. (9th century); Oxford: Bodleian MS Digby 86, fols. 32-4 (13th century): 'Prognosticatio ex vento in nocte Natalis Domini,' and fol. 40v-41r: 'Les singnes del jour de Nouel.' See also László Sándor Chardonnens, *Anglo-Saxon Prognostics, 900-1100: Study and Texts* (Leiden: Brill, 2007): 114-125. Marilina Cesario, 'An English Source for a Latin Text? Wind Prognostication in Oxford, Bodleian, Hatton 115 and Ashmole 345.' *Studies in Philology* 112/ 2 (Spring, 2015): 213-233, at 216.

⁷¹ Richard C. Trexler, *The Journey of the Magi: Meanings in History of a Christian Story* (Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 9-12, 45.

⁷² Karl Young, *The Drama of the Medieval Church*, vol. II (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933; 1967): Christmas was 'unexpectedly meagre,' and the plays of the Magi for Epiphany 'decidedly more impressive,' p. 29.

⁷³ Trexler, *Journey of the Magi*, 58-63, 78. Brent Landau, *Revelation of the Magi* (New York: Harper One, 2010), 1-35; Molnar, *The Star of Bethlehem*, p. 5.

in which the Star of Bethlehem was sometimes illustrated as painted stars hung in the church apse or as part of a procession.⁷⁴

John Mirk (active in the late 14th and early 15th centuries in Shropshire) expands on the Feast of Epiphany in his *Festial* and gives an impression of the kind of rhetoric surrounding this holiday in devotional spaces. In his ready-to-preach sermon for this day he narrates the tale of the Magi, who are kings of distinctive lineage blessed with foreknowledge about the star of the nativity.⁷⁵ Many nights they came together to discuss this star and astronomy, and when it appeared it shone brighter than the sun and glowed ever before them on their journey to Bethlehem.⁷⁶ This time of the year, then, was one in which to contemplate prophecies, stars, and the fate of humankind in the Christian dispensation.

The Clerk of Orléans and the internal folklore of *The Franklin's Tale*

The Clerk of Orléans is not a royal Magus, but a type of wizard or fairy character; he may reside in an actual place, collegiate Orléans, but he has clearly mastered supernatural powers.⁷⁷ This is evident in the brothers' first encounter with him on the road, where he appears suddenly already knowing their purpose, as if he were expecting their arrival. He is

⁷⁴ Sebastião Pestana, *Auto de los Reyes Magos: Texto castellano anónimo do seculo XII* (Lisboa: Ed. da Revista Ocidente 1965), p. 105. Theodor Göllner, 'The Three-Part Gospel Reading and the Medieval Magi Play.' *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 24/1 (Spring 1971): 51-62. Bridget Ann Henisch, *The Medieval Calendar Year* (Penn State University Press, 1999), p. 160, 181, 218. Dunbar H. Ogden, *The Staging of Drama in the Medieval Church* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2002), p. 67-68. Barbara Reid, 'The Feast of Epiphany.' *Bible Today* 56/1 (2018): 37-43, esp. 39. For the celebration of Epiphany at Chartres, see Fassler, *Virgin*, 17, 326, and appendix D. Nicasio Salvador Miguel, *Teatro Medieval* (Madrid: La Muralla, 1973): 24-34.

⁷⁵ Mirk's *Festial*, p. 47.

⁷⁶ Mirk's *Festial*, lines 16-35.

⁷⁷ On Orléans in the tale, see: Barbara Janina Kowalik, 'The Men and Woman Behind the *Franklin's Tale*.' *The Chaucer review* 57/2 (2022): 162-189.

not within the city walls of Orléans but waiting beyond, alone. His first words are portentous, “I knowe,” quod he, “the cause of youre coming” (1176). This is his first ‘wonder,’ how could he possibly know of their coming? This is also the first intrusion of magic into this romance - before this point nothing supernatural has occurred. The tale even reflects reality to a surprising degree: Pedmark is a real place, the shores are indeed littered with jagged black rocks, and everything follows the laws governing the actual world.⁷⁸

Since this is the case many scholars have asked: what does the clerk *do* in his library spectacle, and then along the shoreline?⁷⁹ What is Chaucer’s describing, exactly? Is it magic or fakery? For example, Anthony Luengo considers the clerk’s performance as part of a theatre of illusion based in science, and Laura Hibbard Loomis compares the clerk’s fictional display in his library with the actual stage magic performed at the great feast given in 1378 by Charles V.⁸⁰ Mary Flowers Braswell discusses the illusions produced in the clerk’s house in relation to automata, suggesting perhaps that Chaucer was describing an elaborate mechanical display.⁸¹ Still further, the prohibited forms of divination and illusion-

⁷⁸ Shannon Godlove, ““Engelond” and “Armorik Briteyne””: Reading Brittany in Chaucer’s *Franklin’s Tale*.’ *The Chaucer Review* 51/3 (2016): 269–294. Peter J. Lucas, ‘The setting in Brittany of Chaucer’s *Franklin’s Tale*.’ *Poetica* 33 (1991): 19-29.

⁷⁹ For an up-to-date summary of some of these arguments, see: Martha W. Driver, ‘Chaucer the Mage: a Brief Exploration of Magic in the *Squire’s Tale*, the *Canon’s Yeoman’s Tale*, and the *Franklin’s Tale*.’ *The Chaucer Review* 58/3–4 (2023): 389–402, esp. 400-402. Russell A. Peck, ‘Sovereignty and the Two Worlds of the *Franklin’s Tale*.’ *Chaucer Review* 1 (1967): 270.

⁸⁰ Anthony E. Luengo, ‘Magic and Illusion in “The Franklin’s Tale.”’ *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 77/1 (1978): 1-16. Laura Hibbard Loomis, “Secular Dramatics in the Royal Palace, Paris, 1378, 1389, and Chaucer’s ‘Tregetoures’” *Speculum* 33 (1958): 242–55y

⁸¹ Mary Flowers Braswell, ‘The Magic of Machinery: a Context for Chaucer’s “Franklin’s Tale.”’ *Mosaic: an Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* 18/2 (1985): 101-110. See also Elly Truitt’s discussions on mechanical marvels and feasting: Elly Rachel Truitt, *Medieval Robots: Mechanism, Magic, Nature, and Art* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), see chapter 5.

making of the clerk's productions is explored by Kurtis B. Haas.⁸² Rachel Linn Shields offers a thoughtful study on how oceanic patterns may have shaped the form of *The Franklin's Tale*, arguing that the 'narrative cycles have a more environmental basis,' considering the specific tidal range along the coast of Brittany.⁸³

At this point it is helpful to think of Chaucer as a 'world-builder,' in the sense that the scholar James Wade identifies. In his study of the supernatural in medieval romances, Wade draws from the 'possible worlds theory' of Lubomír Doležal, Claude Bremond and others to describe the fantastical otherworld of medieval romances.⁸⁴ He writes that mental activities such as storytelling create an infinite number of possible worlds that are distinct from the 'actual world' but also reflect it. Specifically, he writes that medieval romances 'contain their own unique entities (characters, objects, places) and organizing principles (spatiotemporal relations and event and action sequences), and thus present a world as, Ruth Ronen describes, with its own 'self-sufficient system of structures and relations.'⁸⁵ Wade builds on this to define what he calls 'internal folklore' of medieval

⁸² Kurtis B. Haas, 'The Franklin's Tale and the Medieval "Trivium": a Call for Critical Thinking.' *Journal of English and German Philology* 106/1 (Jan 2007): 45-63; at 55.

⁸³ Rachel Linn Shields, 'Abiding Tides: Oceanic Influences on Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Franklin's Tale*.' *The Yearbook of English Studies* 53/1 (2023): 21-35, at 23 and 32. She notes, p. 21-2: 'The plot of *The Franklin's Tale* advances in ways that also suggest tidal cycles as an underlying structure. This does not mean that gravitational forces are the primary explanation of how the tale operates, nor does it preclude other influences, such as the genre demands of the romance and folklore. However, taken together, the following instances of tidal effects in the tale suggest that environmental patterns may exert some influence, and that literary forms can be pulled into certain shapes by their environment of origin, much as the earth's bodies of water are tugged at by the moon and sun.'

⁸⁴ Lubomír Doležal, *Heterocosmica: Fiction and Possible Worlds* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998). Claude Bremond, 'The Logic of Narrative Possibilities.' *New Literary History* 11 (1980): 387-411.

⁸⁵ James Wade, *Fairies in Medieval Romance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 2. Ruth Ronen, *Possible Worlds in Literary Theory* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 8.

romances, a world-within-worlds model in which each text creates its own imaginary world with its own rules.

Of course, when applied to Chaucer's works there are many ways in which this can function. *The Franklin's Tale* is nested within the larger bibliocosm of *The Canterbury Tales*, which is indeed unique and operates in its own fashion. The tales interrelate and each tale can be considered singly or together. For the purposes of this study, I consider *The Franklin's Tale* as its own intrinsic text-world following its own internal logic as Chaucer's idiosyncratic take on a Breton lay. Artfully experimenting with chronographia is one of Chaucer's most precise tools in his world-building.

Wade explains that applying the concept of internal folklore provides a critical inroad for analysing the unique construction of fictional worlds, especially when it comes to supernatural marvels.⁸⁶ I argue that in the internal folklore of *the Franklin's Tale*, then, the Clerk is a powerful magician, full stop.⁸⁷ In this text-world there are no certain explanations offered for magic, which is acceptable in the romance genre. What the Clerk performs is more than mere illusion, it is magic. Otherwise, how could he predict Aurelius's arrival, conjure the spectral Dorigen dancing in the library, or make the shore appear entirely clear of rocks?⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Wade, *Fairies...Romance*, 3.

⁸⁷ This is a different stance than that offered by Corinne Saunders, who writes: 'That this is an illusion, "an apparence or jogelrye" (1265), as the Franklin terms it, is important: the clerk's powers are limited, not involving "nigromancie" of the kind that is forbidden in the *Parson's Tale*, but rather the exploitation of natural forces.' Corinne Saunders, 'Subtle Crafts: Magic and Exploitation in Medieval English Romance.' Chapter in: Laura Ashe, Ivana Djordjevic and Judith Weiss, eds., *The Exploitations of Medieval Romance* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 108 – 124, at 112.

⁸⁸ Karnes, 'The Possibilities of Medieval Fiction,' 218-220. Kolve, 'Rocky Shores,' 165-95.

Chaucer's descriptions of the library performance may resemble contemporary Christmas spectacles like those at the court of Edward III or Charles V (magic may have affinities with the 'actual world'), but the magic performed on the beach is simply unaccountable. However, it conforms to the internal folklore of the text, and the narrator only vaguely (and uncertainly) connects this magic with astrology and calculations of time. This assertion is further supported by a close look at what the Franklin actually offers as an explanation of the magic, which is at once complicated and nonsensical. Prefacing the event itself, the Franklin puts forward a lengthy account of the astrological calculations of the 'subtil clerk.' Lines 1261-1296 report the magician's 'magyk natureel' with a piling up of 'termes of astrologye' (1266), language explicitly associated with specialized knowledge.⁸⁹

The Franklin does not approve of this kind of magic, he derides it as 'his japes and his wrecchednesse / Of swich a supersticious cursednesse' (1271-2). Rhyming 'jogelrye' with 'astrologye' (1265-6) particularly underlines the Franklin's misgivings.⁹⁰ Upon closer inspection however, lines 1273-1279 are merely a list of astrological tools and paraphernalia, and do not provide a substantive elucidation of procedures. Indeed, J. D. North dismisses these lines as 'a cloud of meaningless astrological dust.'⁹¹

The language is certainly obscure. For instance, lines 1281-2 read: 'He knew ful wel how fer Alnath was shove / Fro the heed of thilke fixe Aries above.' Comparing the position of Alnath in the constellation Aries can be used to decipher the precession of the

⁸⁹ Moore, 'Everyday English in late medieval England,' 199. Chaganti, 'Terpsichorean Form,' 187.

⁹⁰ On the 'art of the disclaimer' and rhetoric in this context, see: Driver, 'Chaucer the Mage,' 389-402. Pearsall, *Canterbury Tales*, 150.

⁹¹ North, *Chaucer's Universe*, 439. Bachman, "'To maken illusioun,'" 63. Brown & Butcher, *Age of Saturn*, 65-113.

equinoxes (today usually called axial precession), but there is no clear utility for this subtle calculation in making illusions. Here the Franklin impresses upon his audience the level of learning the Clerk has mastered, such as degrees of equinoctial precession. Seb Falk offers the possibility that this astrological passage paints the Franklin's character as old-fashioned and conservative, especially by mentioning the Toledan Tables (1273) which were obsolete by Chaucer's time.⁹² In short, Chaucer may have written lines 1261-1296 to reflect the Franklin's character more than the clerk's magic.

At first lines 1285-1296 seem to allude to a series of complicated trigonometric calculations and technical operations, but the passage only really describes the initial steps in creating an election horoscope. This requires deciphering the first mansion of the moon in its ascendant position for a specific time and place, then calculating the position of the planets in zodiacal domiciles.⁹³ This is something that can be done easily with a (non-magical) astrolabe and calendar tables. But the language obscures and complicates the operations with synonyms. The anaphoric phrases 1286-1292 are repetitive in form as well as substance, mentioning mansions twice as a rhyming word, and they describe only the initial calculations for the position of the moon. There is nothing explicitly magical about these computations, and no explanation is provided about how the magician *uses* this knowledge to produce an illusion.⁹⁴

Nevertheless, scholars have tried to account for the clerk's magic; how is it possible that 'for a wyke or tweye, / It semed that alle the rokkes were awaye' (1295-6)? North

⁹² Falk, *Light Ages*, 243.

⁹³ North, *Horoscopes in History*, part 1.1-5.

⁹⁴ Collette, 'Seeing and Believing,' 395-410.

attempts to extract a specific date on which the tides could have submerged all the rocks along the shore of Brittany: could it have been Christmas or New Year's Day in 1386, or 1387?⁹⁵ Chauncey Wood makes a close investigation of the tides: does the clerk coordinate his trick with naturally occurring solstitial tides?⁹⁶ Is the clerk misusing scientific knowledge to dupe Aurelius and Dorigen, to make an easy thousand pounds?⁹⁷ D. W. Robertson writes that the 'magic' was nothing more than calculating when the rocks will be covered with the tide, whereas Helen Cooper contends that the text does not support such an interpretation.⁹⁸

I suggest that the answer may be found by considering the preceding zodiacal passage as a guide, which prepares the audience to accept inexplicable magic by situating the events in the Twelve Days of Christmas. We are not meant to understand how the clerk's magic along the coastline is accomplished; clearing the rocks from the shore of Pedmark could not have been a manufactured or planned display.⁹⁹ Even the Franklin's discussion of the magic indicates that there are enigmatic forces at work, 'as hethen folk

⁹⁵ North, *Chaucer's Universe*, 429-435. This was further explored by Marijane Osborn, who posited that Chaucer was referring to a real high tide of 1340: Osborn, *Time and the Astrolabe*, 201. See also: Shields, 'Abiding Tides,' p. 21-35.

⁹⁶ Wood, *Chaucer...Stars*, p. 259.

⁹⁷ Lisa M. C. Weston, 'Curious Clerks: Image Magic and Chaucerian Poetics.' Chapter in: Albrecht Classen, ed., *Magic and Magicians in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Time: the Occult in pre-Modern Sciences, Medicine, Literature, Religion, and Astrology* (Walter de Gruyter, 2017), pp. 489-505; from p. 494: 'Troubling any clear answer as to how the clerk makes the rocks disappear, mystifying his craft, it allows even the possibility that he cunningly (or cynically) passes off as magic what is actually an ability to predict something natural.' Also: Joyce Tally Lionarons, 'Magic, Machines, and Deception: Technology in 'The Canterbury Tales.' *The Chaucer Review* 27/4 (1993): 377-86.

⁹⁸ Cooper, *Oxford Guides*, 239. D. W. Robertson, Jr. *A Preface to Chaucer: Studies in Medieval Perspective* (Princeton, 1962), 276. Chauncey Wood, 'Of Time and Tide in the *Franklin's Tale*.' *Philological Quarterly* 45 (1966): 688-711.

⁹⁹ Collette, 'Seeing and Believing.' Sandra J. McEntire, 'Illusions and Interpretation in the "Franklin's Tale."' *The Chaucer Review* 31/2 (1996): 145-63.

useden in thilke days' (1293).¹⁰⁰ In the fictional text-world of *The Franklin's Tale*, the clerk produces real magic: for two weeks or more it seemed that the rocks were completely gone.¹⁰¹

Chaucer's formula – Christmas and an ensuing sorcerous spectacle – is not unique. Indeed, inexplicable magic and the Twelve Days of Christmas go hand in hand in medieval literature. The opening scene in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* begins in King Arthur's court at the New Year's feast, and the author luxuriates in describing the material details of Christmas. Pageantry, youth, beauty, excitement, and marvels abound, with dancing, carolling and often the 'loude crye...Nowel' (64-65).¹⁰² The tempting scents of delicious dishes served with 'good ber and bryzt wyn' abound (129). It is only after this marvellous merrymaking is described in detail that the Green Knight, the 'aglich mayster' (136) enters the hall.¹⁰³ He appears to be an elvish half-giant from the realm of fairy, terrible and otherworldly, interrupting their Christmas festivities.¹⁰⁴ While the assembled guests express alarm at the Green Knight's surprise appearance, Arthur is nonplussed (468). He

¹⁰⁰ This phrase often evokes discussions about Chaucer's own beliefs on astrology, see: Curry, *Ch...Mediaeval Sciences*, 188-90. Dean W. Hendrickson, 'Pseudoscience in Chaucer's "Canterbury Tales."' *Bios* 40/2 (1969): 58-68. Wood, *Chaucer...Stars*, p. 52-53, 192-244. Smyser, 'View...Astronomy,' 371. Gilliard, 'Ch...Astrology,' 365-366. Eisner, 'Ch...Technical Writer,' 193. See also Corinne Saunder's discussion of magic and moral ambiguity: 'Subtle Crafts.'

¹⁰¹ Kolve, *Telling Images II*, 188. Even the setting for the magical operations is in a liminal location, between shore and sea, in what Steele Nowlin calls 'a liminally-charged space': 'Between Precedent and Possibility,' p. 48. On 'reality' in a Boethian context, see Bachman, 'To Maken Illusioun', 55-67.

¹⁰² *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* passages are taken from this edition: Casey Finch, trans & ed., *The Complete Works of the Pearl Poet* (University of California Press, 1993), lines indicated parenthetically.

¹⁰³ The term 'aglich' was derived from Middle English 'a(3)elich,' meaning awesome or dreadful, with overtones of the Old English 'aglaeca,' indicating a monster or demon. Greg Walker, *Reading Literature Historically: Drama and Poetry from Chaucer to the Reformation* (Edinburgh University Press, 2013), p. 93-121. Corinne Saunders, *Magic and the Supernatural in Medieval English Romance* (Woodbridge: D.S. Brewer, 2010), p. 94. Shoaf makes a fascinating argument concerning the words 'astoned' and 'monstre' in relation to the clerk's magic: R. A. Shoaf, 'The Franklin's Tale: Chaucer and Medusa.' *The Chaucer Review* 21.2 (1986): 274-90.

¹⁰⁴ Thorlac Turville-Petre, *Description and Narrative in Middle English Alliterative Poetry* (Liverpool University Press, 2018), p. 49-55.

turns to his queen and explains, ‘Dere dame, today demay yow neuer. / Wel bycommes such craft upon Cristmasse’ (470-1), meaning that such cunning becomes Christmastide well. A similar formula appears in *King Horn* (c. 1250), when Horn joins King Thurston for his Christmas feast it is interrupted by a giant, who challenges the knights to single armed combat.¹⁰⁵ The poet of *Sir Gawain* spends the whole first fitt establishing the temporal setting as the Twelve Days of Christmas, arranging the appropriate stage for the Green Knight to enter, and I suggest that the underlying motivation is similar in lines 1243-55 in *The Franklin’s Tale*.

By conjuring the celebrations of Christmastide, engaging the senses, and invoking Janus, Chaucer encourages the audience to suspend disbelief and accept inexplicable magic at face value, because as King Arthur explains, such cunning becomes Christmastide well. These cues are mostly lost to us today because they reflect vanished holiday traditions and are not as obvious as they were to Chaucer’s contemporaries. Chaucer’s chronographic passage thus aligns this moment in the narrative with the astrology, mystery, and magic of Christmas. By describing the liminal threshold between Christmas and Epiphany, the passage acts as a hinge, opening the door for inexplicable magic to enter the story, with Janus as the doorkeeper.¹⁰⁶ There is no satisfactory explanation of the clerk’s accomplishment because there is no need for one: the time is right for inexplicable magic.

¹⁰⁵ Joseph Hall, ed., *King Horn; a Middle-English romance* (Clarendon Press, 1901). From the manuscript: Oxford, Bodleian Libraries: MS. Laud, Misc. 108.

¹⁰⁶ Chauncy Wood describes this liminality as ‘the worst feature of the periphrasis,’ *Ch...Country of Stars*, 95.

Janus at the Portal

The depiction of Janus in this passage is not an overtly literary image; in fact, no direct analogues or precedents match it. The archetypal description of Janus occurs in Ovid's *Fasti*, as it is Janus who first appears to Ovid as narrator.¹⁰⁷ Ovid describes his appearance as in the shape of a male deity, terrible and awe-inspiring, with two faces on a single head, carrying a staff (*baculum*) and a key (*clavemque*).¹⁰⁸ Janus explains to Ovid why January marks the new year ("Midwinter is the beginning of the new sun and the end of the old one. Phoebus and the year take their start from the same point"), and why the time between December and January is a powerful time to read omens, ("Omens are wont," said he, "to wait upon beginnings").¹⁰⁹ Chaucer's Janus has more similarities than differences with Ovid's, but Chaucer's is distinctly medieval. Chaucer's Janus does not carry a staff or key, but the accoutrements of Christmas. This is because Chaucer's image does not descend from literary precedents, but visual ones.

The combination of a zodiac sign and an image of a holiday was a familiar one to medieval audiences accustomed to seeing Labours of the Month cycles. From the late eleventh century to the late seventeenth, the Labours of the Month appeared in art of all kinds, such as building portals, column capitals in abbeys and churches, altar cloths and vestments, floor mosaics, baptismal fonts, manuscript calendars, and stained-glass

¹⁰⁷ Betty Rose Nagle, *Ovid's Fast: Roman Holidays* (Indiana University Press, 1995), p.6-7, 39-42.

¹⁰⁸ Ovid, *Fasti*, Book I.93-100: 'haec ego cum sumptis agitare mente tabellis, / lucidior visa est, quam fuit ante, domus. / tum sacer ancipiti mirandus imagine Ianus / bina repens oculis obtulit ora meis. / extimui sensique metu riguisse capillos, / et gelidum subito frigore pectus erat. / ille tenens baculum dextra clavemque sinistra / edidit hos nobis ore priore sonos.'

¹⁰⁹ Ovid, *Fasti* Book I.162-4: 'bruma novi prima est veterisque novissima solis: / principium capiunt Phoebus et annus idem.' / 178: "omina principiis" inquit "inesse solent.'

windows.¹¹⁰ These cycles grew from Roman calendrical art, but with enough innovation and stylistic differences to constitute a new, distinctively medieval, visual tradition.¹¹¹ In ancient Roman calendars, the labours were generally passive, timeless, and connected to religious festivals.¹¹² In the medieval tradition the labours were active, temporal, and secular, ‘concerned with life at full flood, not with its source, nor with its ebbside.’¹¹³ Manuscript calendars present a marvellous array of ‘life at full flood,’ whether they depict stomping grapes in September or pruning vines in March.

Depictions of the labours (usually agrarian seasonal work) or occupations (activities associated with a season) were innovative expressions of medieval life, but the star signs followed Hellenistic iconography. The signs of the zodiac assigned to specific months followed a Mesopotamian calendar established in the second and first millennia BCE, and then adopted with variations across the western European continent via Roman occupation.¹¹⁴ Today sun signs are arranged from the 22nd to 21st of each month, thus the sign for December 22 - January 21 is Capricorn, and January 22 - February 21 is Aquarius. In

¹¹⁰ Hourihane, *Time in the Medieval World*. K. Lehmann, ‘The Dome of Heaven.’ *Art Bulletin* 27 (1945): 1-27.

¹¹¹ Webster, *The Labours of the Months*, p. 38-39. Henisch, *The Medieval Calendar Year*. Simona Cohen, *Transformations of Time and Temporality in Medieval and Renaissance Art* (Brill's Studies on Art, e-book, 2014). Teresa Perez Higuera, *Medieval Calendars* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson 1998), p. 118-120.

¹¹² Webster, *The Labours of the Months*, 38-9. Michele Renee Salzman, *On Roman Time: The Codex Calendar of 354 and the Rhythms of Urban Life in Late Antiquity* (University of California Press, 1990).

¹¹³ Henisch, *The Medieval Calendar Year*, 136.

¹¹⁴ The zodiac first appears as a codified group in what are called the *Diaires*, non-mathematical astronomical texts written between 463-453 BCE. These *Diaires* are published in seven volumes: Hermann Hunger and A. Sachs, *Astronomical Diaries and Related Texts from Babylonia vol. I, 652-262 BC* (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1988), p. 96. Beyond the *Diaires*, many full and fragmentary star documents in cuneiform are extant, the three most important are the *Gudea Inscriptions* (2100 BCE), the *Enūma Anu Enlil* (1595–1157 BCE), and *Mul.Apin* (before 8th century BCE). See Francesca Rochberg-Halton, *Aspects of Babylonian Celestial Divination* (Horn, Verlag F. Berger, 1988). Barton, *Ancient Astrology*, p. 13. Hermann Hunger and John Steele, *The Babylonian Astronomical Compendium MUL.APIN* (New York, Routledge, 2018). On the Greek versions of the zodiac, see Toomer's introduction of Ptolemy's *Almagest*.

medieval calendars however, a single month is assigned to a single sign and December pairs with Capricorn and January with Aquarius.

Because Chaucer's icon of Capricorn and Janus reflects a motif in visual art, it merits an art historical contextualization. On this basis, the combination of December, Capricorn, and Janus is highly unusual. December is indeed connected to Capricorn in medieval calendars, but Janus is not its associated 'occupation.' Janus is almost exclusively connected to Aquarius and January. If Chaucer had written instead 'But now in *Aquarius* adoun he lighte' in line 1248, it would have reflected the most typical zodiacal depictions in visual culture and beyond. This is clearly shown in John Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, Book VII, where he reviews each month of the year, their zodiac signs, humours, ruling planets, labour or occupation, and other lore. Gower's is an entirely conventional presentation for Aquarius/January/Janus and reflects most of the visual and literary iterations of the subject.¹¹⁵ Accordingly, the eleventh sign is Aquarius, assigned to frosty cold January and Janus, sitting upon his throne between calendar years:

Aquarius hath take his place,
And stant wel in Satornes grace,
Which duelleth in his herbergage,
Bot to the sonne he doth outrage.

...

¹¹⁵ There are more than twenty-seven examples of January calendar pages matching Aquarius and Janus extant from the 13-14th century manuscripts, mirroring Gower's description. A few examples are: Birmingham: Barber Institute of Fine Arts, Book of Hours, fol. 1r (1340-1350); Brussels: KBR, MS 9961-2, *Psalter of Peterborough Abbey*, fol. 1r (before 1317); Lambeth Palace Library, Lambeth 233, *Psalter of Bardolf-Vaux*, fol. 1v (1310-1320); Munich: Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, BSB Cod.gall. 16, *Psalter of Queen Isabella of England*, fol. 1r (1303-1308); New York: Morgan Library, MS. 511, fol. 1r (1324-1328); M. 700, *DuBois Hours*, attribution: DuBois Master, fol. 5r (c. 1325-1330); M. 75. Breviary, fol. 1r (1350-1374); Metropolitan Museum, Cloisters collection: 54.1.2, *The Hours of Jeanne d'Evreux, Queen of France*, Jean Pucelle, fol. 1v-2r (1324-1328); 69.86. *The Prayer Book of Bonne of Luxembourg*, Duchess of Normandy, attributed to Jean le Noir, fol. 1v-2r (1345-1349); Oxford: Exeter College Library, MS 47. *Psalter of Humphrey de Bohun*, fol. 1r (1360-1400).

The frosti colde Janever,
 Whan comen is the newe yeer,
 That Janus with his double face
 In his chaire hath take his place
 And loketh upon bothe sides,
 Somdiel toward the wynter tydes,
 Somdiel toward the yeer suiende,
 That is the monthe belongende
 Unto this signe, and of his dote
 He gifth the ferste primerole.
 (Lines 1187-1190 / 1205-1214)

Here Aquarius is described as the domicile of Saturn, and Janus bifrons (double-faced)
 spans the space between years and offers the earliest primroses in January.





Figure 1. New York: Metropolitan Museum, Cloisters, 69.86. *The Prayer Book of Bonne of Luxembourg, Duchess of Normandy* (1345-1349), fol. 1v-2r, and detail. This manuscript is likely by Jean le Noir, an illuminator in the service of John the Good, who collaborated with his daughter, the *enluminière* Bourgot.

A fine visual example of Janus accompanying Aquarius is in the calendar pages of *The Prayer Book of Bonne of Luxembourg*, attributed to Jean le Noir, fol. 1v-2r (1345-1349) [Fig. 1]. This is a lavish manuscript with no expense spared, and on the *bas de page* for January we see Janus bifrons, one bearded face representing the outgoing year, and the clean-shaven face representing the new year. Both are consuming the feast before them, with servants pouring wine and presenting roast fowl. The table is scattered with fish bones and utensils, evidence of a well-made and well-eaten feast. Aquarius on the facing folio is presented as a nude youth, pouring a long stream of water from his jug onto a bare landscape. The theme is repeated at the top corner of folio 2r, with another figure pouring water upon the foliate border. The Labours of the Month in such calendars served to personify the season, visually represent the time of year, and vivify the page. The motif also

constituted a visual language which became a creative space for artists to explore, which Kolve calls ‘a sort of free radical.’¹¹⁶



Figure 2. Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale de France, lat. 1403. *Horae ad usum Mettensem ou Heures dites d'Isabeau de Bavière, reine de France* (1375-1400) fol. 2r.

Because of this room for artistic exploration, Labours of the Month motifs varied by region and period, as delineated by James Webster.¹¹⁷ For example, Italian occupations for June often feature reaping and threshing in July, while French and British versions feature them later in the year due to their cooler climates.¹¹⁸ Even in works of art made in close proximity there is a variety in the styles and presentation of zodiacal figures, but in some

¹¹⁶ *Telling Images II*, 129.

¹¹⁷ Webster, *Labours of the Months*, 57-88. See also Hourihane, *Time in the Medieval World*, particularly the introduction. This follows an approach to iconography influenced by Meyer Schapiro, in which a single object or monument is localized based partially on iconography: Patricia Stirnemann, ‘Meyer Schapiro as Iconographer.’ Chapter in: Colum Hourihane, ed., *The Routledge Companion to Medieval Iconography* (Taylor & Francis Group, 2016), pp. 142-153.

¹¹⁸ Webster, *The Labours of the Months*, 62.

instances there can be recognized regional types.¹¹⁹ For example, Aurore Gasseau identifies a regional peculiarity in Books of Hours for liturgical use in the diocese of Metz, through the 12-13th centuries.¹²⁰ For the Occupation of the Month in these calendars, February is personified by a bearded, seated man, holding two outsized keys [**Fig. 2**]. This portrayal is only included in manuscripts made for Metz and can be used to reliably designate its origin. Like Gasseau's man with two keys, Chaucer's December/Capricorn/Janus combination can, indeed, be identified as reflecting a regional model.¹²¹ To show this, I begin with a survey of manuscripts and then sculpture.

In my survey of extant calendar pages of manuscripts dating between 1100-1400 CE, relying most extensively on lists provided by Webster, Hourihane and Princeton's Index of Medieval Art, as well as library, university, and museum databases across the world, at least 149 are recorded in available catalogues and books. Naturally this is not a definitive list, but it provides a sufficiently broad sampling for analysis. Of these, only 68 have complete cycles with illuminations of both the labours/occupations and the zodiac. Of the 68 complete cycles:

- 46 match Janus with Aquarius for January
- 13 feature a male figure warming by the fire with Aquarius for January
- 7 feature a male figure feasting with Aquarius for January
- 2 match Janus with Capricorn in December

¹¹⁹ This is something that Kolve may have overlooked, particularly in his discussion of Gemini; *Telling Images II*, p. 123-151.

¹²⁰ Aurore Gasseau, « Les cycles iconographiques des calendriers des livres d'heures a l'usage de Metz. » *Pecia* 1/22 (2021): 7-42.

¹²¹ Higuera, *Medieval Calendars*, 118-120.

Chaucer's verbal icon is therefore mirrored in only 3% of surveyable manuscript illuminations of the Labours of the Month.¹²² The two manuscripts that pair Capricorn with Janus in December are: (1) Bodleian Library, Lat. Liturge.e.1., Psalter, fol. 8v (1230). This was a portable psalter made for a lay patron, possibly for use in Hildesheim, but this is debatable. (2) British Library, Add. MS 49622, *Gorleston Psalter*, fol. 6v (1310-1324).

Another portable psalter, this one was likely made for a person associated with St. Andrew's monastic community or diocese, in Gorleston, Suffolk. There are no discernible connections between these manuscripts besides the janiform icon, and therefore these manuscripts may not represent a localized trend, but perhaps that the artists were working from lost precedents, or that they are idiosyncratic. Furthermore, after extensive research into the varieties of the Labours of the Month featuring December and January in mosaics, baptismal fonts, and stained glass, I have not uncovered any other visual matches with Chaucer's image in these media types. In summary: the combination of December/Capricorn/Janus is extraordinarily rare in manuscript illuminations, stained glass, mosaics, or baptismal fonts.

Sculptural renditions of the Labours of the Month on church portals also provide a broad sampling of the motif, particularly because they were the most outstanding sites of zodiacal imagery in the Middle Ages. At least fifty extant churches c. 1050-1400 CE across Europe feature zodiacal carvings in the archivolts, lintels or columns.¹²³ Sculpted versions of the Labours of the Month on church portals were prominently placed in facades, boldly

¹²² See Appendix II for MS locations, dates, and folia.

¹²³ This data is available on a map online, with images: [Churches featuring exterior carved zodiac portals](https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/1/edit?mid=1-DlIMvWFEK58wZDrPbCdIS8BVBUPijOB&usp=sharing). < <https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/1/edit?mid=1-DlIMvWFEK58wZDrPbCdIS8BVBUPijOB&usp=sharing> >

painted, and carved in three dimensions. Today these sculptures are mostly weathered and monochromatic, but in the Middle Ages they were a captivating part of the most expensive form of public art in medieval life.¹²⁴ It is also important to note how popular these types of church portals were: a remarkable fifty portals are extant in situ, but more once stood.

In a careful survey of these fifty extant architectural zodiac cycles, only one site certainly represents a Capricorn and Janus for the month of December, with four other church portals which may have done so, making visual matches with Chaucer's icon a slim ~2-10%. Like manuscript motifs, it is far more common to find January associated with Janus and Aquarius.¹²⁵ It is only at the cathedral at Chartres that a double-headed Janus and Capricorn are paired for the month of December, as described by Chaucer.¹²⁶ It appears in two places there: the west façade (*portail royale*), north portal, outer archivolt, lowest southern register (c. 1136-1141); and the north porch, west portal, outer archivolt, lowest eastern register (c. 1217-1220). Four smaller Romanesque churches in western France place Capricorn in December with what may be a representation of Janus, but it is impossible to identify them as they are badly weathered exterior carvings. These four churches are:

- Church of Sainte-Croix, Bordeaux, France (c. late 11th - early 12th century). West façade, middle archivolt, lowest southern register.
- Church of Notre-Dame de Castelviel, Aquitaine, France (c. 12th century). West façade, outer archivolt, lowest northern register.

¹²⁴ Conrad Rudolph, 'Inventing the Gothic Portal: Suger, Hugh of Saint Victor, and the Construction of a New Public Art at Saint-Denis.' *Art History* 33/4 (2010): 568-595, at 569.

¹²⁵ For an example, see the Labours of the Month quatrefoil decorations on the left embrasures, north portal, west façade, at the cathedral of Amiens, built c. 1220-1270.

¹²⁶ The zodiac specifically in Chartres: Adolf Katzenellenbogen, *The Sculptural Programs of Chartres Cathedral* (The Johns Hopkins Press, 1959), p. 20-25, 75. Also: John James, *In Search of the Unknown in Medieval Architecture* (Pindar Press, 2007), p. 478-79.

- Church of Notre-Dame de Fenioux, Poitou-Charentes, France (c. 12th century). West façade, outer archivolt, lowest southern register. Capricorn destroyed.
- Church of Saint-Leger, Cognac, France (c. 12th century). West façade, outer archivolt, lowest southern register.

Descriptions of these churches describe the figures differently, sometimes as a king and sometimes as Janus, and there are no surviving medieval documents concerning the twelfth-century sculptures. These churches are older than Chartres, and thus they may be precedents in December/Capricorn/Janus combination in portal decorations. To clarify, Capricorn may be paired with feasting kings at these small churches rather than Janus for the month of December, which would not have been unusual. Conversely, these small figures may indeed represent Janus, in which case they may have influenced the decorations at Chartres carved some fifty years later. It can therefore be argued that this specific motif is unique to this area of north-central France since each of these Romanesque churches is linked to Chartres via pilgrimage routes. At the cathedral at Chartres however, it is impossible to mistake the double-headed Janus in both locations.

Notre-dame de Chartres







Figure 3. *Portail royale*, north portal, outer archivolt, lowest southern register (c. 1217-1220). Highlights by the author. Last image: Janus, photograph from Etienne Houvet, *Cathedral de Chartres, Portail Occidental ou Royal*, (Chelles Imp A Faucheux, 1919).

The oldest example of a double-headed Janus paired with Capricorn is sculpted in the north portal of the west entrance (c. 1136-1141), a survival of the 1194 fire, on the inner cordon of the south archivolt [Fig. 3].¹²⁷ Below Capricorn, a robed, double-faced Janus

¹²⁷ The *portail royale* was likely commissioned by Geoffrey of Lèves, who was the donor and administrator. Fassler, *The Virgin of Chartres*, p. 174. The sculpture of the west façade was probably sculpted by four masters with five assistants, who completed their work in a span of six years: Whitney Stoddard, *Sculptors of*

leans out of his curved apsidal niche, with his head tilted downward and eyes cast toward the viewer.¹²⁸ This Janus resides behind a well-laid feasting table, and slices a round boule, or perhaps a *galettes des rois*.¹²⁹ Above these two figures huddles a hooded man with the water-bearer Aquarius; Taurus and Aries overlook the toils of spring and summer; threshing and grape-gathering during the seasons of Virgo and Libra; and the centaur Sagittarius with feasting and slaughtering hogs. The signs embrace a tympanum with Jesus as the central figure, heralded by angels beside and below, with the witnessing *collège apostolique* beneath. This is commonly referred to as the Ascension Tympanum, but as discussed by Margot Fassler, may embody more than a singular theme, and include imagery of the *adventus Domini*.¹³⁰ Directly below this Janus are the three Magi making their pilgrimage to the Christ child, and as I have argued elsewhere, together with Janus they create a visual nexus of the celebration of Epiphany.¹³¹ Time thus cascades like a Jacob's Ladder from the final archivolt into the narrative column capitals, placing the Twelve Days of Christmas in a liminal out-of-bounds space.

the West Portal of Chartres Cathedral: their Origins in Romanesque and their Role in the Chartrain Sculpture including the West Portals of Saint Denis and Chartres (New York: Norton, 1987). It is likely there was a master plan, supervised by one person alongside with skilled workmen: Jean Wirth, *La datation de la sculpture médiévale* (Geneva: Librairie Droz S.A., 2004), p. 150-151.

¹²⁸ For a description and explanation for why January prominently projects toward the viewer above the lintel, please see: John James, 'An Examination of Some Anomalies in the Ascension and Incarnation Portals of Chartres Cathedral.' *Gesta* 25/1 (1986), p. 106.

¹²⁹ Scholars have debated whether this round object is indeed a *galette des rois*. Trexler in *The Journey of the Magi* (p. 173) states the *galette des rois* or *gâteau des rois* first appears in records of the early fourteenth-century in France and was later adopted in Germany. Therefore, the Chartres Janus may antedate the *galette* in the Epiphanic feast, however most scholars tend to assume it is a type of *galette des rois*. See Peter Kidson's chapter on the *portail royale* in: *Sculpture at Chartres* (Academy Editions, 1974), beginning p. 8.

¹³⁰ Fassler, *Virgin of Chartres*, 278. Also: Fassler, "Adventus" at Chartres: Ritual Models for Major Processions.' *Ceremonial Culture in Pre-Modern Europe* (2007): 13-62. Cohen, *Transformations*, 109-110.

¹³¹ Williams, 'The Zodiac on Church Portals, 97-98.





Figure 4. North porch, west portal, outer archivolt, lowest eastern register (c. 1217-1220). Final detail of Capricorn: Sonia Halliday Photo Library / Gregory House / Rycote Lane / Thame / Oxfordshire. Copyright © 2010 All Rights Reserved.

The second site with Capricorn and Janus at Chartres is in the north porch, west portal, outer archivolt (c. 1217-1220) [Fig. 4].¹³² The Janus/Capricorn in the north porch are highly carved and stylistically ravishing. Janus is again on the lowest archivolt, the last of his fellow Occupations in the year's procession. His double-face is more pronounced in this iteration, his swirling robes reflecting the sculpting trends of the High Gothic. The figure holds his boule aloft in an elegantly carved arm. Janus is adjacent to a personification of winter: a bearded man wearing a heavy cloak and thickly wrapped footwear, covered in falling snow.¹³³ Above him to the left is a spectacular Capricorn, double-bearded, cloven-hooved, with carefully carved twisting horns and a sinuous tail twisting back on itself in a creative harmonization of imagination and naturalism.¹³⁴

¹³² James, *In Search of the Unknown*, 478-79.

¹³³ Étienne Huvé, *Cathédrale de Chartres* (Chartres: Les Presses d'Helio-Lorraine, les Fils d'E. Spillman A. Nancy, 1952), p. 6.

¹³⁴ Erwin Panofsky, *Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism* (New York: New American Library, 1957), p. 38.

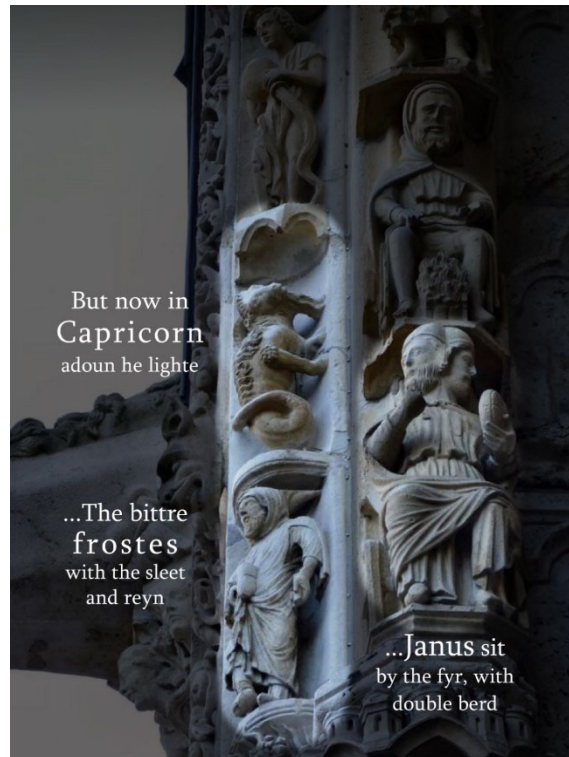


Figure 5. I have highlighted the images of Capricorn, with the personification of Winter below, and double-headed Janus to the right. Beside them are the lines from Chaucer's *The Franklin's Tale*, 1248 / 1250 / 1252.

Of all the versions of December/Capricorn/Janus surveyed in this analysis, these sculptures are the closest match with Chaucer's description in *The Franklin's Tale* [Fig. 5]. The imagery moves left to right, top to bottom in the same fashion in both the sculpture and the passage: Capricorn, winter's cold, Janus and feasting. The evidence therefore suggests lines 1243-55 in *The Franklin's Tale* are a poetic representation of a distinctively French version of December in the Labours of the Month motif cycle. Intentionally or not, Chaucer included a motif that was geographically appropriate to his tale set in north-central and western France.

Tatlock remarks concerning the *Franklin's Tale* that '[n]one of the *Canterbury Tales* more unmistakably points to a clearly seen locality, not even the Miller's, Reeve's or

Shipman's.'¹³⁵ Chaucer may have accentuated this 'clearly seen locality' even in small details, such as the Janus iconography.¹³⁶ This would not be unusual for Chaucer, and Shannon Godlove comments that the setting is a highly self-conscious construction of authentic Breton and French locations.¹³⁷ Peter J. Lucas took this a step further, noting that at least some of Chaucer's contemporaries would have recognized the living landscape from the descriptions.¹³⁸

It is of course possible that Chaucer was aware of this French style and included this icon to further emphasize the tale's setting in western France, or that he had visited Notre-dame de Chartres in his many travels in France and remembered the imagery there.¹³⁹ This can only be speculative, however. Rather, I suggest that the images on the portals and in the text play similar roles as meaningful icons on thresholds. Chaucer chose an image drawn from the Labours of the Month motif commonly seen in church portals (liminal spaces delineating the outside from inside) and situated it at a liminal threshold in the tale. Aurelius, his brother, and the mysterious Clerk of Orléans are in transition between locations, and the audience is in suspense. Will Aurelius's plan work? Like the sculpted chronographiae that decorate the in-between spaces on portals which prepare visitors for what is to come upon entering, I suggest that Chaucer's icon prepares the audience for magic, and timing is everything.

¹³⁵ J. S. P. Tatlock, *The Scene of the Franklin's Tale Visited* (London: The Chaucer Society, 1914), p. 4.

¹³⁶ Friedman, 'Dorigen's "Grisly Rokkes Blake" Again,' 135-142.

¹³⁷ Godlove, "'Engelond" and "Armorik Briteyne," 283.

¹³⁸ Lucas, 'The setting in Brittany,' 23.

¹³⁹ Some scholars argue that there are many indications throughout *The Franklin's Tale* of Chaucer's personal recollections from his extensive time in France. See: Kowalik, 'The Men and Woman,' 167-8.

Chaucer's Timescapes

When presented with an astrological passage in Chaucer's texts Chauncey Wood advises: 'When Chaucer uses astrological imagery, then, we must be on our guard to distinguish just what kind of imagery it is, who employs it, and for what purpose.'¹⁴⁰ In the case of the chronographia in *The Franklin's Tale*, it shows how Chaucer uses such devices as significant signposts in his timescapes for narrative pivots, and how Chaucer's mastery of classical rhetoric provides prime grounds for experimentation. The December chronographia may be merry but it is also meaningful; it matches the courtly register of the lay, punctuates the midway point, and pivots the tale toward the conclusion.

This is not true of each of Chaucer's chronographiae, they can be parodic and light, a kind of literary joke, such as in *The Nun's Priest's Tale*. The Clerk of Orléans may be able to reckon time astronomically through tables and subtle calculations, but Chaunticleer the cock needs none of these tools. The timescape of *The Nun's Priest's Tale* is, like the tale itself, relatively short. It seems the whole escapade of Chaunticleer, his wives, and the fox happens over a single night and day.¹⁴¹ Like *The Franklin's Tale*, an unexpected chronographia occurs at an unusual place in the narrative. Helen Cooper notes that these lines seem better suited for the very beginning rather than after the midway point in the tale.¹⁴² It does not mark a fresh start but instead provides a turn in the narrative by enlarging the scope with cosmic imagery. This chronographia begins with yet another spring by mentioning March, but confusingly adds thirty-two days:

¹⁴⁰ Wood, *Chaucer...Country of Stars*, 50.

¹⁴¹ The night before is full of dreams, the day breaks (2882/4072), sun reaches prime (3197/4387).

¹⁴² Cooper, *Oxford Guides to Chaucer*, p. 346. In 625 lines of poetry, the chronographia occurs at lines 366-378.

Whan that the month in which the world bigan,
 That highte March, whan God first maked man,
 Was complete, and passed were also,
 Syn March [was gon], thritty dayes and two,
 Bifel that Chauntecleer in al his pryde,
 His sevene wyves walkynge by his syde,
 Caste up his eyen to the brighte sonne,
 That in the signe of Taurus hadde yronne
 Twenty degrees and oon, and somewhat moore,
 And knew by kynde, and by noon oother loore,
 That is was pryme, and crew with blisful steven.
 “The sonne,” he seyde, “in clomben up on hevene
 Fourty degrees and oon, and moore ywis.”
 (Lines 3187-3199 / 4377-4389)

This chronographia prefaces the ‘action’ half of the tale, but it can also be interpreted as a line-by-line parody of the chronographia in the *General Prologue*, as Naomi Saslaw argues.¹⁴³ The astrological and astronomical symbolism works on several levels which reinforce the tale’s themes. For instance, Taurus the constellation embraces the Pleiades in the night sky, and these seven stars were sometimes referred to as ‘the hens’ in the Middle Ages.¹⁴⁴ Marijane Osborn interprets the mention of Taurus here as a clever warning about the throat. In the prevailing medieval doctrine of melothesia (which will be discussed at length in my chapter ‘Astral Bodies’), Taurus presides over the throat. Osborn writes, ‘With the Sun in Taurus, what other part of Chauntecleer was more likely to be at risk?’¹⁴⁵

The phrase, ‘Syn March [was gon], thritty dayes and two’ is the most problematic of the entire passage. Peter Travis argues that the ambiguity of dates is a parody of a word-

¹⁴³ Naomi Saslaw, ‘The Nun’s Priest’s Tale’: an Analysis of Thematic Structure and Reflective Structure.’ *Literary Imagination* 21/1 (March 2019): 1–18, see the section ‘Reflective Structure.’

¹⁴⁴ Falk, ‘The Medieval Universe,’ 250.

¹⁴⁵ Osborn, *Time...Astrolabe*, p. 205.

problem common in Latin pedagogy concerning logic and time.¹⁴⁶ The passage also serves to highlight Chaunticleer's remarkable skills at chronometry, although the passage is oblique at best. We already know that Chaunticleer is a fine timekeeper from the beginning in which we are told: 'Wel sikerer was his crowyng in his logge / Than is a klokke or an abbey orlogge' (2853-2854 / 4043-4044).¹⁴⁷ A cock as a timekeeper is a common metaphor, but Chaunticleer can even decipher the difference between equal and unequal hours.¹⁴⁸ So not only is he exceedingly beautiful but naturally gifted with extraordinary knowledge 'by kynde,' meaning instinct.¹⁴⁹

Chaucer's chronographiae are often puzzling, a mixture of visual imagery, cosmic connotations and obfuscated dates, but modern readers are not the first to puzzle out Chaucer's calendar. There is a gloss next to the above passage which indicates the date is '3 May' in the Cambridge University Library MS Dd.4.24. This is one of the earliest manuscripts with *the Canterbury Tales*, written in the first quarter of the fifteenth century, perhaps by the scribe identified as 'Wytton' or perhaps in a collaboration of London-based

¹⁴⁶ Travis, *Disseminat Ch*, 285. Also: Jan M. Ziolkowski, *Talking Animals: Medieval Latin Beast Poetry, 750-1150* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), p.15-32. Edward Wheatley, *Mastering Aesop: Medieval Education, Chaucer, and His Followers* (University of Florida Press, 2000). Sasla considers the thematic exploration of true and false knowledge in NPT: 'The Nun's Priest's Tale,' 1-18.

¹⁴⁷ On musical theory, Boethius and Chauntecleer's voice, see: Juliana Chapman, 'Musicus Animal in the Nun's Priest's Tale.' *The Chaucer Review* 57/3 (2022): 368-390.

¹⁴⁸ John M. Steadman, 'Chauntecleer and Medieval Natural History.' *Isis* 50 (1959): 236-44, at 242.

¹⁴⁹ Esther Quinn compares these qualities with the eagle from *The House of Fame* and the royal tercel in *Parliament of Fowls: Geoffrey Chaucer and the Poetics of Disguise* (University Press of America, 2008), p. 157-8. 'Kyndely enclynyng' is also mentioned in *The House of Fame*, and it refers to a medieval sense of natural inclination. This is the idea that every object in the 'Great Chain of Being' (as discussed by Arthur Lovejoy) has a natural place it tries to reach, and in which it tries to remain. Sources include: Aristotle, *Physics* 8.4; Augustine *Confessions* 13.9, and *De civ. Dei* 11.28, Boethius 3.pr11.95-187, and Dante *Par.* 1.103-41, *Purg.* 18.28, *RR* 16761-67. Lewis, *Discarded Image*, 92-93. On the description of Chaunticleer's beauty, see: Nevill Coghill & Christopher Tolkien, *The Nun's Priest's Tale* (George G Harrap & Co, 1959, 1968), p. 17, 46.

scribes.¹⁵⁰ All the text, including glosses, are written in one hand, which might indicate that Chaucer's first generation of readers were interested in puzzling numerical dates from the lyrical chronographia.¹⁵¹ This is the same urge followed by scholars such as Eisner and North, who extract very specific dates within Chaucer's lifetime (3 May 1392 for NPT, for example).¹⁵²

There is a critical snag in the scribal copies and subsequent editing of *The Nun's Priest's Tale*, however. The phrase could read 'Syn March bigan,' or 'Syn March was gon.'¹⁵³ The passage is not identical across manuscript editions, so the phrase 'Syn March [was gon], thritty dayes and two' could indicate 3 May (which Dd.4.24 suggests), but if the latter phrase is correct, this could also mean 3 April. It may be the case that Chaucer consulted Nicholas of Lynn's *Kalendarium* to decipher when the sun was near the Pleiades at noon at a longitude of 21;15° - but to what end?¹⁵⁴ It is a step too far to argue that Chaucer was specifically tying his poetry to an actual calendrical date in real time. I suggest it is more

¹⁵⁰ The MS is signed 'Wytton' on ff. 39r, 47r, 67r and 92r. It may be that Wytton was part of a larger scribal group working in London: A. I. Doyle and M. B. Parkes, 'The Production of Copies of "The Canterbury Tales" and the "Confessio Amantis" in the early Fifteenth Century.' Chapter in: *Medieval Scribes, Manuscripts and Libraries: Essays Presented to N. R. Ker*, ed. by M. B. Parkes and A. G. Watson (London: Scolar Press, 1978), pp. 163-210. Linne Mooney, Simon Horobin, and Estelle Stubbs, *Late Medieval English Scribes* < <https://www.medievalescribes.com> >, see entries for 'Wytton.' N. F. Blake, Derek Pearsall, A. I. Doyle, C. David Benson, Martha W Driver, J. P. Gumbert, Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, et al. 'A New Approach to the Witnesses and Text of the *Canterbury Tales*.' Chapter in: *New Directions in Later Medieval Manuscript Studies: Essays from the 1998 Harvard Conference* (Boydell & Brewer, 2000), pp. 29-40.

¹⁵¹ Orietta da Rold, ed., *The Dd Manuscript*. The Norman Blake Editions of *The Canterbury Tales* (University of Sheffield, 2013).

¹⁵² North, *Chaucer's Universe*, 462. Peter Travis notes: 'The majority of Chaucer's contemporary readers would of course never have troubled themselves with extra homework assignments to determine the right time of [Chaucer's] literary days. And modern scholars of Chaucer, because of the shortcut "solutions" and correct "answers" supplied by editors of *The Canterbury Tales*, fail to experience anything close to the complicated process of intellectual inquiry that each of Chaucer's *chronographiae* invites and makes possible.' Travis, *Disseminal Ch*, 276.

¹⁵³ See both the Textual and Explanatory Notes in *Riverside* for line 3190.

¹⁵⁴ *The Kalendarium of Nicholas of Lynn*, 89, 93.

significant to consider the effect in the poetry rather than external - and intractable - motivations.

Peter Travis argues that these puzzles and contradictions are perfectly intentional, and that they encourage intellectual investigation. It is the process of thinking through them that is important. Travis concludes that Chaucer's *chronographiae* open interpretive spaces for readers to contemplate time and simultaneously frustrate simple conclusions. Travis writes: 'Each *chronographia* encourages rigorous scientific inquiry, but each eventually throws into doubt the possibility of any verifiably "truthful" conclusion.'¹⁵⁵ If this is accurate (and I believe that it is), then Chaucer's *chronographiae* reflect the nature of time itself: fluctuating, resistant to any definitive conclusions, and entirely dependent on context.

Throughout this chapter I have argued for an approach to Chaucer's *chronographiae* which prioritizes poetry over scientific precision.¹⁵⁶ The idea of a cock telling the time as if his natural instincts included deep astronomical wisdom is inherently comical, but the full extent of the humour is lost unless this *chronographia* is considered in the context of high style epics.¹⁵⁷ A springtime *chronographia* is Ovidian or Dantean in form but by placing it in

¹⁵⁵ Travis, *Disseminal Ch*, p. 300. See also Charles Muscatine's argument concerning the problem of judgement, a single point of view, and 'truth': *Ch...French Tradition*, 242. Mishtooni Bose suggests that NPT ultimately returns the reader 'to the arduous task of renegotiating authentic connections between fiction and the enigma of experience': 'The Nun's Priest's Tale.' Chapter in: Frank Grady, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to The Canterbury Tales* (Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp. 191–204, at 194.

¹⁵⁶ For an adjacent argument, see: Lisa H. Cooper, 'Figures for "Gretter Knowing": Forms in the *Treatise on the Astrolabe*.' Chapter in: Thomas A. Prendergast and Jessica Rosenfeld, eds., *Chaucer and the Subversion of Form* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 99-124.

¹⁵⁷ Michael Warren considers the mapping of incongruous avian and human characteristics here: 'Birds' Form.' Chapter in: *Birds in Medieval English Poetry: Metaphors, Realities, Transformations* (D. S. Brewer, 2018):179-218, at 189. On the nature of Chauntecleer's 'instincts' and human nature, see: Monica McAlpine, 'The Triumph of Fiction in the *Nun's Priest's Tale*.' Chapter in: Robert R. Edwards, ed, *Art and Context in Late*

a foul's mouth it immediately shifts the tale from beast-fable to mock-epic.¹⁵⁸ This is not a courtly setting - it is a barnyard. It is also in the 'wrong' place in the poetry, right in the middle of the tale, rather than a grand opening. The obscurity of the date in this case, I suggest, is not meant to indicate a calendrical date in real time but makes a self-parodic joke about form.¹⁵⁹

A similar joke appears at the end of *The Squire's Tale*, but the humour is lost if it is not contextualized with the rich history of classical chronographic form. The Squire begins with only two lines of what promises to be a classically styled chronographia:

Appollo whirleth up his chaar so hye
Til that the god Mercurius hous, the slye –
(Lines 671-2)

The internal audience of the Canterbury pilgrims 'listening' to the Squire recognize immediately that such a lofty chronographia indicates a new beginning, or the start of a whole new adventure - but no one can tolerate the Squire's loquacious meandering any

Medieval English Narrative: Essays in Honor of Robert Worth Frank, Jr. (Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 79-92, at 84.

¹⁵⁸ Susan Gallick, 'Styles of Usage in the "Nun's Priest's Tale."' *The Chaucer Review* 11/3 (1977): 232-247. On beast fables and NPT, see: Gillian Rudd, 'Animals in Chaucer.' Chapter in: Ian Johnson, ed., *Geoffrey Chaucer in Context* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 209-215. Compare with: Marie de France, 'Fable 60: Le Coq et le Renard.' Charles Brucker, ed., *Marie de France: Les Fables* (Louvain : Peeters, 1991).

¹⁵⁹ There is, of course, an allusion to a very real historical event in the contemporary calendar with the mention of 'Jakke Straw,' lines 3394-3396. See: Mohamed Karim Dhouib, 'History and Literature in the *Nun's Priest's Tale*: The Return of the Repressed.' *International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Culture* 7/2 (2021): 70-81. Rawitawan Sophonpanich, "'So Hydous was the Noyse": Forgetting the 1381 Rebellion in Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Nun's Priest's Tale*.' *Journal of Letters* 49/1 (2020): Article 3. Derek Pearsall, 'A rereading of the *Nun's Priest's Tale*.' Chapter in: Lee Patterson, ed., *Geoffrey Chaucer's the Canterbury Tales: A casebook* (Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 211-219. Richard West, *Chaucer 1340-1400: The life and times of the first English poet* (Diane Pub Co., 2000), p. 200. Strohm, *Social Chaucer*, p. 165. On other forms of parody in NPT, see: Andrew John Pattison, 'Ironic Imitations: Parody, Mockery, and the Barnyard Chase in the "Nun's Priest's Tale."' *Chaucer Review* 54/2 (2019): 141-61.

longer and he is cut off. Contextualizing this chronographia with literary norms supports the argument that this was indeed an ending to the tale, and a perfectly Chaucerian one.

Chaucer's works routinely resist conclusive endings, preferring 'threshold poetics.' Expanding on this, Turner writes: 'Across Chaucer's work, his anxiety about conclusions, and his predilection for unfinished, open texts, reflects a poetic affinity for threshold rather than new place, for possibility rather than decision, for hedging one's bets, rather than coming down on one side or the other.'¹⁶⁰ Chaucer's chronographiae thus cannot be taken at face value and there is not a one-size-fits-all approach. It is not simply a question about the precise date, in each instance it is about what it *does* in the poetry. As I have shown, Chaucer's chronographiae can provide an ideal beginning, act as a hinge in the middle, or stand in as a premature conclusion, and they always creatively respond to classical forms. I urge an approach which considers how chronographiae compare to formal precedents (is this conventional or subversive?), how it builds the internal 'timescape' of the work (why does the time matter here?), and the material context of the imagery (where else does this image appear in the contemporary material record?).

¹⁶⁰ Turner *Chaucer...European Life*, p. 468.

II. ASTRAL ADORNMENT

When Madeleine Albright was the Secretary of State to the United States (1997-2001), one of her most creative diplomatic tactics involved her jewellery. At critical political moments she often wore conspicuous brooches that broadcast symbolic messages, chosen with precision.¹ For instance, in response to an insult by a prominent Iraqi who called her ‘an unparalleled serpent,’ she wore a golden serpent brooch with a pendant diamond to a meeting with Iraqi officials at the United Nations.² This was not only a pointed requite in visual language, but also sent a particularly American message, drawing on Revolutionary iconography: ‘Don’t Tread on Me!’ This kind of communication relies on what Clifford Geertz calls ‘an iconic grammar of representation,’ which is subject to context and culture.³ Jewellery can of course be purely aesthetic embellishment, and not every item of jewellery that Albright wore each day was a political statement. A pearl necklace may be simply a pearl necklace. But when she intended to send a message, every aspect of the brooch had significance – whether it was bespoke or antique, made of precious materials or otherwise, etc. When appraising adornment then, understanding the context is necessary and aesthetic dimensions are of primary importance: the formal properties, symbolic content, affective values, and stylistic features.⁴ This is as true of Albright’s

¹ See her collection here: ‘Read My Pins: the Madeline Albright Collection.’ Exhibit at the National Museum of American Diplomacy: < <https://readmypins.state.gov> >

² ‘The Serpent Strikes Back,’ part of: ‘Read My Pins: the Madeline Albright Collection.’ Exhibit at the National Museum of American Diplomacy: < <https://readmypins.state.gov/the-serpent-strikes-back> >

³ Clifford Geertz, ‘Art as a Cultural System.’ *Modern Language Notes (MLN)* 91/6 (1976): 1473–99, at 1474.

⁴ Geertz, ‘Art as a Cultural System,’ 1476.

brooches as it is for any other form of adornment, and in this chapter, I consider astral adornment in Chaucer's cosmos.

An 'adornment' is defined as a decorative addition or an embellishment, and the word is a Middle English derivation from Anglo-Norman 'aornement.'⁵ The first instance of it in the English language is in fact in Chaucer's hand, in the diatribe against pride in *The Parson's Tale* (431). The Parson states that it is permissible in the eyes of God for men and women to wear honest and suitable clothing without 'superfluitee' or 'disordinat scantitee' (430). However, it is unacceptable to outfit horses lavishly for riding: 'Also the *synne of aornement* or of apparaille is in thynges that apertenen to ridynge, as in to manye delicat horses that been hoolden for delit, that been so faire, fatte, and costlewe;' (431, emphasis mine). From this first instance of this word in English then, it is clear that adornment is a marked choice, and that the choice carries meaning. Furthermore, the Parson advises that ornamentation should be restrained and tasteful, and that excessive adornment can be a sign of sinful pride, so this first instance also informs us that adornment is subjective to taste and judgement. What kind of ornamentation is appropriate, and in what situations? Is it excessive or fitting? What does it signify? Is it superficial embellishment, or deeply symbolic? These are not only aesthetic considerations but semiotic as well, which operate on several levels in this chapter.⁶ We will explore the space between words on the page and

⁵ Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. 'adornment (n.), Etymology,' July 2023. See also 'aornement' in *Middle English Dictionary*, where it is described as: 'Ornament, piece of finery; indulgence in such.'

⁶ This is a particularly apt approach to medieval texts because it was a highly discussed topic among the learned – see: Roger Bacon, *On Signs (Opus maius, part 3, chapter 2)*, Thomas S. Maloney, ed. & trans. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies 2013).

making meaning, images in the mind's eye and interpreting symbols, and examining stars in the sky as signs to be read.

In the last chapter we considered examples of chronographia with layers of interwoven meanings, as in *The Franklin's Tale*. Classical rhetorical forms were significant precedents to consider, and in this chapter classical rhetoric continues to be important, but specifically *ornatus* and ekphrasis. There were established 'rules' in Latin and French poetry which Chaucer subverted through imitation and satire, and it is important to consider first the nature of these rules. Poetic adornment was exalted by the Roman authority Quintilian (first century CE), who decreed that any successful discourse - especially poetry - must be decorated to capture an audience's attention, to make a message persuasive, and to render speech acts more memorable.⁷ Put more simply, messages are better received with 'more honey and less wormwood.'⁸ Ornamental imagery and language (*ornatus*) are not only supplementary therefore but critical building blocks of poetry, and exalted by Quintilian, Horace, and Cicero.⁹

Expanding on these tracts is Geoffrey of Vinsauf's *Poetria Nova* (c. 1210), in which he defines poetic ornament as the skilful application of rhetorical colors: the artistic transposition of words, meaningful metaphors, appropriate adjectives, skilful synecdoche,

⁷ Quintilian, *The Orator's Education*, Donald A. Russell ed. trans. (Loeb Classical Library 126. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), II 3-5; III 1.3-5; VIII 3. See also related ideas in Horace's *Ars Poetica*: Horace, *Satire; Epistles; The Art of Poetry*, H. Rushton Fairclough, trans. (Loeb Classical Library 194. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926), particularly p. 481.

⁸ Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* III 1.3-5.

⁹ Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), p. 70.

and allegories.¹⁰ These devices should refine the inelegant and conjure visual imagery in the mind's eye. 'Where it be brief or long, a discourse should always have both internal and external adornment,' meaning word choice should be considered carefully and reflect the subject matter.¹¹ Vinsauf warns that adornment must be used toward a greater purpose to deliver a worthy message, and it is critical to get it right.¹² Any adornment is an increase, an embellishment, reflects agency, and typically relates to suitable motifs: a horse is embellished with a fine bridle, a chapel is adorned with an appropriate mural, a poet chooses specific language to fit the work.

Middle English poetry includes 'obligatory ornamental features,' which includes rhyme schemes, finely tuned verse-making, and a craft of intricacy, as outlined by Daniel Sawyer.¹³ For Chaucer particularly, astrology and astronomy provided an interconnected network of valent signs with which to create these obligatory ornamental features. Imagery is a critical tenet in medieval creative writing, the *vis imaginativa*, and as Denise Despres writes, 'Chaucer acknowledges a complex code of image creation[.]'¹⁴ According to these definitions then, all of Chaucer's cosmic imagery operate as facets of poetic adornment

¹⁰ For a discussion of Chaucer's relationship with Geoffrey of Vinsauf's *Poetria Nova*, see: Martin Camargo, 'Chaucer and the Oxford Renaissance of Anglo-Latin Rhetoric.' *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 34/1 (2012): 173-207.

¹¹ Geoffrey of Vinsauf, *Poetria Nova* ed. Margaret F. Nims (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1967), chapter 'Ornaments of Style,' p. 40-41. Original text: 'Sit brevis aut longus, se semper sermo coloret / Intus et exterius, sed discernendo colorem / Ordine discreto.' Geoffrey of Vinsauf, *Poetria Nova*, in: Edmond Faral, *Les arts poétiques du XIIe et du XIIIe siècle. Recherches et documents sur la technique littéraire du Moyen Âge* (Paris : Librairie ancienne Honoré Champion, Édouard Champion) : 197-262, at 220.

¹² Vinsauf, *Poetria Nova*, 70-72. David Lawton identified Chaucer's rhetorical writing as one of the three different modalities of voice in *Voice in Later Medieval English*, 152.

¹³ Daniel Sawyer, *How to Read Middle English Poetry* (Oxford University Press, 2024), see chapter 1, esp. p. 17-18.

¹⁴ Denise Despres, 'Chaucer as Image-Maker.' Chapter in: Suzanne Conklin Akbari and James Simpson, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Chaucer* (OUP, 2020), pp. 527-544, at 528.

because they conjure images in the mind's eye and are a key ingredient for his poetic craft. To narrow the scope therefore, I focus on two specific - and quite different - ornamental modes: the Orientalizing astral language in *The Squire's Tale* (*ornatus*), and the astrological paintings on the temple walls in *The Knight's Tale* (*ekphrasis*). In the third section I bring these modes together to analyse the astrological passages in *The Man of Law's Tale*. The usefulness of viewing astrology through the lens of ornamentation is that it properly aligns Chaucer's priorities as a writer of fiction. It highlights Chaucer's 'inaccuracies' not as scientifically deficient but as poetically effective. Before beginning with these topics however, some clear methodology is necessary.

It is notoriously difficult to weigh the artistic or literary value of adornment without resorting to arbitrary aesthetic judgements. To avoid this issue, I am guided by theories and vocabulary offered by Jean-Claude Bonne.¹⁵ His ideas are particularly helpful because his focus is squarely on medieval art, and like medieval theorists and classical rhetoricians, he moves fluidly between mediums.¹⁶ He refers to this as *transversalité*, a non-hierarchical assessment of ornamentation between media types. For instance, he explores aesthetic modalities in syntax and analyses medieval architecture in syntactical terms. He argues that decorations in a building (his example is the church of San Clement in Rome), can function like a grammatical intensive, an adverb, a comparative, or even an intonation. In a

¹⁵ Jean-Claude Bonne, 'De l'ornement à l'ornementalité: La mosaïque absidiale de San Clemente de Rome.' *Le rôle de l'ornement dans la peinture murale du Moyen Âge* (Poitiers : Centre d'études supérieures de civilisation médiévale 4, 1997) : 103-119. J. C. Bonne, 'De l'ornemental dans l'art médiéval (VII-XIIe siècle). Le modèle insulaire,' in : *L'Image: Fonctions et usages des images dans l'Occident médiéval*, ed. J. Baschet et J. C. Schmitt (Le Léopard d'Or, 1996) : 207-249.

¹⁶ Horace, *Satires. Epistles. The Art of Poetry*, H. Rushton Fairclough, trans. (Loeb Classical Library 194. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926), line 361 of *Ars Poetica*: 'A poem is like a picture / Ut pictura poesis.'

transverse manner, I am interested in how Chaucer constructs his fictional spaces with ornamental syntax. Theseus's tournament arena and chapels in *The Knight's Tale* are remarkable fictional structures, and Chaucer carefully constructs his ekphrastic passages. Indeed, he uses rhetoric to build imaginary structures in a two-way process in which real-world spaces and architecture influence poetry, and poetry invents architecture, and these create meaning in the narrative.

Bonne breaks down the essential functions of ornamentality, which he defines as the adornment of the surface of an object. Ornament is a *marque* or form, against a *champs*, a field or background, which manifests certain formal or symbolic qualities.¹⁷ In his estimation, ornamentation is primarily an aesthetic phenomenon that can remain so for its own sake, or it can accumulate value - iconographic, syntactical, or symbolic. Ornament cannot, however, make meaning by itself. It must be considered as part of a whole. Ornament can thus contribute to the order of a work by providing patterns or motifs which can emphasize messages or ideas. Bonne argues that to varying degrees, ornament can either enhance the totality of the work (an aesthetic mode which celebrates its object) or distract from it (the risk of obliterating its object).¹⁸

Bonne thus demonstrates an approach to assessing ornamentation by considering whether it is active or passive in creating meaning in the work as a whole, identifying patterns or figures, and analysing its placement.¹⁹ How does the ornamentation operate

¹⁷ Bonne, 'De l'ornement à l'ornementalité, 105-6.

¹⁸ Bonne, 'De l'ornement à l'ornementalité, 117 ; 'célébrer son objet sur les modes esthétiques,' 'au risque d'oblitérer.'

¹⁹ Bonne, 'De l'ornement à l'ornementalité, 110-114.

within the whole? Does it support, celebrate, or emphasize prevailing themes? Or does it distract, contradict, and obliterate the narrative? *The Squire's Tale* is, arguably, so ornamented that the narrative structure collapses under the weight of it, and provides our starting point for analysing Chaucer's astral adornment.

The Ornamented Squire and his Tale

Of all *The Canterbury Tales*, *The Squire's Tale* has the highest concentration of astrological imagery. This is in part because the Squire aspires to tell a courtly tale in the high style of romance, and as discussed in the first chapter, astral imagery is a hallmark of epic literature. But even in Virgil's nearly one-thousand lines of poetry in the *Aeneid*, cosmic imagery appears sparingly and only at select points. Why does the Squire need five instances of it, across only 672 lines of poetry? In short because the Squire, as a character and storyteller, prizes style over substance. It is one way that Chaucer composes his character, which begins with his description in the *General Prologue*. His father, the Knight, is described by a list of his motivating virtues (chivalrie, trouthe, honour, fredom, curteisie 45-46), whereas his son, the Squire, is described by his appearance ('lokkes cruller, embrouded was he, as it were a meede / al ful fresshe floures, whyte and reede' 89-90). The young man has preened his appearance by curling his hair, a superficial treatment to enhance his style. He wears manipulated fabric, embroidered as if it were a meadow all fresh with red and white flowers. Head to toe, his figure is artificially processed, a sort of sociotechnic projection of his social status, which also possibly speaks of his

pretensions.²⁰ Like his tale, the Squire is so heavily decorated that individual adornments are lost to the overall dizzying surface.

The Squire tells a composite romance in rhymed couplets without a sure ending. Most literary criticism of the last hundred years interprets his tale as a gently satiric mixture of western romance tradition and eastern fairy tales.²¹ As part of the satire, the Squire seems to be directly flouting the counsel offered by Geoffrey of Vinsauf, in which he warns: ‘Give hyperbole rein, but see that its discourse does not run ineptly hither and yon.’²² Yet hither and yon the young narrator goes, without a destination. As Tison Pugh comments, ‘he continually weighs down his primary story line with narrative threads unworthy of further pursuit.’²³ Robert Haller suggests his tale is designedly superficial, and Derek Pearsall that the narrator’s allusions, motifs and lore reveal the Squire’s immaturity.²⁴ Angela Weisl writes concisely that the Squire attempts to ‘cram every possible romance motif into his tale,’ without a clear goal or ordering principle, quite unlike the father’s chivalric romance.²⁵ In fact, the narrative is so decorative that Helen Cooper writes that the

²⁰ Wood, *Ch...Country of Stars*, 98-99. Robert S. Haller, ‘Chaucer’s *Squire’s Tale* and the Uses of Rhetoric.’ *Modern Philology* 62/4 (1965): 285-295, at 288. John P. McCall, ‘The Squire in Wonderland.’ *The Chaucer Review* 1 (1966): 103-109, at 108. D. A. Pearsall, ‘The Squire as Story-Teller.’ *University of Toronto Quarterly* 34/1 (1964): 82-92. Alan S. Ambrisco, ‘“It Lyth Nat in My Tonge”: *Occupatio* and Otherness in the ‘Squire’s Tale’.’ *The Chaucer Review* 38/3 (2004): 205-28, at 205.

²¹ Grace E. Hadow, *Chaucer and His Times* (H. Holt, 1914). Harry Berger, ‘The F-Fragment of the ‘Canterbury Tales’: Part I.’ *The Chaucer Review* 1/2 (1966): 88-102.

²² Nim’s Vinsauf, 25; Original text: ‘Currat yperbolicus, sed non discurrat inepte / Sermo : refrenet eum ratio placeatque modestus / Finis, ut excessum nec mens nec abhorreat auris.’ Faral’s Vinsauf, lines 1013-1015, p. 228. On the topos of *occupatio* (rhetorical trope of non-description): Shirley Sharon-Zisser, ‘The *Squire’s Tale* and the Limits of Non-Mimetic Fiction.’ *Chaucer Review* 26 (1992): 377-394.

²³ Tison Pugh, *Bad Chaucer: the Great Poet’s Greatest Mistakes in The Canterbury Tales* (University of Michigan Press, 2024), p. 108.

²⁴ Haller, ‘Chaucer’s ‘Squire’s Tale,’ 285-95. Pearsall, ‘The Squire as Story-Teller,’ 82-92.

²⁵ Angela Jane Weisl, *Conquering the Reign of Femeny: Gender and Genre in Chaucer’s Romance* (D.S. Brewer, 1995), p. 51.

Squire treats his material only 'as exciting story motifs or blank walls on which to paint rhetorical murals.'²⁶

The Squire is unsuccessful because he lingers, tarries and repeats himself.²⁷ He duplicates descriptions with the same word choice.²⁸ Ideas are expressed multiple times in identical language, such as lines 337-361 and 383-391. Descriptions of the power of Canacee's ring are annoyingly redundant.²⁹ The Squire promises explanations that never arrive (331-3) and employs the topos of inexpressibility no less than seven times. This parodically echoes and exaggerates the style of many French romances, and this is how Chaucer challenges the reader to consider the narrator's ineptitude and the value of romance as a genre.³⁰ Pugh describes the 'campy' flavour of the tale, 'the *Squire's Tale* approximates a medieval vision of camp, an artistic perspective on the creation and consumption of cultural artifacts that transforms their jaw-dropping flaws into their beloved virtues.'³¹ He thus suggests that the *Squire's Tale* is 'a masterpiece of bad art,' and rather than lamenting the rhetorical failings of the poetry, we should revel in it as a particularly comic delight.

²⁶ Cooper, *Oxford Guides to Chaucer*, 241.

²⁷ For views opposing an ironic reading see: David Lawton, *Chaucer's Narrators* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1985). Lawton, *Voice in Later Medieval English*, 158. J. A. Burrow, *Medieval Writers and their Work* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 129. Davenport, *Chaucer: Complaint and Narrative*, 41: 'The tale pleases me and the thought of another 10,000 lines or so about magic horse, mirror and sword is a good deal more alluring than some parts of the tales that did get written; I think Spenser and Milton got it right.'

²⁸ Lines 298-301 / 349-353.

²⁹ Lines 433-438; 247-251; 146-155.

³⁰ Robert M. Jordan, 'Chaucerian Romance?' *Yale French Studies* 51, *Approaches to Medieval Romance* (1974): 223-234. Muscatine, *Ch...French Tradition*, see ch. 1. Derek Brewer, 'The Relationship of Chaucer to the English and European Traditions.' Chapter in: *Chaucer: The Poet as Storyteller* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1984), pp. 8-36.

³¹ Pugh, *Bad Chaucer*, 103.

Reflecting on form, Linsley Jones categorizes the Squire's rhymes as either tediously simple or exorbitantly convoluted.³² Combined with tropes from romance, it all works to create a feeling of *déjà vu*. It verges on the ridiculous with the auto-rhyme in lines 80/89, rhyming *sodeynly*. Auto-rhyme was frowned upon in high quality work and seen as a sign of 'loose' Middle English poetry, as Ad Putter discusses.³³ It would have been seen as a failing in the poetic paradigm of medieval French romances and rhetorical paradigms.³⁴ So the subject matter and style reflect French romances, but the poetry does not follow the strict formal qualities expected of the genre. This is particularly striking when placed in context with Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* or *The Knight's Tale*, which are indeed refined romance-epics of the highest order.³⁵ This is an example of how Chaucer, in Jenni Nuttall's words, 'invites his audience to consider whether this poetics is crafty or unlearned, skilful or *incompetent*.'³⁶ In the same chapter, Nuttall remarks on recognizable forms in Chaucer's works - such as a French-styled exotic romance in rhyming couplets - as 'associated with juvenilia, with inauthenticity, with anxieties about technique for technique's sake,' which is certainly evident in *The Squire's Tale*.

³² Lindsey M. Jones, 'Chaucer's Anxiety of Poetic Craft: *The Squire's Tale*.' *Style* 41/3 (2007): 300-317, at 304.

³³ Ad Putter, 'Verse Forms.' Chapter in: Helen Cooper and Robert Edwards, eds. *Medieval Poetry: 1100-1400* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), pp. 128-144, at 139.

³⁴ Putter comments: 'Poets who rhymed strictly were well aware of poets who did not, and their repudiation of licenses taken by other poets was meant to be noticed.' Putter, 'Verse Forms,' 139.

³⁵ Eugene Vance, 'Chaucer's "Troilus & Criseyde."' Chapter in: *Merveulous Signals: Poetics and Sign Theory in the Middle Ages* (University of Nebraska Press, 1989), pp. 256-310, at 262-5. From 263: 'Just as medieval rhetoricians like Geoffrey of Vinsauf and John of Garland equated the high, middle, and low styles of poetic discourse with the functions proper to the supposedly distinct social classes of their time, so Dante, too, stipulated (*De vulgari eloquentia* II.iv) that the poet of the high or "tragic" style (*stylus tragicus*) should write on noble subjects that are most fitting to the activities of the ruling class: these are love (*amor*), defense or public safety (*salus*), and virtue (*virtu*). These ethical concerns are central to Chaucer's *Troilus*.'

³⁶ Nuttall, ' "many a lay and many a thing," 21-37.

The Squire even outlines - without self-awareness - the process by which an audience loses interest in a tale in lines 401-408: 'If it be taried til that the lust be could...The savour passeth ever lenger the moore.' In this same stanza he twice mentions 'the knotte' or main point, of a story, which prompts the reader to wonder where the 'knotte' is in the tale being told; what is his point?³⁷ This may also be a Middle English pun: *knotte* can mean the gist or point of a story, but it is also the word for an ornamental knob on armour, a button, tassel, or tuft.³⁸ What kind of *knotte* does the Squire present? The answer may be at the premature end of the Squire's narration, when the Franklin (and presumably his fellow pilgrims) can tolerate no more.³⁹ In the brief discussion between the Host and the Franklin after the Squire is interrupted, the host reminds the Franklin to tell his tale 'withouten wordes mo' (702). This could be calling for the end of the current conversation, or a sly reference to the Squire's inability to get to the *knotte* because of excessive verbiage. Then (perhaps as a pointed requite), the Franklin proclaims that he is unlearned in rhetorical colours but proceeds to employ them well in his own prologue.⁴⁰

³⁷ On the unfinished nature of SqT: W. Kamowski, 'Trading the "Knotte" for Loose Ends: The "Squire's Tale" and the Poetics of Chaucerian Fragments.' *Style* (University Park, PA) 31/3: 391-412.

³⁸ MED: *knotte*: 4(a) An ornamental knob on armor, a bed, garment, etc.; a button; also, a tassel, a tuft; (b) an embossed ornament of wood or stone on a wall, pillar, ceiling, etc. Contemporaneously, Thomas Usk used *knotte* to represent the *summum bonum* of love in his *Testament of Love* (1384-85): '...for consente of two hertes alone maketh the fastenyng of the knotte.' Gary Shawver, *Thomas Usk's Testament of Love: A Critical Edition* (Toronto Medieval Texts and Translations, 2016) l.9.84-85.

³⁹ Lawton is unsure this was an intentional ending in Chaucer's calculations: 'It does not resemble, or bear the weight of, other interruptions in The Canterbury Tales: "Hoo!" quod the Knyght, "good sire, namoore of this!" (VII 2767). How many hands made the decisions we read in the text we have?' *Voice in Later Medieval*, 159. William Kamowski, 'Trading the *knotte*,' 392.

⁴⁰ See Lawton's discussion, *Voice in Later Medieval*, 158-180. Davenport does not interpret the Franklin's interruption as a sign that the tale was purposefully incomplete: '[i]t has become almost orthodox to assume that the Franklin's compliment to the Squire is a deliberate interruption, bringing the tale to a stop, though the lines could just as well be taken as intended to go at the end of the tale.' Davenport, *Chaucer: Complaint and Narrative*, 41. He further suggests that perhaps the Squire was intended to finish the tale in instalments throughout the return journey to Southwark.

The Squire's Tale thus presents humor in the ironic gap between expectation and what is delivered, and his astrology contributes to this, which is explored next.

Astrology in *The Squire's Tale*

The Squire adorns his tale with astrological language at five points: in the names of the great Khan's family (28-33), in the chronographic passage describing the date of Cambyuskan's birthday (47-51), the description of the magical steed (129-30), the description of the presence chamber (263-274), and in the simile for Canacee's appearance (384-6). Scholarly focus on these passages tends to fall into three groups: contextualizing these passages with contemporary medieval works (*A Thousand and One Nights* or *Cleomadés*), reconciling imagery with calendar dates (on 16 March 1390 the sun was at 4° 35 m in Aries at midday), and fixating on the etymology of the vocabulary (Is 'Canacee' a version of Cauda Ceti/Deneb Kaitos?).⁴¹ North argues there is a 'scheme hidden deep beneath the slender astronomical allusions' that requires advanced understanding to comprehend, and that only those who have entered into 'a state of grace' could recognize it.⁴² I suggest the opposite is true, that the Squire's slender allusions contain no hidden schemes, but rather adorn the tale with purely decorative language.

In fact, despite the richness of astrological vocabulary, in *The Squire's Tale* it exclusively leads to dead ends. For example, the name of Cambyuskan's wife, Elpheta, is a

⁴¹ See the 'Explanatory Notes' in the *Riverside's* SqT. Chauncey Wood, *Ch and the Country of Stars*, 98-99.

⁴² North, *Chaucer's Universe*, 285. North also admits these theories lean against each other as 'horses in certain stables,' if one element is removed then the stable collapses: *Chaucer's Universe*, 263. Marijane Osborne similarly refers to this as 'astrologically based scheming,' 'oblique references,' or 'provocative concealment': *Time and the Astrolabe in the Canterbury Tales* (Norman, OK University of Oklahoma Press, 2002), p. 31.

true derivative of a star name. Alphecca is the modern version of Elpheta, one of the twenty-one stars marked on the rete of most medieval astrolabes, either 18° or 21° in Scorpio.⁴³ This prompts an onomastic enquiry into her children's names (Algarsyf, Cambalo, and Canacee), are they also stellar? Dorothee Finkelstein suggests that Algarsyf is a derivation of Saiph, the bright star in the southeast corner of Orion (his dagger), indicating Algarsyf's position as first son.⁴⁴ This is only tenuous at best. North further proposed that Cambalo could be a derivation of 'cabalcet,' today recognized as Alpha Leonis, although the connection is observably slight.⁴⁵

If Canacee is named for a star, she has the least convincing derivation of the three. North suggests the possibility that hers is an extrapolation of 'Cauda Ceti' (today's Deneb Kaitos).⁴⁶ This star is 5° of Aries, which some interpret as a sign of her close relationship with her father, whose natal sign is Aries. However, Canacee is also a character in Ovid's *Heroides* XI, and her name could also be a form of a Greek root *Kavakῆ*, which is a Tartar term for 'princess.'⁴⁷ She is also mentioned specifically in the *Introduction to the Man of Law's Tale* as a wicked example of incest (lines 77-80). Simply put, none of the children's names directly or easily relate to astral allusions, and this is the point: their names are star-

⁴³ See the online Astrolabe Catalogue for 'Elfeca' or Alphecca, Museum of the History of Science, University of Oxford. Specifically, 39540, built c. 1400 by Jean Fusoris in Paris. Also: North, *Chaucer's Universe*, 266.

⁴⁴ Dorothee Metlitsky Finkelstein, 'The Celestial Origin of Elpheta and Algarsyf in Chaucer's Squire's Tale.' *Euroasiatica* (Istituto Universitario Orientale: Folia Philologica AION-SI Suppleta) 1970, p. 4. Also her book *The Matter of Araby in Medieval England* (Yale University Press, 1977), p. 78-80.

⁴⁵ North, 'Kalenderes Enlumyned Ben They. Part II.' *The Review of English Studies* 20/79 (1969): 257-283, at 259-61.

⁴⁶ See Cauda Ceti on the flammant of astrolabe 43415 in the collection of Oxford's Museum of the History of Science, made c. 1580 in Heilbronn by Johann Anton Linden.

⁴⁷ A. J. de Havilland Bushnell, 'Names and Sources of Chaucer's Squire's Tale.' *Burlington Magazine* 187 (May 1910): 655. Also: Jacqueline de Weever, *Chaucer Name Dictionary* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1988, 1996).

like. They sound suitably ‘foreign’ for a romance. Elpheta is indeed a stellar name, but if one looks for meaningful connections between the familial nomenclature, there are none.⁴⁸

The full potential of astrological language is again ignored in favour of distracting language in the simile for Canacee’s fresh demeanour in lines 384-386:

Up riseth fresshe Canacee hireselve,
As rody and bright as dooth the yonge sonne,
That in the Ram is foure degrees up ronne.

Specifying that the sun is risen precisely 4° in Aries is unnecessarily specific for a simile of demeanour, which Wood derides as a ludicrous parody.⁴⁹ It is extraneous, and even applying the heaviest of astrological interpretations does not yield a greater purpose for it in the tale. There is no perceptible difference between the relative ‘freshness’ of a young sun rising at 4°, 10° or 30° in Aries.

Aries is a particularly rich constellation with connotations to the beginning of time and the creation of man, or even the golden ram that rescued Phrixos and Helle as recorded by Hesiod and Pherecydes. The Squire’s punctilious 4° in Aries thus contrasts with Aries in the *General Prologue*, which suitably adorns the opening *reverdie*, following poetic precedent and connecting to ideas of time and beginnings. However, none of Aries’ rich symbolism is at play in the Squire’s simile. In this instance, the astrological imagery is

⁴⁸ This is a different conclusion than that made by Vincent DiMarco in: Robert M. Correale, Mary Hamel, eds., *Sources and Analogues of The Canterbury Tales* (D. S. Brewer, 2002, 2003): 169-209. He suggests that the names are ‘the grounds for ingenious astrological allegorizing,’ p. 173.

⁴⁹ Wood, *Ch...Country of Stars*, 98, 101.

an example of how ornamentation can obliterate rather than celebrate its object, as described by Bonne at the beginning of the chapter.

Another astrological dead end is in lines 263-274. Cambyuskan enters his chamber at an astrologically propitious moment, filled with wondrous sounds and sights, and it is a splendid array upon which Venus smiles:

Phebus hath laft the angle meridional,
 And yet ascendyng was the beest roial,
 The gentil Leon, with his Aldiran,
 Whan that this Tartre king, Cambyuskan,
 Roos fro his bord, ther as he sat ful hye.
 Toform hym goth the loude mynstralcye
 Til he cam to his chambre of parementz,
 Ther as they sownen diverse instrumentz
 That is lyk an hevene for to here.
 Now dauncen lusty Venus children deere,
 For in the Fyssh hir lady sat ful hye,
 And looketh on hem with a freendly ye.
 (Lines 263-274)

Venus is personified as a planetary deity blessing her children, and this planetary beneficence is as much a part of the atmosphere as the music, dress, and spiced wine, but no more significant. It works to decorate the space just as a finely woven rug would do. Pisces is referred to obliquely as the 'Fyssh' and only magnifies the presence of Venus, as this is one of her benefic domiciles. Venus's exaltation merely adorns the chamber, it does not indicate that one of the characters will be lucky in love as it often does in other tales, such as Damyan's propitious moment in *The Merchant's Tale*. In that instance, Venus is mentioned specifically to indicate fortunate timing for Damyan:

Were it by destynee or by aventure,
 Were it by influence or by nature,

Or constellacion, that in swich estaat
 The hevne stood that tyme fortunaat
 Was for the putte a bille of Venus werkes –
 For alle thing hath tyme, as seyn thise clerkes –
 (Lines 1967-1972)

In both the *The Squire's Tale* and *Merchant's Tale* passages we are told that Venus is in a beneficial alignment. The astrology in *Merchant's Tale* is operative, it foreshadows Damyan's future success, whereas in *The Squire's Tale*, the astrological alignment counts for nothing beyond ornamentation.

Furthermore, the vocabulary that Chaucer supplies for the Squire is not just obscure, but deliberately obtuse. Astrology tends toward technical jargon as most of its terms are borrowed or adapted from Arabic or Latin. It can seem like gibberish – a word itself a possible conversion from the name of a medieval astrologer and alchemist, Jābir ibn Hayyān, Latinized to *Geber*.⁵⁰ His writing was so obscure that it was deemed pure 'gibberish,' and at times so does the Squire's. In the same passage quoted above, lines 263-274, the Squire mentions the sign of Leo for the month of August. 'The gentil Leon' is an auspicious zodiac sign for Cambyuskan and kings generally, as the King of Beasts is a royal star sign, but it is a stretch to include 'Aldiran' with Leo at all. The phrase 'with his Aldiran' probably refers to the Arabic star name for the Two Forearms (*adh-dhira'an* النراعان), which connect to Gemini.⁵¹ Because the Squire prefers 'Aldiran' over other Latinate names for the

⁵⁰ This theory was published in Samuel Johnson's *A Dictionary of the English Language* (London, 1755) but was challenged in later centuries. Glenn T. Seaborg, 'Our Heritage of the Elements.' *American Society for Metals and Metallurgical Society of AIME* 118 (March 1980): 5-19, p. 6.

⁵¹ Alternative spellings in SqT manuscript sources are Aldryan, Aldrean, Adryan; *MED*. The only other example of 'Aldiran' that I am aware of is from Cambridge University Library MS Hh.6.8.(1), p. xlv, written between the 13-14th centuries at Syon Abbey.

constellation, this would be unfamiliar, and probably even mystifying, to an English audience.⁵² The term is nearly undecipherable, but it increases the feeling of Eastern mystery by exoticizing the language.

This is shown again with the term *Martes* in Cambyuskan's horoscope, 'In Martes face and in his mansioun' (50).⁵³ This is the only instance of this oblique Latin genitive form for the planet Mars in Chaucer's works and does not vary across manuscript editions. Adding the 'te' to Mars is irregular and unnecessary for scansion or meter.⁵⁴ This is thus an instance of aureation, enriching vocabulary with Latinate or French words in a quest for grandeur or prestige. Daniel Sawyer writes that Chaucer 'did reach for abstruse Latin terminology at times,' and I suggest that writing *Martes* is an example of this.⁵⁵ It is literally ornamenting the word with extra letters for the reader, or an extra sound for the listener.

'Aldiran' and 'Martes' are examples of what Chris Cannon describes as confusing anomalies that benefit from applying a critical theory of form. This is 'a theory which insists...that there is still a necessary and constant relationship between a poem's originating thought and the shapes in which it unfolded.'⁵⁶ Cannon opens his discussion with the house-building analogy in *Troilus & Criseyde* (l.1065-9), which is in turn a

⁵² On Chaucer's Arabic sources: Shazia Jagot, 'Fin' Amors, Arabic Learning, and the Islamic World in the Work of Geoffrey Chaucer.' Doctoral Dissertation, University of Leicester (2014). On this constellation: Theony Condos, *Star Myths of the Greeks and Romans; a Sourcebook* (Grand Rapids: Phanes Press, 1997), p. 111.

⁵³ A closer study of Cambyuskan's horoscope will appear in my chapter 'Astral Bodies,' as it works to build his character.

⁵⁴ See notes to line 50 in the 'Explanatory Notes' in *The Riverside Chaucer*.

⁵⁵ Sawyer, *How to Read*, 28.

⁵⁶ Chris Cannon, 'Form.' Chapter in: Paul Strohm, ed., *Middle English: Oxford Twenty-First Century Approaches to Literature* (Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 182. He continued: 'This is an understanding of form that, while simultaneously a theory of literary making (a set of views about how thoughts become things), allows criticism to move from the most trivial of details to the most complex of ideas. It is a theory, then, with the unusual status of a rigorous and practical interpretative tool.'

translation of Vinsauf.⁵⁷ Accordingly, a house is imagined and planned before it is built, which is also the proper order for poetic composition.⁵⁸ And like a house, a poem is not complete until it is tactfully decorated.⁵⁹ Like Vinsauf's and Chaucer's house analogy, a work proceeds from an initial thought, and thoughts *inform* the creation of things. Asking how a single element (such as an obscure Latinate term) fits into the whole can act as an 'Archimedean lever, by shifting the most recalcitrant aspects of a form from the periphery of our attention to the centre of our analysis, also tends to crack open those parts of a textual surface that had, heretofore, seemed impenetrable.'⁶⁰ The textual surface of *The Squire's Tale* is one of excessively gilded ornamentation in which the star names, astrological influences, and zodiacal allusions are only superficial. The highly decorative language exoticizes the tale with foreign (and 'foreign-ish') words, but none of the cosmic allusions go beyond the surface.

Orientalism in *The Squire's Tale*

The Squire's Tale is set further East than any other tale in *The Canterbury Tales* (in the faraway land of 'Tartarye'), and a ideal example of Orientalism as defined by Edward Said.⁶¹ It presents the East as fundamentally different from the West, conflating historical

⁵⁷ Robert Payne, *The Key of Remembrance: a Study of Chaucer's Poetics* (Yale University Press, 1963), p. 16.

⁵⁸ Geoffrey of Vinsauf, *Poetria nova*, ll.194-262, Faral edition.

⁵⁹ Paula Neuss, 'Images of Writing and the Book in Chaucer's Poetry.' *The Review of English Studies* 32/128 (1981): 385-397.

⁶⁰ Cannon, 'Form,' 189.

⁶¹ Kenneth Bleeth, 'Orientalism and the Critical History of the *Squire's Tale*.' Chapter in: *Chaucer's Cultural Geography*, ed. Kathryn L. Lynch (Routledge, 2002), pp. 21-31. On 'Tartary' in fourteenth-century England: Marie Cornelia, 'Chaucer's *Tartarye*.' *The Dalhousie Review* 57 (1977): 81-89. See also Kathryn Lynch's historiography: 'East Meets West in Chaucer's *Squire's* and Franklin's Tales.' *Speculum* 70/3 (1995): 530-51, at 531-2.

figures with fantastical fiction (Cambyuskan for Chinggis Khaan, for instance), and presents Eastern culture as highly ornamented and dangerous.⁶² The Squire's Orientalism is most evident in the way the narrative flattens the nuances of foreignness to represent something familiar, an 'English' exotic.⁶³ In that way, Chaucer's textual Tartars are not unlike the 'Tatars' which processed through London in 22 September 1331, as part of a festival patroned by William Montagu, Earl of Salisbury.⁶⁴ Men of the court were dressed in elaborately 'oriental' costumes, each led by a silver chain by a beautifully clad lady.⁶⁵ In both instances eastern culture is stylized and compressed into a sort of costume, applying an ornamental surface treatment to the men and women of the English court.

I suggest that the Squire's astral passages are part of the ornamental technologies of Orientalism through an artificial, layered, and decorative grammar, especially with the knight's enchanted gifts.⁶⁶ The lines between ornamentation, substance and excess are blurred in the Squire's exotic costume drama, where the cosmic imagery participates in the

⁶² Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), p. 20, 62. Ambrisco, 'It Lyth Nat in My Tonge,' 212. Kathryn Lynch wrote of SqT that 'the tale wraps itself in an aura of exotic alterity, an insistent Orientalism,' 'East Meets West,' p. 531. John M. Fyler, 'Domesticating the Exotic in the *Squire's Tale*.' Chapter in: Lynch, *Chaucer's Cultural Geography*, pp. 32-55. Carol Heffernan, 'Chaucer's "Squire's Tale": the Poetics of Interlace or the "Well of English Undefined."' *The Chaucer Review* 32/1 (1997): 32-45.

⁶³ Said, *Orientalism*, 20, 62. Kathryn Lynch wrote of SqT that 'the tale wraps itself in an aura of exotic alterity, an insistent Orientalism,' 'East Meets West,' p. 531.

⁶⁴ Meg Twycross, 'The Prince of Peace and the Mummers: Richard II and the Londoners' Visit of 1376/1377.' Chapter in: Meg Twycross, Sarah Carpenter, Elisabeth Dutton and Gordon Kipling, eds., *Medieval English Theatre* (D. S. Brewer) 43 (2021), pp. 3-37, at 12.

⁶⁵ William Stubbs, *Chronicles of the Reigns of Edward I and Edward II*, vol. 1. (Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 354: '...una eum rege et aliis militibus electis, omnes splendido apparatu vestiti et ad similitudinem Tartarorum larvati; venerunt etiam eum eis et tot dominae de nobilioribus et pulcrioribus regni, quae omnes idutae fuerunt tunicis de rubeo velveto et capis de camelino albo; et habebat unusquisque miles a dextris unam dominam cum cathena argentea eam decendo.' See also E. J. Burns' work on orientalism, courtliness, and textiles: *Courtly Love Undressed: Reading Through Clothes in Medieval French Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), p. 181-210.

⁶⁶ Anne Anlin Cheng, *Ornamentality* (Oxford University Press 2019), 5-6.

flattening effect of Orientalizing tropes.⁶⁷ In her recent book *Ornamentalism*, Anne Anlin Cheng introduces new theoretical approaches to Asian American female bodies, focused mostly on history of the last two hundred years to the present, but some of her theories and terms are helpful in analysing *The Squire's Tale*. She argues that the Oriental and the ornamental are two critically conjoined presences, and that 'retrieving the Oriental logic of ornamentation and, conversely, the ornamental technologies of Orientalism will open up important conversations[.]'⁶⁸ She refers to this as 'ornamentalism,' redefining a term coined in the nineteenth century, and this is a useful term to apply to *the Squire's Tale*.

For example, when 'This strange knyght' (89) enters Cambyuskan's court, those assembled are abuzz with wonder. In their chatter they liken the enchanted object to famous examples in Western literature: the flying horse is like Pegasus or the Trojan horse (207-11), the mirror is like one described by Aristotle (232-35), the sword is reminiscent of Achilles's spear (240), the ring is like one worn by Moses or Solomon (250).⁶⁹ On the surface, the knight, his gifts, the king and his court appear foreign, but they are only an

⁶⁷ On exoticism in 'The Squire's Tale,' see: Reena Thomas and Ethan K. Smilie, 'Vitiū Curiositatis and Stereotypes in Chaucer's *Squire's Tale*.' *Mosaic* 52/2 (2019): 129-45. From 129: 'Chaucer's experiment into the exotic, the unfamiliar Orient acting as a tempting source of dangerous knowledge, functions as a moral inquiry into the limits of knowledge as well as into the wonder and curiosity that fuel its pursuit.' See also: Michael Murrin, 'Trade and Romance.' *Chicago Scholarship Online* (University of Chicago Press, 2013).

⁶⁸ Cheng, *Ornamentalism*, 18.

⁶⁹ Anne Middleton, 'War by Other Means: Marriage and Chivalry in Chaucer.' *Studies in the Age of Chaucer, Proceedings* 1 (1984): 119-33, p. 129. Corinne Saunders discusses how this is an element of the romance genre: 'Romances often revel in the exoticism, artifice and technology of magic.' Saunders, *Magic and the Supernatural*, 7.

‘English’ translation and stereotyping of Eastern culture; the adornments are only surface-deep, the underlying structures of the court are familiar.⁷⁰

The most emphatically astrological passage in the tale occurs with the description of the enchanted steed of brass, which further participates in the ornamental surface of the tale by highlighting tropes about the East as mysterious, where astrological practices go far beyond the boundaries of acceptability. The creator of the steed of brass is described thus:

He that it wroghte koude ful many a gyn.
 He wayted many a constellacion
 Er he had doon this operacion,
 And knew ful many a seel and many a bond.
 (Lines 128-130)

Here we are told that the inventor of the enchanted equine waited for the perfect celestial configuration before he finished his operations, ‘And knew ful wel many a seel and many a bond.’ The seal and bond refer to particularly dark strain of astrological magic prohibited by Church authorities.⁷¹ The practice of astrological seals relies on the sympathetic magic of celestial figures, particularly the zodiac, which involves drawing or incising star

⁷⁰ Kathryn L Lynch: Chaucer ‘blunts the foreignness of the genre ... by substituting highly courtly and Western motifs.’ ‘East Meets West,’ p. 541. Fyler: The Squire follows ‘an almost irresistible human impulse to explain the exotic, to domesticate it, by recourse to the familiar.’ ‘Domesticating the Exotic,’ 6.

⁷¹ Valerie Irene Jane Flint, *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe* (Princeton University Press, 1991; 2020), 38-39; see also chapter 5, ‘The Magic that Persisted,’ p. 87-126. Tara Williams, *Middle English Marvels: Magic, Spectacle, and Morality* (Penn State University Press, 2018), p. 99-103, 117-8. Frank Klaassen, ‘English Manuscripts of Magic, 1300-1500: A Preliminary Survey.’ Chapter in: Claire Fanger, ed. *Conjuring Spirits: Texts and Traditions of Medieval Ritual Magic* (The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), pp. 3-31, at p. 5: ‘So long as there was some clear connection to the stars and no connected ritual such as incantation, suffumigation, or ritual gestures, the magical operation was less at risk of being identified as demonic.’ Michael Scot (d. c. 1235), wrote about astral seals in his *Liber introductorius*, part III-IV.

configurations on parchment or stone (preferably semi-precious or even a gem), at precise times according to planetary configurations related to the desired outcome.⁷²

Detailed instructions for such ‘seels’ and ‘bonds’ are provided in the *Picatrix*, chapters 11 and 12, a controversial text outlining magical astrological spells and rituals which was translated into Latin around 1300.⁷³ The source text was written in Arabic under the title *Ghāyat al-Hakīm / The Aim of the Sage*, c. 954-59.⁷⁴ This was not widely circulated in Europe until after c. 1450, but provides a glimpse into this prohibited practice. The author claims the text’s sources were revived ancient eastern wisdom, reflecting a type of Platonic Orientalism in which there exists one perennial wisdom tradition that unites sages of every nation.⁷⁵ The *Picatrix* details which planet or zodiac sign works best with which types of stones and claims that these talismans can produce wondrous, supernatural results, which is precisely the kind of image-making for wondrous effects that the magician

⁷² This type of ritual is recorded in these primary sources: Thebit ben Corat, *De imaginibus; De lapidibus filiorum Israel*; and *Liber lune*. Marbodius, *De sculpturis gemmarum*. Attributed to Ptolemy, *Liber hermetic de xv. Stellis and De imaginibus*. Attributed to Hermes Trismagistis, *Liber Lune*. Al-Kindi, *De radiis stellarum*. Richard Kieckhefer describes the practice thus: ‘images bearing signs of the constellations are planets, through which the power of these heavenly bodies is drawn down and concentrated so that it can be used in magic,’ in: *Magic in the Middle Ages*, 131. Lynn Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science: During the First Thirteen Centuries of our Era*, vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1923), p. 289-292. Joan Evans, *Magical Jewels of the Middle Ages and Renaissance* (Clarendon Press, 1922), p. 95-120. Curry, *Ch...Sciences*, 21. Falk, *The Light Ages*, 198.

⁷³ David Pingree, *Picatrix: The Latin Version of the ‘Ghāyat Al-Hakīm’* (London: Warburg Institute, 1986). *Picatrix, a Medieval Treatise on Astral Magic*, ed. & trans. Dan Attrell and David Porreca (The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2019), p. 120. Willy Hartner, ‘Notes on *Picatrix*.’ *Isis: A Journal of the History of Science*, vol. 56 (1965), p. 4.

⁷⁴ It combines: ‘Arabic texts on Hermeticism, Sabianism, Ismailism, astrology, alchemy and magic produced in the Near East in the ninth and tenth centuries A.D.’ David Pingree, ‘Some of the Sources of the Ghāyat al-hakim.’ *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 43 (1980): 1–15. Alfonso X had it translated into Spanish between 1256-1258.

⁷⁵ Attrell and Porreca’s *Picatrix*, 5. In later centuries Marsilio Ficino and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola gave this the term ‘prisca theologia’: James D. Heiser, *Prisci Theologi and the Hermetic Reformation in the Fifteenth Century* (Repristination Press, 2011).

used in creating the brass steed in *Squire's Tale*.⁷⁶ For example, *Picatrix* II.8 states: 'The location of the image, its materials, whether it is in the air or on land, whether hidden or in the open, and other such factors...all these things are worthy of consideration among the works of magic since it is on account of such factors that the planetary influences and effects arise. Greater and more wondrous effects will arise that are hard to believe in the opinions of those who behold them.'⁷⁷

Making astral seals and bonds must have been more than mere rumour or hearsay in at least the thirteenth century, because it is addressed by Thomas Aquinas.⁷⁸ In a letter written around 1272 to 'that certain knight from beyond the mountains,' he answers a query about the apparent effectiveness of just such occult operations.⁷⁹ Aquinas explained that superior forces can work through inferior material: 'Thus it is impossible, that images or sculptures which are made for producing extraordinary effects should have their efficacy from heavenly bodies, although they seem to be made under certain constellations. They have it only from superior agents which work through images and sculptures.'⁸⁰ Following this logic, the stars have an extrinsic virtue derived from God, through which his power can

⁷⁶ For explicit instructions on how to create such astral images, see: Pingree, *Picatrix*, II.9-10. A similar text is Thabit ibn Qurra's ninth century *On Talismans*, first translated into Latin via Adelard of Bath, *Liber prestigiorum Thebidis secundum Ptolomeum et Hermetum* (1100-1150). Later it was more widely circulated in an edition made by John of Seville, later 12th early 13th centuries, which survives in over sixty manuscripts.

⁷⁷ Attrell and Porreca's *Picatrix*, 98.

⁷⁸ For more concerning occult v divine causation, see discussion on pages 58-59: Joseph Bernard McAllister, *The Letter of Saint Thomas Aquinas De Occultis Operibus Naturae Ad Quemdam Militem Ultramontanum* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1939).

⁷⁹ 'De operationibus occultis naturae ad quemdam militem ultramontanum'

⁸⁰ *Aquinas*, p. 29. '...unde non est possibile quod imagines vel sculpturae quae fiunt ad aliquos effectus singulares producendos, efficaciam habeant ex caelestibus corporibus, quamvis sub certis constellationibus fieri videantur, sed solum ab aliquibus spiritibus qui per imagines et sculpturas tales operantur.'

be made manifest. Conversely, belief that the stars have intrinsic power to effect changes on earthly matter is superstition according to Aquinas.⁸¹

It is pertinent to note that Aquinas does not dismiss the power of such image-making; it is just possible that it could work if the astrologer knew precisely how to tap into natural forces and harness planetary influences.⁸² Through this line of reasoning then, astrological causality is an active force in the medieval cosmos, not entirely unlike divine miracles wrought through relics of saints. It is another example of how divine power can work through inferior material. However, unlike holy miracles approved by ecclesiastical leadership, stellar image-making was expressly forbidden because it was usually an attempt to manipulate nature into behaving in a certain way for profane purposes.⁸³ There was thus a distinction made between natural astrological causation and purposeful incantation.⁸⁴ When Aquinas was approached with the knight's conundrum – why does this illicit magic seem to work? – he explains that it is only an expression of divine power, but still prohibited as a practice.

Magic that was no longer allowed in Christendom continued to flourish unabated in the East, at least according to prevailing medieval fictions. A parallel example with the Squire's description of Cambyuskan's court can be found in *The Book of John Mandeville*,

⁸¹ Aquinas, p. 30.

⁸² See the *Picatrix* II.3 'All the Works of the Planets, the Sun, and the Moon,' p. 73-83; II.6 'On the Powers of Images; How They May Be Harnessed; How Images Can Receive Planetary Power; How Images Produce Effects; and How This Is Fundamental to the Knowledge of Magic and Images,' p. 89-96.

⁸³ Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, 132.

⁸⁴ See Robertus Anglicus's commentary on *De sphaera* of Sacrobosco of 1271. North, *Stars, Minds and Fate: Essays in Ancient and Medieval Cosmology* (London: The Hambledon Press 1989), p. 64.

where marvellous mechanical birds astonish the court rather than a horse.⁸⁵ These birds are made of gold, richly wrought and enamelled, and Mandeville does not know how it operates: ‘And whether it be by craft or be nygromancye I wotnere, but it is a gode sight to beholde and a fair, and it is gretmeruayle how it may be.’⁸⁶ By using the term ‘nygromancye,’ he is careful to specify that this is not natural (or white) magic. He further surmises that the inventors must be subtle men of science, ‘for of sotyltee and of malice and of fercastyng thei passen alle men vnder Heuene.’ Just as the wise philosophers in *The Squire’s Tale* ‘wayted many a constellacion’ (129), there is a similar note of forecasting (*fercastyng*) here, of comprehending and predicting the powerful forces exerted by the stars and planets and harnessing this for nefarious ends. In fact, they are even more subtle than Christian men according to Mandeville, dabbling in explicitly forbidden arts. The knowledge is so secret that Mandeville is excluded from learning it, as this is only accessible to a few.⁸⁷

By mentioning specifically in *The Squire’s Tale* that the brass horse was created by an astrologer practicing dark magic, the object veers close to the diabolical, and this edge further exoticizes the elements in the tale. It is the result of subversive human wizardry, ‘*techne* not miracle,’ as Mary Carruthers describes.⁸⁸ It is another instance of Orientalizing: the horse was brought to life through unsanctioned occult arts. In the case of *The Squire’s Tale*, Thomas and Smilie discuss the ‘treacherous’ nature of the pursuit of such forbidden

⁸⁵ John Mandeville, *The Book of John Mandeville*, Tamarah Kohanski & Larry Benson, eds. (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 2007), XXIII.1-36, esp. 8-11.

⁸⁶ *Mandeville* XXIII.11-15.

⁸⁷ *Mandeville* XXIII.16-25.

⁸⁸ Mary Carruthers, ‘Encountering Vision: Dislocation, Disquiet, Perplexity.’ Chapter in: Ardis Butterfield, Ian Johnson, Andrew Kraebel, eds. *Literary theory and criticism in the later Middle Ages: interpretation, invention, imagination; essays in honour of Alastair Minnis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 206-219, at 215.

paths with the term *vitium curiositatis*, defined this way: ‘For medieval theologians such as Augustine, Bernard, and Aquinas, *vitium curiositatis* was present when the speculative part of the intellect was unregulated, that is, when a subject pursued illicit objects of knowledge (e.g., the trivial, the novel, the secret, the demonic, and that which is beyond human ability to know) or pursued licit objects but did so for illicit ends. Such pursuits were deemed distractions from the ultimate aim of knowledge: love of God.’⁸⁹ This mechanical marvel is just such an illicit object of knowledge, created in the dangerous East - where the Church holds no sway – thus making space to explore restricted realms of astrology, and together feed into xenophobic tropes.

While magical steeds and enchanted automata are common in folklore worldwide, Chaucer’s iteration draws mostly from twelfth-century French romances.⁹⁰ North mentions the similarities between the magical horse and an astrolabe, which Marijane Osborne expands to suggest that the horse is in fact a metaphor for an astrolabe, but the genre of romance intrinsically accommodates magical brass horses without metaphor.⁹¹ Rather it corresponds more closely to the magical steeds in two French romances (c. 1285) with

⁸⁹ Thomas and Smilie, ‘*Vitium Curiositatis*,’ 131. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiæ*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Christian Classics, 1981), II-II, q. 167, a. 1.

⁹⁰ Lynch identifies similarities with *A Thousand and One Nights* and medieval French romances. Lynch, ‘East Meets West,’ 539. W. A. Clouston, *Elements in Chaucer’s ‘Squire’s Tale,’ and Analogues* (London: Chaucer Society 2/23 & 26, 1887), p. 281. Scott Lightsey, *Manmade Marvels in Medieval Culture and Literature* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), p. 62. About wonder and ‘The Squire’s Tale’: L. O. Aranye Fradenburg. ‘Simply Marvelous.’ *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 26 (2004): 1-27. Truitt, *Medieval Robots*, see ‘Chapter 1: Rare Devices: Geography and Technology.’ See also the portion on ‘Marvels and Causes’ in: *Sources and Analogues of The Canterbury Tales*, vol. 1, p. 205-9.

⁹¹ North, *Ch Universe*, 267-270. Osborn, *Time and the Astrolabe*, p. 39: ‘The steed of brass in ‘*The Squire’s Tale*,’ in addition to being a mechanical creature capable of carrying passengers within the story, becomes a metaphor for that scientific instrument imported to England and the Continent from Arabia, the brass astrolabe.’ Helen Cooper, ‘Magic That Does Not Work.’ *Medievalia et Humanistica* 7 (1976): 131-146. Saunders, *Magic and the Supernatural*, see introduction. Kolve, *Telling Images II*, 183.

nearly identical plots: Adenet le Roi's *Cleomadés* and Girart d'Amiens *Meliacin; ou le Cheval de fust*.⁹² In these tales, the magical horses are invented by sorcerous clerks who use astrology and nigromancy to imbue their equine creations with power.

In Girart d'Amiens' version, the narrator states that the horse is an 'engien' that no clergy can comprehend.⁹³ In Adenet le Roi's *Cléomades* the narrator describes the inventor of the cunning ebony horse as an African who had great learning about necromancy and about astronomy.⁹⁴ What is significant to note is that the horse is treacherous, and literally the vehicle for the plot: Cléomades mounts the horse and is immediately whisked far away.⁹⁵ The inventor is a trickster, he did not tell the king how to direct the flying steed properly and built it as an instrument of deception. The horse and rider leave the royal court bewildered and the rest of the tale revolves around Cléomades finding his way home. Similarly, the horse in *The Squire's Tale* is created by a magician and offered as a gift to a king - but it never performs. In fact, it never even moves. It remains at the centre of court as an equine embellishment, as something to gaze upon. Indeed, the narrator never returns to the horse after it is described, preferring instead to move onto the next magical object. This is, again, an astrological dead end.

⁹² Girart d'Amiens, *Meliacin ou le Cheval de fust*, éd. Antoinette Saly (Aix-en-Provence, Publications du Cuerno [Senefiance, 27], 1990).

⁹³ Girart d'Amiens ed. Saly, *Meliacin*, lines 505-508, p. 18.

⁹⁴ Adenet le Roi, *Les Œuvres d'Adenet le Roi*, t. 5 : *Cléomades*, Albert Henry, ed. (Brussels, 1971), vv. 1473-80 : 'Sachiez que droit a celui tans / ot el regne des Aufricans / trois rois qui grant richece avoient, / car mout tres grant terre tenoient ; / li uns de l'autre marchissoit / mout pres et mout l'uns l'autre amoit. / Chascuns savoit mout de clergie / d'ingromance et d'astronomie...'

⁹⁵ Adenet le Roi, *Cléomades* ed. Albert Henry, lines 2444-2456.

Such an astounding thing could be the agent for potential narrative action – it could have whisked away Cambyuskan or introduced further ideas about the limits of creativity. Instead, it is like the role that Venus plays in the palace chamber as discussed earlier: present but inoperative, and neither perform. *The Squire's Tale* is indeed a poem about surfaces, and the Squire's astral imagery acts as trinketry-baubles atop a shiny, 'ornamented' surface.⁹⁶ Astrology is part of the Squire's poetic embroidery which gives the impression of richness, but without finishing knots to tie it together.⁹⁷ Ultimately, the Squire's *knotte* is more of a tassel or button than a tapestry. Bonne writes that ornament alone cannot make meaning, and in the case of *The Squire's Tale*, the astral adornments work to project a beautiful, Orientalised surface, but nothing more. Because the astral passages such as Canacee's 4^o in Aries or the star-like names of Cambyuskan's family do not impart meaningful order, significant motifs, or recurring concepts, they create outsized distractions from the narrative which obliterates the work. The astral adornments in his father's *The Knight's Tale* however, function entirely differently.

The adorned arena temples in *The Knight's Tale*

In this section of the chapter, we turn from one type of adornment, *ornatus*, to another, ekphrasis, with the astrological imagery of the arena chapels in *The Knight's Tale*.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ W. A. Davenport may not have agreed with this assessment. Concerning the courtly scenes in *Sqt*, he wrote: 'To argue that such passages of *occupatio* are clumsy, or intended to expose the inadequacies of the narrator misses the knowing, nostalgic quality of the composition; it is just in these passages that Chaucer's late fourteenth-century subtlety and self-awareness are expressed.' *Chaucer: Complaint*, 46.

⁹⁷ About the poetics of the fragment: Kamowski, 'Trading,' 405.

⁹⁸ See the definition of 'ekphrasis': James A. W. Heffernan, 'Ekphrasis: Theory.' Chapter in: Gabriele Rippl, ed. *Handbook of Intermediality: Literature - Image - Sound - Music* (De Gruyter, 2015), pp. 35-49. On ekphrasis and classical rhetoric handbooks: Aelius Theon (Greek, first c. CE) *Progymnasmata* 118.7. After Quintilian,

Like many of Chaucer's astrological passages, the descriptions of the wall murals reflect remarkable creativity and elaboration beyond their source, and thus provide a fascinating conjunction of original ekphrasis, astral iconography, and narrative.⁹⁹ The temples are built into the walls of Theseus's commissioned amphitheatre in preparation for Arcite and Palamon's tournament challenge, and astrologically oriented to reflect the gods Venus, Mars and Diana (1888-1892).¹⁰⁰ They are dedicated spaces for worship with a cult statue at the centre where the characters express their desires in prayer, and the walls are painted with narrative scenes that depict the effects of planetary power over mortals.¹⁰¹

The Knight's Tale includes Chaucer's only ekphrasis that does not occur in a dream vision. The narrator describes the paintings as telescoping, static compositions.¹⁰² The lengthy descriptions of the arena and its three chapels are a deliberate and marked

Hermogenes of Tarsus in the second century, Aelius Festus Aphthonius' *Progymnasmata* in the fourth, and Menander Rhetor, late third to fourth c.

⁹⁹ 'The tournament field and amphitheatre in 'The Knight's Tale' are far grander, more highly decorated and described with more details than the parallel version in Boccaccio's *Teseida*': Kolve, *Imagery of Narrative I*, p. 114. McKinley, *Chaucer's House of Fame*, 46.

¹⁰⁰ Marijane Osborn suggested that the amphitheatre mirrors an astrolabe in its circular construction, and the temples to the gods reflect their placements in their zodiacal houses on the rete if situated in a particular way: *Time...Astrolabe*, 132-135. Barbara Newman, 'What Did It Mean to Say "I Saw"?' The Clash between Theory and Practice in Medieval Visionary Culture.' *Speculum* 80/1 (2005): 1-43.

¹⁰¹ About the arena Kolve writes that it is a 'structure that incorporates other sorts of art, a structure that becomes itself a complex work of art.' *Imagery of Narrative I*, 107, 115. Kolve wrote that the temples themselves had no obvious parallel in the art and architecture of fourteenth-century Europe, and that the decorations may have been a proto-form of *Planetenkinder* scenes, p. 114-116. Douglas Brooks and Alastair Fowler argue the layout of the three oratories reflects a zodiacal chart: 'The Meaning of Chaucer's "Knight's Tale."' *Medium Ævum* 39/2 (1970): 123-146; 129-130.

¹⁰² On Chaucer's ekphrasis: Andrew James Johnston, 'The Aesthetics of "Wawes Grene": Planets, Paintings and Politics in Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*.' Chapter in: Helen Fulton, ed., *Chaucer and Italian Studies* (University of Wales Press, 2021), pp.145-168. Andrew James Johnston, 'Ekphrasis in *The Knight's Tale*.' Chapter in: Howard Bloch et al., eds., *Rethinking the New Medievalism* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), pp. 181-197. Claire Barbetti, *Ekphrastic Medieval Visions* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2011). Robert Epstein, ' "With many a florin he the hewes boghte": Ekphrasis and Symbolic Violence in the *Knight's Tale*.' *Philological Quarterly* 85/1-2 (2006): 49-68. Mary Olson, 'Speaking Walls: Ekphrasis in Chaucer's *House of Fame*.' *Enarratio* 14 (2010): 118-38. Murray Krieger and Joan Krieger, *Ekphrasis: The Illusion of the Natural Sign* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992, 2019). Linda Tarte Holley, *Chaucer's Measuring Eye* (Rice University Press, 1990).

interruption to the plot, but they are not isolated in aesthetic reflexivity.¹⁰³ In James Heffernan's study of ekphrasis in literature, he writes that '[Ekphrasis] is the unruly antagonist of narrative, the ornamental digression that refuses to be merely ornamental.'¹⁰⁴ The Knight's long ekphrastic digression is neither unruly nor merely ornamental, but does what visual art is meant to do: absorb the attention of the viewer and relay a message, seek a response, or elicit a feeling, even if it is a purely aesthetic one. The messages of the paintings on the temple walls are clearly decipherable when careful attention is paid to the language; Palamon is blessed by Venus to succeed, Arcite is fated to die, and Emilye must marry. Here the astrological murals coherently operate within the larger movements of the narrative, or in Bonne's terms, they provide ornamental motifs that enhance the totality of the work and 'celebrate' its subject of Fate and love by foreshadowing the destinies of Palamon, Arcite, and Emilye.

Unlike *The Squire's Tale*, which meanders without concluding *knottes*, *The Knight's Tale* is tightly controlled, balanced and symmetrical. In Helen Cooper's deconstruction of *The Knight's Tale*, she demonstrates that it presents parallel episodes working in from the beginning and end to the centre in a set of paired threes.¹⁰⁵ The temple paintings are carefully described at a critical midpoint, and their images are designed with purpose not only within the tale by Theseus, but also by Chaucer, 'By ordre weren peynted on the wal' (1934). Charles Owen, Jr. defines them as 'governing images' with remarkable staying

¹⁰³ See: Brantley, 'Vision, Image, Text.' Andrew James Johnston, Ethan Knapp, and Margitta Rouse, *The Art of Vision: Ekphrasis in Medieval Literature and Culture* (Interventions: New Studies Medieval Cult. Columbus (Ohio State University Press, 2015), p. 4.

¹⁰⁴ Heffernan, *Museum of Words*, p. 5.

¹⁰⁵ Cooper, *Canterbury Tales*, 73, and see chart on 74.

power.¹⁰⁶ Kolve uses this concept to structure his own studies on imagery and Chaucer, with a focus on the amphitheatre temples in stating: 'There are images that Chaucer moves his story to or through, and which he expected a significant part of his audience to recognize in their iconographic dimension - as images possessing public meanings independent of the narrative in which he uncovers them.'¹⁰⁷ This is certainly true - there is nothing surprising about the presentations of any of the deities and allegorical figures, they are highly conventional. The symbolism in the paintings, such as Venus garlanded with roses and carrying a musical instrument or Mars accompanied by a red-eyed wolf, were recognizable attributes to a medieval audience.¹⁰⁸ As Jessica Brantley observes, ekphrasis is also an important element of medieval mythography which allows a degree of separation from the contemporary Christian world and the classical past.¹⁰⁹

Clearly, then, these images are important to the whole of *The Knight's Tale*, but what is the point of the verbal description of fictional wall paintings at all? I suggest that they perform critical functions for the narrative that would be difficult to do in other ways, and that Simon Goldhill's critical discussion of ekphrasis in literature is enlightening in this case.¹¹⁰ First, he writes that ekphrasis is useful because it demonstrates a practice of interpreting and a method for seeing meaning: What does the poet want us to see? Second,

¹⁰⁶ Charles Owen Jr., 'The Crucial Passages in Five of the *Canterbury Tales*: a Study in Irony and Symbol.' *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 52 (1953): 294-311.

¹⁰⁷ Kolve, *Imagery of Narrative I*, p. 2.

¹⁰⁸ Kolve writes that these paintings may anticipate *Planetenkinder* scenes that become increasingly popular in the fifteenth century. However, he admits they are far from a 'perfect match,' and 'The fit is not exact, and we shall have to pay as much attention to the differences as to the similarities.' *Imagery of Narrative I*, p. 116.

¹⁰⁹ Robert Epstein argues that this ekphrasis is meta-textual and that 'it functions here to reveal art as a social construction.' Epstein, ' "Mith Many a Floryn He the Hewes Boghte," ' 55.

¹¹⁰ Simon Goldhill, 'What is Ekphrasis for?' *Classical Philology* 102 (2007): 1-19.

it dramatizes the viewer in his or her own viewing and thus instructs the audience *how* to look. Third, ekphrasis provides a critical gaze committed to a value-laden view of things. Lastly, ekphrasis is a textual discourse within a wider culture of viewing and the spectacle of display. Goldhill concludes, '[i]n short, ekphrasis is designed to *produce a viewing subject*. We read to become lookers, and poems are written to educate and direct viewing as a social and intellectual process.'¹¹¹ Chaucer's technique to 'produce a viewing subject' is the focus of excellent critical research, particularly in relation to Italian trecento painting and *The House of Fame*, and indeed the arena temple murals in relation to classical rhetorical forms.¹¹² Developments in painting, perspective and narrative approaches to art in the fourteenth century had demonstrable effects on Chaucer's own writing.¹¹³ For example, Kathryn McKinley defines what she terms the 'Boccaccian effect,' when Chaucer's narrator shifts to a first-person voice to describe artworks.¹¹⁴

I suggest that the ekphrasis in *The Knight's Tale* underscores the setting as classically pagan - where judicial astrology is fully operational - and to foretell the futures of the characters.¹¹⁵ Chaucer allows his pagan characters to behave as fatalists subscribed to judicial astrology, as explored by Alastair Minnis.¹¹⁶ The reader is thus invited to suspend

¹¹¹ Goldhill, 'What is Ekphrasis for?', p. 2.

¹¹² Johnston, 'Ekphrasis in *The Knight's Tale*,' 181-197. Barbetti, *Ekphrastic Medieval Visions*. Robert Epstein, '“With many a florin he the hewes boghte”: Ekphrasis and Symbolic Violence in the *Knight's Tale*.' *Philological Quarterly* 85/1-2 (2006): 49-68. Olson, 'Speaking Walls,' 118-38. Holley, *Chaucer's Measuring Eye*.

¹¹³ Andrew James Johnston, 'The Temporal Politics of Chaucerian Ekphrasis and the Beginnings of Trecento Art History.' Chapter in: Cheryl Julia Lee, Neil Murphy, & W. Michelle Wang, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Art* (Taylor & Francis, 2024), pp. 149-159.

¹¹⁴ McKinley, *Chaucer's HoF*, 46.

¹¹⁵ Dorothy Bethurum Loomis, 'Saturn in Chaucer's "Knight's Tale."' Chapter in: Arno Esch, ed. *Chaucer und Seine Zeit: Symposion für Walter F. Schirmer* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1968), pp. 149-61.

¹¹⁶ Minnis, *Ch...Pagan Antiquity*, 18, 21, 40-46, 64, esp. 67: 'An historian must allow the pagans to think and act as pagans – a perfectly acceptable procedure providing one's own Christian standards are asserted.'

disbelief and imagine a world in which the pagan gods existed and had actual power. Chaucer's historical sensitivity was noted by Kolve who writes, 'No medieval author ever imagined it with greater human sympathy, or with a more vivid sense of what human life at its most dignified and noble might have been before the Incarnation of Christ.'¹¹⁷ This is a type of dispensationalism, the belief that the history of mankind was divinely designated into eras, and that the dawn of the Christian era witnessed an enlargement of the soul and its capacity for spiritual agency.¹¹⁸ This is important to note because it means that astrological foreshadowing has implications for the plot in Chaucer's fictions set in antiquity.

The arena temples thus perform as a variation of the oracle at Delphi, and the experiences of the three main characters resemble historical accounts of pilgrims visiting the Pythian oracles for guidance.¹¹⁹ Like Theseus's arena, Delphi was a large, all-encompassing architectural complex with individual treasuries and chapels with cult statues to offer votives. The material significance of the cult statues may be difficult to grasp for some audiences today, but in their time they were physically cared for with ritual baths and clothing, and offerings were made in the form of wine and food.¹²⁰ These

Concerning astral determinism in Chaucer's texts, Kolve wrote: 'Because free will is central to Christian theology, sin is deemed volitional, and we are held morally responsible for the choices we make. But the progress of the sun through the regions of the zodiac was an annual, unchanging given, and the power of those stars to influence human life, which no one then seriously doubted, could border on determinism – an 'almost necessary' conclusion that Chaucer sometimes played with his poetry, though he never granted it full credence in his prose.' Kolve, *Telling Image II*, p. 169.

¹¹⁷ Kolve, *Chaucer ...Narrative I*, 149.

¹¹⁸ About the idea of periodic regeneration versus a meridian of time: Mircea Eliade, *Cosmos and History: the Myth of the Eternal Return* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1954), p. 143-47.

¹¹⁹ Michael Scott, *Delphi: A History of the Center of the Ancient World* (Princeton University Press, 2014). Esther Eidinow, *Oracles, Curses and Risk among the Ancient Greeks* (Oxford University Press, 2007).

¹²⁰ Michael Padgett, *The Centaur's Smile* (Princeton: Yale University Press, 2003).

sculptures, already startingly lifelike in the High Classical style, could sometimes even ‘speak’ through a type of ventriloquy.¹²¹

In a similar manner the arena temples are oracular spaces where the cult statues ‘speak,’ and even the wall paintings broadcast messages. Not only do the statues ‘speak’ to their devotees (2265-2267 / 2332-2364 / 2431-2432), but even the walls seem to have ‘sound effects.’¹²² The point is that by creating these oracular temple spaces with ekphrasis, Chaucer broadens the scope of the text to encompass larger ideas about fate through visual, astrological language, and his language was carefully chosen. In the following section we consider one carefully chosen verb in particular: *depeynt*.

Fate *depeynted*

There are two verbs in Chaucer’s ekphrasis that describe the images in the temple murals: *peynt* and *depeynt*, and there are subtle nuances between them. *Peynt* (or *peinten*) is relatively uncomplicated, it is the direct linguistic precedent to the modern English word ‘paint,’ via Old French *peintier*, from Latin *pingere*. This can indicate the verb ‘to paint’ or a noun (she paints with paint on a palette). Adding the prefix *de-* connotes a change in meaning and is not an emphatic prefix. *Depeynt* (*dēpeinten*) comes from the Old French verb *depeint*, more closely related ‘to depict’ than ‘to paint.’¹²³ The Latin root words are *dē-*

¹²¹ Maria Gerolemou, ‘*Technolarynges* in Classical Antiquity.’ Chapter in: Isabel Ruffell, Maria Gerolemou, Tatiana Bur, eds., *Technological Animation in Classical Antiquity* (Oxford University Press, 2024), pp. 184-199, see esp. 192-195 and the discussion of *technoprophesies* with the Delphic Pythia.

¹²² An example is the labouring mother in lines 2082-2086. See: Sarah Stanbury, *The Visual Object of Desire in Late Medieval England* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), p. 105.

¹²³ *Dictionnaire du Moyen Français* (1330-1500), online : < <http://www.atilf.fr/dmf> >

+ *pingo*, meaning to render through painting or colour.¹²⁴ The modern French *dépeindre* is a descendant of *depeint*, and is defined as a verb which represents, describes (something) in a discourse, writing, and, more rarely, as a gesture.¹²⁵ The Middle English *depeint* is nearer to the French definitions of *dépeindre* than the modern English ‘depict.’

Even more specifically, Chaucer uses *depeynt* to relate to astrological foretelling. Definition 1.d. of *depeinten* in the *Middle English Dictionary* is ‘to show ([something] in the stars), foretell,’ and this is based solely on Chaucer’s examples.¹²⁶ This use of the verb is certainly at work in the amphitheatre temples, where *peynt* indicates wall ornamentations such as frescoes, and *depeynt* illustrates something foretelling fate through stars. *Depeynt* indicates the presence of symbolic representation in visual discourse, whereas *peint* may indicate the act of painting or a surface treatment. *Depeynt* also has specifically negative overtones in Chaucer’s fiction. This would be a verb preferred by the oracles at Delphi, which were rarely joyful or auspicious in literature.¹²⁷ Essentially, a happy fate is never *depeynted*.

For instance, the *oratorie* of Venus is painted with mural scenes of figures suffering for love, as well as allegorical, mythological and historical figures (1931-1935). These visions were ‘peynted on the wal,’ specifically indicating a mural, as a prelude to the cult

¹²⁴ Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short, *A Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879).

¹²⁵ *Dépeindre*² B: Représenter, décrire (quelque chose) par le discours, l’écriture, plus rarement par le geste. Proust uses it in this sense: Proust, *J. filles en fleurs*, 1918, p. 763.

¹²⁶ *Middle English Dictionary*, ed. Robert E. Lewis, et al. (University of Michigan Press, 1952-2001). Online edition: Middle English Compendium, ed. Frances McSparran, et al. (University of Michigan Library, 2000-2018).

¹²⁷ Joseph Fontenrose, *The Delphic Oracle: Its Responses and Operations with a Catalogue of Responses* (University of California Press, 2023). See ‘Narrative Oracles Invented as Delphic Responses,’ p. 107-116.

statue of Venus herself. The mural adorns the walls with benefic allegorical images drawing on long-established precedents.¹²⁸ Palamon's chosen deity provides love and happiness, as well as lovesickness, jealousy, etc., ideas which are echoed in the mural motifs. Prayers to Venus will have the best outcome: Palamon, as a true lover, will live in bliss and health (3100-1). Arcite is fated to die by Mars, Emelye is fated to act against her will like Diana, but Venus's influence is beneficial to Palamon. Her temple is beautifully adorned, it is *peynted*, but there are no dreadful outcomes *depeynted*.

The walls in the Temple of Mars are also 'Al peynted' (1970), but the accounts of these murals are different in tone and length. The Martian paintings are unrelenting, dark imaginings, listed one after another. These are grisly to the point of nauseating, and nearly twice as long as the descriptions of the other temples (37 lines describe the Temple of Venus, 70 lines for Mars, 37 for Diana). Across the descriptions of the three temples, the verb *depeynt* is used five times in the description of the Martian murals, once in temple of Diana, and never for the temple of Venus.

The astrological effects Mars exerts on earth are indeed *depeynted* with a 'soutil pencil' (2049) across the walls: Conquest is *depeynted* in a tower overlooking the horrible actions of humankind unfolding; the assassination of Julius Caesar is *depeynted*.¹²⁹ The

¹²⁸ Brantley, 'Venus and Christ,' from p. 180: 'Medieval mythography is, by and large, an ekphrastic genre; the Olympians are usually described (and sometimes moralized) in terms of their iconic attributes, their visual appearance. Even when no physical picture accompanies a text, the idea of artistic representation stands behind the verbal version of each figure: the crucial verb in Fulgentius and his fourteenth-century successors, for example, is usually *pingitur* ('Venus is painted nude, floating in the sea.')

¹²⁹ Concerning the nature of the imagery in the temples, Peggy Knapp wrote: 'Theseus seems to have gotten more (and differently nuanced) art than he bargained for. The aesthetic effect here is that powerful images impel a drive toward cognition that fails to find an adequate confining concept.' 'Aesthetic Attention and the Chaucerian Text.' *The Chaucer Review* 39/3 2005: 241-258, p. 248.

emperors Nero and Antonius were also fated to die in a passage where the verb *depeynt* is used in quick succession:

‘Depeynted was the slaughtre of Julius,
Of grete Nero, and of Antonius;
Al be that thilke tyme they were unborn,
Yet was hir deth **depeynted** ther-biforn
By manasyng of Mars, right by figure;
So was it shewed in that portraiture,
As is **depeynted** in the sterres above
Who shal be slayn or ells deed for love.’
(Lines 2031-2038, emphasis mine)

Chaucer’s unique use of the word *depeynt* is shown clearly in the last couplet: fate is *depeynted* in the stars, indicating specifically who will die.

The phrase ‘right by figure’ is a reference to the configuration of the heavens when these men were born, marking them as fated to die by Mars. As a devotee of Mars, Arcite aligns with other men of the classical world who were born with Mars in a malevolent position on their horoscope – Julius Caesar, Nero, and Antonius. When introducing the portion of text describing the temples and their decorations, the narrator specifically prefaces that ‘the figures’ are important to note, and here this also indicates the configuration of the heavens. The adornment of the chapel walls enhances the narrative structure with visual foretelling, and the choice of images fruitfully embellishes the entirety of the tale.

In Diana’s temple, *depeynt* is again directly related to fate and the stars with the tale of Calisto, the Greek myth of Ursa Major. Calisto was made the ‘loode-sterre’ (2059) because she unwillingly betrayed Diana when she was raped by Jupiter, who then saved her

from death by transforming her into a constellation, the Great Bear. She was a mortal whose tragic fate was quite literally written into the stars, which serves as the theme for the chapel mural:

Depeynted been the walles up and doun
 Of huntyng and of shamefast chastitee.
 Ther saugh I how woful Calistopee,
 What that Diane agreved was with here,
 Was turned from a womman til a bere,
 And after was she maad the loode-sterre.
 Thus it was **peynted**; I kan sey yow no ferre.
 (Lines 2054-2060, emphasis mine)

The description of the astral adornment is sandwiched between *depeynted* (which cues the reader to look for meaningful connections in the images and associated with astral foretelling), and *peynted* (indicating that these images were painted in a mural on the chapel wall). Unlike the superficial, distracting astrology in *The Squire's Tale*, here in *The Knight's Tale* the decorative wall paintings have meaning in the lives of the characters, just as the stars and planets foretell Fate in this tale. Here, the *depeynted* image of Calisto foreshadows Emilye's painfully coerced surrender to Palamon.¹³⁰

Emilye pleads to be welcomed as an eternally chaste maiden into Diana's company (2304-2330), but like Calisto, her desire is immaterial: her fate was predetermined. Her request is denied by the cult statue herself and her fate reverberates in the astral wall paintings. In Chaucer's poetic universe of *The Knight's Tale*, in which characters are subject to judicial astrology, the night sky is *depeynted* with fateful star signs. The constellations are like stellar words, mystifying ciphers that if interpreted correctly can offer fateful clues.

¹³⁰ Heffernan, *Museum of Words*, 66. McKinley, *Chaucer's HoF*, 47.

The persistent use of the verb *depeynt* to describe the murals on the Temple of Mars foreshadows the death of Mars' subject, Arcite, whose tragic fate was predetermined. Similarly, in the Temple of Diana, Calisto's catasterism is not only a decorative wall embellishment, but a foreshadowing device. Unlike the Squire's astrological dead ends, which offer no meaning beyond the surface, the mural adornments are expertly integrated into the tale and reflect the highest degree of rhetorical *ornatus* through ekphrasis in *The Knight's Tale*.

The Boethian *nox pingitur*

Ekphrasis is a way for an author to show the reader how to see meaning in an artwork, and as I have shown, *depeynt* signals meaning beyond the surface image. To support my argument that Chaucer differentiates the nature of fate in his fictional works set in a pagan past versus his 'nonfiction' philosophical or scientific works, a close look at his translation of Boethius's sky painted with stars provides nuanced evidence.¹³¹ In his *De consolatione philosophiae* (523 CE), Boethius describes stars and constellations as celestial adornments: they gleam, glow and shine in the beautiful fabric of the universe, keeping their ancient peace remote from the world's turmoil.¹³² They are not unrelated to humankind however, and Boethius as narrator often connects them to questions about

¹³¹ The term 'nonfiction' is decidedly modern and does not reflect the kind of differentiation made in Chaucer's era but is useful in this context to draw a comparison. On concepts of fictionality: Julie Orlemanski, 'Who Has Fiction? Modernity, Fictionality, and the Middle Ages.' *New Literary History* 50/2: 145-70.

¹³² IV.1: 'Vel quocumque micans nox pingitur, / Recurrat astri circulum.' IV.6: 'Illic iusto foedere rerum / Veterem servant sidera pacem.'

fate.¹³³ In I.5, Boethius laments the vast separation between the reliable, rhythmic continuity of seasons and stars, and the chaotic world and slippery Fortune.¹³⁴ Boethius emphasizes the rational ordering of the universe, and uses the regular appearance of the Moon, Sun and stars as an attestation of the ordering principles governing all of nature.¹³⁵

In IV.1 Boethius describes the night sky as adorned with stars:

‘Until it [the mind] rise to the houses of the stars
And join its path to Phoebus’,
Or go along the road with the cold old god [Saturn],
Squire to his shining star,
Or where the glittering night is painted forth
Turn with the circling stars;’¹³⁶

That the night sky is imagined as a great mural onto which sparkling stars are painted is an image nearly as old as the first Greek poetry, beginning with Homer, and most influentially with Aratus of Soli’s *Phenomena*.¹³⁷ What is specifically pertinent to this study is how Chaucer chose to translate the phrase ‘nox pingitur.’

¹³³ Boethius, *Theological Tractates. The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. H. F. Stewart, E. K. Rand, S. J. Tester (Loeb Classical Library 74, Harvard University Press, 1973), I.V p. 158-159.

¹³⁴ Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. & ed. P. G. Walsh (Oxford University Press, 1999, 2008), p. 14.

¹³⁵ Stephen C. McCluskey, ‘Boethius’s Astronomy and Cosmology.’ Chapter in: Noel Harold Kaylor and Philip Edward Phillips, eds., *A Companion to Boethius in the Middle Ages* (Brill, 2012), pp. 47-73, at 72-73.

¹³⁶ Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*, Stewart, 316: ‘Donec in astriferas surgat domos / Phoeboque coniungat vias / Aut comitetur iter gelidi senis / Miles corusci sideris, / Vel quocumque micans nox pingitur, / Recurrat astri circulum’ (IV.1: 9-14).

¹³⁷ Marion Dolan, *Astronomical Knowledge Transmission Through Illustrated Aratea Manuscripts* (Historical & Cultural Astronomy; Cham, 2017), p. 5. Aratus was writing in the tradition of Hesiod’s *Works and Days*, influenced by Stoic philosophy. Homer was also crucial in the formation of *Phenomena*: ‘The language of the *Phaenomena* is largely the *Kunstsprache* of Homer - an artificial patois which combines spellings and morphology from a variety of dialects.’ Aaron Poochigian’s introduction to *Phaenomena: Aratus and Eudoxus, Phaenomena*, Aaron Johns Poochigian, ed. (Hopkins New Translations from Antiquity. Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), p. xxii. See also: Stamatina Mastorakou, ‘Aratus’ *Phaenomena* beyond Its Sources.’ *Aestimatio* 1 (2021), unpaginated.

Chaucer did not exclusively work from the Latin but also from Jean de Meun's vernacular French translation (d. 1305), and Nicholas Trevet's (or Trivet, c. 1258-1328) commentary. Jean de Meun translated Boethian poetry into prose, a choice that Chaucer followed. Nonetheless, de Meun's translation of *metrum* IV.1 was a close one:

'...et trespasse la haultesse de la région du feu qui s'eschaufe par l'isnel mouvement du firmament, jusques a tant que elle se lieve es maisons des planetes et aille avec le solail, ou face compaignie en sa voie a *Saturnus*, le froit veillard, et chevauche avec sa clere estoille, ou queure par le cercle des estoilles entouz les lieux ou **la nuit resplendissant en est peinte.**'¹³⁸

Here the stars paint the night resplendently, expanding upon Boethius's *nox pingitur* very little. However, the same passage was considered worthy of a gloss by Nicholas Trevet.

Minnis judges that Trevet's commentary was 'the great late-medieval exposition of *De consolacione philosophiae*' and perhaps Chaucer's most crucial source.¹³⁹ Nicholas Trevet faced difficulties with Boethius's Neoplatonic concepts of the World Soul, knowledge through recollection, and the status of prime matter in III.9, for which Trevet offered commentary.¹⁴⁰ For IV.1, Trevet was wary of the inclusion of the pagan planetary deities Phoebus and Saturn and felt that the entire *metrum* needed clarification. He states twice that when the mind can fully comprehend the zodiac, planets, and stars in the night sky, it will perceive that none of them are gods, but subject to the higher power of the Christian

¹³⁸ V. L. Dedek-Héry, 'Boethius' *De Consolatione* by Jean de Meun.' *Mediaeval Studies* 14 (1952): 165-275, p. 234.

¹³⁹ Alastair Minnis in his preface to Silk's edition, emphasis original to Minnis : E. T. Silk, ed. *Nicholas Trevet's Commentary on Boethius, Consolation of Philosophy* (Online edition prepared by A. B. Kraebel, 2022 Yale University).

¹⁴⁰ Minnis, *Chaucer's Boece and the Medieval Tradition of Boethius* (D.S. Brewer, 1993), 1-83. Lodi Nauta, 'The Scholastic Context of the Boethius Commentary by Nicholas Trevet.' Chapter in: Hoenen and Nauta, eds., *Boethius in the Middle Ages: Latin and Vernacular Traditions of the Consolatio Philosophiae* (Boston, 1997), pp. 41-67.

God.¹⁴¹ He writes that this full comprehension may not occur until the soul transcends beyond the heavens after death.

Chaucer chose to include some of Trevet's gloss in mentioning a cloudless night (*nox splendida que caret nubibus* / 'that is to sey, the nyght that is cloudeles') which only seems painted with figures in the stars (*nocte apparet celum tanquam depictum diversis ymaginibus stellarum* / 'for on nyghtes that ben cloudeles it semeth as the hevene were peynted with diverse ymages of sterres'). Chaucer's translation is close to Trevet's, except in one verb:

Trevet: 'nocte apparet celum tanquam **depictum** diversis ymaginibus stellarum.'

Chaucer: 'it semeth as the hevene were **peynted** with diverse ymages of sterres.'

Arguably a more direct translation of *depictum* into Middle English would be *depeynt* rather than *peynt*, and I suggest that in this instance Chaucer meaningfully chose a different verb.¹⁴² *Depeynt*, as Chaucer used it, was too closely associated with astral foretelling to use in this translation, so *depictum* was translated as *peynted*. This may not have been a conscious or intentional decision, but one based on Chaucer's semantic understanding of the language.

In fact, Chaucer did not use *depeynt* anywhere in *Boece*, and I argue this is because in his fiction the verb signals portentous signs, as shown in the temple paintings of *The Knight's Tale*.¹⁴³ This is a subtle way that Chaucer distances his translation of Boethius's

¹⁴¹ 'mens sufficienter contemplata.' Silk, *Nicholas Trevet's Commentary*, 527.

¹⁴² There is no obvious variation between the manuscripts in lines 17-23 of *Boece* IV.1; see Textual Notes in *Riverside*.

¹⁴³ Another instance of a fateful *depeynt* and a wall painting occurs in *The Legend of Good Women*, lines 1025-1029.

philosophy from his own fictional narratives and carefully delineates between astral fatalism and free will. The night sky is merely painted with constellations, it is strictly through the effects of Providence (enactment of God's will) that events unfold on earth – the stars and planets have no independent agency, as Aquinas states. Boethius, as narrator, searches for meaning in the stars, and likens the night sky to an adorned, cosmic mural, and in this case Chaucer is careful to guide the reader to the correct interpretation. Astral paintings in fictional arena chapels dedicated to the old gods may foretell the future, but viewing and interpreting the actual night sky adorned with stars requires firmer knowledge in the workings of Providence.

Thinking about genre and form can thus inform our understanding of how astrology functions in Chaucer's works, whether they are philosophical or technical (*Boece* or *Treatise on the Astrolabe*), or fictions set in the classical, pagan past (*The Knight's Tale*). Seemingly contradictory examples occur in *The Man of Law's Tale*, however, and at first glance it seems to disrupt this theory, and will be considered next.

How to read 'the book of the sky'

There are four 'readings of the sky' across *The Man of Law's* material but only one character interprets the stars correctly. Custance is the only character across *The Man of Law's* material that correctly addresses the heavens. To see how this works it is necessary to analyse each instance in order, beginning with the headlink. The *Man of Law's Introduction, Prologue* and *Tale* appear together consistently in the manuscript editions,

but their relationships have been challenged by scholars.¹⁴⁴ While it is possible that the sequence in which we have them printed now may be inaccurate, we cannot prove definitively otherwise, so I will take it for granted as other scholars have done.¹⁴⁵

The headlink connecting to the Man of Law's portion begins with an astrolabic reading in lines 1-15, which is mentioned in the Introduction to this thesis.¹⁴⁶ Harry Bailey calculates that it is 'ten of the clokke' (14).¹⁴⁷ Chaucer likely used Nicholas of Lynn's tables to choose a date when shadows would appear in equal length to their object, in this case April 18. Although scholars have treated this passage as a technical reading, it is first and foremost adorned poetry. Before we are told that the sun is 45° risen in the sky, the passage is ornamented with imagery, 'That Phebus, which that shoon so clere and brighte, / Degrees was fyve and fourty clombe on highte' (11-12). Ornamentation is significant to note here because it indicates something about Chaucer's priorities as a writer of fiction and poetry: scientific precision is not necessary, but poetic ornamentation is.

Even if the astrolabic reading does not satisfy those in search of an accurate calendrical date, it demonstrates one way to 'read the book of the sky,' or for our purposes, it is one way to read surface information through observation. Directly after checking the time, Harry Bailey includes a lightly philosophical passage about the irrevocable loss of

¹⁴⁴ This is primarily due to the phrase, 'I speke in prose' from line 96 of the Introduction to the *Man of Law's Tale*, but the tale is told in rhyme royal. See the introduction to 'Fragment II: Introduction to the *Man of Law's Tale* in the Explanatory Notes of *Riverside Chaucer*.

¹⁴⁵ Chauncey Wood also takes the order for granted, see *Ch...Country of the Stars* p. 199-200. On more discussion on this see Correale's commentary for 'The Man of Law's Prologue and Tale' in *Sources and Analogues* vol. 1, p. 277-350, see the introduction.

¹⁴⁶ J. C. Eade, *The Forgotten Sky: a Guide to Astrology in English Literature* (Clarendon Press, 1984), p. 125-138.

¹⁴⁷ For a description of this astrolabic process, see Osborn, *Time and the Astrolabe*, p. 70-74.

time, indicating a space between the surface reading (18 April, 10 o'clock) and deeper implications (time is more valuable than 'gold in cofre' and it is wasting away):

Wel kan Senec and many a philosopre
 Biwaillen tyme moore than gold in cofre;
 For 'Los of catel may recovered be,
 But los of tyme shendeth us,' quod he.
 It wol nat come again, withouten drede,
 Namooore than wole Malkynes maydenhede,
 Whan she hath lost it in hir wantownesse.
 Lat us nat mowlen thus in ydelnesse.'
 (Lines 25-32)

Harry provides us with a reading of the sky and an interpretation about its greater implications: It is 10 am, so the day is quickly passing, and this means that the company must hasten to the next tale because time is precious. Before the Man of Law's tale even begins, then, we are introduced to the idea that time can be read through celestial observation, but what that reading *means* in a deeper sense is another matter. That time is ineffable to the mortal imagination and beyond comprehension is an Augustinian theory, but the Man of Law does not arrive at this idea until the end of his tale.¹⁴⁸

The Man of Law's Tale is a highly textual story, meaning it is reported 'as something told, rather than as something that happened: as text rather than "life"' as Helen Cooper explains.¹⁴⁹ This is evident when the Man of Law mentions, rather bizarrely, Chaucer the poet in lines 46-50.¹⁵⁰ The moralizing story of Custance is partially Chaucer's response to John Gower's treatment of the subject, and thus can be seen as a kind of literary discourse

¹⁴⁸ Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*, Book XI (New York: Penguin Books, 1961), p. 217-219.

¹⁴⁹ Cooper, *Oxford Guides*, p. 124.

¹⁵⁰ E. Talbot Donaldson, 'Chaucer the Pilgrim.' *PMLA* 69/4 (1954): 928-36. Eva von Contzen, 'Who Has Intention? Chaucer Studies and the Search for Meaning.' *The Journal of medieval and early modern studies* 53/3 (2023): 597-622.

or ‘some playful competition’ between the poets.¹⁵¹ Not only does this mark the tale as highly literary, but the early manuscripts include remarkably consistent Latin glosses concerning the source material.¹⁵² Cooper writes that this may indicate that Chaucer himself included these glosses which were preserved in scribal copies, thus presenting not only his own remaking of the tale but identifying what external material he chose to add.¹⁵³ The tale reads rather disjointedly, not only because Custance’s life unfolds episodically, but also because the narrative occupies only a little more than half of the tale and the rest is commentary.¹⁵⁴ Chaucer punctuates the narrative with a succession of interpolations at key points, including more astral imagery than his sources. Barry Windeatt adds that these

¹⁵¹ Elizabeth Allen, ‘Chaucer Answers Gower: Constance and the Trouble with Reading.’ *ELH* 64/3 (1997): 627–655, see section ‘Incest and the Tale of Canacee.’ Cooper, *Oxford Guides*, p. 125. John M. Bowers and Elisabeth Dutton, ‘Rival Poets: Gower’s *Confessio* and Chaucer’s *Legend of Good Women*.’ Chapter in: *John Gower, Trilingual Poet* (NED-New edition. Boydell & Brewer, 2010), pp. 276–287. Peter Nicholson, ‘Chaucer borrows from Gower: the sources of the *Man of Law’s Tale*.’ Chapter in: R. F. Yeager, ed., *Chaucer and Gower: Difference, Mutuality, Exchange* (Victoria, BC 1991), pp. 85–99. John Hurt Fisher, *John Gower: Moral Philosopher and Friend of Chaucer* (New York University Press, 1964), p. 26–36. As Brian Gastle explains: ‘Both Gower and Chaucer drew from Nicholas Trevet’s version of the tale, but in assigning the tale to the Man of Law, Chaucer may have been evoking Gower himself, given Gower’s apparent judicial ties.’ Brian Gastle, ‘Gower and Chaucer.’ Chapter in: Ana Saez-Hidalgo, *The Routledge Research Companion to John Gower* (Taylor & Francis, 2017), pp. 296–311, at 300. For more on Trevet’s translation and Gower and Chaucer’s versions, see: Peter G. Beidler, ‘John Gower’s Transformation of the “Tale of Constance” from Nicholas Trevet’s “Of the Noble Lady Constance.”’ *John Gower Society*, online resource (2006). Paul Theiner, “‘The Man of Law’ Tells his Tale.’ *Studies in Medieval Culture* 5 (1975): 173–9.

¹⁵² Graham D. Caie, ‘The Significance of Marginal Glosses in the Earliest Manuscripts of *The Canterbury Tales*.’ Chapter in: David L Jeffrey, ed., *Chaucer and the Scriptural Tradition* (University of Ottawa Press, 1984), pp. 75–88.

¹⁵³ Cooper, *Oxford Guides*, p. 126. For a feminist reading of these glosses and the idea of masculine containment of female texts, see: Carolyn Dinshaw, *Chaucer’s Sexual Poetics* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 88–103.

¹⁵⁴ William A. Quinn, ‘String Theory and the “Man of Law’s Tale”: Where is Constancy?’ *Critical Survey* 29/3 (2017): 48–64. Quinn writes about the gaps between these episodes as types of ‘wormholes,’ p. 49: ‘At various stages of the tale’s transmission, several wormholes seem to have been opened, gateways to a plethora of mutually valid interpretative universes that now coexist as autonomous yet interconnected options for readers responses.’

formal, non-narrative interpolations restructure the tale from within to highlight significant ideas in the narrative, which begins with the first astrological passage, addressed next.¹⁵⁵

When the Sultan of Syria falls in love with Custance from the mere description of her given by the merchants returning from Rome the narrator claims the Sultan's love will last his whole life, and here the narrative pauses for a digression about fate:

'Paraventure in thilke large book
Which that men clepe the hevene ywriten was
With sterres, whan that he his birthe took,
That he for love sholde han his deeth, allas!
For in the sterres, clerer than is glas,
Is writen, God woot, whoso koude it rede,
The deeth of every man, withouten drede.

In sterres, many a wynter therbiforn,
Was writen the deeth of Ector, Achilles,
Of Pompei, Julius, er they were born;
The strif of Thebes; and of Ercules,
Of Sampson, Turnus, and of Socrates
That deeth; but mennes wittes ben so dulle
That no wight kan wel rede it atte fulle.'
(Lines 190-203)

The first stanza (190-6) is Chaucer's unique paraphrase of Bernardus Silvestris, from his *Cosmographia* (1148), specifically from *Microcosmus* I, which is noted in the manuscript glosses.¹⁵⁶ However, 'paraphrase' or 'translation' may not be appropriate words for this

¹⁵⁵ Barry Windeatt, 'Literary Structures in Chaucer.' Chapter in: Piero Boitani and Jill Mann, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Chaucer* (Second edition; Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 214-232, at 218.

¹⁵⁶ On medieval readers of Bernardus Silvestris' *Cosmographia*, see: Mark Kauntze, *Authority and Imitation: A Study of the Cosmographia of Bernard Silvestris* (Netherlands: Brill, 2014), chapter 4. On Bernardus as an author in the twelfth century, see: Peter Godman, *The silent masters: Latin literature and its censors in the High Middle Ages* (Princeton University Press, 2000), see chapter 7.

section because Chaucer's version does not maintain the original meaning from the text. It is as Wood suggests: 'Rather, what Chaucer has done is to furnish the Man of Law with a passage that is partly a translation and partly a mistranslation: one which at the same time both echoes and falsifies its model.'¹⁵⁷ It is false in form and content because it does not maintain the spirit of the original text; this is, in fact, a bad reading of Bernardus Silvestris.

Of all the medieval tracts written on astrology, fate, and mortality, Bernardus Silvestris's is in a category of its own, and that Chaucer chose to incorporate bits of it is intriguing. The *Cosmographia* is a twelfth-century reworking of traditional cosmology, a myth brought up to date, a Neoplatonic allegory of creation, and primarily a work of literature made by a highly individualistic artist.¹⁵⁸ It is, as far as is known, wholly unique among medieval cosmological works. The *Cosmographia* begins with a discussion of the 'splendid construction' (*gloriosa constructio*) of the celestial spheres (the macrocosmos), and then Bernardus turns to life on earth (the microcosmos).¹⁵⁹ The allegorical figure of Providence speaks to Nature, and describes the heavens this way:

'I would have you survey the firmament inscribed, with its manifold array of symbols, which I have set forth for learned eyes like a book with its pages spread open, containing things to come in secret characters.'¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷ Wood, *Ch...Stars*, 209.

¹⁵⁸ This assessment is offered by Brian Stock, in his book: *Myth and Science in the Twelfth Century: a Study of Bernard Silvester* (Princeton University Press, 1972), 9-10.

¹⁵⁹ See the first chapter in Stock's *Myth and Science*.

¹⁶⁰ 'Caelum velim videas multiformi imaginum varietate descriptum, quod quasi librum, porrectis in planum paginis, eruditioribus oculis explicui, secretis futura litteris continentem.' Bernardus Silvestris, *Poetic Works*, Winthrop Wetherbee, ed. & trans. (Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library, Harvard University Press, 2015), *Cosmographia: Microcosmos I*, p. 78-79. On 'Nature' in medieval thought, see: Alice Lamy, Sarah Kay, and Nicolette Zeeman, 'Defining Nature in Medieval Cosmological Literature: The Founding Principle of Contradiction in the *Cosmographia* of Bernardus Silvestris, the Anonymous *Placides et Timéo*, and the *Image Du Monde* of Gossuin of Metz.'" *The Journal of medieval and early modern studies* 49/3 (2019): 457-478.

Like a book with its pages open, the symbols inscribed on the firmament's surface are the sun, moon, planets, zodiac constellations and stars.¹⁶¹ Bernardus explains further in *Microcosmus* 3.9 that the stars express truth because they are formed in the highest order of unvarying matter.¹⁶² Bernardus does not mention in *Cosmographia* men's inability to correctly read this celestial book, however, this is Chaucer's commentary.¹⁶³

Chaucer's paraphrase thus introduces a frustrating conundrum: fate will unfold according to God's providence and the signs are visible, 'but mennes wittes ben so dulle' that they cannot be read accurately. This is emphasized again with the phrase 'For in the sterres clerer than is glas / Is writen.' This is not a simile derived from Bernardus, rather I suggest it alludes to 1 Corinthians 13, a letter from Paul in which he differentiates between knowledge and prophecy. In verse 9 it states, 'For we know in part: and we prophesy in part.'¹⁶⁴ Prophesying is humanity's effort to interpret divine signs, but it is not sure knowledge. Thus we are like preliterate children, from verse 12: 'We see now through a glass in a dark manner: but then face to face.'¹⁶⁵ By placing these two texts next to one

¹⁶¹ For more on the allegorical concepts of books, see: Jesse M. Gellrich, *The Idea of the Book in the Middle Ages: Language Theory, Mythology, and Fiction* (Cornell University Press, 1985, 2019).

¹⁶² 'Aether omnisque compago siderea non elementale est compositum, seb ab elementis numero quintum, ordine primum, genere divinum, natura invariabile. Si enim ex elementum, natura quorum convertibilis, caelum stellaeque caeligenae substantiam contraxissent, certum nihil, nihil veridicum nuntiarent.' Silvestris, *Cosmographia*, p. 90-91.

¹⁶³ The nearest Bernardus comes to this idea is in *Microcosmos* 12: 'The human race, although, being mortal, it is constrained by its condition, must yet be so reformed that it may rise to dwell among the heavenly powers, subject to its laws whatever the star-bearing sphere impels by the force of its circling, and in these decisive ways redeem the taint of its earthly beginnings and its innate evil.' 'Humanumque genus, quamvis mortale trahatur / conditione sua, / tale reformandum, quod demigrare supernos / possit adusque deos, / et dare sub legis quicquid torquente rotatu / stellifer axis agit, / cognatas sordes innataque crimina certis / extenuare modis.' Wetherbee's translation, p. 155-157. In *Microcosmos* 13 Bernardus touches on instruments of perception in the head of mankind through the brain.

¹⁶⁴ 'ex parte enim cognoscimus et ex parte prophetamus.' From the Vulgate Bible, < vulgate.org >

¹⁶⁵ 'videmus nunc per speculum in enigmate tunc autem facie ad faciem.'

another through allusions and paraphrase, Chaucer makes his own statement: signs are written in the stars clearer than glass, but those on earth can only ever see through a glass darkly. This is reiterated again at the end of the tale:

By certeine meenes ofte, as knowen clerkis,
 Dooth thing for certein ende that ful derk is
 To mannes wit, that for oure ignorance
 Ne konne night knowe his prudent perveiance
 (Lines 480-483)

Chaucer thus introduces ideas about reading texts to find meaning in them as well as the inability to arrive at the right conclusions.¹⁶⁶ One can use an astrolabe to read the sky but cannot comprehend what time really is; the celestial bodies are visible but one can only prophesy without true knowledge.¹⁶⁷

Chaucer's second stanza in the above passage presents a (slightly jarring) recollection of fictional, historical, and Biblical men whose tragic fate was written in the stars. The passage is reminiscent of the Martian paintings in *The Knight's Tale* with a list of famous men who were fated to die tragically, as discussed earlier in the chapter. However, *The Man of Law's Tale* is not an epic romance set in Theseus's realm, it is a Christian story. Fatalistic astrology does not hold sway with Custance because she is a Christian, which will be shown again when the Man of Law makes his astrological apostrophe later in the tale.

¹⁶⁶ Allen, 'Chaucer Answers Gower,' 641.

¹⁶⁷ That humankind cannot fully comprehend the nature of time originates with Plato in *Timaeus*, and reiterated by Augustine, *Confessions XI*.

To summarize up to this point of the *Man of Law's* material: it begins with a technical astrolabic reading of the time (1-15), followed by the idea that time is incomprehensible and precious (18-32). The next astral passage reiterates this in a different way by paraphrasing Bernardus Silvestris who writes that divine signs deliver divine truths (190-196), but the Man of Law comments that people can only read the surface of these signs (202-3). This theme is elaborated yet again in the Man of Law's next astral digression, which shows this process in action when the narrator offers a technical reading of the heavens but comes to the wrong conclusion.

Custance does not want to sail to a 'Barbre nation' to marry a stranger and pleads with her parents to spare her.¹⁶⁸ To stress Custance's piteous plight, the narrator likens her situation to the tragedy of Troy and Hannibal (288-294) and then laments over the 'cruel firmament.' Cooper notes that this is 'the oddest series of exclamations' of all Chaucer's interpolations in *The Man of Law's Tale*, and it is certainly a destabilizing passage.¹⁶⁹ Here we see something like the surface embroidery from *The Squire's Tale*: technical terminology which elevates the language into an astrological register but does not combine to produce an accurate astrological reading:

O firste moevyng! Cruel firmament,
 With thy diurnal sweigh that crowdest ay
 And hurlest al from est til occident
 That naturelly wolde holde another way,
 Thy crowdyng set the hevne in swich array
 At the bigynnyng of this fiers viage,

¹⁶⁸ On Custance, currency and exchange: Laurel Hendrix, "'Penance profitable": the Currency of Custance in Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale*.' *Exemplaria* 6/1 (1994): 141-66. See also: Priscilla Martin, *Chaucer's Women: Nuns, Wives and Amazons* (MacMillan Press, 1990; 1996), p. 131-155.

¹⁶⁹ Cooper, *Oxford Guide*, 130.

That crueel Mars hath slayn this mariage.

Infortunat ascendent tortuous,
 Of which the lord is helplees falle, allas,
 Out of his angle into the derkeste hous!
 O Mars, o atazir, as in this cas!
 O fieble moone, unhappy been thy paas!
 Thou knyttest thee there thou art nat received;
 Ther thou were weel, fro thennes artow weyved.

Imprudent Emperour of Rome, allas!
 Was ther no philosophre in al thy toun?
 Is no tyme bet than oother in swich cas?
 Of viage is ther noon eleccioun,
 Namely to folk of heigh condicioun?
 Noght whan a roote is of a burthe knowe?
 Allas, we been to lewed or to slowe!
 (Lines 295-315)

Here the narrator draws the wrong conclusions from misunderstanding each of the cosmic phenomena he mentions. The ‘firste moevyng’ and ‘diurnal sweigh’ refer to the Ptolemaic idea of the rotating spheres responsible for celestial alignments.¹⁷⁰ The narrator is already on the wrong track with this stanza, because as Jill Mann points out, this contradicts the long-established literary convention which views the *primum mobile* as the force for making cosmic harmony, not discord.¹⁷¹

The Man of Law states that Mars is in a malefic position and the moon is in dejection. Several scholars have tried to reconstruct an accurate astrological configuration based on this passage but none have been successful, and I suggest this is because what

¹⁷⁰ See Explanatory Notes in the *Riverside Chaucer*.

¹⁷¹ Piero Boitani and Anna Torti, eds., *Literature in Fourteenth-Century England: the J.A.W. Bennett Memorial Lectures, Perugia, 1981-1982* (Tübingen: G. Narr, 1983), 169-71.

the narrator describes is not an actual reading.¹⁷² The terminology is ambiguous; it is uncertain from the context how ‘house’ or ‘atazir’ should be interpreted exactly.¹⁷³ All the technical terms point to an unpropitious moment for departure, which an astrologer should have noticed. The conclusion that is reached, however, is inaccurate. The election horoscope relates to the moment of departure, ‘the bigynnyng of this fiers viage’ (300), but the voyage is successful. There is no shipwreck, and Custance is not slain at the marriage feast.¹⁷⁴ Furthermore, that ‘cruel Mars hath slayn’ Custance’s first marriage is not something that a natal or root horoscope is supposed to predict.¹⁷⁵ Even if, hypothetically, the daughter of the Roman Emperor had a root horoscope erected at the precise moment of her birth by a professional ‘philosopre,’ this is not the kind of specific information that it would relay.

In short: this is (another) bad reading by the Man of Law. It is also ironic, since the narrator already knows how the story unfolds. So this passage is ornate and inaccurate, couched in astrological jargon ambiguously employed, and it does not support the plot in a discernible way. So why did Chaucer include this passage at all? I suggest it is because all the astral passages in the Man of Law’s portion build on each other to illustrate the process of reading and interpretation. This is also an example of astral ornamentation that adds a distinct motif to the tale. Like adding pigment to paint, the astrological passages colour the

¹⁷² Dorothy Bethurum Loomis, ‘Constance and the Stars.’ Chapter in: Edward Vasta and Zacharias P. Thundy, eds. *Chaucerian Problems and Perspectives: Essays Presented to Paul E. Beichner*, C. S. C. (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), pp. 207-20. Also: Curry, *Ch...and Science*, 164-94. Wood, *Ch...Stars*, 200-34. North, *Ch’s Universe*, 497.

¹⁷³ See North’s discussion: ‘Kalenderes Enlumyned Ben They. Part III.’ *The Review of English Studies* 20/80 (1969): 418-44. Wood, *Ch...Stars*, 225. J. C. Eade, ‘“We ben to lewed or to slowe,”’ 76-82.

¹⁷⁴ Curry, *Ch...and Science*, 188-190), and Wood *Ch...Stars*, 192-244.

¹⁷⁵ Lines 295-301 are a gloss of Ptolemy’s *Almagest* I.8, and 309-15 from the Arabic astronomer, Zael Benbriz.

tale with overtones of foreboding in the apostrophe to the ‘Cruel firmament,’ and draw attention to questions about how Providence relates to Fate in the other astral passages.

As ornamentation, this passage seems utterly incongruous to its surroundings in form and content. It is even bolder than the decorative astrology in *The Squire’s Tale*. The apostrophic exclamation by the narrator lamenting astral fatalism simply does not harmonize with the hagiography. Neither does it clearly augment the plot as the astral ornamentation does in *The Knight’s Tale*. Rather, it presents an entirely separate motif (Bonne’s *marque*) against narrative (*champs*) to underscore the larger theme of reading and making meaning. It is a discordant ornamentation that connects to the other interpolations by the narrator, but does not integrate smoothly with the tale.

Why wasn’t Custance killed with the rest at the banquet? Why wasn’t she drowned in a shipwreck? It is not because of the position of the planets or moon – it was God’s plan to preserve her, which is made clear at the ending. Not even the best astrologer could construct a natal horoscope predicting Custance’s strange voyages, which ‘ful derk is / To mannes wit.’ This acts as a preface to another fatal misreading by the characters in the tale. When Custance is seen with a bloody knife next to the murdered Hermengyld (596-602), the situation is utterly misinterpreted: the surface appearance is not truthful.¹⁷⁶

The only time the sky is read and interpreted correctly is during Custance’s prayer. Sentenced again to drift upon a merciless sea, but this time with her ‘litel sone,’ Custance

¹⁷⁶ Kolve touches on this idea: Kolve, *Ch and the Imagery of Narrative I*, 300.

casts her eyes to heaven and utters a prayer to the Virgin (840).¹⁷⁷ She addresses Mary, whose suffering is beyond comprehension (841-847), and prays for refuge:

‘Now, lady bright, to whom alle woful cryen,
Thow glorie of wommanhede, thow faire may,
Thow haven of refut, brighte sterre of day,
Rewe on my child, that of thy gentilesse
Rewest on every reweful in distresse.’
(Lines 850-854)

Custance looks to the sky and addresses the ‘brighte sterre of day,’ without the intention of foretelling or seeking understanding, but to beg for mercy. This supports the moralizing aspect of this tale: our heroine has faith in the invisible and inscrutable unfolding of Providence.¹⁷⁸ Wood comments on this, ‘Boethius argued that the stars, the planets, even devils, are all agents of the divine will (Bk. IV, pr. 6), and that we can only understand this world by looking beyond Fortune or destiny to providence, which is precisely what Custance does and the Man of Law does not do.’¹⁷⁹ Essentially, Custance can see more clearly because she is in proper spiritual alignment with the heavens.

The Man of Law’s Tale is unstable and uneven and fittingly refuses a wholly happy ending.¹⁸⁰ The ending returns to Harry Bailey’s sentiments at the beginning concerning the value of time – that time is a fluctuation, ineffable to the human mind:

But litel while it lasteth, I yow heete,
Joye of this world, for tyme wol nat abyde;
Fro day to nyght it changeth as the tyde.’

¹⁷⁷ On Custance as a character, see: Allen, ‘Chaucer Answers Gower,’ 642-647.

¹⁷⁸ On Custance’s agency and attention, see: Catherine Sanok, ‘*The Man of Law’s Tale*.’ Chapter in: Frank Grady, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to “The Canterbury Tales.”* (Cambridge University Press, 2020), esp. p. 98.

¹⁷⁹ Wood, *Ch...Country of the Stars*, 210-11. See Thorndike, *Magic and Science*, II, 104-106.

¹⁸⁰ Gerald Morgan, ‘Chaucer’s Man of Law and the Argument for Providence.’ *The Review of English Studies* 61/248 (2010): 1–33.

(Lines 1133-4)

Not even Custance's hard won peace is lasting while she inhabits the mutable sublunar realm – like sailing in a rudderless ship, all of humanity is subject to Fate and Providence.

Not unlike the introduction of *The General Prologue*, the introduction to the Man of Law's portion immediately brings ideas to the fore about the cosmos with Harry Bailey's astrolabic reading, and cosmic ideas continue to be significant until the end of the tale, but only in connection with one another. In this tale about misinterpretations, we are invited to ponder the 'book of the sky' and how best to read it, even if the narrator is inept.¹⁸¹ The adornment here is something like a statement brooch – unexpected and slightly garish, but it certainly captures attention.

Conclusion

Astral ornamentation is a key facet in Chaucer's rhetorical schemes, and by thinking about celestial passages as instances of *ornatus*, their significance is better aligned with Chaucer's prerogatives. It is necessary to weigh the value of each ornamentation individually in relation to their context, specifically with the narrative, the teller, and the language. It is equally important to think of ornamentation as ornamentation, and not to expect extrinsic or astronomical precision. Chaucer was, indeed, a master of *ornatus*, running circles around Vinsaufian regulations, and manipulating these rules for poetic effect. Ultimately, Chaucer presents astrology as a way of receiving and interpreting celestial information. It is a method for reading the sky and deciphering messages with

¹⁸¹ On the limitations and ineptitude of the Man of Law, see: Dinshaw, *Ch...Poetics*, see her chapter 'The Law of Man and Its 'Abhomynacions.'

varying levels of success and degrees of significance. As Marion Turner discusses, Chaucer was fascinated by surfaces and the multivalent value of signs, and the surfaces of his texts could be adorned with weightless superfluity or weighted with symbolism, but all resist easy generalization.¹³⁷

III. ASTRAL BODIES

‘Now...we speak about the form and character of the body, beginning the detailed discussion in the proper order, inasmuch as naturally, too, the bodily parts are formed prior to the soul; for the body, because it is more material, carries almost from birth the outward appearances of its idiosyncrasies, while the soul shows forth the characters conferred upon it by the first cause only afterwards and little by little, and external accidental qualities come about still later in time.’

Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos* III.11¹

When Chaucer lived in Europe some six hundred years ago, the planets and stars were, in a way, more mundane than they are now. It was believed that they directly impacted each individual and daily life to a certain degree.² Characteristics that are explained with hereditary genetics or environmental factors today were partially ascribed to astrological influences then, such as a sallow complexion, a proclivity to overindulge in red meat, or frequent head colds. The material body was subject to a web of influences, not only invisible cosmic influences but also its earthly surroundings in the air, water and soil. Jack Hartnell addresses this medieval doctrine, and its foreignness to thinking today: ‘We think of our bodies now as a relatively closed and contented circuit, our skin a clear border between the inside and outside of ourselves. But the human form in the medieval period was considered a far more open and porous group of organs and systems. As a result, an understanding of the world circling around the body was crucial to an

¹ Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, F. E. Robbins, trans. (Loeb Classical Library 435. Harvard University Press, 1940), p. 306-307. ‘Εφοδευομένης δὲ καὶ τῆς τοῦ περὶ χρόνων ζωῆς 142λόγου πραγματείας, λέγομεν ἀρχὴν τὴν κατὰ μέρος λαβόντες κατὰ τὴν οἰκείαν τάξιν περὶ τε τῆς μορφῆς καὶ τῆς σωματικῆς διατυπώσεως, ἐπειδὴ καὶ τὰ τοῦ σώματος τῶν τῆς ψυχῆς¹ προτυποῦται κατὰ φύσιν, τοῦ μὲν σώματος διὰ τὸ ὑλικώτερον συγγενωμένας ἔχοντος σχεδὸν τὰς τῶν ἰδιοσυγκράσεων φαντασίας, τῆς δὲ ψυχῆς μετὰ ταῦτα καὶ κατὰ μικρὸν τὰς ἀπὸ τῆς πρώτης αἰτίας ἐπιτηδειότητος ἀναδεικνυούσης, τῶν δ’ ἐκτὸς ἔτι μᾶλλον ὕστερον² κατὰ τὸν ἐφεξῆς χρόνον ἐπισυμπιπτόντων.’

² See chapter 6, ‘Macrocosme et microcosme’ of Jean-Claude Schmitt’s *Les rythmes au Moyen Âge* (Éditions Gallimard, 2016).

understanding of what lay within.’³ Bodies were porous receptacles, enmeshed in the world surrounding them, and this is as true for living people in the Middle Ages as it is for fictional configurations of them.

It was, in short, a more intimate universe. It was not known then that the surface of Mars was red due to dusty iron oxide dunes and craters – but it was believed that the glowing red orb could amplify anything associated with Greco-Roman deity Mars.⁴ In Ptolemy’s *Tetrabiblos* I.4-6, Mars is described as influencing the rise of anger, the spilling of blood and violence, of burning and dryness, and associated with masculinity.⁵ The red planet was thus relatable to everyday experiences. Today we know that the Milky Way is all that the naked eye can see of the center of our galaxy, but in the ancient world it was ‘the milk with which souls are nourished when they fall into generation,’ and as Pythagoras reasoned and Macrobius repeated, ‘why milk is the first nourishment offered to the newborn infant.’⁶ The first time the Milky Way appears in the English language is indeed in Chaucer’s hand, in *The House of Fame*. Chaucer is instructed by the eagle to look up, to cast his eye toward the Milky Way:

‘Se yonder, loo, the Galaxie,
Which men clepeth the Milky Wey

³ Jack Hartnell, *Medieval Bodies: Life, Death and Art in the Middle Ages* (London: Wellcome Collection, 2018; 2019), p. 13.

⁴ Bernardus Silvestris writes for instance, ‘You observe that Jupiter moves in an extended circle, Mars in a more contained one, that the latter glows bloodred, and that the former has the mild gleam of a friendly star.’ ‘Exporrecto lovem circulo, Martem aspicias castiore, hunc rutilare sanguineum, illum amici fulgore sideris eblandiri.’ Silvestris, *Poetic Works*, p. 80-1.

⁵ See Ptolemy’s *Tetrabiblos* I.4-6.

⁶ Proclus Diadochus, *In Platonis Rem publicam commentarii*, 2 vols., W. Kroll, ed. (Leipzig, 1899-1901), II.129-130. Porphyry, *On the Cave of the Nymphs*, Thomas Taylor, ed. & trans. (London: John M. Watkins, 1917), I.13. Macrobius, *Commentary*, Stahl, 134. See also Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 1.170.

For hit ys whit (and somme, parfey,
Kallen hyt Watlynge Strete)
(Lines 936-939)

Here the Milky Way is immediately brought down to earth. The eagle first remarks on the grandeur of the vision, with ‘loo, the Galaxie’, but then relates it to the familiar old Roman road connecting London to Canterbury, ‘Watlynge Strete.’⁷ The astral becomes intimate and relatable through embodied experience – which is the focus of this chapter.

Chaucer writes about all kinds of human bodies in his corpus of work - male and female, sick and healthy, young and old, wealthy and poor. These bodies are sometimes described through cosmic imagery or astrological allusions that draw attention to the interconnectedness of the medieval universe. Bodies are the central focus of this chapter, celestial and human bodies, and how they interrelate in Chaucer’s poetry. The theoretical framework builds on the concept that the body is a type of discursive text, following Gail Ashton’s thought that ‘Any body is both a discursive (produced by a range of ‘texts’ including non-verbal and iconographic ones) and a social construct, one that we seek to contain by making it legible.’⁸ Images and objects such as astrolabes, quadrants, medical pamphlets, and visions of the ‘Zodiac Man’ are examples of non-verbal discursive texts that illuminate the conduit between the celestial and the personal. I explore the intimate corporeality of astronomy and astrology, considering instances of touching, looking, or marks on the body as evidence of the social construct of the medieval cosmos.

⁷ Turner discusses Chaucer’s method of familiarization, juxtaposition, and demystification in *HoF: Ch...European Life*, 225.

⁸ Gail Ashton, ‘Feminisms.’ Chapter in: Steve Ellis, ed. *Chaucer: an Oxford Guide* (Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 369-383, at 378.

The first two chapters of this thesis dealt in part with the nature of time, rhetoric, and poetics; this chapter takes a stronger turn toward materialism. While it is impossible, of course, to fully integrate Chaucer's texts with the richness of his material surroundings (of which we only have fragments today), scholarship to date has generally contextualized Chaucer's works with the finest medieval objects and works of art.⁹ But these represent only a tiny portion of the kinds of things Chaucer and his contemporaries encountered daily in their lifetimes.¹⁰ There is thus a need to rebalance the ledger of evidence, to contextualize Chaucer's works with not only the polished but the peculiar, not only pricey, upmarket *objets d'art*, but also down-market items intended for regular popular consumption.¹¹

Chaucer's own writing intrinsically prompts considerations of materiality and corporeality. Take for example how the word 'experience' is used in *The Wife of Bath's Prologue* and *The Treatise on the Astrolabe*, which are the two central texts in this chapter. 'Experience' is famously the first word of *The Wife of Bath's Prologue*, contrasted against 'auctoritee' as a source of sure knowledge.¹² Because it was a new word in Chaucer's day

⁹ For examples see the works of art included as references in Wood's *Ch...Country of Stars*, all of which are pinnacles of their craft and most created after 1400; or Kolve's chapters on *The Merchant's Tale* in *Telling Image II*, p. 92-170.

¹⁰ Bill Brown, 'Thing Theory.' *Critical Inquiry* 28 (2001): 1-22.

¹¹ On the imbalance of scholarly focus on surviving material culture, especially with the history of astrology, see: Richard Dunn, Silke Ackermann, and Giorgio Strano, eds. *Heaven and Earth United: Instruments in Astrological Contexts* (Brill, 2018), specifically the introduction. On the usefulness of damaged artefacts, see: Stephen Greenblatt, 'Resonance and Wonder.' *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 43 (1990):11-34, at 22.

¹² See Marion Turner's discussion in: *The Wife of Bath: A Biography* (Princeton University Press, 2023), p. 17-18. For a summary of critical views about experience and authority in the *Prologue*, see: Mark Allen and J. H. Fisher, eds., *A Variorum Edition of the Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale* (University of Oklahoma Press, 2012), 1.135-40.

its definition is debated, and Derek Pearsall argues that in the Wife of Bath's vocabulary it relates to the idea of an 'experimental proof,' perhaps closer to 'experiment' rather than 'experienced wisdom.'¹³ 'Experience' is more than book learning or intellectual perception then, it is embodied experimentation, and this is also how Chaucer uses it in *The Treatise on the Astrolabe*.

Elly Truitt describes how Chaucer introduces another nuance to the meaning of 'experience' in part II of the *Treatise*.¹⁴ Chaucer as parent-author explains how to find the degree of the sun on a specific day, using the example of 13 December, when the sun is in the first degree of Capricorn, according to astrolabic calculation with the ruler (lines 17-25). He concludes the section with the phrase, 'And than had I of this conclusioun the ful experience.' Truitt writes that here Chaucer 'was the first to introduce experience, meaning a demonstration or confirmation of a theory on the basis of observation, into English.'¹⁵ She continues, 'Chaucer asserted that focused experiential knowledge, instruments, and textual knowledge are all equally necessary for "gretter knowing," raising the possibility that instrumentation and experimentation in pursuit of natural knowledge may have begun in England centuries earlier than previously thought.' The term 'experience' in both examples specifically relates to physical perceptions; 'experience' is knowledge gained through the senses from real world events. The Wife of Bath has done more than read about marriage,

¹³ Derek Pearsall, 'The Wife of Bath's "experience": Some lexicographical reflections.' Chapter in: Cristina Maria Cervone and D. Vance Smith, eds., *Readings in medieval textuality: Essays in honour of A. C. Spearing* (D. S. Brewer, 2016), pp. 3-14.

¹⁴ E. R. Truitt, 'Making English Scientific: Chaucer, Translation, and the Astrolabe.' *Isis* 115/4 (2024): 757-775.

¹⁵ Truitt, 'Making English Scientific,' 773.

she has lived it. Chaucer does more than write about the astrolabe, he uses one.

Experience thus leads to greater knowing, and experience involves the body.

First, I offer a new reading of the Wife of Bath's version of her basic root nativity. I uncover some of the deep logic in the statements about her body, her birthmarks, complexion, and astrological claims. Redefining some of the terms Chaucer employs in the *Wife of Bath's Prologue* proves enlightening, as is examining alternative sources for astrological concepts. What does it mean that she is imprinted with the 'seal' of Venus? Why does she specify her sun sign is Taurus? Chaucer constructs a marvellously middle-class merchant with Alison, and in today's terms, it seems that she would be less likely to read peer-reviewed articles on astrophysics than browse the horoscopes at the back of a trade magazine. And yet, scholars have only contextualized her speech with the equivalent of highly scientific academic texts and not included fourteenth century 'pop culture' astrology as a serious source with which to contextualize Chaucer's embodiment of Alison. Here I attempt to rebalance the scales.

I then turn to *The Treatise on the Astrolabe* as an intimate text intended to work in tandem with tools and the body. Suzanne Conklin Akbari and Jill Ross write that the role of the human body is 'the metaphorical heart of human culture,' and that the 'best medievalist work engages with the body both as a dematerialized, abstract, representational effect and as fully concrete, historically embedded agent fully immersed in the particulars of its social and cultural "situation."¹⁶ I think of the *Treatise* as immersed

¹⁶ Suzanne Conklin Akbari and Jill Ross, *The Ends of the Body: Identity and Community in Medieval Culture* (University of Toronto Press, 2013), p. 4, 8. Peter Biller and A. J. Minnis, eds., *Medieval Theology and the*

in its material situation and as a text that requires engagement with the body. Marion Turner writes that the *Treatise* is an emotional text, and I suggest it is intimate in another way – it situates the reader philosophically at the center of his or her universe.¹⁷ To provide an appropriate ideological mainframe and background, in the following section I review the relevant doctrines which guided cosmological thinking in the fourteenth century.

Medical astrology and mortal agency

Since antiquity through the Middle Ages, personality traits and inclinations were believed to be partially an expression of the specific stellar and planetary alignments in place when the soul was forming.¹⁸ This is a tenet of medical astrology with a long and knotty textual history, founded in the classical works of Hippocrates (c. 460-370 BCE), Empedocles (c. 494-434 BCE), and Theophrastus (371-287 BCE).¹⁹ The interconnectedness of the macrocosm and microcosm is an outgrowth of Platonic concepts of *sympatheia*, also influenced by Stoicism and the Pythagoreans.²⁰ Particularly important texts are the

Natural Body (York Medieval Press, 1997). Roy Porter, 'History of the Body.' Chapter in: Peter Burke, ed., *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), pp. 206-32. For a succinct guide to modern philosophical and methodological approaches to embodiment in the Middle Ages, see: Gilchrist, *Medieval Life*, see chapter 1.2, 'Embodiment and Ritual,' beginning p. 7.

¹⁷ Turner, *Ch...European Life*, 236.

¹⁸ Barton, *Ancient Astrology*, 109: 'The soul was, from at least Plato onwards, associated with the stars.'

¹⁹ Siraisi, *Medieval...Medicine*, from p. 16: Medical astrology 'was probably greatest in the West between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries. Astrology linked medicine with yet other branches of knowledge distinct from Aristotelian natural philosophy. Above all, medicine remained irrevocably and intimately bound to the world of crafts, "secrets" (magical or otherwise), skills, and techniques.' See also: Aldebrandin de Sienne, *Le Régime de corps. Texte français du XIIIe siècle*, L. Landouzy and R. Pépin, ed. (Honoré Champion, 1911; reprint 1978 Geneva: Slatkine).

²⁰ Tester, *History of Western Astrology*, 23. Gilchrist, *Medieval Life*, 32-33.

Hippocratic treatise, *On the Nature of Man*, Galen's subsequent commentary on it, and Ptolemy's *Tetrabiblos* III.1.²¹

Ptolemy writes that medical astrology was first mastered by the Egyptians with their 'iatromathematical systems' (I.3), and that 'For the cause both of universal and of particular events is the motion of the planets, sun, and moon' (III.1.1).²² Individual 'temperaments' (κρᾶσις), the mingling of physical and other traits making up an individual, is one result of the cosmic 'cause' (αἰτία).²³ Views on the relationship between body and soul generally followed Platonic foundations, revived throughout the Middle Ages in Christian commentary.

In this line of thinking, a mortal body is inhabited by an eternal soul, and until death they combine to make a whole individual.²⁴ The mortal body may be made of earthly elements, but it was believed that the soul traversed the celestial spheres in its pathway to 'ensoul' a body on earth.²⁵ As it descended, the soul absorbed planetary influences like a

²¹ For Galen, see: J. Mewaldt, *Corpus Medicorum Graecorum* V. 9, 1 (Berlin, 1914). For Hippocrates, see: J. Jouanna *Corpus Medicorum Graecorum* I.1, 13 (Berlin, 1975). Jacques Jouanna, 'Galen's Reading of the Hippocratic Treatise *The Nature of Man*: The Foundations of Hippocratism in Galen.' Chapter in: *Greek Medicine from Hippocrates to Galen* (Brill, 2012), pp. 313-333. Wedel, *Medieval Attitude Toward Astrology*, 51. For an example of these theories at work in a medieval manuscript, see MS Radcliffe Trust e. 30, which includes a treatise on diet and astrology.

²² Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, p. 220-221: 'ἐπειδὴ περ καὶ τῶν καθ' ὅλου καὶ τῶν καθ' ἓνα ἕκαστον συμπτωμάτων αἰτία μὲν ἢ τῶν πλανωμένων ἀστέρων ἡλίου τε καὶ σελήνης κίνησις, προγνωστικὴ δὲ ἢ τῆς τῶν ὑποκειμένων αὐτῆς φύσεων τροπῆς / epeidíper kaí tón kath' ólou kaí tón kath' éna ékaston symptomáton aítía méné i tón planoménon astéron iliou te kaí selínis kínisis, prognostikí dé i tís tón ypokeiménon aftís fýseon tropís.'

²³ Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, p. 222-223.

²⁴ See Bernardus Silvestris, *Cosmographia*, Microcosmos 8.27-33.

²⁵ Macrobius, *Commentary*, from chapter XII.1, p. 133: 'At this point we shall discuss the order of the steps by which the soul descends from the sky to the infernal regions of this life.' Macrobius explains that the soul descends from the point where the zodiac and the Milky Way intersect, 'just as a line is sprung from a point and passes from this indivisible state into length', p. 134. Bernardus writes of this succinctly: 'He will derive his mind from heaven, his body from the elements, so that he may dwell bodily on earth, mentally in heaven.' 'Mentem de caelo, corpus trahet ex elementis, / ut terras habitet corpore, mente polum.' *Cosmographia*, Microcosmos 10.15-17.

fabric passing through dyes, and this is the 'cosmic cause' resulting in individual personalities. In his commentary on *Aeneid* VI.714, Macrobius succinctly describes the process by which souls are formed: 'the astrologers claim that when the souls descend, they draw with them the sluggishness of Saturn, the anger of Mars, the lust of Venus, the desire for wealth of Mercury, the desire for power of Jupiter.'²⁶ Each soul has varying degrees of these planetary qualities, but how much depends on the arrangement of the heavens at the moment when the soul descended. When and how this precisely occurred was a matter for debate, and these influences did not preclude free will, naturally.²⁷

In this way there were perceived similarities between the complexity of human nature and the complex revolutions of the sky. In medieval ecclesiastical thinking, humankind's intimacy with the heavens was also evidence of the divinely ordained separation from the rest of the animal kingdom, as expressed in the fourteenth-century work, *Cursor Mundi; or þe Cours of þe Werlde*. This ambitious Northumbrian poem retells the history of Christianity from the Creation to Doomsday in 30,000 lines, and the makeup of human bodies is discussed in lines 516-552.²⁸ The author describes how the human body is made of the same stuff as earth - the hardness of bones is the same kind of hardness as stones, and flesh the same as trees and grass, and waters in the womb are the same as waters of the sea. The end rhymes of the couplets bring the point home: *bones /*

²⁶ As quoted by Tester, *History...Astrology*, p. 119. From: Th. Zielinski, *Philologus*, LXIV (1905) 21f.

²⁷ Gilchrist, *Medieval Life*, 21-22. The text *De Secretis Mulierum* by Pseudo-Albertus Magnus, late thirteenth to the early fourteenth century, focuses specifically on how celestial bodies affected the conception, formation, and temperament of a baby. Helen Rodnite Lemay, *Women's Secrets: a Translation of Pseudo-Albertus Magnus's De Secretis Mulierum with Commentaries* (State University of New York Press, 1992).

²⁸ *Cursor Mundi; or þe Cours of þe Werlde*, Richard Morris, ed. (Early English Texts Society. London: N. Trubner & Co., 57 & 59 Ludgate Hill, 1874), part I.

stones, trees & gres / mannes fleshe. But the head, the home of the imagination, thought and agency, is related to the extraterrestrial:

‘His heed wipynne haþ ezen tweyn
 Þe sky haþ sonne & mone certeyn
 And as mennes ezen are set to siȝt
 So serueþ sonne & mone of liȝt
 Maistir sterres are þere seuen
 Seuen holes haþ mannes heed euen’
 (Lines 521-526, taken from Cambridge, Trinity College MS R 3.8)

The ‘Maistir sterres’ are the wandering planets, and here the author connects them to the openings in the head. This is one way that the poet integrates the formation of the cosmos with the formation of Adam, the biblical first man, and makes the infinite universe intimate to each audience member.

Because the universe in the Middle Ages was intimate to everyone, then there must be a way to read the sky for each individual, which is the purpose of natal horoscopes. Horoscopes provide visual ordering to this ethereal web of entanglements, which often appear in fourteenth-century manuscripts concerning astrology or nativities. The foundations of erecting horoscopes are outlined in Abū Ma‘shar’s introduction to astrology, as translated by Adelard of Bath, which identifies the nature, properties, and effects of the signs.²⁹ The most famous horoscope of the fourteenth century is the root nativity of Richard II, as witnessed in MS Rawl D 1227 (**Fig. 1**).³⁰

²⁹ Abū Ma‘shar al-Balkhi, *The Abbreviation of the Introduction to Astrology, together with the Medieval Latin Translation of Adelard of Bath*, Charles Burnett and K. Yamamoto, M. Yano, eds. & trans. (E. J. Brill, 1994), beginning p.93.

³⁰ Carey, *Courting Disaster*, 92–116, also Appendix 3. North, *Horoscopes and History*, 139-140.

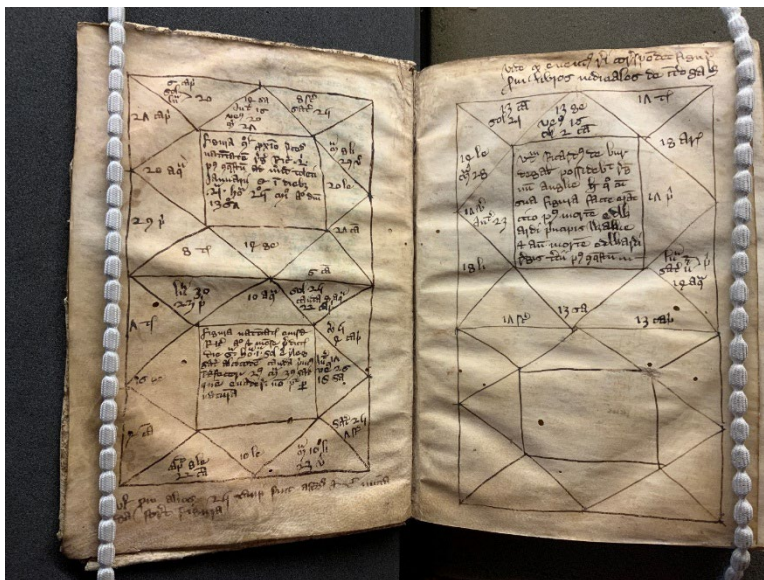


Figure 1. Oxford: Bodleian Library, MS Rawl D 1227 (fourteenth century). Nativity horoscope of Richard II on 1v, and election horoscope for the coronation of Edward III, 2r.

From Hilary M. Carey’s *Courting Disaster*, appendix 3, p. 251:

7. Oxford, Bod. Lib., MS Rawlinson D. 1227, fol. 1^r; Figures for the nativity of Richard II, 6 January 1367, 1h; Born in Bordeaux; d. bef. 17 February 1400.

Figura conjunctionis proximo precedans nativitatem regis Richardi 2ⁱ post conquestum, ad meridiem Toleti, Januarii et primis diebus, 21a hora 25^o minuto, anno domini 1367^o.

1	2	3	4	5	6
20 Aqu.	29 Pisc.	8 Taur.	14 Gem.	6 Can.	27 Can.
7	8	9	10	11	12
20 Leo.	29 Virg.	8 Scor.	14 Seg.	6 Cap.	27 Cap.
	Mars:	Saturn:	Jupiter:	Sol)	
	8 Lib	25 Scor.	16 Seg.	Luna):	
			Venus:	20 Cap.	
			20 Sag.		
			Merc.:		
			27 Sag.		

Each of the triangular sections represent the positions for specific celestial bodies in relation to one another with interpretations concerning the life of the subject (business,

illness, marriage, death, etc.).³¹ Like this example, there are election or nativity horoscopes that represent significant amounts of calculations, but there are many more examples in manuscripts of practice horoscopes, or those left incomplete.

Richard II's horoscope may demonstrate how root natal horoscopes appear but it is far from an objective record of the heavenly configurations at the time of his birth. Even the precise time of his birth is debated – it is recorded differently in various places. This horoscope has been created to reflect badly on the king and the astrologer travelled to coordinate the configuration with Richard's death date. Hilary Carey says of it, 'There can be no mistaking the anxiety of the astrologer to make Richard II's horoscope accord with the disastrous facts of his reign.'³² Each of the horoscopes in MS Rawl D 1227 may have been created at the same time for an occasion, and possibly specifically to favour the rise of Henry Bolingbroke. This exemplifies how horoscopes of all kinds are creative, subject to the context in which they were made, and sometimes to fulfilling specific purposes.³³

Chaucer warns against putting too much belief into horoscopes in *The Treatise on the Astrolabe* (II.4.25-41). He relates how 'these astrologiens' (II.4.31) erect nativity horoscopes according to judicial astrology, relying on astrolabic readings to record planetary aspects and ascendant signs.³⁴ This is also the only part of his *Treatise* that he follows with a caveat about faith: 'Natheles these ben observaunces of judicial matere and

³¹ Other examples are in British Library: MS Royal App 85, fol. 1-2, with North's analysis: *Horoscopes in History*, 98-103.

³² Carey, *Courting Disaster*, 126.

³³ This can be said even about the most 'accurate' horoscopes. See North, *Horoscopes and History*.

³⁴ Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, III.11.

rytes of payens, in which my spirit hath no feith, ne knowing of her *horoscopum*' (56-60).³⁵

This phrase has generated sustained debate about Chaucer's 'feith' in astrology.³⁶

Attempting to reconstruct Chaucer's personal faith from his writings is, however, an impossible task, which also does not necessarily enrich our understanding of his work. A primary argument of this thesis is that astrology and its imaginative systems are tools for crafting poetics in Chaucer's work, and like the signs of the zodiac, these tools are primarily aesthetic and not scientific, religious, or otherwise. So when Chaucer constructs Alison's horoscope, he is using aesthetic language relying on astrological semiotics which his audience could recognize, and it is not a matter of what he 'believed.'

This is not to say that the fluctuating boundaries of astrology within the constraints of orthodox religious observance was not a major concern in the Middle Ages.³⁷ Bishop Etienne Tempier, associated with the University of Paris, drew the heretical line in the famous 219 articles of 1277. He was concerned with doctrinal errors and issued a decree of condemnation, including specifically ideas about the time of birth, planetary influences and fate.³⁸ The following are explicitly condemned theories:

³⁵ On fourteenth-century anti-astrological tracts, see: Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem, Libri VI-XII*, Eugenio Garin, ed. (Arango Publishing, 2004).

³⁶ For discussions on Chaucer's astrological 'beliefs', see: Gilliard, 'Chaucer's Attitude,' 365-366. Eisner, 'Chaucer as a Technical Writer,' 193. Hendrickson, 'Pseudoscience...Tales,' 58-68. Wood, *Ch...Country of Stars*, 52-53; 192-244. Curry, *Ch and Science*, 188-190. Smyser, 'A View of Chaucer's Astronomy,' 359-532. Loomis, 'Constance and the Stars,' 207-220.

³⁷ On the distinction between licit and illicit astrology, see: Seb Falk, 'What's on the Back of an Astrolabe? Astrolabes as Supports for Planetary Calculators.' Chapter in: Richard Dunn, Silke Ackermann, and Giorgio Strano, eds. *Heaven and Earth United: Instruments in Astrological Contexts* (Brill, 2018), pp. 24-41.

³⁸ Pierre Félix Mandonnet, *Siger de Brabant et l'averroïsme latin au XIII^e siècle : Textes inédits* (Belgium: Institut supérieur de philosophie de l'Université, 1908). Etienne Tempier, *La condamnation parisienne de 1277*, David Piché and Claude Lafleur, trans. & eds. (J. Vrin, 1999). English translation: Tester, *History...Astrology*, 177-8.

- **94 (195)** That fate, which is a universal disposition, proceeds from the divine providence not immediately but by the mediation of the movement of the heavenly bodies...
- **104 (143)** That by different signs in the heavens there are signified different conditions in men both of their spiritual gifts and of their temporal affairs.
- **105 (207)** That in the hour of the begetting of a man in his body and consequently his soul, which follows the body, by the ordering of causes superior and inferior there is in a man a disposition including him to such and such actions and events. This is an error unless it is understood to mean 'natural events' and 'by way of disposition.'
- **106 (206)** That anyone attribute health and sickness, life and death to the position of the stars and the aspect of Fortune, saying that if Fortune is well-aspected to him he will live, and if not, he will die.
- **154 (162)** That our will is subject to the power of heavenly bodies.
- **156 (161)** That the effects of the stars on free will are hidden.

These condemnations build careful safeguards protecting the limitlessness of God's divine Will, reiterating that celestial influences can only affect disposition and not agency. This is the official statement that circulated among medieval theologians and university scholars, but the extent to which these theories trickled into the mainstream of western European culture is debated.³⁹ At the very most, Bishop Tempeir's 219 theses liberated Christian thought from the dogmatic acceptance of Aristotelianism and marked the birth of modern science, as argued by Pierre Duhem and Edward Grant.⁴⁰ Bishop Tempier and his associates thus attempted to create some kind of consensus across ecclesiastical education, but there are no perfectly unified answers to the question of astrology's place in Christianity. Every writer on the topic offers a slightly different opinion, both in the Middle Ages and today. That the planets and stars exerted influences on the nature of individuals

³⁹ Hans Thijssen, 'Condemnation of 1277.' Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman, eds. *The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2023 Edition), unpaginated. Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 49.

⁴⁰ Pierre Duhem, *Medieval Cosmology*, Roger Ariew, trans. (University of Chicago Press, 1985), see Part II. Edward Grant, 'The Condemnation of 1277, God's Absolute Power, and Physical Thought in the Late Middle Ages.' *Viator* 10 (1979): 211–44.

was not in doubt, but the extent of this was nebulous. In summary: horoscopes were creative products, the cosmos was at once intimate and remote, astrology was a fluctuating praxis and this fluctuation provided poetic potential for Chaucer.

Alison's Corporeal Cosmos

The Wife of Bath is an 'intensely corporeal presence' in the Tales, from her striking portrait in the *General Prologue* to the review of her body and confession of its secrets in her *Prologue*.⁴¹ Alison describes herself as: 'Gat-tothed I was' (603), 'faire, and riche, and yong, and wel bigon,' (606), and from the *General Prologue* the narrator describes her appearance: 'Boold was hir face, and fair, and reed of hewe' (459), and 'hir hipis large,' (470). Most importantly for this study, in her prologue she explains her inner dispositions through physical markers on her body and astrological influences.

Alison's words pour forth as if they were unfolding from her train of thought, creating an illusion of interiority and a remarkable mimesis of consciousness, as Marion Turner has shown.⁴² In lines 587-626 Chaucer builds a segue between the microcosmos (Alison's physical features) to the macrocosmos (Venus, Mars and Taurus). She describes Jankyn's fine legs, explains that she has a 'coltes tooth' (a taste for young men, line 602), and

⁴¹ Ashton, 'Feminisms,' 375.

⁴² Turner, *Wife of Bath*, 36. Donald B. Sands has interpreted this in an entirely different way, that her speech patterns and unfolding thoughts do not build an illusion of interiority as much as a woman suffering from antisocial or sociopathic behaviour: Donald B. Sands, 'The Non-Comic, Non-Tragic Wife: Chaucer's Dame Alys as Sociopath.' *The Chaucer review* 12/3 (1978): 171-182. See also: Wayne Shumaker, 'Alisoun in Wanderland: a Study in Chaucer's Mind and Literary Method.' *ELH* 18 (1951): 77-89.

speaking of teeth, she is gap-toothed, and better looking for it.⁴³ It is here, when the subject turns toward her own physical body, that she pivots to astrology.

Alison mentions specifically that she is imprinted with the seal of Venus, and further that her emotional sensibility is influenced by Venus and her boldness is from Mars:

'I hadde the prente of seint Venus seel.
 As help me God, I was a lusty oon,
 And faire, and riche, and yong, and wel bigon,
 And trewely, as myne housbondes tolde me,
 I had the best *quoniam* myghte be.
 For certes, I am al Venerien
 In feelynge, and myn herte is Marcien.
 Venus me yaf my lust, my likerousnesse,
 And Mars yaf me my sturdy hardynesse;
 Myn ascendent was Taur, and Mars therinne.'
 (Lines 604-613)

Remarkably, here she states that Taurus was in ascendant on her birth and that she is marked with Mars on her body (604-626). For a character to present their natal sign as supporting evidence for their actions is extraordinary in the history of medieval literature.

Alison explains that her inner inclinations toward love and sex are manifest in her body through the seal of Venus and her excellent *quoniam* (608).⁴⁴ Walter Curry states that the

⁴³ Concerning her 'feminine self-awareness,' see: Lidija Štrmelj, 'Body and Awareness as Reflected in the Wife of Bath: a Historical Study Based on Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*.' Chapter in: Gert Hofmann and Snježana Zorić, eds. *Presence of the Body: Awareness in and Beyond Experience* (Brill, 2016), pp. 77-91. Robert Longworth, 'The Wife of Bath and the Samaritan Woman.' *The Chaucer Review* 34/4 (2000): 373-387. About the trope of women husband-hunting at funerals, see Turner, *The Wife of Bath*, 38-39. The image of a widow searching for a husband at a funeral resonates with the *Lamentations* of Matheolus: Matheolus, *Lamentationes*, 2 vols., A. G. van Hamel, ed., (Paris, 1892), l.862-3; 953-5; 976-7. About Alison's objectification of Jankyn and his attractive legs, see: Tison Pugh, 'Squire Jankyn's Legs and Feet: Physiognomy, Social Class, and Fantasy in The Wife of Bath's *Prologue* and *Tale*.' *Medievalia et Humanistica* 32 (2007): 83-101.

⁴⁴ Concerning sexual puns in the *Wife of Bath's Prologue*, see: James W. Marchand, 'Quoniam, *Wife of Bath's Prologue* D.608.' *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 100/1 (1999): 43-49. Larry D. Benson, 'The 'Queynte' Punnings of Chaucer's Critics.' *SAC Proceedings* 1 (1984): 23-4.

seal of Venus refers to a purple birthmark somewhere in the loins, thighs or neck, and this interpretation is repeated often.⁴⁵ However, Curry draws from a variety of astrological sources, and in each instance concerning the Wife of Bath (beyond a short reference to Firmicus Maternus), he cites seventeenth-century texts. As general references these are perfectly acceptable, but when attempting a more precise analysis, they should be approached with caution.

While later astrological texts certainly contain ideas present in medieval works, they were also influenced by texts printed in the intervening years, and therefore may have no relevance to Chaucer's writing, especially considering how robustly astrological tracts multiplied in England between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries. It seems prudent, therefore, to interpret the phrase 'prente of seinte Venus seel' more openly.

Furthermore, it is more enlightening to consider this 'seel' according to the first definition in the *MED*, referring to a wax seal. The relationship between a body and soul was described memorably by Aristotle as that of wax and a seal in *De Anima* II.1. The wax and the seal are not identical, nor are they one substance, just as a body and soul relate but are different substances. It is the seal that appears in the wax, and in that way they are inseparable. The poet of *Cursor Mundi* modifies this concept only a little, writing:

'Bot resoun 3et herde 3e no3t.
of mannys saule how hit ys wro3t.
a gastely li3t men says hit ys.
pat god has made til his liknes.
als prent of seal in wax ys prest
per-in he has his likenes fest.'

⁴⁵ See the 'Explanatory Notes' for these lines in *Riverside Chaucer*.

(Lines 553-558, from Bodleian Library, Fairfax MS 14)

The 'gastely lizt' indicates the immortal soul, which God has imprinted with his likeness. In the case of Alison, however, it is Venus which has imprinted her soul like a wax seal, and those astrological influences exhibited in her body. Wax is used in a similar manner in a metaphor for the Black Knight's impressionable mind in *The Book of the Duchess*. As a young man, the Knight was quick to learn the arts, to 'cacche and take' (781), just as 'a whit wal or a table' (780), *table* here meaning a portable writing tablet made of wood and covered with wax. Of all the arts, however, the Knight chose Love, 'I ches love to my firste craft' (791). A white wall can be repainted, and a wax tablet can be erased, but because the Knight chose to make love his craft, it remains permanently etched in his soul.

That Alison uses the phrase 'seinte Venus' in relation to a wax seal takes on more significance when situated in contemporary material culture. As a substance, beeswax was a versatile commodity, not only used for high quality candles but also for votive sculptures, which crowded altars at pilgrimage sites throughout Europe. The medium often relates to the message in devotional practices, and wax is a significantly dynamic substance.⁴⁶ At the high end, one could hire a 'honeyscribe' to create an individualized wax model to dedicate

⁴⁶ Alexandra Sapoznik, 'Bees in the medieval economy: religious observance and the production, trade, and consumption of wax in England, c. 1300–1555.' *The Economic History Review* 72/4 (2019): 1152-1174. About writing on wax tablets and erasure, see: Benjamin A. Saltzman, 'The Friar, the Summoner, and Their Techniques of Erasure.' *The Chaucer Review* 52/4 (2017): 363–395.

at the shrine of a saint.⁴⁷ This kind of figural slip casting of wax was typically done by chandlers, a practical outgrowth of working with beeswax.⁴⁸

The presence of wax votive offerings, usually hung from railings at or near a saint's shrine, were intended to remind the saint of special requests, and represented a type of spiritual promise. A large collection of ex-votos in a sacred structure amplified these messages, as described by Jaś Elsner: 'The collective logic of multiple ex-votos acts as a powerful argument for the claims that sanctuaries make for supernatural intervention in the material world.'⁴⁹ A striking example of a remarkably preserved female figure was found among the bundle of hollow wax ex-votos from behind a choir screen in the cathedral of Exeter [**Fig. 2**].⁵⁰ This is a young woman in the attitude of prayer, reflecting the clothing and hair fashions of her day, and acted as a vessel to hold a spiritual promise.

⁴⁷ Naomi Howell and Graham Fereday, 'The Exeter Cathedral Wax Votives.' Warburg Institute, Conference: 'A Material World,' March 2021.

⁴⁸ Nina Gockerell, 'Votive Wax: The Hipp Workshop in Pfaffenhofen.' Chapter in *Agents of Faith: Votive Objects in Time and Place*, Ittai Weinryb, ed. (New York: Bard Graduate Center, 2018), ch. 7-8. On trade, beeswax and Christian churches, see: Alexandra Sapoznik, 'Bees in the Medieval Maghreb: Wax, Honey and Cross-Cultural Trade in the Western Mediterranean.' *Medieval encounters: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim culture in confluence and dialogue* 27/4 (2021): 434-455, at 442-3.

⁴⁹ Jaś Elsner, 'One: Place, Shrine, Miracle.' Chapter in: *Agents of Faith: Votive Objects in Time and Place*, edited by Ittai Weinryb (New York: Bard Graduate Center, 2018), ch. 1.

⁵⁰ In an ongoing digital humanities project the University of Exeter, in partnership with the cathedral of Exeter, have created [three-dimensional models online](#), allowing the viewer to examine these extremely fragile waxworks.



Figure 2. Votive wax figure of a woman, Exeter Cathedral, 14-15th century, beeswax.

Chaucer's Alison, bearing the seal of saint Venus, can be viewed similarly as an adherent to the metaphorical worship of Venus. The stars-soul-body conduit works both directions in this case: the powerful position of Venus in the night sky when Alison was 'born' inflected her body with strong sexual desires, and Alison chooses to act on it. She thus figuratively stands at the altar of Venus like a wax votive offering, her body and soul imprinted by Love. With the comment, 'I hadde the prente of seinte Venus seel,' Chaucer touches on the concepts of imprinting, the duality of body and soul, planetary powers, and the cult of saints.

If this phrase refers to a wax seal as I suggest, then it could be another example of Chaucer nullifying misogynist arguments by pre-empting them in Alison's speech. In

Andreas Capellanus's twelfth century *De amore*, he wrote: 'A woman is just like melting wax, which is always ready to take a new form and to receive the impress of anyone's seal.'⁵¹ In this case, Alison admits she has been imprinted by Venus resulting in strong sexual desires and does not try to refute it. Chaucer thus robs the power from this misogynist image through Alison's fictive agency. His character chooses to act on her impulses; she was not a passive receiver of Venus's seal. This is one way Chaucer builds authority in her character through her confession, supporting one of the primary themes of the prologue.⁵²

Alison continues the discourse on her body by mentioning her sturdy hardiness, which is explained by the time of her birth: she was born when Taurus was in ascendance, and Mars therein.⁵³ She has the mark of Mars on her face (619), and she adds flirtatiously, on another privy place (620). Skeat connected this phrase to one in Ptolemy's *Centum dicta* 74, 'Whoever has Mars ascending will indeed have a mark.' In the *Tetrabiblos*, Ptolemy states that those born with Taurus in ascent with Mars therein will be tall and robust, with a red and white complexion, and in temperament showing an excess of the warm and dry.⁵⁴ This is reflected exactly in the description of Alison's face, which is bold, fair and red (GP

⁵¹ Andreas Capellanus, *The Art of Courtly Love*, John Jay Parry, ed. & trans. (Columbia University Press, 1960, 1969), p. 204. From Book III.83: 'Est etenim mulier tanquam cera liquescens, quae semper est formam novam parata suscipere et ad sigilli cuiuslibet impositionem mutari.'

⁵² On Alison's use of Ptolemy as authority, see: Edgar Laird, 'The Astronomer Ptolemy and the Morality of the 'Wife of Bath's Prologue.' *The Chaucer Review* 34/3 (2000): 289–299.

⁵³ On the medieval concept that an individual's disposition and character were formed prenatally, see: Gilchrist, *Medieval Life*, 21.

⁵⁴ Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, III.11.

456-458). Her Martial influences seem to be so strong in fact that they extend to her fashion choices: even her hose are scarlet red.⁵⁵

She must contend with conflicting forces then, since Mars and Venus impart contradictory desires and impulses of love and war, hot and dry, cold and wet. This is another expression of the ‘conflicting force-fields’ in her character, as discussed by Robert Longworth.⁵⁶ Gail Ashton interprets these conflicts as the source of discourse, stating: ‘I read the Wife as a textual body upon which are inscribed competing discourses, the masculine and the feminine (not male and female).’⁵⁷ Ashton’s interpretation is even supported by astrological material, specifically from Julius Firmicus Maternus, who wrote the most complete work on astrology from the classical world, *Matheseos Libri VIII*, begun around 334, and several manuscript copies survive from the Middle Ages.⁵⁸ He writes that those born under the sign of Taurus in ascendant ‘are always involved in luxury and lust.’⁵⁹ They drink too much, speak too much, love too much. Firmicus emphasizes their conflicted nature: ‘They will always be in love, or pretend that they are, and it pains them that they were born men.’⁶⁰ Males born under this sign, according to Firmicus, will be conflicted with feminine desires, wishing for a soft body, cosmetics, to wear women’s clothing, and walk on tiptoes. Firmicus does not address how the sign affects female

⁵⁵ Laura Hodges, ‘The Wife of Bath’s Costumes: Reading the Subtexts.’ *Chaucer Review* 27/4 (1993): 359-376.

⁵⁶ Longworth, ‘The Wife of Bath...Samaritan Woman,’ 372-387.

⁵⁷ Ashton, ‘Feminisms,’ 376.

⁵⁸ Jean Rhys Bram writes about the manuscript tradition in the Middle Ages in his edition of Firmicus Maternus, p. 6. See also: Hannah Elizabeth Mace, ‘Firmicus Maternus’ *Mathesis* and the Intellectual Culture of the Fourth Century AD.’ Doctoral thesis (University of Saint Andrews, 2017), p. 209-212.

⁵⁹ Bram’s Maternus, *Ancient Astrology*, 274. Kroll’s Maternus, VIII.Vii (In Tauri), p. 299: ‘Quibus orientibus si qui nascentur, luxuriosis semper et lascivis voluptatibus implicantur.’

⁶⁰ Kroll’s Maternus, p. 300: ‘Amabunt semper aut se amare simulabunt, et paenitebit eos quod viri nati sint.’

bodies, but it stands to reason that they are at home with their feminine qualities but also conflicted with a masculine, warlike nature, depending on the position of malefic planets (Saturn and Mars) at birth. Since Alison claims that both Venus and Mars were in powerful aspectual alignment on her nativity, then Firmicus would interpret that such an individual might become a gladiator or die pleasurably in *flagrante delicto*.⁶¹

These competing discourses and conflicting influences make Alison a more rounded and compelling character, particularly when compared to another horoscope in *The Squire's Tale*. By indicating unequivocally that Cambyuskan's birthday is 15 March (SqT 47), Chaucer is building masculine characteristics into his role. Since March 12-April 11 are the season of Aries in the medieval calendar, a benefic house for Mars, and the sun reaches its exaltation in the first ten degrees of this sign which amplifies hot, dry, choleric humours, associated specifically with masculinity, virility, and aggression.⁶² Cambyuskan's nativity is unchallenging because all the contingent cosmic movements and effects are aligned, Sun-Mars-Aries, quite unlike the Wife of Bath's clashing horoscope. Where Alison's horoscope creates a dynamic tension in her personality, Cambyuskan's renders him a stock character without complexity.

Curry, Wood, and North note that Alison's nativity is imprecise, which they see as perhaps an oversight or mistake made by Chaucer.⁶³ They approach the Wife of Bath's horoscope as if it could be aligned with data in calendrical tables. This is not, I suggest,

⁶¹ See the fourth section of *Liber Octavus: VII Taurus*.

⁶² Wood, *Ch...Country of Stars*, 98-99. Refer to the notes of *Riverside Chaucer* on Cambyuskan's horoscope, and as a reference for Aries see Gower's lines of the sign in *Confessio Amantis* VII. 979-1002; 1007-1014.

⁶³ Wood, *Ch...Country of Stars*, 172-180. North, *Chaucer's Universe*, see chapter 8 part iv.

how Chaucer approached the poetic potential of a horoscope. He furnished his character with a vague, invented horoscope to use it creatively in her speech.⁶⁴ If she had been a living woman of the middling classes, she very likely would have little knowledge of her own birthdate, let alone the precise hours and ascensions of planets, as this was something that only the extremely wealthy could afford. There were, however, other ways to access astrological insights about one's birth. There were collective nativities, for example, called 'destinaries,' which were constructed to relate to groups of people, born in the same era or place.⁶⁵ There were also popular astrological pamphlets, which will be explored later in this chapter.

It is also significant to note that even the authoritative astrologers, such as Abū Ma' shar, provide short, vague, and generalized mini-horoscopes. In the first discourse of his 'smaller' introduction to astrology, he writes that 'Taurus is the house of Venus,' and those under its sway might be feminine, of imperfect figure, lacking a limb, libidinous, having few children (usually none), of imperfect voice, and earthy.⁶⁶ Precise, calculated horoscopes are the exception, not the rule, and even these are of questionable veracity, as

⁶⁴ Robert S. Sturges, 'The Canterbury Tales' Women Narrators: Three Traditions of Female Authority,' *MLS* 13 (1983): 41-51.

⁶⁵ Irma Taavitsainen, *Middle English Lunaries: a Study of the Genre* (Helsinki: Société Néophilologique, 1988), p. 36.

⁶⁶ Abū Ma' shar, *The Abbreviation...Astrology*, Adelard's translation, p. 94-5: 'Taurus domicilium est Veneris'; 'Natura eius frigida et sicca, terrea, melancolica; sapor eius acetosus; sexus femininus; nocturnum; firmum ad germina; dies augens; figura imperfecta, membro diminuta; libidinosum; paucorum liberorum, plerumque nullorum; vocis imperfecte; quadrupes; cornipes.'

noted with the horoscope of Richard II. That Chaucer uses Alison's body creatively is perfectly at home with astrological literature – but his approach is novel.⁶⁷

Chaucer is doing something new: instead of looking outward at the stars and then at her body, Alison looks at her own body and then at the stars. By inverting the usual procedure, she controls the narrative. It is another way that 'experience' trumps 'authority,' precisely because her horoscope is imprecise. She interprets her own individuating birthmarks as external indicators of her inner inclinations, which she then extrapolates to build a vague nativity. She construes her sexual desires and commanding presence as evidence that Venus and Mars must have been in the ascendant of Taurus. Her horoscope is vague because it is not professional, and her conversation unfolds from her body outward. She is ruddy and argumentative, with a strong libido, enjoys luxury, with a mark or mole on her face, and so reason follows that Venus and Mars must have been the dominant planetary powers in Taurus when she was born. And Chaucer could not have chosen a more indicative birth sign for Alison, because of all twelve signs, Taurus is indeed the most sexually charged.⁶⁸

That Alison's horoscope is constructed from her body outward rather than from the heavens downward comes into relief again when compared with the horoscope Chaucer wrote for Hypermnestra (*The Legend of Good Women*, IX The Legend of Hypermnestra: 2576-2599). This is the final legend of the F manuscript, and it is left incomplete. Of its 161

⁶⁷ Adler & Strohm, *Alle Thyng Hath Tyme*, 69: 'The Wife of Bath's inclinations to love are, in her view, determined by the Zodiac. Multiplying astrological references to different narrative and aesthetic ends, Chaucer also avails himself of the idea that the stars working in unison with the heavens.'

⁶⁸ See the myth as recorded in Euripides' *Phrixus*, Epitome 14.

lines, a full 23 are dedicated to her nativity horoscope, and it is entirely Chaucer's invention. He describes how the planetary influences of her birth shaped her body and inclinations: Venus gave her body great beauty (2584), which Jupiter tempered with truthful good conscience (2589-90). Venus and Jupiter overpower Martial influences entirely as their conjunction necessarily places Mars in dejection, and thus his venom is conquered (2592-3). Sadly, however, the 'badde aspectes' (2597) of Saturn curse Hypermnestra to die in a prison. Chaucer uses this nativity horoscope to define Hypermnestra as a character ruled by Fate, which lends pathos to her inability to murder her husband on their wedding night. Criseyde was similarly born under a 'corsed constellacioun' (*Troilus & Criseyde* IV.745), which Criseyde blames for her destiny to part from Troilus. These cursed nativities would not stand against Bishop Tempier's rules, but as discussed in Chapter 2, Chaucer's pagan characters are subject to judicial astrology.

Professional horoscopes and elections may have been the exclusive province of the wealthy, and complicated astronomical and astrological treatises were interpreted, copied, and glossed in university and monastic centres, but there was also a down-market demand for popular astrology for laymen.⁶⁹ In her survey of Middle English material, Laurel Means describes the full range of market demand this way: '[E]vidence proves that the very large number of astrological texts circulated widely in every class of manuscript - from the most deluxe, illuminated copy on parchment to the poorest household almanac on dog-eared paper.'⁷⁰ A dog-eared almanac may have been the kind of astrological knowledge

⁶⁹ Technical horoscopes required both mathematical and astronomical skill, typically learned at a university or under a master Abbot: Sophie Page, *Astrology in Medieval Manuscripts* (The British Library, 2002), p. 14

⁷⁰ Means, 'Electionary, Lunary, Destinary,' 368.

that Chaucer had in mind for characters such as the Wife of Bath. Imagined as a real fourteenth-century woman, she likely would not have access to (or need for) computistical treatises or astronomical tables but might have had a familiarity with popular renditions of simplified astrology in calendars or booklets.

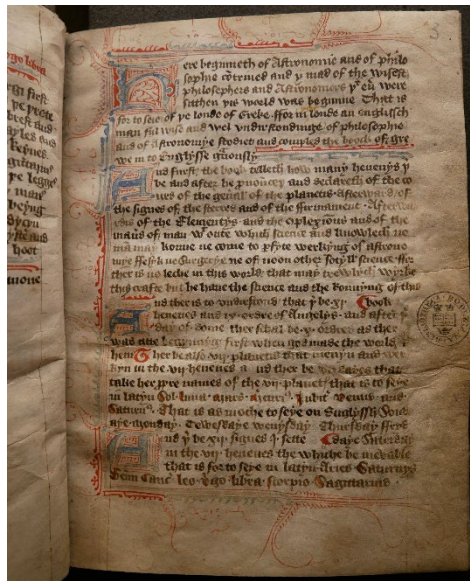


Figure 3. Oxford: Bodleian Libraries, MS Add. B. 17 (beginning 15th century), fol. 3r.

MS Add. B. 17 in the Bodleian's collection is just such a booklet, made of only nineteen folia, created at the beginning of the fifteenth century [Fig. 3]. It begins with simple charts for the movements of planets and zodiac signs, an introduction to the signs and months with illuminated icons, and then a remarkable claim: that it was written by an Englishman 'ful wise and wel understanding of philosophie and of Astronomie,' who travelled to Greece and translated ancient wisdom into English. It opens with a simple introduction to the seven planets, signs of the zodiac, four elements and the four humors.

This is followed by predictions about men and women born under certain signs and presumably responds to popular curiosity in the zodiac signs and astrology.⁷¹

Rather than including the traditional Greco-Roman myths associated with the signs, this author chooses to connect the signs to Biblical events. Cancer is not the helpful crab championed by the Olympians, but rather a reminder of Job's physical maladies, 'Job was a leper and full of cancers' (4r). Or Leo, no longer the Nemean lion, but rather a reminder of Daniel in the lion's den (4r). This shift aligns this text slightly closer to religious prayer books or a litany of saints. The connections between the signs and biblical topics may be the author's invention since these are not found in common or authoritative sources. Here then, the author is taking advantage of the creative space afforded by the nebulous boundaries of astrology, something like Kolve's 'free radical' as mentioned in the first chapter.⁷² There are no clues about the author, manuscript production, or intended audience for this manuscript. What can be surmised is that this is an example of the increase in vernacular manuscripts in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century, driven in part by the middle class and by women.⁷³

The predictions offered in the manuscript for those born under certain signs reveal insights into the most important issues to readers in the fourteenth century, but also seem timeless: who will they marry? Will they have children, or a fortune? Will they be met with

⁷¹ Some historians interpret the rise in popular interest in astrology as a reaction to the Black Death. See: Peregrine Horden, 'Medieval Medicine.' Chapter in: *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Medicine*, Mark Jackson, ed. (Oxford University Press, 2011, 2013), pp. 40-59.

⁷² Kolve, *Telling Images II*, p. 129.

⁷³ Marion Turner, 'The English Context.' Chapter in: Ian Johnson, ed., *Geoffrey Chaucer in Context* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 132-139, at 137: 'the growth of vernacular literature was partly driven by women's desire to participate in literary culture[.]'

kindness or hostility in their ventures? Will they travel, or go on pilgrimage? Should they anticipate certain diseases, such as headaches or toothaches or problems with internal organs? Will they live a long life? What kind of foods should they eat for optimal health? What are some lucky signs to look for? Is one colour of horse preferable to another? Does a birthmark mean anything? This pamphlet offers easy answers: all these things are related to invisible cosmic influences and potentially decipherable. On the final folio, however, the author shifts the responsibility of interpreting signs onto the reader: It is up to men and women to learn about predestination, to learn about the twelve signs, and seven planets, and four elements, and to be aware of perilous times on the calendar to know when it is best to do something (18v).

Chaucer wraps up Alison's nativity this way: 'I folwed ay myn inclinacioun / By vertu of my constellacioun' (615-6). This tidy couplet rhyming *inclinacion/constellacioun*, repeats the same stressed beats syllable by syllable, and neatly encapsulates the whole point of her astrological digression: she followed the inclinations she was born with, imparted by the stars and planets. MS Add. B. 17 is the kind of inexpensive and entertaining manuscript that a merchant woman could afford to consult, and indeed, the predictions for a woman born in Taurus bear a striking resemblance to the Wife of Bath: A woman born under the sign of Taurus shall buy and sell and work studiously, and she shall have six

husbands, where she will find wealth.⁷⁴ This chimes remarkably well with Alison's proclamation, 'Welcome the sixte, whan that evere he shal' (*Prologue* 45)!

Chaucer again does something unusual with astrology in *The Wife of Bath's Prologue* in lines 697-710. He takes an old argument, clerks versus women, and uses astrology to flip the power dynamic. Chaucer furnishes his character with an allegorical passage about the children of Mercury and Venus:

'The children of Mercurie and of Venus
 Been in hir wirkyng ful contrarius;
 Mercurie loveth wysdam and science,
 And Venus loveth ryot and dispence.
 And, for hire diverse disposicioun,
 Ech falleth in otheres exaltacioun.
 And thus, God woot, Mercurie is desolat
 In Pisces, wher Venus is exaltat,
 And Venus falleth ther Mercurie is reysed.
 The clerk, whan he is oold, and may noght do
 Of Venus werkes worth his old sho,
 Thanne sit he doun, and writ in his dotage
 That wommen kan nat kepe hir marriage!
 (Lines 697-710)

With terms such as *desolate* and *exaltat*, this passage is written in an astrological register, making a practical point about the right of celibate old men to pass judgement on women's bodies. Astrologically, Venus exalts in Pisces, but in the same house Mercury is in dejection; conversely, when Mercury exalts in Virgo, Venus is in dejection. Here, astrological language neatly packages big concepts. Clerks - celibate, scholarly men - are the 'children' of Mercury, the god of learning and writing. The zodiac sign Virgo is figured as

⁷⁴ From 11v: 'Sche schal bye and selle and sche schal have vi housbonds w(ith) ? sche schall have moch go(o)d and on of hem schal dwelle w(ith) a gret lord. Sche schall have a child that w(ith) fyre or w(ith) water schal be hurt sche schal be besy and stodyous ? her wrke.'

a maiden carrying either a wheat sheaf or sometimes a palm branch, and in Christian texts sometimes is related to the Virgin.⁷⁵

In a provocative and limber hypothesis Albertus Magnus even muses that Jesus was born when Virgo was in ascendant, in his *Speculum Astronomiae*.⁷⁶ This built on an ancient idea by Basilides and Ignatius of Antioch, in which Christ had been ‘preconceived at the time of the generation of the stars.’⁷⁷ This is not because the creator of the universe is subject to the motion of the planets, however, responding:

‘...but because when [God] spread out the heavens, just like vellum, to form the book of the universe, He refused to make the work incomplete; He did not wish there to be missing from its letters which were written according to His providence in the book of eternity – even what was furthest removed from nature: that [He would be] born from a Virgin – in order that by this means He might be recognized as a natural and true human being, who was not born in the natural manner not because the figure of heaven was the cause of His birth, but rather because [it was] a sign; or rather, as is truer than the truths, He Himself was the cause by which the manner of His miraculous birth was signified by means of the heavens.’⁷⁸

Whether or not this was genuinely written by Albertus Magnus or only attributed to him, it was written circa 1260 as part of a comprehensive introduction to astronomy and astrology

⁷⁵ Hesiod’s *Theogony* identifies Virgo as Dike, daughter of Zeus and Themis. Aratus writes she was an immortal who dwelt among humans long ago during the Golden Age. Eratosthenes and Hyginus, *Constellation Myths with Aratus’s Phaenomena*, Robin Hard, ed. & trans. (Oxford University Press, 2015).

⁷⁶ It is possible that this is not Albertus Magnus’ own work, and that it was later attributed to him. Paola Zambelli, *The Speculum Astronomiae and its Enigma; Astrology, Theology, and Science in Albertus Magnus and his Contemporaries* (London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1992).

⁷⁷ Scott Noegel, Joel Walker, and Brannon Wheeler, *Prayer, Magic and the Stars in the Ancient and Late Antique World* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), p. 211-213. Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium haeresium*, Miroslav Marcovich, ed. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1986), 7.15.

⁷⁸ Albertus Magnus, *Speculum Astronomiae*, in: Paola Zambelli, *The Speculum Astronomiae and its Enigma* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1992), p. 255-257: ‘...sed quia cum extenderet caelum sicut pellern, formans librum universitatis, et dedignaretur opus facere incompletum, noluit litteris eius deesse, ex eis quae secundum providentiam suam in libro aetemitatis sunt scripta, etiarn illud elongatissimum a natura quod de Virgine nasceretur, ut profecto per hoc innueretur homo naturalis et verus, qui non naturaliter nascebatur, non quod caeli figura esset causa quare nasceretur, sed potius significatio, immo ad vero verius, ipse erat causa quare modus admirandae suae nativitatis significaretur per caelum.’

with theological arguments.⁷⁹ According to this passage, the mortality of Jesus, even his body, was signified by the heavens, or perhaps it was his birth that caused the heavens' arrangement.⁸⁰ To be a 'natural and true human being', then, means having a root nativity. Mercury's exaltation in Virgo is thus an apt allegory for ecclesiastical life: writing, 'wysdam and science,' and scholarly life are best undertaken in celibacy.

As we have seen, throughout the *Wife of Bath's Prologue* Chaucer uses astrological ideas and imagery to formulate her character, relying on the connection between the microcosmos (the body) to the macrocosmos (the universe) to fortify his points. Shifting the emphasis from exclusively 'authoritative' astrological written sources (such as Ptolemy's *Tetrabiblos*) to a wider scope encompassing fourteenth-century materials (such as inexpensive wax figures or manuscripts such as MS Add. B. 17), her character takes on new complexions. Because of its high concentration of astrological language, the *Wife of Bath's Prologue* is a particularly fruitful example of how a material approach to Chaucer's astral writing makes room for new interpretations, but far from the only one. The next portion of this paper builds on this argument by applying this approach to Chaucer's most astral text of all, *The Treatise on the Astrolabe*, with images of the Zodiac Man, and extant medieval tools.

⁷⁹ Paola Zambelli, *The Speculum Astronomiae and its Enigma* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1992), see 'Mandonnet, the *Speculum Astronomiae* and the Condemnation of 1277.'

⁸⁰ A similar idea is expressed in Bernard Silvestris of Tours' *De universitate mundi* (1145-1153): 'He shall be at once divine and human. The motions of the stars shall prefigure his life, he shall know the cosmos, rule the earth, and after death shall ascend to the Ether.' See: Curtius, *European Literature ... Middle Ages*, 111.

Homo Signorum

Chaucer may not have recognized the term, but with concepts such as the ‘diverse disposicioun’ of planetary influences, age and youth in male and female bodies, and ‘Of Venus werkes,’ the Wife of Bath’s argument about Mercury and Venus relates to what is termed the doctrine of melosthesia.⁸¹ This is the theory that not only do astrological natal influences follow individuals through the life cycle, but the movement of stars and planets affect parts of the body at different times of the month and even hourly, and differently over time.⁸² This is most famously expressed in images termed the ‘Zodiac Man’ or *Homo Signorum*.⁸³

Typically *Homo Signorum* depict a nude figure overlaid with zodiac signs, beginning at the head with the vernal equinox and ‘beginning’ of the world with Aries, then Taurus at the shoulders; Cancer at the heart; Gemini at the arms; Leo, Virgo and Libra on the torso; Scorpio at the genitals; Sagittarius at the thighs; Capricorn the knees; Aquarius at the legs, until finally the feet with twin fish of Pisces. These images present what Jack Hartnell terms ‘the creative body’: ‘They were a powerful metaphor, a creative body which could be made by healers, writers and craftsmen alike to stand in for almost anything, from the locus of everlasting metaphysical salvation to the recurring machinations of the seasons and the planets.’⁸⁴ Another way to view this is through what Mircea Eliade called the observation of

⁸¹ As recorded by Orosius, in *Priscilliani quae supersunt*, G. Schepps, ed. *The Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* 18 (1889), p. 153-4.

⁸² See the discussion on ‘Blood’ in: Hartnell, *Medieval Bodies*, 159-179.

⁸³ Marcus Manilius’s *Astronomicum*, II.xi.

⁸⁴ Hartnell, *Medieval Bodies*, 25.

biocosmic rhythms as part of a larger cosmogonic system.⁸⁵ This is how Chaucer uses his fictional bodies, as powerful metaphors which serve as a locus of metaphysical ideas. The invisible is made visible through corporeality, and in this sophisticated sense Chaucer builds characters to inhabit the working medieval cosmos.



⁸⁵ Eliade, *Cosmos and History*, 52, 142.



Figure 4. Oxford, Bodleian MS Ashmole 391 (fourteenth century), fol. 9r.

This symbolic interweaving of zodiacal constellations and parts of the human body was already more than a thousand years old when Chaucer was writing, having been codified sometime between the third and fourth centuries CE.⁸⁶ A vibrant example of this is in MS Ashmole 391, 9r [Fig. 4]. This full-page illumination is the penultimate folio in a quarto made in the fourteenth century, following texts from Nicholas of Lynne and excerpts from Ptolemy, a double volvelle, and an image of *Homo Venarum*.⁸⁷ It is protected dramatically by a small silk veil which must be lifted to reveal the image.⁸⁸ The male figure and lively zodiac signs are encased in a trapezoidal arrow shape with two backgrounds. One is blue with stars, representing the celestial spheres, and the other is painted brown with a grid pattern, representing the figurative four corners of the earth. The human body

⁸⁶ Tester, *History...Astrology*, 23.

⁸⁷ W. H. Black, *A descriptive, analytical, and critical catalogue of the manuscripts bequeathed unto the University of Oxford by Elias Ashmole Esq.* Quarto Catalogues X (Oxford University Press, 1845), 'Ashmolean Manuscripts,' p. 298-99.

⁸⁸ It seems the veil was contemporaneously attached to the folio, or perhaps a short time afterward.

and the heavenly stars are entirely matriculated, with explanatory Latin text reiterating what the image displays.

This painting, and every other iteration of the same idea, represents a synthesis of working principles, each sign depicting a cosmic, terrestrial, and organic function. Julie Orlemanski explores the significance of these images, and how the imagery concretizes ‘an image of the body’s susceptibility to such a cause-struck world.’⁸⁹ She states that the effect ‘was multivalent: bespeaking bodily vulnerability but also medicine’s learned mastery of that vulnerability; diagramming practical information while emblemizing, with strange acuity, the feeling of a body not quite under human control.’ She continues, ‘It suggests how newly accessible information might have redounded on images of the body in an era when creaturely life was being reconceived within a web of material forces and technical explanations.’⁹⁰ This is particularly true of the image in Ashmole 391, where it is only one part of a larger astrological treatise. The contemporary material surrounding the painting is made of lunar calendars, charts of domical Sundays, a perfectly working volvelle, a diagram connecting veins and moon phases, etc.

Chaucer may have intended a Zodiac Man as part of his *Treatise on the Astrolabe*. In

I.21.70-77, Chaucer describes the zodiac signs’ correlation to the body:

‘And everich of these 12 signes hath respect to a certeyn parcel of the body of a man, and hath it in governaunce; as Aries hath thin heved, and Taurus thy nekke and thy throte,

⁸⁹ Julie Orlemanski, *Symptomatic Subjects: Bodies, Medicine, and Causation in the Literature of Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), p. 27.

⁹⁰ Irma Taavitsainen, ‘A Zodiacal Lunary for Medical Professionals.’ Chapter in: *Popular and Practical Science of Medieval England*, Lister M. Matheson, ed. (East Lansing: Colleagues Press, 1994), pp. 283-300, at 275: ‘Astrology found its culmination in medieval medicine, both in the underlying doctrines and in the practical side of choosing the appropriate times for various actions, i.e., elections.’

Gemini thin armholes and thin armes, and so furth, as shall be shewid more pleyne in the 5 partie of this tretis.’

Chaucer’s treatise was illustrated with images of the relevant parts of the astrolabe in nearly all the earliest copies of the text, and it is possible that his plans for Part V (never concluded) included a Zodiac Man, to ‘shewid more pleyne.’ Lisa Cooper sees this verbal description of the Zodiac Man as a conceptual hinge in the *Treatise* between the two parts of the manual, and that it emphasizes to Lowys that ‘the signs on the astrolabe’s rete are intimately connected to him even before he picks it up, since every part of his body is already linked to its celestial counterpart as if with an invisible thread.’⁹¹ In other words, Lewys is at the centre of his own universe.

Indeed, Chaucer’s *Treatise* is not meant to be read silently, it requires physical, kinetic movement and full visualization to fulfil its potential.⁹² Chaucer portrays himself as ‘a lewd compiler of the labour of old astrologiens’ (61-62) citing authorities, but then emphasizes that physical practice is equally crucial, ‘techen the worken the verrey practik’ (70). Chaucer explains that the astrolabe is *performed* to find answers (‘in alle thinges performen’ 22-23). The first instruction in Part I describes the body’s position in relation to the object: ‘Thyn Astrolabie hath a ring to putten on the thombe of thi right hand in taking

⁹¹ Cooper, ‘Figures,’ 108.

⁹² Seb Falk writes that using an astrolabe with a technical manual increases understanding: Falk, ‘What’s on the Back of an Astrolabe?’, 32. Even Astronomy in Martianus Capella’s *Marriage* mentions an armillary sphere as a companion to the discussion of her craft, Book VIII.815: ‘I myself do not consider an axis and poles, which mortals have fastened in a bronze armillary sphere to assist them in comprehending the heavens[.]’ / ‘neque enim vel axem polosque, quos in sphaera aenea, quae cricote dicitur, ad intellegentiae compendia affinxere mortales[.]’ Ulrich Harsch, *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii* (Biblioteca Augustana, digital resource < www.hs-augsburg.de >

the height of thinges.’ This puts the body at the centre of the hub of cosmic networks.⁹³ This is an example of the blurring of text-instrument boundaries, which Seb Falk suggests was particularly evident at the end of the fourteenth century.⁹⁴ Chris Cannon thinks more philosophically about this boundary, writing that the purpose of an astrolabe is in part to tell ‘whoever is using it about him or herself, and in particular, just where and when he or she actually is.’⁹⁵ This is particularly poignant when thinking about Chaucer writing this as a guide for his child.

Chaucer employs ‘vehicular language’ in *The Treatise*, which prioritizes effective communication over expression.⁹⁶ His sentences are mostly simple. Experiential learning is more important than rote repetition of authoritative sources in this text, which is clear from his use of ‘naked words in Englissh’ (26-7) but also in his turns of phrase. He uses simple metaphors and straightforward language to describe each part of the astrolabe and how to use it, such as in part I.6. The lines leading to the zenith are like the legs of a spider leading to the body, ‘From this cenyth, as it semeth, there comen a maner croked strikes like to the clawes of a loppe, or elles like the werk of a womans calle’ (I.19), or the lines of the zodiac appear like a net or a spider’s web, ‘shapen in manere of a net or of a lopweb

⁹³ Elly Truitt links this point to Chaucer’s emphasis on experience: ‘I argue that Chaucer articulated and emphasized experience, a concept taken from thirteenth-century natural philosophy, as a necessary component of acquiring natural knowledge: using the astrolabe is as important as reading about it.’ Truitt, ‘Making English Scientific,’ 761. Cooper, ‘Figures for “Gretter Knowing,”’ 105.

⁹⁴ Seb Falk, ‘What’s on the Back of an Astrolabe?’, see conclusion, esp. 41-42.

⁹⁵ Chris Cannon, *From Literacy to Literature: England, 1300-1400* (Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 103.

⁹⁶ Michael D. Gordin, *Scientific Babel: How Science was Done Before and After Global English* (University of Chicago Press, 2015), p. 4-5. Truitt, ‘Making English Scientific,’ 767.

after the olde descripcioun' (l.21). These are things that could be easily recalled by a medieval audience, even by a little boy, drawing on their own experiences.

Indeed, when instructing the reader on how to use the astrolabe the most frequent verbs in Chaucer's *Treatise* are: look, take, understand, note, turn, know, set, reckon, find, and see. These verbs have an explicit mandate and anticipate physical actions. The text is also clearly organized so that one can handle an astrolabe, observe and record, and easily return to the text. There is an immediacy with phrases such as, 'Now have I told the twyes.' (l.16, line 18), and frequent remonstrances to remember or not to forget. This is an intimate text for immediate use.

The examples we have looked at so far in this chapter from *The Wife of Bath's Prologue* and *The Treatise on the Astrolabe* not only reflect the physical materiality of the biocosmic rhythms in the medieval construction of the cosmos - but depend upon it. This is brought into focus further through examining objects which connected human observers with the heavens through physical touch, practice, and calculations. Brass quadrants are such instruments, middling somewhere between high-end astrolabes and low-end vellum volvelles, engraved with astrological, astronomical, and calendric information. Essentially one-quarter of an astrolabe, quadrants were an economical and portable time-telling device and a type of pocket calculator. The Canterbury Astrolabe Quadrant, now in the British Museum (BM 2008,8017.1, **Fig. 5**), is an exceptional example.



Figure 5. 'The Canterbury Astrolabe Quadrant.' British Museum: 2008,8017.1, c. 1388.

This device was uncovered during a 2005 archaeological dig of an historic inn, The House of Agnes, in Canterbury. The inn was built in the thirteenth century, rebuilt in the seventeenth century, and still stands today, situated near Canterbury's Westgate on St Dunstan's Street, directly on the pilgrimage route to the cathedral. This discovery is rare – objects like this are almost never found buried – and it is dated to c. 1388, made in England,

set to the geographical latitude of London.⁹⁷ It is only 67 mm x 11 mm, and specialists hypothesize that someone may have lost the quadrant while staying at the inn. The innermost circle on the back provides the nineteen-year lunar cycle, and the outer ring is marked with abbreviated symbols indicating months for calculating the Easter Moon according to the Roman calendar.⁹⁸ An eagle stands in place of a pointer which once carried something in its talons but now is entirely oxidized to the plate.⁹⁹ The Canterbury Astrolabe Quadrant is not expensive object, or precise – it has noticeable mistakes. It was probably not made by professional instrument makers, but rather a general metal worker(s) with a copper alloy.¹⁰⁰ This device could deliver data for trigonometric calculations, but it could equally deliver simple information, such as the ascendant degrees or hours. This was a commodity answering the market's demand for affordable ways to access astronomy, as mentioned in the introduction to this thesis. Having such a device to hand is not enough to use it, however. It requires basic memory of constellations and the physical *habitus* of observation and touch, which is what Chaucer's *Treatise* endeavours to outline for his reader.

In her assessment of this instrument, Elly Dekker connects the placement of the eagle in the position of the sun with Pliny the Elder's *Natural History* (X.3-6), Isidore of Seville's *Etymologies*, and Dante's *Paradiso*, which describe the eagle's fabled ability to

⁹⁷ Elly Dekker, "'With His Sharp Lok Perseth the Sonne': a New Quadrant from Canterbury." *Annals of science* 65/2 (2008): 201–220, at 212.

⁹⁸ Each date is marked with a number, a letter for Kalends, Ides and Nones, followed by the first letter of the month; Dekker, p. 214.

⁹⁹ Dekker, 'With His Sharp Lok,' 217: 'The eagle is shaped such that then the shorter wing will point to the ordinal number of the previous year and the eagle's tail to that of the following year.'

¹⁰⁰ Dekker, 'With His Sharp Lok,' 219-220.

look directly into the sun. The same allusion is made in Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls*, in which the royal eagle 'with his sharpe lok perseth the sonne' (331).¹⁰¹ The quadrant's eagle once carried something in its claws (probably either prey or a hatchling), and the choice of an eagle pointer is significant. This creature can traverse the land and sky, just as the quadrant allows the user to mentally 'move' through the night sky through physical manipulation of a tool and mental calculations.

More than bookish learning about the night sky is also expected by the eagle in *The House of Fame*. Twice the eagle encourages Chaucer, the narrator-dreamer, to look and learn from the stars: "Now turn upward," quod he, "thy face, / And behold this large space' (925-6). Then the eagle asks Geoffrey if he will learn starlore, 'Wilt thou lere of sterres aught?' (993).¹⁰² The eagle seems to offer Geoffrey lessons about the names of the stars and the heaven's signs, but Geoffrey obstinately refuses with short, single-syllable answers, and the answers are revealing. He is too old: 'For y am to old' (995). It is no good, 'No fors' (999, 1011). The narrator's fearful ineptitude is reflected in these inadequate responses. In reply the eagle gives Geoffrey a taste of what he is missing by alluding to constellations and their stories (1002-1008), and ends with this reprimand: 'For though thou have hem ofte on honde, / Yet nostow not wher that they stonde' (1009-10).¹⁰³ To put it another way, the Eagle

¹⁰¹ John M. Steadman, 'Chaucer's Eagle: A Contemplative Symbol.' *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 75/3 (1960): 153-159. Ingrid Nelson, 'Ambient Media and Chaucer's *House of Fame*.' *English Language History* 88/3 (2021): 551-78. Dekker's original assessment for the British Museum indicated 1388 as the creation date, as it is published now, but it may be 1314. Personal correspondence with John Davis, November 2023.

¹⁰² The verb *lêren* means to teach, and *aught* roughly translates to 'estimation, opinion, or reputation' according to the *MED*. See also: Steven F. Kruger, 'Imagination and the Complex Movement of Chaucer's "House of Fame."' *The Chaucer Review* 28/2 (1993): 117-134.

¹⁰³ John Scattergood, 'Chaucer's Joke against the Egle: The House of Fame, 1011-1017.' *Notes and Queries* 51/3 (2004): 233-234.

is encouraging *experience* as it was understood in the fourteenth century - as embodied experimentation.¹⁰⁴ Having the stars often to hand also recalls an astrolabe or quadrant, a handheld device which is useless unless the user comes to it with essential knowledge and training. To imaginatively explore the web of material and invisible influences permeating the earth and its inhabitants, both body and mind are required.



¹⁰⁴ For more on the Eagle's conversation with Geoffrey, see: Turner, *Ch...European Life*, 223.



Figure 6. Physician's quadrant, Merton SC/OB/AST/4, c. 1350. I am grateful for the librarians of Merton College and especially Julia Walworth for allowing me to view this object in person, and to Stephen Johnston for taking the time to discuss it in depth with me.

Like the Wife of Bath's mental circuit between human bodies and celestial bodies, the Merton Quadrant SC/OB/AST/4 [Fig. 6] makes this circuit explicit with an engraved version of the Zodiac Man. This tool once belonged to a member of Merton College in the mid-fourteenth century and has remained in its library ever since.¹⁰⁵ The back of this tool has nine concentric circles, with a rotating dial bearing a pointer, the *index solaris*, and another for lunar months, the *index lunae et aspectum*.¹⁰⁶ These circles and dials are confusing since the months are arranged in 'no intelligible plan,' and the 'haphazard arrangement of names and numbers may have a magical rather than a scientific

¹⁰⁵ Julia Caroline Walworth, *Merton College Library: an illustrated history* (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 2020). New X-ray fluorescence analysis by John Davis has placed its creation date earlier than previously thought, to the mid-fourteenth century.

¹⁰⁶ For more information on these elements, see: Falk, 'What's on the Back of an Astrolabe?,' 24-41.

significance.¹⁰⁷ The quadrant front bears the mark of at least two hands some time apart, and the later hand updated the calendar and hour lines to reflect equal hours.

What is extraordinary about this object, and possibly unique, is the curving figure of the Zodiac Man engraved beyond the hour lines. The figure bears a close resemblance to Bodleian Library MS Canon Misc. 248, f.42r [Fig. 7], however, just as each manuscript calendar and Labors of the Month cycle is distinctive in some way (see ch. 1), so is this Zodiac Man. Specifically, its placement on a tool designed to measure altitudes and dates lends philosophical dimensions to the object, reminding the user that while the sun, moon, planets and stars are infinitely remote, they are also intimately connected to the organs and blood inside each person.

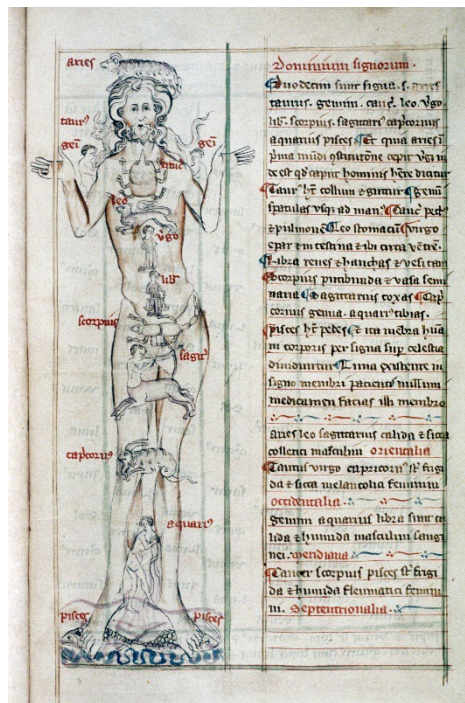


Figure 7. Bodleian Library MS Canon Misc. 248 (third quarter 14th century), f.42r.

¹⁰⁷ R. T. Gunther, *Early Science in Oxford, vol II: Astronomy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923), 241-242.

The male figure on this quadrant is unnaturally attenuated, exaggerating the Gothic sway to accommodate the curving hour lines. The artist has taken extra care to relate the zodiac signs with the parts of the body: Aries' woolly coat seamlessly blends into the hair at the top of his head and into Taurus at the shoulders; Cancer looks less like a crustacean and more like a heart with ventricles in the middle of his chest; Virgo's grain sheaf reside above the stomach; his genitals are a combination of Libra's balanced scales and creaturely Scorpio; and Pisces gracefully echo the shape of the man's feet. This is a direct way of imagining the human body as fully incorporated into the cosmos in a kind of sympathetic harmony.¹⁰⁸ The swinging plumb bob working with the sights would have swung across the quadrant in a mutually reinforcing manner: the Zodiac Man is a reminder of the metaphysical ideas underpinning the circuit between humankind and the cosmos, and the interactive, working parts demonstrate how celestial bodies move and can be read through handheld devices. This clever prognosticating tool is thus an example of the Ptolemaic system in action, supplemented with a stunning visual reminder of its implications through touch and sight.

This is the pumping heart of the matter: the material body and the cosmos were thoroughly integrated in the prevailing medieval ideological framework of Chaucer's day. This is best understood visually with objects like Merton's quadrant, which is why I argue that Chaucer's poetic astral images must be contextualized with visual expressions of the

¹⁰⁸ Sir James Frazer identified two basic principles of magic, 'The Law of Similarity' and 'The Law of Contact or Contagion,' and the neo-Platonic idea of *sympatheia* was key to both: Sir James Frazer, *The Golden Bough: a Study in Magic and Religion*, 8 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1911-15, third edition), vol. 1, chapter 4.

cosmos alongside - and equally - with textual matter. Cosmic imagery was not only meant to be seen, but to be sensed.

Conclusion



Figure 8. British Museum 1909,0617.1, 'The Chaucer Astrolabe' (c. 1326), English in origin.

A group of astrolabes made between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in England are labeled 'Chaucerian astrolabes' because their designs reflect many of the diagram details from early manuscript copies of *The Treatise on the Astrolabe*.¹⁰⁹ They are kept in museums, such as British Museum 1909,0617.1 and 1914,0219.1. In fact, the BM 1909 astrolabe is often referred to as 'The Chaucer Astrolabe' on its information labels, and it is connected with Chaucer both implicitly and explicitly in publications [Fig. 8]. These astrolabes feature on dust jacket designs for copies of the *Treatise*, they influenced Skeat's

¹⁰⁹ John Davis, 'The "Chaucerian" Astrolabe in the British Museum: A Reassessment of its Dating and Ownership.' *Journal for the History of Astronomy* 50/2 (2019): 121-154.

diagrams and often serve as examples of astrolabes in survey introductions to Chaucer's astronomy.

This attention is rightly deserved because these objects are contemporaneous examples of the finest tools of the trade. But they are also showpieces. They are professional products, completed with precision, easily read and finely tuned. They show little evidence of heavy use, they are beautifully well-preserved, and their reverential encasement in museums can make it easy to forget that to perform their functions astrolabes must be handled, brought outdoors, the plates exchanged, and the pin removed.

Titles such as 'The Chaucer Astrolabe' may unintentionally privilege such objects over others when considering material contexts for his poetry, and this can obscure the wealth of material available from Chaucer's time. As I have shown, a more complete picture of Chaucer's material world requires a look at the imperfect objects - the ones lost at inns (The Canterbury Astrolabe Quadrant), or the reworked and unique (the Merton Quadrant), or pamphlets of popular astrology. Cosmological concepts were supplemented or freely altered by homegrown, vernacular literature and objects, such as the text in MS Add B. 17, as part of an exciting uptick in literacy and interest.

In the end, Chaucer's astral bodies simply defy one-to-one definitions (Venus' seal means a purple birthmark), rather, they embody their own creative cosmos with limitless potential. The Wife of Bath's nativity is closer to the peculiar than the paragons, just as she rejoices in her own imperfection (line 112). Seeing this fuller picture necessarily reveals the

great range and dynamism of the prevailing culture. Chaucer's astral poetry demands more context than only authoritative texts, the materials of experience must be included. I have only analysed a handful of remarkable examples, but there is an enormous body of manuscripts, instruments, and objects waiting to be noticed.

IV. ASTRAL PLAY

In the prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*, the narrator dreams he is in a luscious green garden in May, filled with blooming flowers. It is presided over by the God of Love and his companion the Queen Alceste with an entourage of courtiers, and they are all as beautifully adorned as the garden.¹ This prologue is written in a courtly high style, with lines and lines of lavish adulation for the God of Love and Alceste, which many interpret as allusions to Richard II and his wife, Anne of Bohemia.² Near the end of the prologue, after the queenly Alceste charges the narrator Chaucer to write a new literary work to atone for his poor representation of women, the narrator praises the goodness of Alceste (lines 511-536).³ He connects this vision of her with the Greek myth of the same name. In the Athenian tragedy by Euripedes (438 BCE), Alceste nobly sacrifices herself for the life of her husband. She is so worthy and good in fact that he writes, ‘No wonder ys thogh Jove hire stellyfye, / As telleth Agaton, for hir goodnesse!’ (F Prologue, 525-6 / G 513-514).⁴

Only Alceste was never turned into a star - she is never ‘stellyfyed’ in classical literature or anywhere else.⁵ No constellation or star is named for Alceste in any known

¹ Many see this as an allegorical presentation of Richard II and his queen, Anne of Bohemia, see the Explanatory Notes in *Riverside*.

² For an up-to-date discussion of this, see Lynn Staley’s chapter, ‘Anne of Bohemia and the Objects of Ricardian Kingship.’ Bradbury & Adams, *Medieval Women*, pp. 97-122, esp. 102. Thomas, *Court of Richard II*, chapter 2.

³ Here Alceste is possibly connected to Queen Anne of Bohemia, and clearly a fertility figure and partner to the King of Love, emphasized by the daisy crown presented by the goddess Cybele (line 531). Andrew Taylor, ‘Anne of Bohemia and the Making of Chaucer.’ *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 19/1 (2017): 95-119. Geaman, *Anne of Bohemia*, 120.

⁴ The narrator cites an ‘Agaton’ as the *auctoritas*, which may be the ‘Agatone’ mentioned by Dante, or possibly Plato’s *Symposium*. Both those texts include the myth of Alceste, but she is never catasterized to a star in those sources. *Purgatorio* 22.107.

⁵ Alceste is not mentioned in Boccaccio’s *Famous Women*, and neither does astrology play a significant role in the poetry: Giovanni Boccaccio, *Famous Women*, trans. ed. by Virginia Brown (I Tatti Renaissance Library,

treatise, or today. This is, in fact, a pretend constellation. And neither is it passed over quickly. A few lines later the God of Love treats this contrived constellation as if it were a star by which women could consult in an astrological almanac: ‘And wost so wel that kalender ys shee / To any woman that wol lover bee’ (542-3). In the G Prologue it reads: ‘For of Alceste shulde thy wrytynge be, / Syn that thow wost that calandier is she / Of goodnesse, for she taught of fyn lovynges’ (533-4). The terms *kalender* / *calandier* are glossed as a calendar or ‘almanac; hence, guide, model’ (note to line 542). By turning Alceste into a constellation which women can refer to like an almanac, this false star plays a part in the sophisticated sense of irony that Chaucer constructs in this poem.⁶ This prologue is suspended between earnest and game, a poem set in the ludic space of a dream-vision garden and intended as ‘a court interlude for a knowing, sophisticated audience.’⁷ As alluded to in lines F 72 / G 82, this is a take on the ‘Flower and Leaf’ genre, ‘a gender game popular with continental aristocrats,’ as Nicola McDonald puts it.⁸ She explains that the prologue wears a ‘festive guise,’ and it is ‘best understood as ludic.’

1; Harvard University Press, 2003). Florence Percival, *Chaucer's Legendary Good Women* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 55-56. She is not mentioned in classical sources: Theony Condos, *Star Myths of the Greeks and Romans; a Sourcebook* (Grand Rapids: Phanes Press, 1997).

⁶ See the portion on the Court of Frederick II in: Charles Homer Haskins, *Studies in the History of Mediaeval Science* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1924, reprinted 1960). Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge University Press, 1989, reprint 2014), p. 122.

⁷ Turner, *Chaucer*, 350, 359. Carolyn P. Collette, *The Legend of Good Women: Context and Reception* (D.S. Brewer, 2006); esp. William A. Quinn, ‘The Legend of Good Women: Performance, Performativity, and Presentation’, 1-32; and Nicola McDonald, ‘Games Medieval Women Play’, 176–97. Percival, *Chaucer's Legendary*, 299-321.

⁸ Nicola McDonald, ‘Chaucer's “Legend of Good Women,” Ladies at Court and the Female Reader.’ *The Chaucer Review* 35/1 (2000): 22-42, at 25.

Patricia Ingham suggests that Chaucer ‘teases readers with fake sources and misattributions,’ and this seems to be what he is doing with Alceste’s constellation.⁹

Play like this is one of the primary modes of Chaucer’s astral poetics, comprising no less than a third of the total examples, as discussed in the Introduction and Appendix. From constructing a timescape in *The Merchant’s Tale* so that Damyan makes his plea to Venus at an auspicious moment (lines 1967-1972), or likening the Milky Way to ‘Watlynge Strete’ (*House of Fame* lines 936-939), or writing obscure references in misleading language that requires careful disentangling to understand (*Legend of Ariadne*, lines 2223-2224), Chaucer takes full creative license to invent his own version of the cosmos.¹⁰

Nowhere is this clearer than in *The Complaints of Mars & Venus*, which are the primary focus of this chapter, considered through a lens of play. I offer a new interpretation of these texts as ‘play texts,’ not only as playful with astrology, but as texts for a small-scale dramatic performance. Johan Huizinga and Mikhail Bakhtin provide theoretical definitions and theories of play and offer the methodological structure of this chapter, which I combine with an innovative, dance-based approach pioneered by Seeta Chaganti.¹¹ I offer a material perspective which allows for this new interpretation. We begin with a brief

⁹ Patricia Clare Ingham, *The Medieval New: Ambivalence in an Age of Innovation* (The Middle Ages Series. Philadelphia, 2015), p. 15.

¹⁰ There are also instances when Chaucer is not necessarily inventive with cosmic poetics, such as when he is translating Boethius or *Romaunt de la Rose*, or when he is closely following generic expectations, as he mostly does in *Book of the Duchess*. Often Chaucer’s hagiography is also ‘unplayful,’ such as the Marian invocation prefacing the *Second Nun’s Tale*, or *The Prioress’s Tale*, which conform in most every way to the established mode of writing saint’s lives, and the cosmic allusions in these texts are not unusual.

¹¹ Johan Huizinga, *Homo ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (London: Routledge, 1949). Mikhail Mikhaïlovich Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s poetics*, Caryl Emerson, ed. & trans. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984). Seeta Chaganti, *Strange Footing: Poetic Form and Dance in the Late Middle Ages* (University of Chicago Press, 2019).

discussion of the shift in zodiacal art toward the domestic and a background of domestic theatre in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and I explore the increased literacy and desire in the middle classes for greater astronomical knowledge of the late fourteenth century, shown in an increase of manuscript production and astronomical tools. This provides sufficient contextualization for a deep dive into *The Complaint of Mars*.

From portals to parlours: the domestication of the zodiac in art and literature

By the fourteenth century astrolabes were not rare or unusual, but when they splashed into Europe with new verve in the 11-12th centuries, they were thrilling.¹² Extant letters from eleventh-century Fulbertian Chartres exhibit the thrill of the new technology in monastic communities: Radolf of Liège wrote to Ragimbold of Cologne about his acquisition of a precious brass astrolabe, and that he should meet him on Saint Lambert's Day to see it.¹³ Monasteries were eager to have their own astrolabes primarily for timekeeping and fuelled demand.²⁷

This kind of enthusiasm for greater astronomical knowledge and technology provided what Stephen McCluskey terms the 'hardy rootstock' from which later astronomies flourished and resulted in mechanical clocks and numerous devices.¹⁴ A crucial expansion occurred in the following two centuries as the astrolabe - and

¹² Olaf Pedersen, 'Astronomy.' Chapter in: *Science in the Middle Ages*, David C. Lindberg, ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

¹³ Loren C. McKinney, *Bishop Fulbert and Education at the School of Chartres* (Notre Dame, Indiana: The Medieval Institute, 1957), 'Une correspondance d'écolatres,' 234-240, 283; also 14-15, 29-30. R. W. Southern, *The Making of the Middle Ages* (Yale University Press, 1953), 198; 201-203.

¹⁴ Stephen McCluskey, *Astronomies and Cultures in Early Medieval Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 208.

astronomical knowledge more generally - became more accessible.¹⁵ By the middle of the thirteenth century, new astronomical materials were so plentiful that Oliver of Brittany wrote, 'a day would scarcely suffice to completely tell of [astronomy's] innumerable books and authors.'¹⁶ Robert de Sorbon (founder of the Sorbonne college in Paris. D. 1274) even complained that clerks too eagerly fixate on predicting eclipses and astronomy generally and not enough on their sins.¹⁷ Later in the fourteenth century, John of Saxony writes in his almanac for 1336-1380 of the need to 'lighten' and abbreviate the available astronomical texts.¹⁸ He explains that the authoritative texts available are too ponderous for the many students interested in learning the practice of astronomy and astrology. These desires were requited with a significant surge in astronomical manuscripts and proliferation of knowledge, exemplified with texts such as Chaucer's *Treatise on the Astrolabe*.

A review of the International Instrument Checklist, and inventories such as those at Oxford's Museum of the History of Science, provides a rough idea of the creation and distribution of astrolabes.¹⁹ Most of the earliest astrolabes come from Spain, such as OMHS 55331, dated 1068. In England astrolabes appear in records during the early thirteenth century and increase in numbers almost exponentially between 1300-1500.²⁰

¹⁵ Turner, *Chaucer*, 230-31.

¹⁶ McCluskey, *Astronomies*, 191.

¹⁷ Paris: BnF 15971, fol. 167 va. Here thanks are due to Laure Miolo for her paper, 'Predicting and Observing Eclipses in Fourteenth-Century Paris: What the Manuscripts tell us,' delivered 27 May 2025 for the Centre for MS and Text Cultures at Queen's College Oxford.

¹⁸ Erfurt: Universitätsbibliothek Erfurt, Dep. Erf. CA 2° 386, fol. 62r.

¹⁹ David A. King 'European Astrolabes to ca. 1500: an Ordered List.' *Medieval Encounters: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Culture in Confluence and Dialogue* 23/1-5 (2017): 355-64.

²⁰ Seb Falk, *Light Ages*, 129-150.

Manuscript production was also instrumental in the dissemination of astrolabes, as volvelles and vellum astrolabes also increased in numbers.²¹

As an art motif, the Labors of the Month gradually disappeared as a favoured image in churches after about the mid-thirteenth century, only appearing sporadically after. It is rare to find any new zodiac portals (either extant or in written records) anywhere after about 1250 CE. The portals and sculptures at the cathedral of Chartres represent its heyday as a motif in architecture (see chapter 1). The motif also generally disappears from church floor mosaics, baptismal fonts and episcopal accoutrement. Instead, the zodiac migrated to hundreds of calendar folia in Books of Hours, which became increasingly numerous as the fourteenth century progressed. Books of Hours outside of ecclesiastical settings were typically intended for private, domestic use in households, and almost always included a calendar (illustrated or not) with the zodiac signs.²² The same is true of almanacs and scientific treatises, which spread beyond the realms of university or monastic scriptorium to more common usage, and from Latin to the vernacular.²³ Taavitsainen and Pahta identify the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in England as significant turning points in the production of scientific treatises and vernacular texts in English, with a particular boom in production in the early fifteenth century.²⁴ Access to astronomical and astrological

²¹ See the rotating volvelle on fol. 25r in MS Ashmole 370, c. 1424. Also see Sigmund Eisner's introduction to *The Kalendarium of Nicholas of Lynn*.

²² Umberto Eco, foreword in Raymond Cazelles and Johannes Rathofer, *Illuminations of Heaven and Earth; the Glories of the Tres Riches Heures du Duc de Berry* (Harry Abrams, 1988), p. 7. John Harthan, *Books of Hours* (Thames and Hudson, 1977).

²³ L. E. Voigts, 'What's the word? Bilingualism in Late-Medieval England.' *Speculum* 71 (1996): 813-826. Nicholas Campion, *History of Western Astrology: volume 1, the Ancient World* (Bloomsbury, 2015), p. 81-83.

²⁴ Irma Taavitsainen and Päivi Pahta, *Medieval and Scientific Writing in Late Medieval English* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 1, 8-9.

knowledge grew and diversified in these centuries and consequently astrological imagery became more commonplace, as witnessed in the expansion in the material record of zodiacal art into domestic spaces.

Zodiacal art remained in medieval churches (as it remains today), but the motif rippled from these centres to more everyday spaces, paralleling the shift in architecture in which personal spaces in familial residences also grew. In London during Chaucer's lifetime, specifically after the 1348-9 plague, domestic spaces became more spacious and significant. Parlors and private chambers increasingly gained ground in household architecture, as did the accumulation of belongings.²⁵ These new spaces were more likely to have books, devotional objects, and items for entertainment. They provided a space for socializing and study.²⁶ The star signs that soared above grand cathedral portals and encircled holy baptismal fonts now decorated homes in the form of hand-held astrolabes, game pieces, planispheres, and devotional and scientific books.

²⁵ Katherine L. French, *Household Goods and Good Households in Late Medieval London: Consumption and Domesticity after the Plague* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021), p. 83.

²⁶ French, *Households*, 84.



Figure 1. Royal Library of the Monastery of San Lorenzo de El Escorial, MS T-1-6, fol. 96v; manuscript full-page miniature accompanying description of 'Astrological Checkers.'

Games were even invented based on astrology, such as 'Astrological Checkers' recorded in the *Libro de axedrez, dados e tablas*, or *The Book of Games*, translated from Arabic into the vernacular in Toledo in 1283 in the court of Alfonso X of Castile.²⁷ The game is a descendant of a game played in the Islamic world, but its origins are obscure.²⁸ The

²⁷ Royal Library of the Monastery of San Lorenzo de El Escorial (RMBE), MS T-1-6. Ricardo Calvo, 'El libro de los juegos de Alfonso X El Sabio', in *Libros del axedrez, dados et tablas*, Mechthild Crombach, ed., 2 vols., facsimile edition (Madrid, Valencia: Patrimonio Nacional, Vicent García Editores/Ediciones Poniente, 1987) vol. 2, p. 126-235, 150. Fidel Fajardo Acosta, 'The King Is Dead, Long Live the Game: Alfonso X, El Sabio, and the *Libro De Acedrex, Dados E Tablas*.' *Ehumanista* 31 (2015): 489-523, from 490: 'Alfonso further understood games as capable of representing not only the interactions of human agents with one another but also with larger, natural and transcendental forces, such as *uentura*, and their role in the unfolding of human history and destiny.' Only one other manuscript copy is known to exist, made in 1334: Michael A. Conrad, 'The Playing Eye: On the Transfer of Game-Related Knowledge through Miniatures in Alfonso X's Book of Games.' Chapter in: Vanina Kopp and Elizabeth Lapina, eds., *Games and Visual Culture in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Studies in the History of Daily Life (800-1600)* vol. 8 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2020), pp. 237-262, at 259. Also: Sonja Musser Golladay, 'Los Libros De Acedrex Dados E Tablas: Historical, Artistic and Metaphysical Dimensions of Alfonso X's *Book of Games*.' Doctoral dissertation, University of Arizona (2007), p. 28.

²⁸ Fol. 95r, p. 59. David Parlett in his *Oxford History of Board Games* points out that this is misleadingly listed under the title 'Los Escaques' (Chess) in the MS. However, it appears to be a gambling game known as *al-falakiya* in Arabic, or *Kawakib* (stars) in Iranian. On the manuscript's games: Ricardo Calvo, 'El libro de los juegos de Alfonso X el Sabio.' Chapter in: Vicent García, ed., *Libros del ajedrez, dados y tablas* (Editores Valencia, and Ediciones Poniente. Madrid: Patrimonio Nacional, 1987), pp. 125-386. Dwayne E. Carpenter,

game transforms the elements that govern astrology into a roll-of-the-dice boardgame with wagers [Fig. 1]. It is played on a board with seven sides which represents the Ptolemaic spheres with earth at the centre. Each player plays the part of a 'planet' on the board, and the planet-players rotate according to the roll of the dice, and each player begins with an equal amount of gold coins. When the planet revolves into another zodiacal house the player wins or loses in relation to the planet's four aspects with the other players: conjunction (0° , when two planets are in the same house, +12), opposition (180° , directly opposite the player's position on the board, -6), trine (120° , the fourth sign before or after the player's position, +3), quartile (90° , the third sign before or after the player's position, -3), and sextile (60° , the second house before or after the player's position, +2).²⁹

The manuscript includes fascinating and detailed instructions concerning the game pieces. They should reflect the figures or colours of their respective planets, either small painted counters or figures carved in a likeness as follows: Saturn is black, or an old man, naked but for a black cloak wrapped around his head, his face is sad with one hand raised like a troubled man. Jupiter is green, or a glad middle-aged man, dressed in green and blue, holding a book. Mars is naturally red, embodied by a young man dressed in ancient Greek armour holding a sword in one hand, and his beheaded enemy in the other. The Sun is yellow, or a young king, shining in golden raiment, holding an apple and a tree bough. The planet-goddess Venus is purple, or a young woman, blonde hair trailing down her back,

'Fickle Fortune: Gambling in Medieval Spain.' *Studies in Philology* 85/3 (1988): 267–78. Ulrich Schädler, *Das Buch der Spiele* (Vienna: Lit Verlag, 2009).

²⁹ On how Chaucer uses the same terminology: Edgar S. Laird, 'Astrology and Irony in Chaucer's "Complaint of Mars."' *The Chaucer Review* 6/3 (1972): 229-31.

garlanded with blooming roses and purple robes, holding a comb and a mirror. Mercury is multi-coloured and writing in a book. Finally, the Moon is a woman in white, holding above her head an image of the moon.³⁰



Figure 2. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Cartes et Plans, GE D 12644 : Étienne Vouillemont and Pierre Séguier, *Le jeu de la sphère ou de l'univers selon Tyco-Brahé*, Paris 1661-1671.

³⁰ The planetary iconography described here has an Islamic heritage: Alejandro Garcia Aviles, 'Ministers for a Wise King: The Sun-King and Planetary Imagery at the Court of Alfonso X.' *Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies* 11/2 (2019): 157-92, at 166; 'Imágenes mágicas.' Chapter in: Carlos Estepa Díez et al., eds., *Alfonso X: aportaciones de un rey castellano a la construcción de Europa* (Miguel Rodríguez Llopis, Murcia, Región de Murcia, 1997), pp. 137-172, at 146-52. Fritz Saxl, 'Beiträge zu einer Geschichte der Planetendarstellungen im Orient und im Okzident.' *Jahresband* 3 (1912): 151-177. It may have inflections of Indian astrological imagery: David Pingree, 'Indian Planetary Images and the Tradition of Astral Magic.' *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 52 (1989): 1-13; 'Representation of the Planets in Indian Astrology.' *Indo-Iranian Journal* 8/4 (1965): 249-67.

'Astrological Checkers' is thus a haptic recreation of celestial spheres, a malleable model of the cosmos beyond astrolabes or planispheres, intended for social play. Planet-players roll the dice and make the cosmos rotate, winners and losers are determined at random, a sort of astrological manifestation of Fortune's Wheel. If gameplay encourages conversation, then this game promotes questions about fate, planetary influences, celestial movements, debts, money exchange, and chance. The concept even lived on in various iterations, such as *Le Jeu de la Sphere*, the Game of the Sphere, published 1661 by Étienne Vouillement [Fig. 2].³¹



³¹ A. Seville, 'The Game of the Sphere of the Universe.' *Board Games Studies Journal*, X/1 (2016): 1-16.

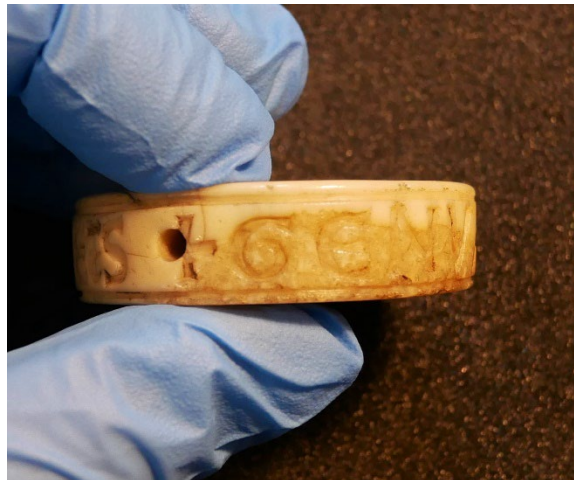


Figure 3. Ivory draughts-piece, provenance and date unknown. Currently in The British Museum, museum number 1853,0221.4.

We have no surviving materials from ‘Astrological Checkers,’ no game pieces or boards. But other game pieces have survived to the present, kept in museum collections around the world, collected mostly due to their precious material rather than their value as play objects. A unique zodiacal draughtsman provides a useful example of the medieval cultural shift of astrology from public to private and toward increasing domesticity. This game piece features a man carrying a bundle of sticks through foliage, and a woolly ram

turning his head toward him [British Museum 1853,0221.4, **Fig. 3**]. Based on evidence collected from other ivory game pieces with similar provenance, this may have been carved in a thriving trade centre in lower Saxony, possibly Cologne, at the end of the twelfth century.³² Small, round draughtsmen were an economical way to use the tapering tip of an elephant's tusk and usually made for a complete set for a gaming table (or *tabler*).³³ Ivory was a prized material and not a quotidian commodity, so this object had high intrinsic value.³⁴ This piece was a luxury item, and perhaps something that would be on display more often than played, just as luxury chess sets adorn spaces today.

The iconography in the piece is confusing, and the inscription does not help clarify it. The edges are inscribed thus, as transcribed by O. M. Dalton:³⁵

† GENVARIVS // ARIEṬS

This text is written in what appears to be Lombardic capitals (or Lombardic uncial), commonly exhibited in metalwork and jewelry between 1200-1400 in England and elsewhere.³⁶ The first word is clearly Latin for January, followed by a derivative of 'Aries,'

³² O. M. Dalton, *Catalogue of the ivory carvings of the Christian era with examples of Mohammedan art and carvings in bone in the Department of British and mediaeval antiquities and ethnography of the British Museum* (London, Printed by order of the Trustees of the British Museum, 1909), p. xxxii. Danielle Gaborit-Chopin, *Ivoires du Moyen Age* (Paris: Office du livre, 1977). Katherine Elisabeth Staab, 'Tactile Pleasures: Secular Gothic Ivory.' Pennsylvania State University Dissertations (2014), see historiography in the introduction.

³³ Sarah M. Guérin, 'Aporio d'ogni ragione: The Supply of Elephant Ivory to Northern Europe in the Gothic Era.' *Journal of Medieval History* 36/2 (June 2010): 156-74.

³⁴ On ivory in medieval economies, see: Kirsten A. Seaver, 'Desirable teeth: the medieval trade in Arctic and African ivory.' *Journal of Global History* 4/2 (2009): 271-292. Gaborit-Chopin, *Ivoires médiévaux*, 11-21.

³⁵ Dalton, *Catalogue*, 79-80.

³⁶ The script compares nicely with several posy rings in the Victoria and Albert collection: M.184-1975, c. 1300; M.178-1962, 13th c.; or the ring brooch M.34-1975, c. 1200. Many thanks to Daniel Wakelin for his help in identifying the script style.

which is interrupted with a peculiar marking, which may be a 'T/c.' This inscription is perplexing, primarily because Aries is not the sign for January. There are a few possible explanations for this: it could represent the start of the calendar year in January, paired with the beginning of the solar calendar with the sign of Aries, but equally it could be an erroneous label.

The composition fits the general pattern of a Labor of the Month image (an active human figure paired with a symbolic creature), even if the month and labor are mismatched. There is a further possibility that this imagery is not a derivative of the Labors of the Month at all, but rather a symbolic representation of the sun and the moon. Claudia Kren describes folkloric versions of the Man in the Moon, writing that the dark maria on the moon were sometimes imagined as a man carrying a bundle of sticks or thorns on his back, perhaps a hedge layer.³⁷ Beyond a brief passage in Alexander Nequam's *De Naturis Rerum* which mentions that the 'rustics' see a man carrying sticks upon his back on the face of the moon, this folkloric image is indeed absent from scholastic treatises.³⁸ It does rarely appear in church art and popular lyrics, however, as seen in a surviving Harley Lyric playfully written about the Man in the Moon (1314-1349).³⁹ In this poem, the Man in the

³⁷ Claudia Kren, 'The Medieval Man in the Moon.' *Medievalia* 7 (1981): 221-238, at 221. About the motif she continues: 'This configuration stems from an Old Testament account of a man who gathered sticks on the Sabbath, was stoned to death for his transgression [Numbers 15: 32-36], and was apparently placed in the moon as a warning to potential Sabbath-breakers.'

³⁸ Alexander Nequam, *De Naturis Rerum*, Thomas Wright ed. (Longman, 1863), chapter XIV *De macula lunæ*, p. 54.

³⁹ 'Man in the moone stont and strit,' lyric l.114: Thomas G. Duncan, *Medieval English Lyrics and Carols* (D. S. Brewer, 2013), p. 169-170. There are only a few surviving images of the Man in the Moon from medieval Britain, and they reflect the imagery in the Harley lyric. There is a painted profile of the Man in the Moon carrying his bundle in a roundel decorating the fifteenth-century chancel in the Church of St Benedict, Gyffin, near Conwy in Wales. See: Richard Haslam, Julian Orbach and Adam Voelcker, *The Buildings of Wales:*

Moon is a delinquent hedge-layer and the slowest worker who ever lived (lines 14-15). Thus when Pandarus exclaims a colloquialism, 'Lest that the cherl may falle out of the moone!' in *Troilus & Criseyde* I:1023-24, Chaucer is lending his character an idiomatic, even provincial, register.

If the man and bundle of thorns on the ivory game piece was a representation of the Man in the Moon, then the ram may represent the Sun. Sabine Baring-Gould records a legend about the Man in the Moon's dog and the sun appearing as the *Agnus Dei* on Easter morning, in just such a configuration.⁴⁰ It is just possible, then, that the ivory carving represents the moon and the sun, and someone at a later date mistakenly attributed it the Labors of the Month motif and inscribed it.

The question, then, is: What is at stake with the iconography of a game piece? Not much. If this is a depiction of January and Aries, then it does not matter if the labours, zodiac signs, and months align correctly because it is a plaything. A game piece need not deliver proper calendrical information iconographically in the same way that liturgical hours or a church portal must. It is possible this game piece was originally part of a zodiacal set, or like some decorative cycles such as that on the floor pavements at

Gwynedd (Pevsner Architectural Guide, 2009), p. 382. Richard Suggett, *Temlau Peintiedig: Murluniau a Chroglenni yn Eglwysi Cymru, 1200–1800* (RCAHMW 2021), p. 114–17. In some legends one of the moon's dark maria is the banished thorn-bearer's faithful dog, as depicted in a wax seal dating to 1335. It is the personal seal of Walter de Grendon (Grendone), used to ratify a deed of transfer of land to his mother. Roger H. Ellis, *Catalogue of Seals in the Public Record Office. Personal Seals*, vol. 1 (London, 1978) 29, no. P348. National Archives shelf number E329/16, part of the Ancient Deeds, S series. I owe a debt of gratitude to Dr. Brigitte Miriam Bedos-Rezak, professor of History at New York University for helping me locate this seal.

⁴⁰ Sabine Baring-Gould, *Curious Myths of the Middle Ages* (Cosimo Classics, 2007), p. 110: 'The dog I have myself had pointed out to me by an old Devonshire crone. If popular superstition places a dog in the moon, it puts a lamb in the sun; for in the same county it is said that those who see the sun rise on Easter-day may behold in the orb the lamb and flag.'

Canterbury, it was part of a combination of motif cycles of virtues and vices, heraldry, animal imagery, etc. Whatever the case, we are missing its original context, and when this object is removed from its intended 'game world' it loses much of its iconographic significance.

This game piece may have been lost to its set, but it was given new life when it was converted from into a jewellery pendant. Roberta Gilchrist calls this kind of adaptation a form of 'animation.'⁴¹ At some point during the later Middle Ages a hole was carefully drilled in the least disruptive section of the text inscription, at the small cross, so that it could be suspended by a knotted string or chain.⁴² The evidence shows that it was handled often and perhaps worn next to the skin.⁴³ Its edges are worn so that it nestles pleasingly in the palm of the hand, encouraging a thumb to run along the decorative border, exactly as the haptic wear shows. It is thinner in areas where it was polished by the back-and-forth of a pendant string, and the border decoration is nearly obliterated around the edges from persistent handling.⁴⁴ This was not a wholly unusual fate for a draughtsman, several extant ivories began as parts of premium game sets and later turned into highly personalized

⁴¹ Gilchrist, *Medieval Life*, 11.

⁴² This was not a unique practice, other ivory draughtsmen were also converted into a pendant; see BM 1885,1010.3 / BM 1853,0214.2.

⁴³ On this kind of tactility, see: Geraldine A. Johnson, 'Touch, Tactility, and the Reception of Sculpture in Early Modern Italy', in *A Companion to Art Theory*, Paul Smith and Carolyn Wilde, eds. (Blackwell, 2002): 61–74; 61.

⁴⁴ The 'Genvarius/Aries' game piece may show further signs of personalization with the inexplicable 'T/c,' which seems as if it was carved at a date later than the text inscription along the circumference, or at least with a different carving tool. Unlike the Latin inscription, which was incised with straight cuts about .2 cm deep, the added inscription is shallowly chiselled with sloping sides. The thick arm of the 'T' appears to have carved serifs to match the other capitals, but the stem downstroke is so much thinner and shallowly carved that it may not be a 'T' at all. The 'c' equally may not be a letter, and instead some kind of symbol. Naomi Speakman, Curator of Late Medieval Europe at the British Museum, was very helpful and generous with her expertise and time in helping me assess this piece.

jewellery. This zodiacal object thus transformed from an object of public display to one of personal, intimate value.

To this point I have briefly discussed a shift toward greater accessibility and personalization in the production of astronomical instruments, manuscripts, and art, and there is also a roughly comparable movement in literature. Chaucer exuberantly deployed astrological imagery throughout his poetry, more dynamically and plentifully than did his Italian counterparts and classical precedents. Dante particularly tends to employ astral imagery something like the soaring archivolts of cathedral portals: they decorate the threshold and introduce the space where theological and philosophical will be addressed.⁴⁵ This is also a Boethian pattern: his astronomical *metra* preface conversations with Lady Philosophy.⁴⁶ For example, in Canto 1 of *Purgatorio*, the poet emerges from hell to Purgatory, where the vast starry night opens before the narrator. As Dante crosses the threshold into Purgatory, Venus rises in her auspicious *domus* of Pisces, bestowing influential rays which incline all to love and laughter (l.13-21).⁴⁷ This is not a naturalistic description of unfolding celestial movements in April 1300. Rather, Dante is using this imagery to make a metaphor of rebirth, an ideal sunrise, ‘to make the allegorical point that Love (Venus) leads the way and that Divine Illumination (the Sun) follows upon it.’⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Concerning Dante’s astrology, Nicholas Campion wrote: ‘Dante was more like an Old Testament prophet than a classical astrologer – he sees the stars and, inspired by their closeness to God, he speaks the truth.’ Campion, *History of Western*, 73.

⁴⁶ See for instance Book II, metrum 3 in *Consolation of Philosophy*.

⁴⁷ Dante Alighieri, *Purgatorio*, vol II; Italian text with English translation Courtney Langdon (Harvard University Press, 1920). Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy: the Inferno, the Purgatoria, and the Paradiso*, trans. by John Ciardi (Penguin Random House, 1954, 2024), p. 287.

⁴⁸ Ciardi, notes to lines 19-21, p. 292.

Purgatory resides between the sublunar and celestial realms shining with the relative light of the stars, thus stars specifically indicate Purgatory in the structure of Dante's cosmos.⁴⁹ The ending line of each final canticle (and indeed the very last word) in *Purgatorio* is 'stars / stelle', which John Ciardi defines as 'a fixed architectural device.'⁵⁰ *Paradiso* then opens with the sun, infinitely brighter than the stars of Purgatory, illustrating the hierarchy of the spheres.⁶⁹ Dante opens and closes his *Purgatorio* with stellar imagery; he introduces and closes the imaginative space as if entering a cathedral through a zodiac portal and then processing through to exit in the same way.

Chaucer's chronographia at the opening of the *General Prologue* can be said to follow the classical, or Dantean, format.⁵¹ Aries blesses the spring sky, opening the *Canterbury Tales* with an expansive vision. However, Chaucer is not confined to these regulated poetics, and in texts such as *Legend of Good Women*, he reflects a more dynamic approach, trading in layers of meaning on a sliding scale between portentous to frivolous. As far as I am aware, neither Dante, Boccaccio or their classical forefathers (such as Virgil) ever invented constellations, or used zodiacal signs for comic effects; that seems to be a Chaucerian specialty.

Compared to the monastic letters between Fulbert's students, thrilled to have a treasured astrolabe, Chaucer's *Treatise on the Astrolabe*, written in the vernacular and

⁴⁹ On Dante and stellar imagery, see: Sheila J. Nayar, 'Dante's Star of the Sea: the Narrative Constellation of Mary in the *Divine Comedy*.' *Literature and Theology* 33/1 (2019): 1-24.

⁵⁰ Ciardi's notes to *Purgatorio*, p. 581.

⁵¹ Karla Taylor, *Chaucer Reads "The Divine Comedy."* (Stanford University Press, 1989), see the introduction and chapter 4.

addressed to his little son, is domestic indeed. It was not unusual to address an astronomical text to one's offspring. Martianus Capella's *De nuptiis* is dedicated to his son, and Cicero's discussion of the heavens occurs between Scipio Aemilianus and his grandfather, for instance. But Chaucer's is more intimate, with frequent mentions of Lewis ('my litel sone' line 28) with a sensitivity to his level of learning ('Now have I told the twyes' l.16.18). Marion Turner writes that 'this text is an emotional text, a text that focuses on Lewis's vulnerability and Chaucer's love for him.'⁵² Therefore, when Chaucer was writing about the cosmos the subject was no longer the sole province of the *scholia* and dominated by *auctoritas*, but increasingly domiciliary, personalized, and vernacular.

When Chaucer experiments with astronomy and astrology in his poetic play, some passages function like soaring cathedral portals and some function like game pieces. The sign and signified do not always correspond. The draughtsman's iconography may have only made sense when it was part of its original set and used in its own game. Chaucer's work ranges from the conventional to the innovative, and it requires a flexible and sensitive approach with an openness to play. His passages need not reflect astronomical reality, expected convention, or iconographic patterns. On the surface it seems that Alceste is a genuine constellation with a genuine source – but this is not the case. By catasterizing Alceste and refiguring her as an astral guide, Chaucer is playing with invented star signs like draughtsmen on the page. Alceste is only a constellation in his game. This is what is important to remember when reading *The Complaints of Mars & Venus*: the astronomical events described do not need to correspond to a specific reality because these poems

⁵² Turner, *Chaucer*, 236.

exist in a closed realm of play, and as I will show, parts that are puzzling may only make sense when considered part of its own, and this case theatrical, game.

The Complaint of Mars in Disguise

Chaucer's *Complaint of Mars*, written perhaps between 1385 and 86, is a classical myth retold in unfamiliar terms.⁵³ The astrological jargon peppering the language is confusing. Terms and ideas of celestial movement which were mostly commonplace among the learned in the Middle Ages have grown arcane and remote now, turning many readers away. Even the title is contested: in three manuscripts *The Complaint of Mars* is not titled thus, but rather 'The Brooch of Thebes' after Statius, because it is mentioned in line 245 of Mars's complaint.⁵⁴

Mars is not mentioned in the retractions of *The Canterbury Tales* or *The Legend of Good Women*. This suggests that *Mars* was not considered significant enough to list by name: it was not a 'book,' lay, song or poem by Chaucer's reckoning. It probably fell under his umbrella category of holiday hymns, occasional poetry following French *formes fixes*. The poem self-identifies as a 'compleynt or lay' (71), but in fact it is a triple ballade, three three-stanza ballades followed by a ten-line envoy.⁵⁵ It draws from French poetry certainly,

⁵³ This is extrapolated in part from the astronomical details, which may not be a reliable source. Gross's notes in *Riverside* state, p. 633: 'The details of the planetary motions are for the most part quite accurate, and they closely (but not exactly) fit the actual conditions of the skies in the year 1385.'

⁵⁴ As mentioned in the first line of the fourth section of the *Compleynt of Mars*, line 245. See also the prologue of Lydgate's *Fall of Princes* 1.322-3; MS Harley 7333. Lee Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 62-63, 136.

⁵⁵ Nuttall, ' "many a lay and many a thing," 30.

especially Machaut and Deschamps, and the conventional complaint genre, but as Jenni Nuttall states, it is an anomalous hybrid.⁵⁶

Laila Gross discusses the poem's patronage, which reads: 'The occasion may have been a Valentine's Day celebration at court, perhaps involving a "disguising," but that is only conjecture.'⁵⁷ This idea was put forth by John Stevens in 1961, where he briefly mentions the possibility of *Mars* as a type of divination game.⁵⁸ It was followed by another mention by Derek Pearsall nine years later.⁵⁹ To my knowledge, no scholar has since attempted to interpret *Mars* and its companion piece, *The Complaint of Venus*, as play texts for a courtly disguising, and it is this possibility that I explore.

There are indeed enough markers embedded in the texts to comfortably read this work as a piece of theatre, and early manuscript copies further provide intriguing clues. If *The Complaint of Mars* and *Venus* were theatrical texts, then there would be significant implications. It would illuminate new aspects of the history of drama in late medieval England. It further has implications concerning the manuscript rubrics and colophons which frame the texts and how we interpret them. It would indicate that not only does *Mars* display Chaucer's intellectual virtuosity but his clever improvisation on established genres. It also demonstrates exactly how Chaucer uses astrology and astronomy in a mode of play: it is inventive, imaginatively engaging, and stratified with layers of meaning.

⁵⁶ Nuttall, ' "many a lay and many a thing," 29, from 34: Concerning Chaucer's attitude toward form, Nuttall writes further: 'Form needed to be just right, just as he preferred, but it could rarely be specified, recognized, or straightforwardly named.'

⁵⁷ From explanatory notes in *Riverside*, p. 1079.

⁵⁸ John Stevens, *Music & Poetry in the Early Tudor Court* (London: Methuen, 1961), p. 175.

⁵⁹ Pearsall, *John Lydgate*, p. 84, 90, 183-88.

There are different ‘kinds of time’ in *Mars* (linear and circular), as discussed by Carolyn Dinshaw and Megan Murton, but this study thinks of *Mars* as existing as a work *in* time as a performance piece.⁶⁰ Disguisings were a particularly local and seasonal type of domestic theatre, not intended for public spectacle. As defined by Tom Pettitt, a medieval disguising ‘might include parading and dancing in masks and outlandish costumes...elaborate spectacles deploying substantial structures, both stationary and mobile, with a correspondingly sharper distinction between performers and spectators.’⁶¹ These were particularly connected to winter feasts or wedding banquets, a playful form of sub-dramatic play (or ‘para-dramatique,’ as defined by Jelle Koopmans) with stationary and mobile components, which may include music, choreographed dances, poetic recitations, costumes and sets.⁶² These were theatrical plays staged in open interior spaces, such as Henry Medwall's *Fulgens and Lucrese* (c. 1497) written specifically for performance at the Great Hall at Lambeth Palace.⁶³

⁶⁰ Carolyn Dinshaw, ‘All Kinds of Time.’ *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 35 (2013): 3–25; 3. Megan Murton, ‘Secular Consolation in Chaucer’s Complaint of Mars.’ *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 38 / 1 (2016): 75-107; p. 81-83.

⁶¹ Tom Pettitt, ‘Performing Intrusions: Interaction and Interaxionality in Medieval English Theatre.’ Chapter in: Philip Butterworth and Katie Normington, *Medieval Theatre Performance: Actors, Dancers, Automata and their Audiences* (Cambridge Core Cambridge, 2017): 52-75, at 59. Also, Meg Twycross and Sarah Carpenter, *Masks and Masking in Medieval and Early Tudor England* (Aldershot, 2002), p. 129-130: ‘A *disguising*, then, seems to be a form of courtly dancing entertainment which involved dressing up in spectacular or extravagant clothes.’

⁶² Armand Strubel, *Le théâtre au Moyen Âge: naissance d'une littérature dramatique* (Paris : Bréal, 2003), p. 9-10.

⁶³ ‘Teaching Medieval Drama and Performance,’ Folger Institute 2016-2017. Medieval Drama: Staging Contexts < https://folgerpedia.folger.edu/Medieval_Drama:_Staging_Contexts#Spectacle>.

Typically, courtly disguisings explored themes of fallen virtue, romance and sex.⁶⁴ John Lydgate's *Disguising of Hertford* is an example, produced in 1427 for Henry VI, and introduced by a rubric as: 'a disguising of the rude upplandisse people compleyning on hir wyves, with the boystous aunswere of hir wyves.'⁶⁵ About Lydgate's debt to Chaucer in *The Disguising of Hertford*, Claire Sponsler writes: 'While the details of the performance are unclear, critics have stressed the originality of the Hertford disguising, noting how Lydgate uses the Chaucerian themes of unruly wives and good governance to create a secular comedy that comes close to containing actual dialogue and that looks ahead to the Tudor masque.'⁶⁶ Chaucer may have been more influential on Lydgate's disguisings than has been previously thought.⁶⁷ Lydgate's Hertford disguising is more clearly directed as a theatrical production because of its headings. It is also written in a simpler rhyme scheme with less complex subject matter, but it has many of the same elements as *Mars*. The disguising is written as a bill of complaint, it participates in rhetorical gender disputes, begins with the male perspective then shifts to the female, and is presented as a satirical version of a legal

⁶⁴ Some have interpreted disguisings as a mischievous antithesis to dramaturgy. Alternatively, Robert Withington argued that courtly disguisings arose from disguising in tournaments: Robert Withington, *English Pageantry*, vol. 1. (Harvard University Press, 1918, 2014), p. 85

⁶⁵ John Lydgate, *Disguising at Hertford*, as recorded: Claire Sponsler, *Mummings and Entertainments* (Medieval Institute Publications, 2010), p. 15. Pamela M. King, 'Morality Plays.' Chapter in: Richard Beadle and Alan J. Fletcher, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 235–62, at 252. In this same book see: Alexandra F. Johnston, 'An introduction to medieval English theatre', p. 1-2.

⁶⁶ Sponsler, *Mummings*, 86. Paul Reyher, *Les masques Anglais: étude sur les ballets et la vie de cour en Angleterre (1512-1640)* (B. Blom, 1964), p. 113. G. Wickham, *Early English Stages... 1300 to 1576*, 221.

⁶⁷ Lydgate's Chaucerian influences are well-researched, see: Alexandra Gillespie, *Print Culture and the Medieval Author: Chaucer, Lydgate, and Their Books 1473-1557* (Oxford University Press, 2006), see chapters 3 & 4. Amanda M. Leff, 'Lydgate Rewrites Chaucer: *The General Prologue* Revisited.' *The Chaucer Review* 46/4 (2012): 472-479. S. M. Straker, 'Deference and the Difference: Lydgate, Chaucer, and *The Siege of Thebes*.' *The Review of English Studies* 52/205 (2001): 1–21. Maura Nolan, 'Lydgate's Literary History: Chaucer, Gower, and Canacee.' *SAC* 27 (2005): 59-92.

proceeding. It is possible therefore that Lydgate follows Chaucer's new literary trail and then furthers it. As I discuss below, Chaucer reinvented the French *jeu parti* in English and essentially created something new with *Mars & Venus*.

John Shirley's Manuscript

The earliest eight manuscript copies of *Mars & Venus* include them with other shorter works by Chaucer, but significantly they are also included in an early fifteenth-century book with explicitly dramatic and performative works: Trinity College, Cambridge MS R.3.20. This book was executed by John Shirley c. 1429-1432 and includes the most important disguising-texts in Middle English, including Lydgate's *Disguising of Hertford*.⁶⁸⁶⁹ It could be that John Shirley included *The Complaints of Mars & Venus* with other disguisings and mummings because there was a theatrical thread connecting them: they were theatrical pieces.

This manuscript was once part of a much larger anthology of poetry, planned as a continuous whole but now disassembled into three books, the other two are MSS British Library Harley 78 and Sion College Arc. L.40.2/E.44. At first glance, it may seem as if the Trinity manuscript is a haphazard collection of English poetry by Lydgate, Chaucer, and Hoccleve, along with unattributed French verse, Latin prayers, instructions, and even some recipes on the final pages, but as Margaret Connolly has argued, 'a more careful assessment of its composition and contents reveals a greater degree of direction and

⁶⁸ Claire Sponsler, *The Queen's Dumbshows: John Lydgate and the Making of Early Theatre* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), chapter 7.

⁶⁹ Sponsler, *Mummings*, 86. Reyher, *Les masques*, 113.

organization than is immediately apparent, and shows that, far from being a collection of jottings compiled over a lengthy period of time, the Trinity manuscript was put together much more rapidly, possibly within the space of two years.⁷⁰ Quire xxii holds the *Complaints of Mars & Venus, Fortune and Truth*, and it is sandwiched between Hoccleve's *Letter of Cupid*, and a quire of Lydgate's occasional works written for performance or recitation at aristocratic events (*On a New Year's Gift of an Eagle*, and *Ballade to King Henry VI upon his Coronation*, and *On Gloucester's Approaching Marriage*).⁷¹

The current quire ordering may not reflect Shirley's original organization, but I suggest that since the *Complaints* are placed closer to Lydgate's disguisings rather than Chaucer's other poems in the anthology (*Lak of Stedfastnesse, Truth, Gentillesse and Adam Sciveyn*, or portions of *Troilus*, quire xxxvi), the *Complaints* were generically associated with other dramatic performance pieces. It is a large compilation of roundels, ballads, and disguisings, using terms such as 'the fourome of desguysinges . . . the maner of straunge desgysinges . . . the gyse of a mumynge.'⁷² In other words, it was not primarily organized by author but thematically and by genre. I am not suggesting that all the texts were performance pieces intended for theatrical presentation, only highlighting that many of them were, and *Mars* and *Venus* were included with them.⁷³

There are two colophons and one rubric which mention potential patronage and performances of *Mars* and *Venus* in Shirley's book. The rubric before *Mars* identifies

⁷⁰ Margaret Connolly, *John Shirley: Book Production and the Noble Household in Fifteenth-Century England* (Ashgate, 1998), p. 69.

⁷¹ Connolly, *John Shirley*, 70-74, 79.

⁷² These are running titles in Trinity R.3.20, specifically for *Bycorne* and *Chychevache*: Sponsler, *Mummings*, 84.

⁷³ Lydgate, *Mummings*, from Sponsler, 84.

Chaucer as the author and writes that it was done ‘at þe comandement of þe renommed and excellent prynce my lord þe duc John of Lancastre.’⁷⁴ That this is identifying John of Gaunt, the Duke of Lancaster, as the patron has nearly complete consensus (but may not be certainly accurate). What is more perplexing appears at the end of the complaint, where the colophon reads:

‘Þus eondeþe here þis complaint whiche some men sayne was made by my lady of york, doughter to þe kyng of Spaygne, and my lord of huntyngdon some tyme duc of excestre.’⁷⁵

And finally, at the end of *The Complaint of Venus*, Shirley wrote:

‘Hit is sayde þat Graunsome [Otons de Grandson] made þis last balade for venus resembled to my lady of York, aunswering þe complaynt of Mars’⁷⁶

The Duke of Exeter mentioned here is generally believed to refer to John Holland (1352-1400), son of Thomas Holland and Joan of Kent, and half-brother to Richard II. He was rumored to be involved with at least two love affairs and two conspiracies, and he was executed for his involvement against Henry Bolingbroke in the Epiphany Rising of 1400. He married Elizabeth of Lancaster (*b.* 1363) in June 1386, daughter of John of Gaunt and his first wife Blanche of Lancaster. Elizabeth had been in an arranged marriage with John Hasting, earl of Pembroke, when she was seventeen and he was only eight years old. She and John Holland had an affair seven years later in 1386, when she was twenty-three, and they were hastily married after she became pregnant.

⁷⁴ Cambridge, Trinity College: MS R.3.20, p. 130: ‘Loo yee lovers gladeþe and conforteþe you, of þallynce entrayted bytwene þe hardy and furious Mars, the god of armes, and Venus þe double goddessse of love made by Geffrey Chaucier at þe comandement of þe renommed and excellent prynce my lord þe duc John of Lancastre.’

⁷⁵ MS R.3.20, p. 139.

⁷⁶ MS R.3.20, p. 142.

Does the ‘lady of york, doughter to þe kyng of Spaygne,’ refer to Elizabeth of Lancaster, then? Scholars have argued that indeed *The Complaint of Mars* is a sort of allegorical retelling of this scandalous love affair, and it seems this interpretation began with Walter Skeat.⁷⁷ But others have debated which ‘doughter to þe kyng of Spaygne’ this could be, a daughter of John of Gaunt or the daughter of King Pedro of Castile and León? When John of Gaunt married Constance of Castile in 1371, he was formally endowed with the title ‘King of Castile and Leon,’ thus his daughter could carry the title ‘doughter to þe kyng of Spaygne.’⁷⁸ Therefore it is possible to interpret this phrase as either Elizabeth of Lancaster or Isabel/Isabella of Castile, Duchess of York (1355-1393; married Edmund of Langley, Duke of York, in 1372). To add to the confusion, ‘Isabel’ is the Spanish equivalent to ‘Elizabeth,’ and allegedly John Holland had affairs with both women.

T. B. Pugh’s account of these alleged affairs represents the most common interpretation and is cited as a source in many publications:

‘[Isabel of Castile’s] affair with Richard II’s half-brother, John Holland (d. 1400), earl of Huntingdon was one of the causes of her lasting notoriety and Geoffrey Chaucer’s poem *The Complaynte of Mars* has been thought to allude to that episode. Joan of Kent’s second son, John Holland, was one of the most violent and lawless of the English nobles in the later middle ages; in July 1385, he murdered the earl of Stafford’s eldest son and heir, Sir Ralph Stafford, and in the following year he seduced John of Gaunt’s second daughter, Elizabeth (already contracted in marriage to the last Hastings earl of Pembroke) and made her pregnant before their marriage could be arranged. In view of Isabel of Castile’s well-known liaison with John Holland, the possibility that her ruffianly lover (and not the dull and negative Edmund of Langley) was the father of the duchess’s younger (and favourite) son, Richard of York, cannot be ignored.’⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Skeat’s *The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, 1-64, 110-11.

⁷⁸ *John of Gaunt’s Register*, Sydney Armitage-Smith, ed. (Royal Historical Society. London: Offices of the Society, 1911), 1371-1375, vol. II, nos. 1661, 1662m, pp. 298-302.

⁷⁹ T. B. Pugh, *Henry V and the Southampton Plot of 1415* (Alan Sutton Publishers, 1988), p. 90.

There are many problems with this interpretation. Primarily, Pugh takes a markedly uncritical view of his sources, Thomas Walsingham, Jean Froissart, and John Hardyng. Neither John Hardyng nor Jean Froissart state anything whatsoever about an affair between Isabel of Castile and John Holland.⁸⁰ Walsingham states that she was a ‘pampered and voluptuous lady,’ but he also does not explicitly mention an affair.⁸¹ Walsingham’s reports of women are generally misogynistic; he only gives favourable judgements to ‘women of extreme piety.’⁸² From the available evidence it appears that the argument that Isabel of Castile had an illicit affair with John Holland is a circular one depending entirely on how one interprets Shirley’s rubrics – and this is certainly not the only possible interpretation. Indeed, Jenny Stratford offers a wholly different view of Isabel in her recent article carefully studying her will.⁸³ Essentially, none of Pugh’s judgements of personality or what may or may not have happened behind closed doors are verifiable.

The most common adjective in scholarly literature describing Shirley’s commentary is ‘gossipy.’⁸⁴ This also may be an unfairly subjective judgement. Shirley only makes five

⁸⁰ *The Chronicle of John Hardyng*, Henry Ellis, ed. (London: F. C. and J. Rivington, 1812), p. 335. Katariina Närä, ‘Isabel of Castile, countess of Cambridge, duchess of York (d. 1392).’ ‘The Online Froissart,’ general editors Peter Ainsworth and Godfried Croenen (Sheffield: HRIOnline, 2013, version 1.5): < www.dhi.ac.uk/onlinefroissart >.

⁸¹ Thomas Walsingham, *The Chronica Maiora of Thomas Walsingham, 1376-1422*, David Prest and James G. Clark, eds. (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2005), p. 292: ‘In the same year [1394] died Lady Isabel, the duchess of York, half sister of the duchess of Lancaster. She was a pampered and voluptuous lady, but men said that she was very sorrowful and repentant at the end. At the king’s order she was buried at his manor of [King’s] Langley with the Friars [i.e. Dominicans].’

⁸² Thomas Walsingham, *Ypodigma Neustriæ*, Henry T Riley, ed. (London: Longman & Co., 1876), p. 366.

⁸³ Jenny Stratford, ‘The Bequests of Isabel of Castile, 1st Duchess of York, and Chaucer’s “Complaint of Mars.”’ Chapter in: Jessica Lutkin and J. S. Hamilton, eds. *Creativity, Contradictions and Commemoration in the Reign of Richard II: Essays in Honour of Nigel Saul* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2022), pp. 75-96. Isabel’s will is also published with the article.

⁸⁴ John Norton-Smith, *Geoffrey Chaucer* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), p. 24. Stratford, ‘The Bequests of Isabel of Castile,’ 75. Brewer, *Geoffrey Chaucer...the Critical Heritage*, under the heading ‘John Shirley, Gossip’; ‘Shirley is distinguished by gossipy headings.’

comments on Chaucer's works across his editions (or those done in his workshop), and none are objectively 'gossipy.' Naturally, it is because of the adulterous subject matter of *Mars* that it is interpreted thus, but several assumptions are required to believe the poem was written concerning flesh-and-blood people. Norton-Smith interprets the phrases 'some men sayne' and 'Hit is sayde' as gossipy turns of phrase, but they may simply stipulate that the knowledge comes from word-of-mouth or second-hand accounts.

John Shirley was a well-connected Londoner with ties to the Earl of Warwick and other nobility and well placed to gather information about social events in the upper echelons of society, even those from thirty years before or more. As a headnote to Lydgate's *Legend of Saint Margaret*, Shirley mentions the marriage of Anne Stafford (6 March 1425), for whom Lydgate's poem was written.⁸⁵ She was married to the second John Holland, Earl of Huntingdon, and it seems that Shirley was at least aware of society events in their circle.

Nonetheless, others have been quick to add grist to the gossip mill, as North takes for granted Skeat's surety that Mars represents John Holland and Venus represents Elizabeth of Lancaster, writing: 'Be that as it may, Holland's misbehaviour, and in particular his murder of the earl of Stafford in July 1385, had made him a social outcast: he was Mars, and "no wight counseyled him." We know, however, that Elizabeth "took him in subjeccioun" and was unfaithful to Pembroke.'⁸⁶ Chauncy Wood goes so far as to say Shirley's brief rubrics 'identified' the characters as prominent fourteenth-century people.⁸⁷ However, Norton-Smith rightly points out that Shirley's 'made by' cannot definitely mean

⁸⁵ Connolly, *John Shirley*, 78.

⁸⁶ North, *Ch Universe*, 323.

⁸⁷ Wood, *Country of Stars*, 103.

‘composed concerning.’⁸⁸ It seems the verb ‘resembled’ is the adulterous sticking point for many scholars (‘pat Graunsome [Otons de Grandson] made þis last balade for venus *resembled* to my lady of York’), but this does not necessarily mean that Venus in the poem resembled the lady of York as a one-to-one caricature. Perhaps this indicates the lady of York was disguised as Venus for its recitation after Mars’s complaint was recited by John Holland.

The third definition in the *MED* states *resemblen* could mean ‘to appear in the likeness of,’ and this is how John Gower used *resemblen* to describe the appearance of the zodiac signs and their constellations: ‘Aries..lich a wether of stature / Resembled is in his figure’ (*Confessio Amantis* 7.982); ‘This Signe [Aquarius] is verrailly resembled / Lich to a man which halt assembled In eyther hand a water spoute, / Wherof the stremes rennen oute’ (7.1191). The constellations are represented by their sign; the stars in Aries are figured as a castrated ram, and Aquarius resembles a man pouring water from two jugs.

There is a history of theatrical-type school plays with characters in costume resembling zodiacal constellations, as witnessed in Ausonius’s *Ludus septem sapientum*, or *Masque of the Seven Sages* (fourth century).⁸⁹ This is a didactic poem in which the prologue instructs a group of students/actors to dress as allegorical figures for its performance, or perhaps as a type of pantomimic *tableau-vivant*.⁹⁰ Parts are offered to students/performers to ‘resemble’ the constellations in character, including the seven

⁸⁸ Norton-Smith, *Chaucer*, 24-25.

⁸⁹ Ausonius, *Works*, Hugh G. Evelyn-White, ed. (Harvard University Press, 1919).

⁹⁰ From lines 20-21, ‘today step forth upon our stage, wearing Grecian cloaks’ / ‘superior aetas nec secuta sustulit, / hodie in orchestram palliati prodeunt.’ Ausonius, *Works*, 312-313. John Lydgate, *Pageant of Knowledge*, in Sponsler’s *Mummings*, explanatory notes. H. N. MacCracken and Merriam Sherwood, *Minor Poems of John Lydgate* (Early English Text Society no. 107, 1911). Pearsall, *Lydgate*, 183.

planets and all twelve zodiac signs. John Lydgate found inspiration in this tradition, and drawing from precisely the sections mentioned above in Gower's astrological poetry, he wrote his own the *Pageant of Knowledge*.⁹¹

By reconsidering the verb *resemblen*, perhaps John Shirley's remarks are not gossiping allusions to an adulterous affair but indicate that *Mars & Venus* was requested by John of Gaunt for a disguising and the bills of complaint were performed by Elizabeth of Lancaster (or possibly Isabel of Castile) and John Holland. Whatever the case, by claiming Shirley's comments are gossiping draws attention away from other, possibly more important, aspects of his commentary: that it was 'made' by the 'lord of huntynghdon' and 'answered' by the 'lady of York,' in other words, *performed*.

Thinking of *Mars & Venus* as a performance piece designed for a disguising further situates it in the prevailing literary culture of London in the mid-1380s. Paul Strohm described the culture this way: 'Poetry in the later fourteenth century was not "oral," in the sense of being improvised or composed in the course of a performance but was "aural" in the sense that it was privately composed and written out in manuscript form for presentation, aloud, to an audience gathered to hear it. This was certainly the case with Chaucer. He embraced the idea of manuscript circulation only latterly, and few manuscripts were in circulation among readers outside his immediate circle in his lifetime - particularly few or even none by 1386.'⁹² Reading aloud is naturally performative, but

⁹¹ John Lydgate, *Pageant of Knowledge*, in Sponsler's *Mummings*.

⁹² Strohm, *The Poet's Tale*, 190. Also: Joyce Coleman, *Public Reading and the Reading Public in Late Medieval England and France* (Cambridge University Press, 1996).

some of Chaucer's works lend themselves to a single voice better than others.⁹³ *The House of Fame* or *The Book of the Duchess*, for instance, lend themselves better (although not necessarily exclusively) to a single reciter, since the narrative is guided by an individual through a series of events. *Mars & Venus*, I suggest, were written with the potential for actors and, most importantly, movements.

The poem plays with the idea of celestial orbits and fate. How do planets (or people) relate to one another? Is love the product of choice or external influences? Astrology functions as a deliberate type of play in Chaucer's *Mars & Venus*, therefore it is not necessarily a reflection of an astronomical event witnessed by Chaucer, or a sardonic pantomime of living people, but a sophisticated play text.

I suggest that Chaucer was experimenting with dramatic forms with *Mars*, borrowing from French poetry and theatrical continental precedents, but in Middle English.⁹⁴ Chaucer was practicing a similar French-to-English translation of genre (and even directly lifting lines) for his *Book of the Duchess*, which owes a special debt to Machaut's *Roy de Behaingne*, and *dits amoureux*.⁹⁵ It is important to note that medieval theatrical productions

⁹³ Jessica Brantley, *Reading in the Wilderness: Private Devotion and Public Performance in Medieval England* (University of Chicago Press, 2007).

⁹⁴ Concerning Middle English and French precedents, see: Ardis Butterfield, *The Familiar Enemy: Chaucer, Language, and Nation in the Hundred Years War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). On Chaucer specifically: Muscatine, *Chaucer...French Tradition*.

⁹⁵ Many other texts from the French tradition were also formative here too of course, such as those by Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, Jean Froissard, and Guillaume de Machaut. On Chaucer's interactions with French sources, see: Wimsatt, *Ch...French Contemporaries*. On Chaucer's sources for *Book of the Duchess*, see fn 3 in: J. Burke Severs, 'Chaucer's Self-Portrait in the "Book of the Duchess."' *Philological Quarterly* 43/1 (1964): 27. D.W. Robertson, 'The Historical Setting of Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*.' *Essays in Medieval Culture* (Princeton University Press, 1980), 235-256 & 372-375. Robert Edwards, 'The *Book of the Duchess* and the Beginnings of Chaucer's Narrative.' *New Literary History* 13/2 (1982): 189-204. Susan Crane, 'Froissart's "Dit dou Bleu Chavalier" as a Source for Chaucer's "Book of the Duchess."' *Medium Ævum* 61/1 (1992): 59-74. Steven Davis, 'Guillaume de Machaut, Chaucer's "Book of the Duchess", and the Chaucer Tradition.' *The Chaucer Review* 36/4 (2002): 391-405.

were particularly free and exploratory, as Jelle Koopmans states ‘The Middle Ages were reinventing a thing unknown; their experimental theatre was not, like it was in the twentieth century, an experiment directed against a mainstream culture; their experiment was really open as it had no clear referent.’⁹⁶ Chaucer’s astral play has been evident in every part of this thesis, and I argue that it extended beyond poetry into theatre in the form of a theatrical presentation.

Theatre as Game and the French context

The word *game* in Middle English could refer to table game or a theatrical play, depending on context.⁹⁷ Theatre, performance, recitation and costuming were much more present in the fourteenth-century cultural landscape than is often recognized. Dramatic performances were everywhere: in classrooms, churches, streets, homes, and palaces, and ‘theatre’ was a mobile concept.⁹⁸ Spaces for the ‘stage’ operated like Huizinga’s ‘magic circle’: it could be drawn anywhere from wooden carts (such as those used for the York cycles), to a platform in a hall.⁹⁹ Although it is mentioned as a prevalent activity throughout medieval society in contemporary chronicles, religious tracts and sermons, and theory texts, theatrical performances left few material traces and only a hint of a ‘paper trail.’ This is partially because medieval writers and performers were not reworking classical material, they were inventing something new.

⁹⁶ Jelle Koopmans, ‘Arras, where Burghers and Jongleurs Meet, Play and Develop Forms – Afterwards seen as Theatre.’ Chapter in: Pamela M. King, ed., *The Routledge Research Companion to Early Drama and Performance* (Routledge, 2017), pp. 30-59, at 34.

⁹⁷ Twycross & Carpenter et al., *Medieval English Theatre*, 191-192.

⁹⁸ Pamela M. King, ed. *The Routledge Research Companion to Early Drama and Performance* (London: Routledge, 2017), see her introduction.

⁹⁹ Huizinga, *Homo ludens*, 20.

V. A. Kolve wrote that medieval drama ‘owes nothing to the tragedy and comedy of either Greece or Rome; it was a fresh beginning, unrooted in any formal tradition of theatre.’¹⁰⁰ Indeed, medieval drama did not grow from classical precedents but from the symbolic role-playing, processions, and public worship of Christian liturgy.¹⁰¹ Medieval theatre was a special sort of game world, an imaginative mode separate from daily life and its expectations. Dramaturgy and expansive cycles such as those from Chester or York could be breathtakingly ambitious and innovative.

Secular, vernacular theatre can be seen at times as an outgrowth or reaction to religious theatre, but disguisings specifically were a branch of *entremets*, interludes, and courtly entertainment. This kind of theatre was a specifically private and a distinct conduit of ludic spectacle.¹⁰² The earliest extant texts which can be defined as performative ‘play texts’ written in the vernacular come from the Picardian north of France before 1300, specifically the Arras region, such as Adam de la Halle’s *Jeu de Robin et Marion* (1282-3).¹⁰³ These play texts often involve dialogues with different roles presenting two sides and an argument, termed *jeux-partis*, taking cues from *trouvère* poetry.¹⁰⁴

Jeux-partis evolved from older forms of debate poetry, perhaps extending back to Carolingian debates in Latin (*disputatio*), which feature two voices.¹⁰⁵ Often these are

¹⁰⁰ Kolve, *The Play Called Corpus Christi* (London: Edward Arnold Publishers, Ltd., 1966), p. 8.

¹⁰¹ David M. Bevington, *Medieval Drama* (Ebook Central, 2012), p. 1-5.

¹⁰² Strubel, *Le théâtre au Moyen Âge*, 17.

¹⁰³ Strubel, *Le théâtre au Moyen Âge*, 16.

¹⁰⁴ Koopmans, ‘Arras, where Burghers and Jongleurs Meet,’ 30-59; 32. Robert Clark, ‘The Early “Anglo-Norman” and French Tradition.’ Chapter in: Pamela M. King, ed., *The Routledge Research Companion to Early Drama and Performance* (London: Routledge, 2017), pp. 42-59.

¹⁰⁵ Jennifer Saltzstein, ‘Cleric-Trouvères and the Jeux-Partis of Medieval Arras.’ *Viator (Berkeley)* 43/2 (2012): 147–163, at 148.

dialogues between two personified abstractions, seasons, philosophical concepts, flowers, or even two historical figures.¹⁰⁶ As the genre's popularity grew in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, specifically in courtly settings, topics of marriage, sex, and romantic love dominated.¹⁰⁷ Jenna Phillips discusses the performance aspect of this genre: 'Unlike any other genre of *trouvère* song, the *jeu parti* appears fixed in time and place, an improvised one-off performance between specific contestants and judges, many of whom are noted thirteenth- and early fourteenth-century individuals from aristocratic, bourgeois and clerical backgrounds.'¹⁰⁸ *Jeux partis* could also include theatrical elements and staging, as Mélanie Lévêque-Fougère carefully outlines.¹⁰⁹

It is important to remember that none of these texts appear as a script would today, there are no equivalent stage directions or similar organization, it is primarily contextual evidence and later identifications made by scribes that indicate a play text. Small-scale, domestic productions in the court were referred to as *les représentations en salle*; these were pioneering ludic interludes, associated with kings from at least the beginning of the fourteenth century in France.¹¹⁰ Records from the courts of France, Anjou, Provence,

¹⁰⁶ Pierre Bec, ed., *La Joute poétique: de la tenson médiévale aux débats chantés traditionnels* (Paris : Les Belles Lettres, 2000). Michel-André Bossy, *Medieval Debate Poetry: Vernacular Works* (Garland Publishing, 1987). Georges Lavis, 'Le Jeu-parti français: jeu de réfutation, d'opposition et de concession.' *Medioevo romanzo* 16 (1991) : 21-128. Michèle Gally, *Parler d'amour au puy d'Arras: Lyrique en jeu* (Orléans : Paradigme, 2004).

¹⁰⁷ Jenna Phillips, 'Singers without Borders: a Performer's *Rotulus* and the Transmission of *Jeux Partis*.' *Journal of Medieval History* 45/1 (2019): 55–79.

¹⁰⁸ Phillips, 'Singers without Borders,' 58.

¹⁰⁹ Mélanie Lévêque-Fougère, « Je amoureux et amour du jeu : l'hétérogénéité énonciative dans les jeux-partis lorrains du XIIIe au début du XIVe siècle. » *Plasticité* 1 (2019). See section titled : '2.1 La posture argumentative du je.'

¹¹⁰ Darwin Smith, Gabriella Parussa and Olivier Halévy, eds. *Le théâtre français du Moyen Âge et de la Renaissance : Histoire, textes choisis, mises en scène* (Éditions L'avant-scène théâtre, 2014), p. 70.

Brittany, Bourbon, Orleans, Savoie, and Bourgogne all hosted *représentations en salle* to celebrate tournaments, marriages and diplomatic meetings.¹¹¹

The English courts of Edward III and Richard II responded to and contributed to continental trends in courtly theatrics, and the disguisings held by Plantagenet courts laid the foundation for later Tudor-era masques.¹¹² Bespoke costumes as such do not survive, but some records of them appear in expense rolls.¹¹³ The most popular costumes from these lists are for birds, angels, dragons and wodewoses. At the Christmas festivities in 1347, Mark Ormrod described the ‘great release of ecstatic energy’ in several theatrical disguisings, where court members dressed as swans, peacocks and dragons, and performed choreographed dances set to live music.¹¹⁴ During the same season at a tournament at Bury St Edmunds, the king himself appeared dressed as a pheasant, with flapping wings made of copper piping and real birds’ feathers.¹¹⁵ Sydney Anglo noted ‘the fluidity of all forms of entertainment in the period under discussion...combats, dances, and disguisings could appear upon almost any social occasion.’¹¹⁶ This hybridity suggests that these events were not codified, and that they occurred irregularly, only in certain situations.

¹¹¹ Smith, *Le théâtre français*, 73.

¹¹² Pettitt, ‘Performing Intrusions,’ 63. Twycross & Carpenter, *Masks and Masking*, 101.

¹¹³ Twycross & Carpenter, *Masks and Masking*, 138.

¹¹⁴ Ormrod, *Edward III*, 299-300. Kew, The National Archives: E 101: Exchequer, King’s Remembrancer: Various Accounts; 391 / 5.

¹¹⁵ Juliet Vale, *Edward III and Chivalry: Chivalric Society and its Contexts, 1270-1350* (Boydell & Brewer, 1983), p. 69-71.

¹¹⁶ Sydney Anglo, ‘The Evolution of the Early Tudor Disguising, Pageant and Mask.’ *Renaissance Drama* 1/1 (1968): 3-44, at 7.

Essentially, disguisings could be a part of entertainment if a patron had funds available and participation from a willing group of friends and craftsmen. Presented like this, in a scholarly study providing historical and literary context, the traces of play are effectively removed from the subject matter. These were lively, generally informal events, with ends in themselves. This was fun, social entertainment, with a level of spontaneity and excitement that are difficult to render here but important to keep in mind.

Efforts to understand the staging of courtly theatre are blurred by the elastic Middle English terms used to describe them, such as *disguising*, *maskelyn*, *mummary*, *mask*.¹¹⁷ While these terms seem to be almost carelessly exchanged in records at times, they refer to different events. Mummings involved house visits, gift-giving and were generally silent ('mum's the word'), such as the mumming performed by a group of London's political leaders in 1377 to Richard II when he was a child.¹¹⁸ Other mummings between Londoners and Richard were recorded in 1392, 1393 and 1396, but this likely does not represent the scope and number of such events.

Identifying a play text is thus a knotty affair, and it seems that medieval plays are often 'lost' and 'found' in modern publications. In fact, in recently reassessing a fifteenth-century manuscript (National Library of Scotland, Advocates' MS 19.3.1), James Wade of the University of Cambridge persuasively argues that the three works in the first booklet may record the repertoire of a traveling minstrel, likely performed in costume for banquets

¹¹⁷ Twycross & Carpenter, *Masks and Masking*, 102. Stevens, *Music...Tudor Court*, 246.

¹¹⁸ Meg Twycross, 'The Prince of Peace,' 21-34.

and holidays in local households.¹¹⁹ Wade writes that these humorous, folksy texts were the types performed by itinerant entertainers, and the colophon connects the contents with live storytelling. By contextualizing the works with the idea of live performance, Wade considers how the colophon, written by the scribe Richard Heege, ‘could bridge the gap between the fiction of the poem and the performative space of the dining hall.’¹²⁰ Wade’s research serves as an example of how scribal material can be used to identify a performance piece. Bruce Moore also discusses this messy process for *The Harrowing of Hell* and *Dame Sirith* texts.¹²¹ He writes that Middle English texts are often uncomfortably divided into genres of dramatic theatre or public recitations according to rules devised by later scholars, stating ‘it would have been news to the writer of *The Castle of Perseverance* that there were any such dramatic rules.’¹²² Even in contemporary French theatre, where drama was thriving, many of the related texts remain in an ‘ambiguous status,’ as discussed by Armand Strubel.¹²³ This is true partially because the texts were designed to be flexible, malleable for individual circumstances.¹²⁴

Put simply, all medieval play texts require extensive revision to reflect the form of a modern play because play texts on both sides of the Channel present the modern scholar

¹¹⁹ James Wade, ‘Entertainments from a Medieval Minstrel’s Repertoire Book.’ *The Review of English Studies* (2023): 1-14.

¹²⁰ Wade, ‘Entertainments,’ 13.

¹²¹ Bruce Moore, ‘The Narrator within the Performance: Problems with Two Medieval “Plays.”’ Chapter in: Clifford Davidson, John H. Stroupe, ed. *Drama in the Middle Ages: Comparative and Critical Essays* (New York: AMS Press, 1991), pp. 152-167.

¹²² Moore, ‘The Narrator,’ 153.

¹²³ Strubel, *Le théâtre au Moyen Âge*, 9 : « ‘Ce n’est qu’après 1350 que se dégagé, en contraste avec le reste de la littérature, un théâtre proprement dit, mais dont les marges restent indécises, et qui conserve encore de nombreux textes au statu ambigu. »

¹²⁴ Smith et al., *Le théâtre français*, 112 : « le “texte” malléable en toutes circonstances, à l’oral comme à l’écrit. »

with a *découpage* of poetry, lost context, scribal and printed editions, and sometimes rubrics or financial records. While the exact circumstances for the first performance or recitation of the work are absent, reading *Mars* as a play text reasserts its significance in the Chaucerian oeuvre, and offers a new perspective on its highly experimental form. Indeed, *The Complaints of Mars & Venus* may be the oldest extant disguising text in the English language.

Chaucer's 'New Courtliness' and Critical Contexts

The Complaint of Mars is an enterprising Valentine's Day poem combining narrative and lyric, which introduces a new poetic formula combining an Ovidian mythological story, astrological language, and French courtly love motifs.¹²⁵ It was written when, in Marion Turner's words, 'Chaucer was flirting with court poetry anew,' during years marked by 'extravagance, sexual license and fashionable play,' and '[p]oetic and riddling interludes formed part of the cultural milieu.'¹²⁶ This style was defined by A. C. Spearing as the 'new courtliness' of the 1380s.¹²⁷ Richard II had not yet become a dangerous tyrant, and he and his queen were the harbingers of style. Richard was demonstrably more interested in astrology than his grandfather, and spent large sums of money on astrological treatises, divinatory and geomantic texts, and horaries, as mentioned in the introduction to this thesis.¹²⁸ In context and content therefore, and responding to aristocratic tastes, *Mars* and *Venus* have more in common with *The Legend of Good Women* (begun 1386) than with

¹²⁵ Davenport, *Chaucer: Complaint*, 33.

¹²⁶ Turner, *Chaucer*, 351, 349.

¹²⁷ Spearing, *Readings in Medieval Poetry*, 83.

¹²⁸ Saul, *Richard II*, 325. Carey, *Courting Disaster*, chapter 6.

Chaucer's other most astronomical work, *The Treatise on the Astrolabe*, which he wrote in 1391 in very different circumstances.

Concerning critical interpretations of *Mars*, Gross's explanatory text states there are three major strands: one which interprets the poem allegorically as representing a contemporary court scandal; an astrological interpretation which considers it as a poetic description of planetary conjunction; and one which approaches it for its poetic merits, where it is often compared to *Troilus and Criseyde*.¹²⁹ Astrological interpretations in past publications have been concerned with timing: did the kind of conjunction described in *Mars* occur in the skies during Chaucer's lifetime? J. D. North and Sigmund Eisner have painstakingly applied modern astronomical knowledge to reconstruct celestial movements in the fourteenth century; nevertheless the exact conditions described in the poem occurred at no time between 1369 and 1400, so others insist the configuration is merely imaginary.¹³⁰ While using astrological jargon to describe naturally occurring (although relatively rare) events, Chaucer plays fast and loose with precise astronomical sequences, which indicates that he privileges literary success over astronomical accuracy, yet again.¹³¹

When considering Chaucer's astrological layers in this text, the influence of Martianus Capella's *Marriage of Philology and Mercury* has been perhaps understated in

¹²⁹ Norton-Smith, *Chaucer*, 28.

¹³⁰ North, 'Kalenderes Enlumyned Ben Theyl, 129-154. Johnstone Parr and Nancy Ann Holtz, 'The Astronomy-Astrology in Chaucer's "The Complaint of Mars."' *The Chaucer Review* 15/3 (1981): 255-66. They argue on p. 263: 'If the poem is analysed and annotated correctly, Chaucer reflected with considerable accuracy the actual transits of the planets between February 14 and early May (or possibly September) of 1385.' Manly argues for an imaginary configuration: Manly, *Some New Light on Chaucer*, 81-82. Eade argues that the allusions were never meant to be complicated but written in a way that Chaucer's audience would have recognized them: Eade, 'We ben to lewed or to slowe,' at 69-76, 82.

¹³¹ See the Riverside Explanatory notes to line 120, in which North explains the early degrees of Gemini are *lucidi* and not *fumosi*.

past studies.¹³² Chaucer was certainly aware of this text, and indeed mentions Martianus Capella by name in *The House of Fame* and *The Merchant's Tale*.¹³³ Capella's *Marriage* is a complexly layered allegory intended to be picked apart for hidden meanings.¹³⁴ It is highly syncretic, combining Greco-Roman and Egyptian theologies to produce an intentionally mysterious text.¹³⁵ It begins with a fictional tale of a mortal woman chosen and prepared to marry the god Mercury, and her handmaidens are the seven Liberal Arts. Mercury is called 'the Cyllenian' throughout the text, and the gods reside in their planetary orbits while simultaneously existing in bodily forms. After the terms of the betrothal are determined, overseen by Jupiter, the assembly of gods is dismissed:

'Then Juno announced that because of the marriage of these celebrated young people and the ceremonies that had to be performed, all that assembly of gods was to reassemble at dawn on the next day in the palace which formed the principal home of Jove the arbiter in the Milky Way. At the end of these proceedings, the king himself arose from his throne, and all the number of gods dispersed to their own celestial homes and orbits.'¹³⁶

¹³² Katie Reid, *Martianus Capella in the Late Middle Ages and Renaissance* (Koninklijke Brill, 2024), see chapter 3, 'The Middle English Martianus.' Carolyn van Dyke, *Chaucer's Agents: Cause and Representation in Chaucerian Narrative* (Rosemont Publishing & Printing, 2005), p. 45. Anthony G. Cirilla, 'Trivial Persons: the Trivium, Personifications, and Identity in Medieval Literature, c. 400-1400 CE.' Doctoral dissertation, Saint Louis University (2016), see chapter 4.

¹³³ *House of Fame* line 985; *The Merchant's Tale* IV.1732. On Martianus Capella in *MerT*, see: Jane Chance, *The Mythographic Chaucer: the Fabulation of Sexual Politics* (University of Minnesota Press, 1995), p. 234. On reconciling *auctoritas* and *amor*, see: Alastair Minnis, 'Authors in Love: the Exegesis of Late-Medieval Love-Poetys.' Chapter in: *The Uses of Manuscripts in Literary Studies: Essays in Memory of Judson Boyce Allen*, Charlotte C. Morse, Penelope Reed Doob and Marjorie Curry Woods, eds. (Medieval Institute Publications, 1992), pp. 161-189. On the significance of Martianus in medieval literary texts, see: William K. Wimsatt and Cleanth Brooks, 'Further Medieval Themes.' Chapter in: *Literary Criticism: A Short History* (Routledge, 1957), 1-4:139-154.

¹³⁴ Stahl's *Quadrivium of Martianus Capella*, see the introduction.

¹³⁵ Indeed, C. S. Lewis went so far to write of Capella: 'for this universe, which has produced the bee-orchid and the giraffe, has produced nothing stranger than Martianus Capella.' Lewis, *The Allegory of Love*, 78.

¹³⁶ Stahl's *Martianus Capella and the Seven Liberal Arts*, I.97, p. 33. Augustine *City of God* 7.7, citing Varro. Harsch's *De nuptiis*, line 97: 'tunc Iuno condicit propter praedictorum thalamum iuvenum et nuptialia peragenda, uti postridie omnis ille deorum senatus in palatia, quae in Galaxia Iovis arbitri habitationem potissimam faciunt, diluculo convenirent. his igitur actis solio rex ipse surrexit, omnisque ille deorum numerus sedes proprias cursusque repetivit.'

Here Capella insists the reader hold in their imagination the idea that the gods are figured as people planning a wedding *and* planets inhabiting the celestial spheres. Chaucer does the same, but he increases the intertextuality by including a layer of chivalric ideology and the trappings of a complaint. He also, of course, describes a conjunction of planets that does occur in nature – Mars and Venus do conjoin in the house of Taurus. Chaucer’s *Complaints* are therefore even more complexly nuanced than Martianus Capella’s, which is a true feat.

Many scholars consider Chaucer’s creative sequence: was he commissioned for a poem (likely by John of Gaunt), for which he used existing sources, such as the *Ovide moralisé*, to compose the poem with his own inventive astrological style? Or did he write the poem about an astronomical event, which was subsequently performed at a courtly function (perhaps in winter 1385?) More recently, Kara Gaston has argued that when Chaucer mentions 12 April (139), that ‘[t]he date confirms that Mars is an occasional poem, providing an initial data point for readings that attempt to find as many points of congruence between the poem and a specific celestial event as possible.’¹³⁷ While Chaucer does proffer dates and descriptions of actual conjunctions, I suggest this is a fundamental misreading of how they work in the poetry.

Just as attempting to assign one-to-one correspondences between the characters of Mars and Venus with flesh and blood courtiers ignores the potential for play in *Mars*, pinpointing precise dates to find points of astronomical congruence passes over the

¹³⁷ Kara Gaston, ‘Forms and Celestial Motion in Chaucer’s *Complaint of Mars*.’ *PMLA* 133/2 (2018): 282–295, at 286.

aesthetic dimensions of the poem, which I suggest take priority. It is impossible to provide concrete answers to questions about dates, especially when contextualized with Chaucer's astrological poetic modes across his work.

The *Complaint of Mars* comes to life when imagined in three dimensions as a disguising play text rather than silently reading it two-dimensionally on a page. I suggest that *Mars & Venus* were parts of a theatrical whole, one which has been compressed through time and shifting editorial demands. The compression from a multi-voiced performance to a printed poem thus lost key ingredients that the text seems to require, such as the precise moments when the bird-herald enters and exits. Bakhtin described this kind of compression between carnival theatre performance and literature, describing how the playful aspects of carnival (syncretic pageantry) cannot be adequately translated into verbal language, but it can be *transposed* into the language of literature.¹³⁸ By transposing a dramatic piece from stage to page it necessarily loses what Tom Pettitt termed 'interaxiality,' defined as that which 'encompasses the performance aspects of drama, such as the appearance (dress, posture, facial expression), gesticulation, and movement of performers, their interaction with each other, with the performance space, and sometimes with spectators.'¹³⁹ A reversal of this process, de-transposing literature to see the theatrical or carnival play in a piece, naturally carries scholarly hazards. The fundamental conundrum of reconciling the verbal vestiges recorded in play texts with their long-lost visual dimensions is not fruitless however, as imaginatively revisualizing potential staging,

¹³⁸ Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's poetics*, 122. See also, Sponsler, 'From Archive,' 33.

¹³⁹ Tom Pettitt, 'Performing Intrusions,' 53.

costumes, sets, movements, etc., is not an ahistorical exercise.¹⁴⁰ By reconsidering *Mars & Venus* as a play text for a disguising, the separate parts function better as a whole. It was highly experimental, and medieval drama provided the imaginative space for this kind of play.

Narrative in motion

Chaucer's primary source for the narrative of *Mars* was the Greco-Roman myth, retold by Ovid, of Mars and Venus's love affair and subsequent capture in Vulcan's net.¹⁴¹ Chaucer specifically alters Ovid's myth to better fit astronomical phenomena by replacing Vulcan with Phebus, the Sun. This allows Chaucer to use the movement of the sun into the sign of Taurus to 'weaken' Mars, and it reflects actual conjunctions.¹⁴² On the chivalric level this is an aubade, a waking song addressed to the beloved.¹⁴³ Chaucer's poem thus uses astronomical movements to lend an allegorical meaning in terms of courtly love. John Norton-Smith wrote: 'There is nothing quite like the *Complaint of Mars* in the Middle Ages in either Latin or the vernacular. Yet, in its own nature it displays typical Chaucerian literary characteristics: complexity of construction, amalgamation of hitherto unrelated material, humanist wit, Ovidian aetiological fabulizing, and a penetrating philosophical interest in

¹⁴⁰ Véronique Plesch, 'Word and Image in Early Performance.' Chapter in: King, *Routledge Research Companion*, 99-117, at 100.

¹⁴¹ Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 4.171-89 & *Ars amatorial* 2.561-600. Strohm, *Social Chaucer*, 113-115. James M. Dean, 'Mars the Exegete in Chaucer's *Complaint of Mars*.' *Comparative Literature* 41/2 (1989): 128-40, at 129.

¹⁴² Textual evidence for such a conjunction is evidenced in the Alfonsine Tables, various almanacs, and *The Equatorie of the Planetis* in Peterhouse MS 75.I. North, *Chaucer's Universe*, 305. One such conjunction occurred around Valentine's Day in February 2022: Jamie Carter, 'See Venus and Mars in a 'Triple Conjunction' this weekend as the planets of love and war perform a rare embrace.' *Forbes Magazine Online* 9 Feb 2022.

¹⁴³ Arthur T. Hatto, *Eos: An Inquiry into the Theme of Lovers' Meetings and Partings at Dawn in Poetry* (The Hague: Mouton, 1965), p. 5.

the perplexities (and eventual heartache) of human love.¹⁴⁴ The complexity of construction is evidenced in the multiple interlocking planes of narration: the proem establishes the narrator as a bird recounting this tale from a fellow bird (13-28), repeating ‘the sentence of the compleynt.’¹⁴⁵ It is not entirely clear either when the bird-narrator finishes his performance: is it with the end of the narrative portion, or with the *Levoy*?¹⁴⁶

Concerning the structure, *The Complaint of Mars* is separated into three parts: proem (1-28), narrative (29-154) and complaint (155-298). The proem addresses ‘ye lovers’ on Saint Valentine’s Day, sung by a bird.¹⁴⁷ This bird acts as a herald, calling an audience to attention. The bird also behaves something like a master of the dance, establishing the rhythm and pace of the subsequent performance with alliterative meter in the first five lines, with energetic phrases such as ‘Upon thy day er sonne gan up-sprynge’ (14) and ‘I rede yow al awake’ (15). While the poem allows the bird-herald to pass out of mind, if *Mars* was indeed the companion for a miniature stage-production, it would be obvious when and if the character returned to narrate as per stage directions. *Mars* provides a core sequence, but it is not self-sufficient, indeed it is malleable. Following the proem are the narrative and complaint, which create a sort of ‘diptych effect’: the narrative is in motion and the complaint is static.¹⁴⁸ The motion of the narrative is enacted by the gliding of Mars and Venus through zodiacal houses, which are natural conjunctions in the heavens used as an

¹⁴⁴ Norton-Smith, *Chaucer*, 23.

¹⁴⁵ Norton-Smith, *Chaucer*, 29.

¹⁴⁶ Gaston, ‘Forms and Celestial Motion,’ 291.

¹⁴⁷ Singing or speaking birds are a trope also evidenced in *Roman de la Rose*. Davenport describes them as representing aspects of both divine knowledge and of simplified human nature, both a court entertainer and divine messenger in *Chaucer: Complaint*, 35.

¹⁴⁸ Davenport, *Chaucer*, 33.

allegory for their illicit liaison. This ‘action’ half of the poem could have been accompanied by a coordinated dance, alternating between dialogue and dancing, *à la française*.¹⁴⁹

As I touch upon in the introduction to this thesis, abstract ideas can be made concrete through tangible manipulation and kinetic movement. Astrolabes do this, as do planispheres and quadrants, and so did dance. In his cosmological work titled *Le livre du ciel et du monde*, the philosopher Nicole Oresme (1325-1382) used dance to illustrate the proper order of circular motion in the heavens.¹⁵⁰ He likened it to a ‘round dance made up of men...turning in a circle in the same direction [from east to west] as the daily motion of the heavens, which is the natural order.’¹⁵¹ Embodying the ‘hevenysh revolucioun’ (*Mars* line 30) figuratively concretizes the revolutions of the heavens, and I suggest that the physical movement of dancers - and the reception from spectators - could also.

Planets move at varying speeds and degrees to each other in the night sky, sometimes appearing near each other, other times appearing to oppose their former partners. This is mirrored exactly in the narrative movements of Venus and Mars as characters in the poem: they meet and separate, in both the planetary and mythological planes of narration. Dance could have amplified the motions in the poem, orchestrated by the characters’ own movements.¹⁵² I am arguing for a sensitivity to what Seeta Chaganti

¹⁴⁹ Twycross & Carpenter, *Masks*, 133.

¹⁵⁰ Grant, *Foundations of Modern Science*, 114–16.

¹⁵¹ Nicole Oresme, *Le livre du ciel et du monde*, Albert D. Menut, Alexander J. Denomy, eds. & trans. (University of Wisconsin Press, 1968), lines 313-315, p. 343 : ‘...une carole de homnes torne en circuite selon le mouvement journal, car ainsi va elle naturelment.’

¹⁵² Kathryn Dickason, *Ringleaders of Redemption* (Oxford University Press, 2021), p. 183. Germaine Prudhommeau, *Histoire de la danse* (Amphora, 1986), 1:171–81. Anne Wéry, *La Danse écartelée, de la Fin du Moyen Âge à L’âge Classique. Mœurs, Esthétiques Et Croyances En Europe Romane* (Paris : Classiques Garnier Numérique, 2006), p. 32–33.

terms ‘medial multiplicity,’ how aural, visual and kinetic phenomena may have connected two artforms: dance and poetry. In her book, *Strange Footing*, she builds a methodology centered ‘in bringing dance-based perceptual practices to bear upon the apprehension of poetry.’¹⁵³ She considers the ‘ductile experience of poetic form,’ how poetry *moves* the reader through the poem.

For case studies Chaganti primarily draws from lyrics and *caroles*, but her methodology can be applied to *The Complaint of Mars*.¹⁵⁴ For instance, the choreography of the male and female body is insistently rhythmic in the narrative: Mars enters first and then Venus follows, they take steps in a prescribed course, she revolves quickly, they conjoin, then separate:

That Mars shal entre, as fast as he may glyde,
 Into hir nexte paleys, and ther abyde,
 Walkynge hys cours, til she had him atake,
 And he preide her to haste her for his sake.

(53-56)

Wherfore she sped her as faste in her weye
 Almost in oo day as he dyde in tweye

(69-70)

They perform conventional amorous gestures: Venus instructs Mars in the art of love and casts her eye upon him, and then Mars is bound in *obeisaunce*, the lovers conjoin and are ‘knyt’, and Venus kisses Mars.¹⁵⁵ The two glide and abide, circle in a compass, walk softly for a pace, and then stand alone.¹⁵⁶ Bodies move at different speeds: first Mars moves in

¹⁵³ Chaganti, *Strange Footing*, 3.

¹⁵⁴ Chaganti, *Strange Footing*, see ‘A Strumpet Leads Us Further,’ beginning p. 84.

¹⁵⁵ At lines 34 / 39 / 47 / 50 / 77.

¹⁵⁶ Rhyming words *glyde* and *abyde* 53-4; ‘Walkynge hys cours, til she had him atake’ 55; Venus takes ‘Not but two pas’ (121) while Mars ‘walketh softly a paas’ (134).

haste and then Venus moves more quickly, they embrace, then they pass and depart. Looks, touches, movement; dancers conjoin, rotate, and swirl away from each other. Planets move in sextile and quartile degree angles, in conjunction and opposition. This could have easily translated into a processional or couples' dance.¹⁵⁷ In fact, Germaine Prudhommeau argues that partnered dances were invented in the high Middle Ages as a response to chivalric ideals played out in aristocratic courts, in exactly these types of circumstances.¹⁵⁸

In terms of socio-cultural context then, *Mars* as a disguising text would directly respond to the most current trends and topics of its day: astrology, theatrical productions in indoor, courtly spaces, and possibly costumed dance as part of ludic spectacle. The poetry provides rich imaginative potential for sets and costumes in *Mars*, beyond the feathered bird-host. As Clifford Davidson examines, costumes, props, and sets could have been provided by the same carpenters, painters and sewists employed to furnish materials for local mystery cycles, dramaturgical events in monastic spaces, royal entries into London, or public holidays sponsored by guilds or nobility.¹⁵⁹ Gordon Kipling explores how Richard II used royal processions (such as Richard's 'reconciliation' triumph and civic entry of 1392) to produce a symbolic 'cosmic drama' with an emphasis on the Magi and Epiphany, as a public recognition of his sovereignty.¹⁶⁰ There are thus even astrological

¹⁵⁷ Dickason, *Ringleaders*, 177.

¹⁵⁸ Prudhommeau, *Histoire de la danse*, 1:182. Jean-Michel Guilcher, *Rondes, branles, caroles : le chant de la danse* (Centre de recherche bretonne et celtique, 2003), p. 222–23.

¹⁵⁹ Clifford Davidson, ed. *Material Culture & Medieval Drama* (Medieval Institute Publications, 1999).

¹⁶⁰ Gordon Kipling, *Enter the King: Theatre, Liturgy, and Ritual in the Medieval Civic Triumph* (Clarendon, 1998), p. 118-120.

dimensions to the iconography and drama of official royal entries at the end of the fourteenth century.

A wealth of iconographic sources could have informed costume choices for a disguising corresponding to conventional depictions of the gods (Venus garlanded with roses, Mars painted red, like the Alfonsian game pieces), depending on resources available for the performance.¹⁶¹ In *Mars*, the zodiacal houses are described as palaces (54, 79), with plotted motions in and out of spaces. The house of Taurus is described as ‘Depeynted was with white boles grete’ (86), imaginatively plaiting the astrological, mythical and allegorical in one image. As discussed in the previous chapter, the verb *depeinten* cues the reader that an image is portentous, and in this instance it draws on Ptolemaic imagery to highlight romantic love.

Of the twelve signs, Taurus is the most closely associated with sex and reproduction, as mentioned in chapter 3. Beyond the associated myth of rape, Taurus is the sun sign for 20 April – 20 May in the Julian calendar, during the abundance and renewal of Spring. Appropriately, it is ruled by Venus but not wholly inimical to Mars. The stars of the Hyades (an asterism in Taurus) are described by Ptolemy as ‘bright and somewhat reddish, called the Torch, has a temperature like that of Mars.’¹⁶² The ‘chambre’ of Taurus is thus conducive to the coupling of Mars and Venus, even if Mars is weakened.

This description also provides a prompt for a backdrop representing the house of Taurus: a chamber painted with white bulls. The sun could be envisioned as a man carrying

¹⁶¹ Twycross and Carpenter, *Masks*, 101.

¹⁶² Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, 47.

a torch, 'The torche is come' (91), and by replacing Ovid's Vulcan for Phebus, the cues for visual symbols remain astrological. There is thus a hierarchy in the plaiting of the aetiological, allegorical and astrological symbol systems favouring the astrological, and perhaps responding to the mimetic demands of a performance.

There are layers of disguises in the narrative. The characters and their movements are disguised by symbols: Venus is a planet, a goddess, and Love simultaneously. Mars is also a planet, a god, and War. Disguised words stand in for astrological terms and the courtly language of love. For example, 'Thus be they knyht and regnen as in hevne' (50), indicates this is a platic conjunction (planets within 7.5° of each other), but it also brilliantly combines love imagery of knots, which may be an opaque allusion to Vulcan's net.

In line 58 Mars declares 'Ye knowe wel my myschef in that place,' again spoken in language with two possible interpretations. Mars has no dignities in Taurus because its qualities are opposite of Mars's own astral house, Aries (58). Yet this also allows Mars to act as a the 'subject' of Venus ('she hath take him in subjeccioun,' 32), for he enters a place malefic to him on her orders, 'But when I se the beaute of your face, / Ther ys no drede of deth may do me smerte' (61-2). The phrase works in both ideations, astrological and chivalric.

When Venus flees from the house of Taurus to 'Cilenios tour' (113), this is a doubly disguised term for the subsequent zodiacal house, Gemini. Gemini is the astral house of Mercury, the god born at Mount Cyllene, and when Chaucer describes zodiacal Gemini as 'Cilenios tour' he refers to Mercury's natal myth as recorded in *Aeneid* 8:139. The word *tour*

according to the MED has several definitions: a free-standing tower used as a seat of power or residence (2a); with the adjective *hevenly* it could be the zodiacal residence of a planet; a turret in a defensive fortification (4a); or lastly, *tour* could refer to a structure on a stage representing a tower (8a).¹⁶³ All of these associated definitions could be at play in *Mars*, as ‘Now fleeth Venus unto Cilenios tour’ could be seen in the mind’s eye as a goddess hastening to a tower on a mountain, or the planet Venus entering the constellation Gemini, or even a character on stage play-acting Venus’s flight against a painted tower set-piece. The poem is a disguise in terms of veiled language, and an ideal text for a theatrical production suited for courtly entertainment.

Static Complaint

After the active portion in *Mars*, ending in line 153, the static complaint begins. Compared with the narrative, the complaint is more prosaic. As defined by W. A. Davenport, a complaint is an established poetic mode influenced by Juvenal and Horace, mingled with Old Testament indignation, ‘to produce a homiletic tradition of castigation of the vanity and transitoriness of man’s life presided over by Dame Fortune.’¹⁶⁴ Complaints are often presented as written bills, sometimes with legal terminology in a tribunal atmosphere, in which there is ‘no movement, no action, only the lover and his mistress forever frozen into ritual gestures of beseeching and disdain.’¹⁶⁵ A satirical take on a legal

¹⁶³ Compare with KT’s temple mural, ‘And al above, depeynted in a tour, / Saugh I Conquest, sittyng in greet honour’, lines 2027-8.

¹⁶⁴ Davenport, *Chaucer*, 4. For types of complaint, see John Peter, *Complaint and Satire in Early English Literature* (Clarendon, 1956) chapter 4, esp. 59-60. It is sometimes considered with medieval satire: Paul Miller, ‘John Gower, Satiric Poet.’ Chapter in: A. J. Minnis, ed., *Gower’s Confessio Amantis: Responses and Reassessments* (D. S. Brewer, 1983), pp. 79-105, esp. 87-89. On the context for complaint literature: Norton-Smith, *Chaucer*, chapter 2, ‘The Complaint: Venus, Pity and Mars,’ 16-24.

¹⁶⁵ Pearsall, *Lydgate*, 92-93. Chaucer’s legal language in the *Complaint of Mars*: ‘redresse’ and ‘declare my ground’ (lines 161-2).

practice, a complaint is a redress on grounds of heartbreak, a genre championed by French courtly poets.¹⁶⁶

The complaint that Mars delivers is divided into five parts, which Skeat gave appropriate subtitles: I. Devotion II. A lady in fear in woe III. Instability of Happiness IV. The Brooch of Thebes V. Appeal for Sympathy.¹⁶⁷ It is in the final section that ‘hardy knyghtes of renoun’ (272) and ‘my ladyes’ (281) are addressed, an appeal to a mixed-gender audience. As a parody of official judicial proceedings, in which bills of complaint were presented to a judge and read aloud, a man dressed as Mars reading his complaint about his ladylove Venus would have been particularly striking and amusing, especially to an audience familiar with such legal proceedings and the French tradition.¹⁶⁸ Indeed, Emma Cayley asserts that theatricality is central to the development of the genre of love debate poetry: ‘The introduction of judicial structures to literary debate concretizes this sense of theatricality.’¹⁶⁹ Performance and circulation of texts were key to the success of this genre, as Cayley shows through the poetry of Alain Chartier and Christine de Pizan’s early works.¹⁷⁰

As a rebuttal to Mars’s allegations, *The Complaint of Venus* is usually paired with *Mars* in manuscripts, and they travel as companions in nearly all editions. However, they do

¹⁶⁶ Wendy Scase, *Literature and Complaint in England, 1272-1553* (Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 184-185.

¹⁶⁷ Skeat’s *Chaucer*, 495.

¹⁶⁸ Peter, *Complaint and Satire*, 59-60. Chaucer and the Scrope-Grosvenor Trial (1385-1390), see Turner, *Chaucer*, 79-80. R. Howard Bloch, *Medieval French Literature and Law* (University of California Press, 1977). Bloch writes (p. 39) that from the twelfth century onward there grew among the elite class ‘a highly developed system of civil judicial procedure, vernacular debate literature, and philosophical dialectic.’ See also: Françoise Autrand, *Naissance d’un grand corps de l’Etat: les gens du Parlement de Paris 1345– 1454* (Publications de la Sorbonne, 1981).

¹⁶⁹ Cayley, *Debate and Dialogue*, 22.

¹⁷⁰ See Alain Chartier’s *Livre des Quatre Dames* or the early work of Christine de Pizan (1998b).

not look alike. Venus's complaint is shorter than Mars's and written in a completely different stanzaic form with different meter and rhyming patterns. Due to differences such as these, Julia Boffey observes that 'nothing in the text of either poem suggests it should be linked with the other[,] and Robinson suggests that it was Shirley responsible for their conflation.¹⁷¹ However, if considered as part of performance, a complaint from Venus would balance the presentation of actors and their roles and therefore comply with French examples.¹⁷²

The Complaint of Venus is a translation of three ballades written by Oton de Graunson, as attributed at the end of the *Lenvoy*. Chaucer made one significant alteration to Graunson's writing however: he changed the voice of the poems from male to female. If, as I argue, the two complaints were part of a theatrical production, this change is entirely appropriate. *A jeu-partis* requires balance: Mars was given space to voice his complaint and then the stage opens for Venus's rebuttal. The structures of the two complaints are different, but the subject matter corresponds. Venus answers Mars's complaint topic by topic: devotion, jealousy, and the instability of love, as shown below:

1. Both poems begin with praising the other's virtues:

My lady is the verrey sours and welle	In him is bounte, wisdom, governaunce,
Of beaute, lust, fredom, and gentilnesse,	Wel more then any mannes wit can gesse,
Of riche aray – how dere men hit selle!	

¹⁷¹ Julia Boffey, *Manuscripts of English Courtly Love Lyrics in the Later Middle Ages* (D. S. Brewer, 1985), p. 36: 'While nothing in the text of either poem suggests that it should be linked with the other, a precedent for joining the two, and for the neatly symmetrical titles, must have been set early in the fifteenth century, for they survive side by side in a total of six copies. Robinson suggested, plausibly, that John Shirley was responsible for the original conflation, in his provision of a biographical background for the poems which gave them some sort of connection.' These six manuscripts are: Bodleian MS Fairfax 16, Tanner 346, Arch. Selden B.24; TCC MS R.3.20; two copies in Magdalen College, Cambridge, MS Pepys 2006. Seth Lerer, *Chaucer and His Readers: Imagining the Author in Late-Medieval England* (Princeton University Press, 2020), p. 139.

¹⁷² See Cayley's chapter, 'The Antecedents of Late Medieval Debate.'

(Mars 174-176)

For grace hath wold so ferforth him
avaunce
That of knyghthod he is parfit richesse.
(Venus 9-12)

2. A promise of devotion follows:

Therefore **my herte forever I to her hette**,
Ne truly, for my deth, I shal not lette
To ben her truest servaunt and her knyght.
(Mars 185-187)

That **I am his for ever**, I him assure,
For every wight preyseth his gentillesse
(Venus 15-16)

3. He makes a chivalric promise to serve her and she accepts his service:

To ben her truest servaunt and her knyght.
I flater noght, that may wete every wyght;
For this day in her servise shal I dye.
But grace be, I se her never wyth ye.
(Mars 187-190)

And notwithstondyng al his suffisaunce,
His gentil herte is of so gret humblesse
To me in word, in werk, in contaunce,
And me to serve is al his besynesse,
That I am set in verrey sikernesse.
(Venus 17-21)

4. Mars addresses an audience of knights and ladies (part V) like a bill of complaint to his peers, and Venus addresses Love acting as a higher judge (parts II & III).

5. Love performs fundamental changes in lovers in 'hewe and countenance,' 'as any metal that is forged newe'. This could be a hint of alchemical concepts and an allusion to sexual union.

For thogh so be that lovers be as trewe
As any **metal that is forged newe**,
(Mars 200-1)

That men ful dere bye thy nobil thing,
As wake abedde and fasten at the table,
Wepinge to laughe and singe in
compleynyng,
And doun to caste visage and lokyng,
Often to **change hewe and
countenance**,
(Venus 26-30)

6. Mars writes about the corrupting influence of jealousy, and she refutes its power:

Somtyme yf that **jelosie hyt knewe**,
They myghten lyghtly leye her hed to
borowe;

Jelosie be hanged by a cable!
She wolde al knowe thurgh her espying;
Ther doth no wyght nothing so reasonable

And thogh the **lyne** breke, he hath
penaunce;
That he his wages hath for evermore.
(*Mars* 237-244)

11. The power and influence of Love are responsible for the inevitability of falling in love, and Love is the creator of Venus.

For thogh my lady have so gret beaute
That I was mad til I had gete her grace,
She was not cause of myn adversite,
But he that wroghte her, also mot I the,
(*Mars* 264-267)

And certis, Love, when I me wel avise
On any estat that man may represente,
Then have **ye made me** thurgh your
fraunchise
Chese the best that ever on erthe wente
(*Venus* 57-60)

12. In the final stanzas Mars makes a plea for pity, and Venus offers it. Mars makes his plea to an audience of knights and ladies, while Venus offers her response to her heart and to Love.

And ye, my ladyes, that ben true and
stable,
Be wey of kynde, ye oughten to be able
To have pite of folk that be in peyne.
(*Mars* 281-283, and all the final stanza)

Seche no ferther, neythir wey ne wente,
Sith **I have suffisaunce unto my pay.**
Thus wol I ende this compleynt or this lay;
To love hym best ne shal I never repente.
(*Venus* 69-72)

This pattern of parallels across the poems suggests that they were indeed conceived of as a pair and that it was not only Shirley's compilatory choices connecting them. They work together as a version of the *jeu parti*, with a particularly Chaucerian flair. By positioning *Mars* and *Venus* in a performative, theatrical environment, I am replacing them 'where poetry belongs,' as recently described by Willie van Peer, 'in the real world, in the social sphere, embedded in a live performance, vibrant with music.'¹⁷³ Finally, motion is a crucial component to consider when reading *Mars* and *Venus*, and the playful disguising of words,

¹⁷³ Willie van Peer & Anna Chesnokova, *Experiencing Poetry: a Guidebook to Psychopoetics* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2023), p. 19.

ideologies and possibly even live actors, operated rhythmically. If *Mars* and *Venus* are moved into the realm of play, in which actors resembled characters and choreographed dances amplified the movement in the poem, then a flash of imaginative possibility invites this radically new interpretation.

Conclusion

To successfully play a game, one must have the proper materials and space, such as a board and dice or a stage and script, and time set aside for play - Huizinga's time that is 'different' from 'ordinary life.'¹⁷⁴ Playing games is a type of endemic bonding through fantasy, chance and delight, and it serves an important role in social life. Serina Patterson defines games this way: 'Games are designed experiences; they model behaviour and imply intent from players (those who participate). Unlike unstructured, freeform play...games have identifiable rules within a contained system. They require varying degrees of abstract thought, cognitive representation, skill, imagination, and an understanding of rules.'¹⁷⁵ Chaucer's *Complaint of Mars* is a designed experience, with identifiable rules (astrological / chivalric romance / mythological) and expectations. It operates within a contained system (proem, narrative, complaint), and it petitions the imagination to participate. Chaucer's gamesmanship with astral imagery highlights the humour and dynamism with which he crafted his poetry and leaves his work an 'open

¹⁷⁴ Huizinga, *Homo ludens*, 28.

¹⁷⁵ Serina Patterson, *Games and Gaming in Medieval Literature* (Palgrave, 2015), p. 7.

text.¹⁷⁶ Indeed, all poetry is a kind of game proceeding from the playground of the mind, and Chaucer's playground was a teeming, vibrant cosmos of possibilities.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁶ Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), p. 1–11.

¹⁷⁷ Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 119, 129.

CONCLUSION

In William Shakespeare's play, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595), Act III.1.46-50, the clownish Bottom and his amateur acting guild plan their theatrical play in the enchanted wood. The group is faced with a staging problem: Pyramus and Thisbe must meet by moonlight. The tinker, Tom Snout, wonders if there will be moonlight for the evening's performance, and Bottom cries, 'A calendar, a calendar! Look in the almanack; find out moonshine, find out *moonshine*.'¹ After this exclamation, Robin Goodfellow (Puck) invisibly joins the group, and Quince the carpenter consults an almanac: Yes, the moon will shine that night!

Presumably, the artisans brought what they needed for a collaborative rehearsal to the woods that night, and one of the items considered useful for such an endeavor is an almanac. An almanac in Shakespeare's time would contain nearly the same information that one in Chaucer's time would include: timetables for the phases of the moon, agrarian wisdom and possibly predictions, and probably an image of a Zodiac Man and various astrological miscellany.² This gaggle of thespians are made up of working-class folk: a weaver, a carpenter, a bellows-mender, a tinker, a joiner, and a tailor. In a play full of surprises – indeed, directly after this scene Bottom is transfigured with the head of an ass – that a group of working people has an almanac is not one of them.

¹ William Shakespeare, *A Midsommer Nights Dreame* (Project Gutenberg, e-book 1514, released 1998; 2023).

² David Wiles, *Shakespeare's Almanac: A Midsummer Night's Dream, Marriage and the Elizabethan Calendar* (D.S. Brewer, 1993). Laurel Braswell, 'The Moon and Medicine in Chaucer's Time.' *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 8 (1986): 147. Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 50, 82. An interesting context can be found in the *Kalender of Shepherdes* (1490), an almanac first published Paris, and an English translation in 1506 by Wynkyn de Worde.

Almanacs could help make any number of choices about propitious times to make an endeavor.³ When was the best time to plan a wedding? When the moon was in a stable sign. When was it best to harvest? When the moon was in one of the earth signs. When should watermills be built, or wells dug? When the moon was in a wet sign, such as Cancer, because the moon increased the moist effect. When should a bell be forged, or a new furnace built? When the moon was in a hot and dry sign.⁴ Apparently, the moon will shine brightly and favorably for Bottom's crew.

Throughout *A Midsummer Night's Dream* the moon is a recurring motif, recalling ideas of lunacy, magic, the land of fairy, the cycles of love, and the mutability of mortality.⁵ Bottom's call to find an almanac functions like one of the play's rhythmic fairy songs or an incantation, 'A calendar, a calendar! Look in the almanack; find out moonshine, find out moonshine.' If this were an incantation, then it conjures Puck. On a mission from Oberon to play a trick on the Queen of Fairies, Puck is sidetracked by the actors and Bottom's words. Moonshine in this context has a double meaning, the first is obviously practical. Will the play be lit by the moon that night? And humorously, moonshine can be a term for foolish or fanciful talk, which also certainly ensues.⁶

There is an inconsistency here, however. In the first scene of the play Hippolyta mentions specifically the darkness of a new moon: 'And then the moon, like to a silver bow

³ Taavitsainen, *Middle English Lunaries*, 45-51. Allen Chapman, 'Astrological Medicine.' Chapter in: Charles Webster, ed. *Health, Medicine and Mortality in the Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 275-300.

⁴ Taavitsainen, 'A Zodiacal Lunary,' 289-290.

⁵ Keith Linley, *A Midsummer Night's Dream in Context: Magic, Madness and Mayhem* (London: Anthem Press, 2016), see chapter 12: 'Sweet Moon': The Woods and The Context of Magic.'

⁶ *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "moonshine (n. & adj.)," September 2023.

/ New bent in heaven, shall behold the night' (I.1.9-10). Sukanta Chaudhuri notes this, stating: 'The fluctuations of the moon seem to exceed normal Shakespearean inconsistency and form a deliberate imaginative design.'⁷ This imaginative design may be evident in Theseus's language: 'how slow / This old moon wanes! She lingers my desires, / Like to a stepdame or a dowager, / Long withering out a young man's revenue' (I.1.3-5).⁸ If the 'timescape' of this play is the course of twenty-four hours, how could a waning moon and a bright moon share the same sky?

Such Inconsistencies may be relatively normal for Shakespeare, but for Chaucer they are not. Of all Chaucer's cosmic passages, none conflict as resolutely as a new moon and a bright moon in the same evening. The moon in *Troilus and Criseyde* is a reliable marker of time throughout the five books, for example, even if the astronomy does not align with the skies in Chaucer's day. Criseyde's love for Troilus waxes and wanes like the moon: when Criseyde is open to Troilus's love the moon is new (III.548), and when her love begins to shift toward Deiphebus the moon is full (V.275) and the sun sets with Troilus's hopes and the moon leaves the house of Leo (V.1016-20). It is not illogical then to search for all imaginable interconnecting temporal indicators in Chaucer's work as many have done, but not at the expense of overlooking deliberately imaginative designs.

⁷Sukanta Chaudhuri, *The Arden Shakespeare: A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022), p. 181.

⁸ Some scholars have interpreted this as an oblique reference to the aging Queen Elizabeth I. Suk-Keo Ko, 'The Moon and the Metamorphosis: Female Sexuality and Politics in A Midsummer Night's Dream.' *Shakespeare Review* 46/4 (2010): 709–730.

Chaucer manipulated astronomical settings to fit his needs as much as they may reflect realities. His astral passages are integrally consistent, but often playfully misleading. He tweaked his sources, manipulated motifs, invented constellations, bent the rules, and made the stars his own. Past scholars have privileged the scientific over the aesthetic, but the evidence in the text points to aesthetic primacy.

Chaucer's astrology was one of the exceptional aspects of his works that accrued interest after his death in 1400. He was even considered an expert on occult sciences; his alchemical and astrological passages were at times extracted and published in separate compilations.⁹ In 1713 and again in 1730, the London playwright John Gay brought to the stage his take on the Wife of Bath and a character named Chaucer with his play, *The Wife of Bath: a Comedy*.¹⁰ Gay gives his character Chaucer a role akin to that of Nicholas in *The Miller's Tale*: he uses astrology to attempt to woo a woman. The woman is Myrtila, and she places her faith in the predictions of her astrologer, the appropriately named Astrolabe. To trick her into believing that her fate lies in marriage and not in the nunnery, Chaucer bribes Astrolabe to take his place for a session with Myrtila.

⁹ Robert M. Schuler, 'The Renaissance Chaucer as Alchemist.' *Viator* 15 (1984): 305-333. Alan Pritchard, *Alchemy: a Bibliography of English-language Writings* (London: Viking Press, 1981). Gareth D. Dunleavy, 'The Chaucer Ascription in Trinity College, Dublin MS D.2.8.' *Ambix* 13 (1965): 2-21, see p. 2. There was a further strain of thinkers that believed Chaucer was thoroughly skeptical of alchemy, see: Caroline Spurgeon, *Five Hundred Years of Chaucer Criticism and Allusions 1357-1900*, 3 vols. (Cambridge University Press, 1960). Also: Carroll Camden, 'Chaucer and Two Elizabethan Pseudo-Sciences.' *Philological Quarterly* 38 (1959): 124-6.

¹⁰ John Gay, 'The Wife of Bath: a Comedy, as acted at the Theater-Royal in Drury-Lane, by his Majesty's servants.' (London: Bernard Lintott, 1713). Also: John Gay, *The Wife of Bath: a Comedy*, Ross G. Arthur, ed. (Ontario: In Parentheses Publications Restoration Drama Series, 2001).

The interaction between the astrologer and Chaucer is intentionally ridiculous. Astrolabe hands over his garb to Chaucer for a disguise: his ‘Hiroglyphical Cap’, the ‘Mystical Wand’, and the ‘Covert of these Necromantical Vestments.’¹¹ But the outfit is not complete. Chaucer believes he looks too young to be taken as an astrologer, therefore ‘a Beard and a Pair of Whiskers would undoubtedly give a good magical Air to my Countenance.’ Astrolabe then surprises Chaucer (and the audience) when he removes his own false beard and hands it over. He too is a young man, pretending to be a wise old astrologer to pay his debts. They discuss the situation as a masquerade in the theatre of love, and Astrolabe claims that all it takes to be an astrologer is ‘but a solemn unintelligible *Jargon*, and an awful Appearance.’

Sometimes the astrology in Geoffrey Chaucer’s works may seem like ‘unintelligible jargon,’ but it would be wrong to think of Chaucer as a poet disguised as an astrologer, wearing the false trappings of the trade. Neither was he a genuine astrologer, erecting horoscopes through careful calculations to guide his own fictional frameworks. Chaucer was a writer, and astrology and astronomy permeated cultural life. Physical instruments and objects mingled with metaphysical discussions, theories of the cosmos were discussed socially, and explorations into the celestial spheres were creatively represented in the arts. Chaucer exhibited his own personal interest in the subject and participated in building and extending cultural astronomy in fourteenth London and beyond, as this thesis has demonstrated.

¹¹ Gay, ‘Wife of Bath,’ 35. Each of the following quotations occur on the same page.

For my final point, I turn to Chaucer's *House of Fame*. This has sometimes been viewed as the first precursor to science fiction narratives in the English language.¹² While it sparkles with glints of past masterworks, Chaucer's *House of Fame* is its own fantasy.¹³ More than a commentary, more than a didactic work, and more than a philosophical exposition, this is a highly experimental text which touches on many concepts: language, intertextuality, the limits of knowledge, interrelations between humans, and of course, astral flight.¹⁴ The narrator, Geoffrey, is carried by an eagle through the Ptolemaic spheres and arrives in an alien destination (with suspicious similarities to London).¹⁵ It is framed as

¹² Michael R. Kelley, T.S. Miller, 'Flying Chaucers, Insectile Ecclesiasts, and Pilgrims Through Space and Time: The Science Fiction Chaucer.' *The Chaucer Review* 48/2 (2013): 129–65, at 129. Dean Swinford, 'Cosmic Position in Chaucer's House of Fame.' *Mirator* 1/24 (2024): 56–72.

¹³ Specifically, Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis*, Boethius's *The Consolation of Philosophy*, Alan of Lille's *Anticlaudianus*, and Dante's *Commedia*. *The House of Fame* can be viewed as a parody of Dante's *Commedia*, but as Marion Turner states, *Ch...European Life*, p. 8: 'Chaucer is a deeply secular poet, with no interest in supporting the grandiose claims of the Italian poets laureate who aspired to be poet-theologians.' See also p. 131. For more on *Paradiso*, see: B. S. Koonce, *Chaucer and the Tradition of Fame: Symbolism in The House of Fame* (Princeton University Press, 1966). William Joyner, 'Parallel Journeys in Chaucer's *House of Fame*.' *Papers in Language and Literature* 12 (1976): 3–19. Carruthers, 'Italy, Ars Memorativa,' 179–188; Glenn A. Steinberg, 'Chaucer in the Field of Cultural Production: Humanism, Dante, and the House of Fame.' *The Chaucer Review* 35/2 (2000): 182–203. On the *Somnium Scipionis*, see: John M. Fyler, "'Cloude,"—and al that Y of Spak": "The House of Fame," v. 978.' *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 87/4 (1986): 565–68. W. A. Quinn, 'Chaucer's Recital Presence in the "House of Fame" and the Embodiment of Authority.' *The Chaucer Review* 43/2 (2008): 171–96. On *Anticlaudianus*, see: Francis W. Nelson, 'Chaucer's "Airish Beasts."' *Modern Language Notes* 64 (1949): 339–41. J. A. W. Bennett, *Chaucer's Book of Fame: An Exposition of "The House of Fame."* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1968). John M. Fyler, *Chaucer and Ovid* (Yale University Press, 1979). Sarah Powrie, 'Alan of Lille's *Anticlaudianus* as Intertext in Chaucer's *House of Fame*.' *The Chaucer Review* 44/3 (2010): 246–67.

¹⁴ Kathryn Lynch, 'The Logic of the Dream Vision in Chaucer's *House of Fame*.' Chapter in: Richard J. Utz, ed., *Literary Nominalism and the Theory of Reading Late Medieval Texts: A New Research Paradigm* (Edwin Mellen Press, 1995), pp. 179–203.

¹⁵ Turner, *Ch...European Life*, 168–169, 426; see also 218–229. Dale Kedwards, 'Astronomy, Literary Criticism, and Medieval Literature: An Introduction.' *Interfaces* 8 (2021): 7–13, at 7. On Chaucer as a self-aware character in a fictionalized place, see: A. J. Minnis, V. J. Scattergood, and J. J. Smith, eds., *Oxford Guides to Chaucer: The Shorter Poems* (Oxford University Press: Oxford 1995), p. 248.

a dream narrative, but I suggest in a manner that as much looks ahead to L. Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* as it looks backward to Cicero's *Somnium*.¹⁶

As I discuss in chapter 3, the eagle makes a remarkable offer to Geoffrey while they ascend through the stellar sphere: 'Wilt thou lere of sterres aught?' (line 993), will he learn about the stars? But Geoffrey turns down the offer - he is too old and it is no good (995-999).

The eagle chides Geoffrey and then tells him why one should know the stars:

"Yis, pardee," quod he; "**wostow why?**
For when thou redest poetrie,
 How goddes gonne stellifye
 Bridd, fissh, best, or him or here,
 As the Raven or eyther Bere,
 Or Arionis harpe fyn,
 Castor, Pollux, or Delphyn,
 Or Athalantes doughtres sevene,
 How alle these arn set in hevене;
 For though thou have hem ofte on honde,
 Yet nostow not wher that they stonde."
 (1000-1010)

Why should he know the stars? For reading poetry. For the myths and their poetic value.

This passage encourages wonder and awe, describing a visual experience of *seeing* the stars and then connecting them with their ancient tales. By knowing the stars, where they stand in the sky as well as their mythology, one becomes a better reader of poetry.

This is as true for reading Chaucer's texts today as it is for Geoffrey the dream narrator. Chaucer used cosmic imagery to envision networks of connections between

¹⁶ On the Dream Vision genre, see: J. Stephen Russell, *The English Dream Vision; Anatomy of a Form* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1988). Hans Robert Jauss, 'Theory of Genres and Medieval Literature.' Chapter in: Timothy Bahti, ed., *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), pp. 76-102. Kathryn L. Lynch, *The High Medieval Dream Vision: Poetry, Philosophy, and Literary Form* (Stanford University Press: Stanford 1988), p. 1.

humanity and the wider universe, to adorn language for specific effects, and most importantly, to innovate. Chaucer's astral poetics encourage sensual engagement: we imagine the stars twinkling in the lofty heavens, sense the tactility of an astrolabe or the folia of a manuscript calendar, feel the rotations of the planets through dance, laugh at characters' puffed-up astronomical digressions, and hold still in wonder at the existential smallness of earth amid such a vast universe. My ultimate argument, then, echoes the Eagle's admonition to Chaucer: learning more about the stars makes one a better reader of poetry.

APPENDIX I: CHAUCER'S COSMIC PASSAGES

Below is a complete list of astronomical, astrological, or cosmological passages in Chaucer's writings. As mentioned in the Introduction, a 'passage' here is defined as a complete idea or sense unit, whether that is an allusion, a metaphor or simile, poetic description, or extended stanzas building cosmic imagery. The chapel murals in *The Knight's Tale*, for instance, are detailed in dozens of lines of poetry thick with astral imagery, but in this table I consider them as a single unit. This is because each individual astral phrase or idea works together to build a whole component of the tale. The same is true for the astrological digression in *The Franklin's Tale*, for example.

The table below includes a short excerpt of each passage and my own brief annotations. I have also indicated whether the passage is best categorized as an instance of chronographia, adornment, corporeality, direct translation, or play. The final column indicates where I discuss the passage in this thesis. There is an unavoidable level of discretion in these categories with comfortable room for debate. For example, each instance of chronographia could be interpreted as a type of rhetorical adornment, but it makes sense to treat the numerous instances of chronographiae as their own category because they are easily distinguishable and function differently than other ornamental passages.

A chronographia has a literary formula: a description of the natural world with an invocation to a season accompanied by a mythic figure. Chaucer at times follows, subverts, or reinvents this formula, but always with a clear view of expected conventions in mind. Chaucer's chronographic passage in *The Franklin's Tale* is only unusual when compared with conventional chronographia in Dante or Virgil for example, which Chaucer

is clearly aware of and interested in experimenting with. Some chronographia are relatively short (such as lines 1885-1889 in *The Merchant's Tale*) and some are elaborately long (the opening lines to the *General Prologue*).

'Adornment' is similarly formulaic and defined by classical rhetoricians. This is often highly conventional, such as Custance hailing the Virgin Mary as the 'bryghte sterre of day' (*Man of Law's Tale*, line 852), or the simile for the number of flowers in *The Book of the Duchess* (406-409). Another example of this is when Criseyde is described as shining brightly beneath her widow's robes like a bright star behind a black cloud (T&C I.174-5). This follows an established precedent in decorative amorous poetry, such as Petrarch's many comparisons of Laura with nature's beauty. But it also participates in a larger program of celestial imagery associated with Criseyde, so it also builds her character and corporeality. In instances such as these which exhibit aspects of two categories (ten altogether), I have marked with two categorical designations.

Corporeality refers to anything related to bodiliness, from medical or metaphysical theories of the human body to ways in which Chaucer uses astrology to shape his characters. Nicholas in *The Miller's Tale* is introduced to the audience first by his interest in astrology in lines 3190-3210, and this is a crucial part of his character and a major plot point. Another example of how Chaucer shapes characters with astrology is with Calkas in *Troilus & Criseyde*. In Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato*, Criseida's father is a prophet with no mention of astrological foreknowledge, but Chaucer makes this an important part of Calkas's character (T&C IV.115-116). Chaucer therefore uses astrology and astronomy to build his characters into his literary universe.

Another way I use the term ‘corporeality’ is when Chaucer writes about the body’s relationship to the cosmos, humoral theories, or horoscopes. This is the primary focus of my third chapter. When the Franklin mentions the constellations as specifically influencing individuals’ moods in lines 779-783, this is related to concepts of astrological influences in daily life on the body. The Wife of Bath’s nativity and its bodiliness are the perfect example of ‘corporeality’ because she discusses astral influences on her inner inclinations and her outward appearance. Horoscopes constitute the primary examples of this type of ‘corporeality,’ such as Troilus and Criseyde’s contrasting natal ‘constellaciouns’ (II.680-686 / IV.744-6).

It may seem that these two modes of ‘corporeality’ (building characters / cosmic theories of corporeality) are different enough to constitute separate categories, but I see them as two branches of the same tree. Chaucer wrote characters into his fiction in a manner that reflects the way human beings were believed to inhabit the medieval cosmos. Astrological influences worked in invisible and powerful ways – from mysterious astral concepts lurking in the corners of the carpenter’s superstitious imagination, to the Wife of Bath’s hidden birthmark, and Chauncleer’s innate ability to tell the hour. His characters have ‘birthdates’ and thus astrological influences affect their habits, complexions, and bodies.

‘Play’ is the most amorphous and multidimensional category. I use it to refer to passages that show evidence of experimental or inventive play. These are often instances without clear literary precedent or contemporary analogues: they are products of Chaucer’s idiosyncratic poetic ‘playground.’ Lines 941-949 in *The House of Fame*, for

example, are an abbreviated retelling of the myth of Phaeton's disastrous chariot ride as recorded in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 2.47-332, but clearly it is not a direct translation. No one has written it just as Chaucer has, and he takes creative license in this version by altering the perspective and placing the tale in the mouth of an eagle. I have therefore categorized this as an instance of 'play,' since Chaucer is indeed playing with his sources and inventing a new work of fiction. It is also playful in tone, with moments of absurdity passing between the eagle and the narrator. Even further, with *The Complaints of Mars & Venus* I use the term to refer to theatrical play, so 'play' is an intentionally far-ranging and flexible term.

Naturally there are instances which do not fit neatly into any category at all. Indeed, according to my count at least thirty passages do not, and these are primarily in *A Treatise on the Astrolabe* and *Boece*, and these I have categorized as 'Other.' *A Treatise on the Astrolabe* is a work apart from the rest with entirely different parameters and goals. I include these passages in the total count, and they feature prominently in chapter 3, but the astral passages here are generically different because the *Treatise* is a nonfiction, technical manual with literary dimensions.

As I hope I have made clear, this assessment is not meant to be interpreted as hard and fast judgements, rather it is offered as a helpful tool to facilitate new critical approaches for future scholars. These categories are useful because they encourage a way of interpreting Chaucer's cosmic poetry as part of a whole rather than in isolation. It makes it easier to see how cosmic ideas operate across his oeuvre. Even further, when viewed this way largescale patterns appear that go further to enlighten our reading of Chaucer's works.

It also places Chaucer's poetry in wider networks of meaning, especially when combined with a materialist view as I have shown.

CATEGORICAL ABBREVIATIONS:

- 'C' for chronographia
- 'A' for adornment
- 'B' for corporeality
- 'P' for play
- 'T' for direct translation
- 'O' for 'other, instances which do not relate to any of the other categories.

THE CANTERBURY TALES

	Citation	Lines & notes	Categories
1.	General Prologue	1-11: 'Hath in the Ram his cours yronne'. The very beginning of <i>The Canterbury Tales</i> opens with a chronographic description of Aries and Zephirus, sourced from Guido delle Colonne's <i>Historia destructionis Troiae</i> , which begins with the vernal equinox. By mentioning that the sun is nearly out of the sign of the Ram (12 March – 11 April in the Julian calendar) indicates that it is sometime in April. This is a classical <i>reverdie</i> , or 're-greening,' and a call to the road.	C
2.	The Knight's Tale	1087-1090: 'Som wikke aspect or disposicioun / Of Saturne, by som constellacioun'. Arcite blames their incarceration on a malefic positioning of Saturn among the constellations. Saturn was personified as a malicious old god responsible for floods and other disasters.	B
3.		1881-2092: 'For in the lond ther was no crafty man / That geometrie or ars-metrike	A

kan, / Ne portreyour, ne kervere of yimages,
 / That Theseus ne yaf him mete and wages
 / The theatre for to maken and devyse.'

This is the description of the chapel murals, which are extraordinary and elaborate, and I discuss at length in chapter 2. Nearly all of *pars tertia* includes astrological imagery, including each of the planetary deities and their characteristic attributes, allegorical images demonstrating their influences, concepts of zodiacal domiciles, mention of malefic and benefic astral configurations, and ideas about Fate, of course. The passage on Callisto and her constellation *Ursa Major* (2051-2061) demonstrates specifically how creatively Chaucer incorporates star lore into his fiction.

4. **2214-2217:** 'Unto the blisful Citherea benigne - / I mene Venus, honourable and digne'. This describes the time when Palamon entered the temple of Venus to make his plea. It is important to note that he entered at an auspicious time, 'in hir houre'. Each hour of the day was believed to be dominated by a planet (Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Sun, Venus, Mercury, Moon). Emelye prayed in the hour of the moon, which aligns with Diana the huntress (l.2273), and Arcite went to pray in the hour of Mars (l.2367). See *Astrolabe* 2.12. P
5. **2438-2482:** 'And right anon swich strif ther is bigonne, / For thilke grauntyng, in the hevene above, / Bitwixe Venus, the goddesse of love, / And Mars, the stierne god armypotente, / That Juppiter was bisy it to stente, / Til that the pale Saturnus the colde'. There is trouble between the gods – how should the prayers of Emelye, Arcite, and Palamon be answered? The attributes of each god are briefly mentioned, as well as astrological concepts such as Saturn P

dwelling in the house of Leo (2461-2462), and the conflicting 'complecciouns' of the gods. Compare with Martianus Cappela's *Marriage* lines 150-152, p. 51: 'Between the pathway of the sun and the orb of the moon are the deities of the second stage of blessedness, those of almost equal power, through whom prophecies and dreams and portents are disposed.'

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| 6. | 2987-2989 / 2994 / 3004: | ‘The First Moevere of the cause above, / Whan he first made the faire cheyne of love, / Greet was th’effect, and heigh was his entente.’ Chaucer has swapped Teseo’s speech from Boccaccio to an adapted version of Boethius. The First Mover is an Aristotelian idea of the ‘first uncaused cause,’ the very foundation of the cosmos. | P |
| 7. | 3035 / 3069: | ‘What maketh this but Juppiter, the kyng, / That is prince and cause of alle thyng’. This relates to the idea of cosmic ‘causes.’ | P |
| 8. | The Miller’s Tale | 3190-3210: ‘...but al his fantasye / Was turned for to lerne astrologye’. This introduces Nicholas as a scholar favoring astronomical arts, and specifically astrological prognostications about the weather and horary questions. This obliquely indicates that he intends to benefit fiscally or otherwise from this learning, since providing these kinds of prognostications were profitable. Wonderful bit of materialism here with the mention of manuscripts, astrolabes, and an abacus. | B |
| 9. | 3449-3461: | ‘This man is falle, with his astromye, / In some wodenesse or in some agonye. / I thoghte ay wel how that it sholde be! / Men sholde nat knowe of Goddes pryvetee.’ The carpenter calls | B |

Saint Frideswide on behalf of Nicholas, who has fallen into a stupor. I agree with those who argue that ‘astromye’ (3451 / 3457) is a malapropism reflecting on the unlearned nature of the carpenter, who is fearful and superstitious about Nicholas’s learning.

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| 10. | 3513-3518: ‘I have yfounde in myn astrologye, / As I have looked in the moone brighte’. This is Nicholas’s cruel ruse in which he claims to have foreknowledge of a flood because of his study of the moon. | B |
| 11. | The Man of Law’s Introduction & Tale
1-15: ‘Our Hooste saugh wel that the brighte sonne / The ark of his artificial day hath ronne’. This is a surprisingly complicated headlink connecting Fragment II to the frame narrative. It mentions the hours of the artificial day, the length of shadows, that the sun is 45° in ascension, the latitude, and the hour (ten o’clock). This is a chronographia with an astrolabic flavor and relies on the shadow tables of Nicholas of Lynn’s <i>Kalendarium</i> . | C |
| 12. | 190-203: ‘Paraventure in thilke large book / Which that men clepe the hevene ywriten was / With sterres, what that he his birthe took’. This is a fascinating adaptation of Bernardus Silvestris’s <i>Megacosmos</i> 3.33-34, and Chaucer’s own addition to the tale of Custance. | P |
| 13. | 295-301: ‘Infortunat ascendent tortuous, / Of which the lord is helplees falle, allas’. The narrator laments the terrible fate Custance is heading toward with her voyage. There is some debate about which moment an astrologer was supposed to foresee – the timing of her initial voyage? Or the date of her marriage? Whatever the case, this is a highly unusual exclamation for a hagiographic account. | B |

14. **852:** 'Thow haven of refut, brighte sterre of day'. Custance refers to Mary with one of her epithets, the 'brighte sterre of day.' A
15. **The Wife of Bath's Prologue** **182-183 / 324-5:** 'The same words writeth Ptholomee; / Rede in his Almageste, and take it there.' 'The wise astrologien, Daun Ptholome, / That seith this proverbe in his Almageste'. Twice the Wife of Bath claims Ptolemy as her source, whether that is accurate or not is questionable. O
16. **604-620:** 'I hadde the prente of seinte Venus seel.' This is the Wife of Bath's astral digression explaining the cosmic causes she believes provide context for her personal inclinations. B
17. **696-710:** 'The children of Mercurie and of Venus / Been in hir wirkyng ful contrarius'. As an analogy to support her argument that celibate old clerks cannot know enough about women to pass judgements on them, the Wife of Bath refers to the astrological differences between Venus and Mercury. B
18. **The Merchant's Prologue and Tale** **1795-1804:** 'Night with his mantel, that is derk and rude, / Gan oversprede the hemyspherie about'. This is a chronographia describing the fall of night. C
19. **1885-1889:** 'In two of Tawr, was into Cancre glyden; / So longe hath Mayus in hir chambre abyden'. This describes the time span of four days between the marriage day and the end of the 'honeymoon' period. See Kolve's discussion about astrology in this tale and the sign of Gemini in *Telling Images II*. C
20. **1967-1972:** 'Were it by influence or by nature, / Or constellacion, that in swich estaat / The hevene stood that tyme' P

fortunaat'. Damyan makes his request to Venus at an auspicious moment. This is an example of how astrology was seen to work in the Middle Ages: events could be lucky or unlucky due to invisible influences from the configuration of the heavens, 'by influence, or by nature, / Or constellacion.'

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| 21. | 2220-2224: 'Bright was the day, and blew the firmament; / Phebus hath of gold his stremes doun ysent'. This is a chronographic interlude breaking up the narrative scenes and shifting to the world of 'Fayerye' (2227). This describes the end of May before Cancer, in which the summer solstice occurs. | C |
| 22. | The Squire's Tale 29: '...Elpheta his wyf'. Elpheta is the name of a star which cues the reader to an astronomical register. | A |
| 23. | 47-57: 'In Martes face and in his mansioun / In Aries, the colerik hoothe signe.' This does two things, first it serves as a chronographic opening to the tale describing the astrological arrangement of Mars and the season of spring. It is also an abbreviated horoscope for Cambyuskan, describing the sun sign Aries and the exaltation of Mars and the sun in its house. | B / C |
| 24. | 129-131: 'He wayted may a constellacion / Er he had doon this operacion'. The inventor of the brass steed engaged in illicit astral image-making to imbibe his creation with magic. | A |
| 25. | 263-267: 'Phebus hath laft the angle meridional / And yet ascendynge was the beest roial'. This is a loquacious and opaque chronographia, and I suggest it serves as adornment as well. | C / A |

26. **272-274:** ‘Now dauncen lusty Venus children deere’. This describes the propitious moment when Cambyuskan enters his chamber in highly ornamental language. A
27. **384-386:** ‘As rody and bright as dooth the yonge sonne, / That in the Ram is foure degrees up ronne’. This is an ornate simile of Canacee’s fresh beauty. North and others have extrapolated a specific time and date for this moment (16 March 1390 at 6:15 am), but I argue that its purpose in this context is not to indicate a calendrical date but to add to the excessive ornamentation. A
28. **671-2:** ‘Appollo whirleth up his chaar so hye / Til that the god Mercurius hous, the slye’. This is the beginning of an unsuccessful chronographia which is interrupted by the Franklin. C
29. **The Franklin’s Tale** **779-783:** ‘For in this world, certein, ther no wight is / That he ne dooth or seith somtyme amys’. The narrator explains how people can suffer from bad moods due to anger, sickness, or a malefic astral configuration. It was believed that complexions change hour by hour in part due to the revolving heavens. B
30. **1016-1019:** ‘Til that the brighte sonne loste his hewe’. Dorigen and her companions spend all day in the garden until the sun sets. The hue of the sun is mentioned a few times in this tale, and Alexander Nevrosky (*Chaucer the Alchemist*) considers this part of an alchemical subtheme in the tale. C
31. **1031-1079:** ‘Which in the signe shal be of the Leon, / As preieth hire so greet a flood to brynge’. This is a prayer offered to Apollo P

(god of the sun), with many astrological components. It mentions the astrological connections between planets and growing plants on earth; Lucina (goddess of the moon) can affect the sea, rivers and tides; and Aurelius pleads for a two-year high tide with the moon in Aquarius, as if time could stop.

32. **1125-1134 / 1154-1156:** ‘Which book spak muchel of the operaciouns / Touchynge the eighte and twenty mansiouns / That longen to the moone, and swich folye / As in oure dayes is nat worth a flye’. Aurelius’s brother remembers a clerk in Orléans who had studied astrology, and the Franklin makes an aside to the audience commenting that this knowledge is not worth a flea. The brother suggests finding this clerk since he may have knowledge of the tides and the moon’s mansions. P
33. **1243-1255:** ‘Janus sit by the fyr, with double berd, / And drynketh of his bugle horn the wyn’. This is a chronographic interlude introducing the second half of the tale drawing on imagery from the Labors of the Month motif. C
34. **1261-1296:** ‘So atte laste he hath his tyme yfounde / To maken his japes and his wrecchednesse / Of swich a supersticious cursednesse.’ The Franklin vaguely describes the operations undertaken by the magician to make the rocks along the shore disappear. He uses legitimate astrological terms but none of it satisfactorily explains how any of it would create ‘swiche illusiouns.’ Meanwhile he ironically claims not to know anything about astrology and derides its powers. These lines are full of astrological language, touching on theories of root nativities, the Toledan tables, P

astronomical tools, equations, stars names, zodiac signs, angles and arcs, calculations, zodiacal mansions, and the faces of the moon.

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| 35. | The Physician's Tale | 19-40: 'Right as my list, and ech thyng in my cure is / Under the moone, that may wane and waxe, / And for my werk right no thing wol I axe'. Chaucer uses cosmic imagery of the moon, the sun, and the personification of Nature to describe Virginia's perfection. | A / B |
| 36. | The Nun's Priest's Tale | 2853-2858: 'By nature he knew ech ascencioun / Of equynoxial in thilke toun; / For whan degrees fiftene weren ascended, / Than crew he that it myghte nat been amended.' Chaunticleer is a natural astrologer, he can tell the hour of the day purely by instinct. | B |
| 37. | | 2955-2957: 'Ye been ful coleryk of compleccioun; / Ware the sonne in his ascencioun / Ne fynde yow nat repleet of humours hote.' Pertelote counsels her husband on how to balance the humors through purging and herbs. She claims that Chaunticleer's complexion is choleric and warns him from becoming too hot under the sun when it is high in the sky. | B |
| 38. | | 3187-3199: 'Caste up his eyen to the brighte sonne, / That in the signe of Taurus hadde yronne / Twenty degrees and oon, and somewhat moore, / And knew by kynde, and by noon oother loore, / That it was pryme, and crew with blisful stevene.' This is another springtime chronographia with the sun 21° in Taurus. The phrase 'Syn March [was gon], thritty dayes and two' causes some confusion. The editors of <i>Riverside</i> made the decision to include '[was gon]' so that it neatly works with the rest of the passage, but there is some | C |

room for doubt because the manuscript reads ‘bigan’ instead, which may be a scribal error. This passage seems to be a technical reading drawn from Nicholas of Lynn’s *Kalendarium*, which states that on 3 May at the latitude of Oxford the sun was at 21°6’ in Taurus, and at 9 AM (‘pryme’) the sun’s ascension was 42°17’ (‘Fourty degrees and oon’). This contributes to the high literariness of the tale, making it a one-of-a-kind beast fable.

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| 39. | The Second Nun’s Prologue | 43-49: ‘Whom erthe and see and hevene out of relees / Ay heryen; and thou, Virgine wemmeles, / Baar of thy body – and dwelest mayden pure – the Creatour of every creature.’ This is a cosmological perspective on the role of the Virgin Mary. She is the maiden who bore God the Creator of everything within the ‘tryne compass,’ meaning the threefold universe (earth, sea, and sky). | B |
| 40. | | 106-118: ‘And right as men may in the hevene see / The sonne and moone and sterres every weye, / Right so men goostly in this mayden free’. Building on the previous cosmological passage, Cecilie is similarly like the Virgin: pure, shining with her bright wisdom, ‘round and hool’ like the swift Empyrean heavens. | B |
| 41. | The Canon’s Yeoman’s Tale | 825-829: ‘The bodyes sevene eek, lo, hem here anoon: / Sol gold is, and Luna silver we threpe, / Mars iren, Mercurie quyksilver we clepe, / Saturnus leed, and Juppiter is tyn, / And Venus coper, by my fader kyn!’ This is a description of the seven planets and their related metals, demonstrating how astrology and alchemy overlap. | O |
| 42. | Parson’s Prologue & Tale | 2-12: ‘Therwith the moonnes exaltacioun - / I meene Libra – alwey gan ascende / As we were entryng at a thropes ende’. Here the | C |

narrator reads the time with all the methods available to a traveler with an astrolabe and a calendar: the sun's height along the horizon, the length of shadows, and a calendrical reading of the moon exalting in Libra. It is like the astrolabic reading in the introduction to the *Man of Law's Tale*. North uses these data points to extrapolate a date, specifically 4 PM on 16 or 17 April. Eisner suggests 17 April 1394. I agree with Wood (*Ch...Country of Stars*, 272-97) who suggests that Libra was chosen for symbolic reasons. It is an allusion to the scales of justice, final judgement, and the impending arrival at the pilgrimage destination. It is also the sign of the autumnal equinox, and thus a balance to the beginning with Aries and the vernal equinox.

43.

420-4: 'Allas, somme of hem shewen the boce of hir shap, and the horrible swollen membres, that semeth lik the maladie of hirnias, in the wrappyng of hir hoses;/ and eek the buttokes of hem faren as it were the hyndre part of a she-ape in the fulle of the moone.' The Parson is speaking against immodesty and revealing the body and uses a simile in the subjunctive mood ('as it were') to make his point. Medieval encyclopedias sometimes record that during a full moon apes expose their posteriors. In the *Physiologus* as recorded in Latin medieval versions, the monkey (a relative of the ape) is specifically associated with the devil and ugliness: 'It is fitting also that, in addition to not having a tail, the monkey lacks beauty also. And he is quite ugly in the region where he lacks a tail. Just so the devil has no good end.' *Physiologus*, Michael J. Curley ed & trans. (University of Chicago Press, 1979, 2009) XXVI, p. 39.

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THE BOOK OF THE DUCHESS

1. **406-409:** ‘To be gayer than the heven, / To have moo floures,
swiche seven, / As in the welken sterres bee.’ This is a simile for
the number of flowers in the wood. A
2. **820-824:** ‘...and hath more lyght / Than any other planete in
heven, / The moone or the sterres seven’. Blanche is more
beautiful than anything in the night sky. B / A

THE HOUSE OF FAME

1. **586-599:** ‘Wher Joves wol me stellyfye’. The narrator wonders if he will
be turned into a constellation like Ganymede. This is a humorous
allusion to the imagery of Zeus/Jupiter in the form of an eagle carrying
off Ganymede in classical art. P
2. **930-932 / 965:** ‘...eyryssh bestes’, ‘ayerissh bestes,’ an allusion to
Plato’s description of the beasts of the air (Ovid *Met.* 2-47-332, also
Martianus Capella *Marriage* line 156, p. 52). P
3. **936-939:** ‘Se yonder, loo, the Galaxie; Which men clepeth the Milky Wey
/ For hit ys whit (and somme, parfey, / Kallen hyt Watlynge Strete)’. This
is the first instance of the Milky Way in English, spoken by the Eagle to
Geffrey the narrator. P
4. **941-949:** ‘Whan the sonnes sone the rede / That highte Pheton, wolde
lede / ... / Til that he sey the Scorpioun, / Which that in heven a sygne is
yit.’ This is the Eagle’s retelling of the myth of Phaethon in Apollo’s
chariot. Phaeton is afraid of Scorpio and drops the reigns (Ovid *Met.* 2-
47-332). P
5. **992-1017:** “Lat be,” quod he, “thy fantasye! / Wilt thou lere of sterres
aught?” Conversation between the eagle and narrator about the names
and stories of the constellations. P
6. **1266-1281:** ‘Al this magik naturel, / That craftely doon her ententes / To
make, in certeyn ascendentes, / Ymages, lo, through which magik / To
make a man ben hool or syk.’ This is a brief mention of astral magic,
horoscopes, image making, and a list of famous practitioners. Some
are mythical (Medea, Circe, Calipsa), and some are Biblical (Symon
Magus), and even a famous fourteenth-century magician, ‘Colle
tregetour’, Collin Tregetour. P / B

7. **1375-1376:** ‘And with hir hed she touched hevene, / Ther as shynen sterres sevene’. Fame’s height reaches the sphere of the planets. A

THE PARLIAMENT OF FOWLS

1. **43-70:** ‘Thanne telleth it that, from a sterry place, / How Affrycan hath hym Cartage shewed’. This passage references Macrobius’s commentary on the *Dream of Scipio*, which the narrator is reading before bed. He outlines the basic scheme of the cosmos (a tiny earth at the center, nine concentric spheres, the music of the spheres, the revolution of the fixed stars, etc.) P

BOECE

1. **Book I, Metrum 2, lines 6-26:** ‘...this man, overcomere, hadde comprehended al this by nombre (*of acontynges in astronomy*)’ (13-14). In this metrum Boethius presents a philosophical view on the purpose of astronomy and astrology: it is an antidote to the existential weight of living. ‘This man’ is the term used to represent Boethius as narrator and the allegorical the plight of humankind, which is ‘dreynt in overthrownges depnesse’ and darkness, weighed down with unrelenting ‘anoyos bysynes’ without measure, like a neck bent with heavy chains. But the heavens are open to this man, the wonder of celestial splendor and terrestrial beauty is there for his contemplation and edification. This wonder leads to the ‘hevenliche pathes’ and to astronomy, the highest level of the quadrivium. Searching for the causes behind natural phenomena and how they relate to living on earth is thus the highest aspiration for the mind of humankind, and part of the nourishing ‘medycyne’ offered by Lady Philosophy. T
2. **Book I, Metrum 5, lines 1-30:** ‘O thow makere of the wheel that bereth the sterres’. This is Boethius’s poem *O Stelliferi Conditor Orbis*, a beautiful recounting of the Ptolemaic spheres. T
3. **Book I, Metrum 6, lines 1-4:** ‘Whan that the hevy sterre of the Cancre eschaufeth by the bemes of Phebus (that is to seyn, whan that Phebus the sonne is in the sygne of Cancre)’. Here Boethius connects celestial timekeeping with the movement of the zodiac in an agrarian context, reminiscent of Hesiod’s *Works and Days*. T

4. **Book II, Metrum 2, lines 5-7:** ‘...or elles as manye rychesses as ther schynen bryghte sterres in hevne on the sterry nyghtes;’ a metaphor for the allegorical figure of Plenty. T
5. **Book II, Metrum 6, lines 19-21:** ‘And ek this Nero governyde by ceptre alle the peples that ben undir the colde sterres that heighten the septemtryones.’ This means that Nero ruled over all those under the Little Dipper. ‘Septemtryones’ is a Latinate term for ‘of the north.’ T
6. **Book II, Metrum 8, lines 1-21:** ‘That Phebus, the sonne, with his goldene chariet bryngeth forth the rosene day’. This is Boethius’s description of the ‘fayre moevynges’ of the universe, which he later describes as held together by Love. T
7. **Book III, Metrum 1:** ‘The sterres schynen more aggreabley whan the wynd Nothus leteth his plowngy blastes; and aftir that Lucifer, the daysterre, hath chased away the dirke night.’ This is part of a series of metaphors about appreciating sweetness after bitterness. T
8. **Book IV, Metrum 1:** ‘the swifte moevynge of the firmament’. This is a poetic description of the stars and their astral houses, the sun, and Saturn. He states that when one’s thoughts are turned to God and the heavens they become ‘a knyght of the clere sterre.’ T
9. **Book IV, Metrum 6, lines 1-18:** ‘Ther kepin the sterres, be rightful alliaunce of things, hir oolde pees.’ Poetic description of the night sky mentioning Ursa Major, Hesperus and Lucyfer (Venus). T

TROILUS & CRISEYDE

1. **I.169-175:** ‘Nor under cloude blak so bright a sterre’. Comparison of Criseyde’s beauty with the stars. B / A
2. **I.1023-24:** ‘Lest that the cherl may falle out of the moone!’ Colloquial phrase about the man in the moon and an example of Pandarus’s proverbial and hyperbolic register; compare with lyric in Harley MS 2253. B
3. **II.680-686:** ‘And also blisful Venus, wel arrayed.’ Troilus’s nativity, the planetary alignments were ‘disposed wel’ (favourably inclined), ‘with aspects payed’ (made propitious by the signs of the heavenly bodies). B

4. **II.1312:** “Who, Troilus? Nay, help me so the moone,”. Pandarus again uses a proverbial phrase involving the moon. B
5. **III.1-49:** ‘O blisful light of which the bemes clere / Adorneth al the thridde heven faire!’ This is the encomiastic *incipit prohemium* for Book III. Much is a translation of Boccaccio: Fil. 3.74-79; Virgil, *Aeneid*; Boethius 2.m8; Dante *Paradiso* 8.1-15. T / A
6. **III.617-630:** ‘The bente moone with hire hornes pale, / Saturn, and Jove, in Cancro joyned were’. This describes a conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter with the moon in the zodiacal house of Cancer which causes rain. Line 551 implies Pandarus may have predicted rain, and Criseyde foresaw it in line 562. Because this is a conjunction that occurred during Chaucer’s lifetime, North and others speculate that he is referring to a specific event, but this is far from sure. The source in Boccaccio’s *Teseida* only mentions it is dark and cloudy at this point. By including astrological dimensions, Chaucer turns this into a question of timing and foreknowledge. P
7. **III.715-735:** ‘And if ich hadde, O Venus ful of myrthe, / Aspectes badde of Mars or of Saturne’. Troilus evokes celestial powers in a prayer to embolden him to approach Criseyde in her bed. While much of their romance reflects medieval chivalric values and behaviours, moments like this remind the audience that this is emphatically set in the pagan past. P
8. **III.1415-1421:** ‘But whan the cok, comune astrologer, / Gan on his brest to bete after crowe’. Here the rooster is a ‘common astrologer.’ From Alanus de Insulis, *De planctu Naturae* 2.163-64, and compare with Chaunticlere in the NPT. It is also a chronographic description of the morning and a version of an aubade. C
9. **IV.115-116:** ‘I have ek founde it be astronomye, / By sort, and by augurye eke, trewely’. Calkas used astrology to learn the truth about the destruction of Troy. Boccaccio makes no mention of Calkas as an astrologer, that is Chaucer’s addition. Reminiscent of *Aeneid* I.887-898. B / P
10. **IV.744-6:** ‘I, woful wrecche and infortuned wight, / And born in corsed constellacioun,’ Criseyde blames her sad fate in part on her cursed nativity. B

11. **V.1016-1020 / 1190:** ‘The brighte Venus folwede and ay taught / The wey ther brode Phebus down alighte;’ This is a poetic description of the planet Venus, following the sun after sunset on the horizon, and the rise of the moon as it whirls out of Leo, and the sign-bearer (*Signifer*) the Zodiac shows its bright stars (*candels*). This is a chronographia that also informs the reader that Criseyde has stayed in the Greek camp beyond her promise to Troilus. North argues that this suits the ten-day period 3-13 May 1388, but there is no contextual evidence to support connecting this to real time and real astronomical events. C
12. **V.1807-1813:** ‘His lighte goost ful blisfully is went / Up to the holughnesse of the eighthe spere,...And ther he saugh with ful avysement / The erratik sterres, herkenyng armonye / With sownes ful of hevenyssh melodie.’ Troilus’s soul flies through the celestial spheres after death, essentially reversing the soul’s path from the heavens to ‘ensoul’ a body at birth. Sources include Boccaccio’s *Teseida* 11.1-3, *Dream of Scipio*, and Boethius. B / T

THE LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN

1. **F Prologue, 108-114:** ‘And this was now the firste morwe of May’; this is a highly literary chronographic description of the beginning of May. The sun was red as a rose in the breast of the beast (Taurus) that Europa was ravished by. It indicates a season and heightens the sexual tension in the spring. It presents obscure allusions, referring to Taurus as ‘the beste,’ and Europa as ‘Agenores doghtre.’ C
2. **F Prologue, 230:** ‘His gilte heer was crowned with a sonne’. A spectacular image of kingly royalty in which the sun itself gilts his hair and raiments. A
3. **F Prologue, 525-526 / G Prologue 513-14 :** ‘No wonder ys thogh Jove hire stellyfye, / As telleth Agaton, for hire goodnesse!’ This is a remarkable instance of play, as Chaucer invents a constellation. Alceste is never catasterized in any classical or medieval text, and ‘Agaton’ may refer to Plato, but it is a false attribution, not unlike ‘Lollius’ in T&C. P

4. **Legend of Ariadne, 2223-2224:** ‘And in the signe of Taurus men may se / The stones of hire corone shyne clere.’ This is another obscure reference written in misleading language that takes some disentangling to understand. The shining crown refers to Corona Borealis, which is on the opposite side of the sky to Taurus, which may indicate this is an astrolabic reading of the sky. The myth is recorded in Ovid’s *Fasti* 3.451-516; *Metamorphosis* 8.176-82; Hyginus’s *Fabulae*, 39-43. P
5. **Legend of Hypermnestra, 2575-2597:** ‘Ypermystra, yongeste of hem alle. / To which child of hire natyvyte / To alle thewes goode yborn was she.’ Here the narrator discusses Hypermnestra’s nativity in relation to her fate. Venus and Jupiter were in conjunction and repressed evil influences from Mars, but Saturn held sway which ‘made hire for to deyen in prisoun’. B
6. **Legend of Hypermnestra, 2637-9:** ‘For al the good under the colde mone, / And what I mene, it shal be seyde right sone’. This is in the voice of Egistus speaking to Hypermnestra. It is part of his overture to the news that she must die. Rhyming ‘mone’ with ‘sone’ amplifies the totality of his love for his daughter, although ‘sone’ means ‘soon’ here, thus amplifying the pathos of the scene. Line 2638 is also a direct translation of Dante, *Inferno* 7.64. P / T

THE COMPLAINTS OF MARS & VENUS

1. **1-7:** ‘Lo, Venus, rysen among yon rowes rede.’ This is a fascinating proem, a chronographic description of spring spoken by a narrator to a flock of birds. C
2. **25-28:** ‘That woful Mars made atte departyng / Fro fresshe Venus in a morwenyng, / Whan Phebus with his firy torches rede / Ransaked every lover in hys drede.’ The bird-narrator introduces the subject that he will ‘synge’. O
3. **29-35:** ‘Whilom the thridde hevenes lord above’. Mars is lord of the third celestial sphere, and the planet is in conjunction with Venus, which is an allegory for Mars and Venus having a love affair. P
4. **45-46:** ‘Who syngeth now but Mars, that serveth thus / The faire Venus, causer of plesaunce?’ Aries is the chief domicile of Mars, thus he is powerful, and Venus may be near her exaltation near 27° Pisces. See *Exfrenon* 1.203. P

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| 5. | 50-56: ‘Thus be they knyght and regnen as in hevne’. This is a poetic description of a platic conjunction, working on multiple levels as I discuss in chapter 4. | P |
| 6. | 58: ‘Ye knowe wel my myschef in that place’. Taurus is an unfortunate sign for Mars, it is of opposite qualities to his house. See <i>Treatise</i> II.6. | P |
| 7. | 64-70: ‘She hath so gret compassioun of her knyght, / That dwelleth in solitude til she come’. A clever description of lovers awaiting a rendezvous, which also reflects the slower pace of Mars in the night sky (daily meridian transit rate of .5°, compared to Venus at 1°). | P |
| 8. | 72: ‘When they be mette ther may no tunge telle.’ Mars and Venus are in exact conjunction in 5° of Taurus. | P |
| 9. | 78-84: ‘Throgh Phebus, that was comen hastely / Within the paleys yates sturdily, / With torche in honed, of which the stremes bryghte / On Venus chambre knockeden ful lyghte.’ The lovers are interrupted by Phebus, or the sun enters the sign of Taurus and disrupts the conjunction. A wonderful synesthetic pun lies in the final rhyme of the stanza: it could mean to knock lightly on a door, or that the brightness of the sun obliterates the planets in the sky. | P |
| 10. | 85-91: ‘The chambre ther as ley this fresshe queen / Depeynted was with white boles grete’. This is again layered symbolism which can be imagined as a bedchamber decorated with murals of white bulls, or as the planets exiting the house of Taurus. There is humoral language here as well – Venus ‘nygh dreynt in teres wete’ refers to the traditional humoral associations of Venus with warm and wet attributes. | P / A |
| 11. | 92-98: ‘Up sterte Mars; hym liste not to slepe’. Mars exhibits his hot and dry humors here with ‘firi sparkes.’ | P |
| 12. | 106-112: ‘For she that hath thyn herte in governaunce / Is passed half the stremes of thin yën’. Complicated astrological terms serve chivalric purposes with phrases and terms such as ‘paleys,’ ‘governance,’ and ‘half the stremes.’ Venus is leaving faster than Mars. See Richard of Wallingford <i>Works</i> I: 562, 2:115. | P |
| 13. | 113-119: ‘Now fleeth Venus unto Cilenios tour’. Complexity continues in this stanza, thick with veiled astrological language. | P |

Venus moves into Gemini, and 'Cilenios tour' can have multiple definitions. See chapter 4 for an analysis of this passage.

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| 14. | 120-126: 'Derk was this cave and smoking as the helle; / Not but two pas within the yate his stod.' This stanza describes the cave into which Venus fled and shifts the focus to Mars. Marvelously rich language in this stanza with 'two pas' indicating 2° in Gemini, or simply two human steps. | P |
| 15. | 127-133: 'He passeth but o steyre in dayes two.' As Mars approaches the Sun he is weakened, and he can only move half as quickly as Venus. Imagined as a man this slowness is due to his 'hevy armure,' and as a planet Mars moves more slowly across the sky because of its orbit. | P |
| 16. | 134-140: 'That evere so wyd a compas ys my spere!' This is a lament from Mars. The phrase 'twelfte daye of April' is mentioned in the notes as referring to the day the sun enters Taurus, in which Mars remains at 21° on 12 April 1385. I contend this is too rigid an interpretation and far from certain that Chaucer had this in mind. | P |
| 17. | 141-147: 'Cilenius, rydinge in his chevache, / Fro Venus valaunse myghte his paleys se'. This stanza presents more complicated imagery in masked language. Mercury is in his domicile, Gemini, but the term 'valaunse' is highly debated without a firm definition, especially in this context. | P |
| 18. | 235: 'Hath offer wo then changed ys the mone.' Love and happiness change with time. | O |

A TREATISE ON THE ASTROLABE

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| 1. | Prologue, 87-108: 'The fourthe partie shal ben a theorike to declare the moevyng of the celestiall bodies with the causes.' The prologue lays out Chaucer's plan for the treatise which is never fully executed. In parts IV & V he intended to shift the focus from the practical parts of making calculations with an astrolabe to a greater view of the cosmos and its 'causes.' | O |
| 2. | I.8: 'Under the compas of thilke degrees ben writen the names of the 12 Signes'. Here Chaucer lists each of the zodiac constellations and how to find them on the incised degrees on an astrolabe. | O |

3. **I.17-18:** ‘The plate under the riet is discribed with 3 cercles, of whiche the leest is clepid the cercle of Cancre by cause that the heved of Cancre turnith evermo consentrik upon the same cercle.’ These sections describe how the visible heavens and stars relate to the rete of an astrolabe. O
4. **I.19-20:** ‘From the cenyth, as it semeth, there comen a maner croked strikes like to the clawes of a loppe, or elles like the werk of a womans calle, in kervyng overthwart the almykanteras.’ This is the first time ‘zenith’ (*cenyth*) appears in English, but here it refers to the azimuth. O
5. **I.21:** ‘The riet of thin Astrolabie with thy zodiak, shapen in manere of a net or of a lopweb after the olde descripcioun’. The zodiac acts as a framing device to understand the entirety of the sky and align instruments. This section discusses the meaning of the word ‘zodiak,’: ‘And this foreside hevenysshe zodiak is clepid the cercle of the signes, or the cercle of the bestes, or ellis for that the sterres that ben ther fixed ben disposed in signes of bestes or shape like bestes, or elles whan the planets ben under thilke signes thei causen us by her influence operaciouns and effects like the operaciouns of bestes.’ This is an important precis of Ptolemaic cosmology, explaining the relationship between the earth and the constellations. See Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos* I.2. O
6. **II.2:** ‘Put the ryng of thyn Astrelabie upon thy right thombe, and turne thi lift syde ageyn the light of the sonne; and remewe thy rewele up and doun til that the stremes of the sonne shine through bothe holes of thi rewle.’ This is a wonderful example of the physicality of the astrolabe and its purpose, ‘in this same wise maist thow knowe by night the altitude of the mone or of brighte sterres.’ O
7. **II.3:** ‘To knowe every tyme of the day by light of the sonne’. This is a step-by-step instruction on how to note the time from the position of the sun, written in such a way that clearly an astrolabe to hand is required. O
8. **II.4:** ‘The ascendent sothly, as wel in alle nativities as in questions and eleccions of tymes, is a thing which that these astrologiens gretly observen.’ Here astrology comes to the fore with a succinct description of how astrologers can use an astrolabe to erect nativity and election horoscopes. This is also the section including the famous phrase, ‘Natheles these ben observaunces of judicial O

matere and rytes of payens, in whiche my spirit hath no feith, ne knowing of her horoscopum.'

9. **II.6:** 'The nader of the sonne is thilke degree that is opposyt to the degre of the sonne, in the 7 signe, as thus: every degre of Aries by order is nadir to every degre of Libra by ordre, and Taurus to Scorpioun, Gemini to Sagittarie, Cancer to Capricorne, Leo to Aquarie, Virgo to Piscis.' This describes the signs and their opposition and the definition of the nadir. ○
10. **II.7:** 'But the day natural, that is to seyn 24 hours, is the revolucioun of the equinoxial with as mucche partie of the zodiak as the sonne of his propre moeving passith in the mene while.' This describes the meaning of an 'artificial day' in which the sun passes through each house of the zodiac. ○
11. **II.12:** 'Understand wel that evermo, fro the arisyng of the sonne til it go to reste, the nadir of the sonne shal shewe the houre of the planete; and fro that tyme forward al the night til the sonne arise, than shal the verrey degre of the sonne shewe the houre of the planete.' This is a description of how the revolution of the zodiac through the ecliptic works daily, and how to use an astrolabe to find the position of planets. ○
12. **II.14:** '*To knowe the degre of the sonne by thy ryet, for a maner curiosite.*' This explains how to make a mark on the meridional line at the sun's apex on a specific day and then how to match the rete to find which zodiacal house the sun is in, within 2°. This is one way to tell which zodiacal house the sun is in during daylight hours, compared to the traditional sun sign for each month 'by the sesoun of the yere.' ○
13. **II.15:** 'Loke which degrees ben ylike fer fro the hevedes of Cancer and Capricorne, and loke when the sonne is in eny of thilke degrees'. This section explains how the vernal and autumnal equinoxes have roughly equal amounts of daylight, and the summer solstice Cancer has the longest day compared to the winter solstice in Capricorn with the longest night. It also encourages the reader to use the astrolabe on each of these days to observe how the astrolabe reflects this information. ○
14. **II.16:** 'Understond wel that thy zodiak is departed in two halve circles, as fro the heved of Capricorne unto the heved of Cancer'. This describes how the zodiac is arranged on the rete. ○

15. **II.17-18:** ‘*To knowe the verrey degree of eny maner sterre*’. This describes how to find the longitude of a planet using the positions of known stars. O
16. **II.19:** ‘And tak god kep of this chapter of arisyng of celestiale bodies’. Stars will rise at different times according to the viewer’s latitude. O
17. **II.23:** ‘In som wynters nyght whan the firmament is cler and thikke sterred, wayte a tyme til that eny sterre fix sitte lyne-right perpendiculer over the pool artik, and cleped that sterre A’. This section describes how to find the altitude of the northern and southern poles by using two positions of observed stars. It also points to turning the mind toward astronomy by way of observation – wait for a dark winter night when the sky is ‘thikke sterred’ to make certain calculations. O
18. **II.26:** ‘Truste wel that by mediacioun of thilke ascensions these astrologiens, by her tables and her instruments, knowen verreily the ascensioun of every degre and minute in all the zodiak in the embelif cercle, as shal be shewed.’ This is an interesting passage encouraging Lewis to trust the information on the astrolabe and the work of past astronomers. O
19. **II.31:** ‘Thus maist thou understonde also the cenyth of eny sterre, in which partie he riseth.’ This section explains how to set the degree of the sun against the markings on the astrolabe, and from that find the azimuth of a star. Chaucer follows through with his promise to explain things twice, as evidenced here. O
20. **II.32:** ‘Considerere the tyme of the conjuncyoun by the kalender’. The new moon occurs when the sun and moon are in conjunction, and a full moon occurs when the sun is in opposition to the moon. Chaucer points the reader to the canon tables at the beginning of a calendar to use together with the astrolabe to make calculations: ‘Loke hou many hours thilke conjunccioun is fro the midday of the day precedent, as shewith by the canon of thy kalender.’ O
21. **II.34:** ‘*To knowe sothly the degre of the longitude of the mone, or of eny planete that hath no latitude for the tyme fro the ecliptik lyne.*’ See the notes in *Riverside* for a clear description of this operation. The last sentence in this passage is another example of how Chaucer relates using an astrolabe to everyday observations of the sky: ‘And *nota* that yf the mone shewe himself by light of day, than O

maist thou worche this same conclusioun by the sonne, as wel as by the fixe sterre.’ Beyond noting another way to make the same calculation, he is also encouraging the reader to notice when the moon is visible in daylight hours.

22. **II.35:** ‘Take the altitude of eny sterre that is clepid a planete, and note it wel; and take eke anon the altitude of any sterre fix that thou knowist, and note it wel also.’ This explains how to observe a planet in retrograde motion. ○
23. **II.39:** ‘The longitude of a climat is a lyne ymagined fro est to west ilike distant fro the equinoxiall.’ Chaucer shifts from assessing the position of celestial bodies to bodies on earth. This section describes how the position of the sun can indicate where the viewer is standing by longitude, taken in part from Sacrobosco. If Lewis can master this method, Chaucer ensures that his son can never be lost. ○
24. **II.40:** ‘Know by thin almenak the degre of the ecliptik of eny signe in which that the planete is rekned for to be, and that is clepid the degre of his longitude.’ Here Chaucer again points to supplementary materials as helpful tools, in this case an almanac. He further mentions a method which essentially adds a temporary mark to the rete using an auxiliary narrow metal ruler covered in wax like a wax tablet: ‘tho tok I and waxed my label in manere of a peire tables to receive distinctly the prickes of my compas.’ This is an example of how the astrolabe is a dynamic tool that can synergistically combine with other materials to produce data. ○
25. **II.40, part 2:** ‘And yif thou wilt pleye this craft with the arisyng of the mone, loke thou rekne wel hir cours houre by houre, for she ne dwellith not in a degre of hir longitude but litel while, as thow wel knowist.’ This is a continuation of the operations mentioned in part 1, although not every manuscript includes this section as mentioned in the *Riverside* notes. It is interesting to note the gendering of the moon – in Old English the noun *mōna* is masculine, and in Latin the noun *luna* is feminine. ○
26. **Supplementary Propositions 46:** ‘Bring furth than the label, and set the point therof in that same cost that the mone makith flod, and set thou there the degre of the mone according with the egge of the label.’ This portion takes for granted that the reader has mastered the skills outlined in the first section to predict the tides through careful annotation over time. By making marks on a wax *label* (ruler) concerning the tide, this is another way to augment an ○

astrolabe. John Reidy in the explanator notes from *Riverside Chaucer* notes that ‘This procedure seems pointless.’ It is not pointless if one records the times of high and low tide in concordance with the position of the moon and hour by the sun’s position in one location over the course of a year, which not only would demonstrate how these elements correspond to each other, but it would provide valuable knowledge of the tides specific to that location. It is also not pointless if one is attempting to calculate when to embark on a sea voyage, in which case the best hour to sail with the tide could be calculated a few days in advance.

GRAND TOTAL: 123

- Adornment: 15
- Corporeality: 24
- Chronographia: 16
- Play: 37
- Translation: 12
- O: 31

APPENDIX II: JANUARY AND FEBRUARY ICONOGRAPHY IN ILLUMINATED MS, c. 1100-1400 CE

Janus and Aquarius for January	Oxford: Bodleian Library, Auct. D.2.6. <i>Psalter-Anselm</i> , Med. Et Orat., fol. 2v-7r. 1100-1200
	Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale de France, lat. 238. <i>Psalter</i> , fol. 1r-6v. 1175-1225
	Besancon: Bibliothèque Municipale Ms. 54. <i>Psalter of Bonmont</i> , fol. 1r-6v. 1260
	Cambridge: Trinity College Library, B. 11. 4. <i>Psalter</i> , fol. 1r-VIv. 1250-1270
	Chantilly: Bibliothèque du château, 0009, 1695/9. <i>Ingeborg Psalter</i> , fol. 3v-9r. Attribution: Ingeborg Psalter Workshop. c. 1195
	Copenhagen: Det Kongelige Bibliothek, Gl. Kongl. 1606. <i>Psalter of Christina</i> , fol. 4r-9v. 1222-1240
	Stuttgart: Baden-Württemberg, Don. 186. <i>Psalter</i> , fol. 2r-7v. 1240-1260
	Hague: Koninklijke Bibliothek, 76 J 18. <i>Breviary</i> , fol. 201r-215v. 1275
	London: British Library, Add. 38116. <i>Huth Psalter</i> , fol. 2r-7v. 1280-1290
	London: British Library, Add. 50000. <i>Oscott Psalter</i> , fol. 1r-6v. 1265-1270
	London: British Library, Add, 62925. <i>Rutland Psalter</i> , fol. 1r-6v. 1260
	London: British Library, Lansdowne 420. <i>Psalter</i> , fol. 2r-6v. 1220-1230
	London: British Library, Lansdowne 431. <i>Psalter</i> , fol. 4r-9v. 1220-1230
	London: British Library, Roy.I.D.X., <i>Psalter</i> , fol. 9r-14v. 1200-1220
	Madrid: Biblioteca Nacional, Vit.23-10. <i>Hours</i> , fol. 29v-40v. 1200-1300
	Manchester: John Rylands Library, Latin MS 117, 1250-1300
	Melk: Stiftsbibliothek, 1903. <i>Wurzburg Psalter</i> , fol. 1r-6v. 1255-1260
	New York: Morgan Library, M. 92. <i>Hours</i> , fol. 15r-20v. 1225
	New York: Morgan Library, M. 103. <i>Reading Psalter</i> , fol. 4r-8v. 1250
	New York: Morgan Library, M. 153. <i>Psalter-Hours</i> , fol. 1v-12v. 1228-1234
	New York: Morgan Library, M. 283. <i>Psalter</i> , fol. 1v-7r. Attribution: Soissons Workshop. 1228-1247
	New York: Morgan Library, M. 729. <i>Psalter-Hours of Yolande de Soissons</i> , fol. 8r-13v. 1275-1300

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Master. England, probably Oxford, ca. 1325-1330

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d'Evreux, Queen of France*, fol. 1v-12v. Artist: Jean Pucelle. 1324-1328

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Male figure warming by the fire with Aquarius for January

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Cambridge: Fitzwilliam Museum, 288. *Psalter of Lambert le Bègue* fol. 7r-12v. 1255-1265

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London: British Library, Add. 18144. Psalter, fol. 2v-8r

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Male figure feasting with Aquarius for January

London: British Library, Add. 44874. Evesham Psalter, fol. 2r-5v. after 1246-1325

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**Janus with
Capricorn in
December**

Oxford: Bodleian Library, Lat. Liturge.e.1., Psalter, fol. 3r-8v. Made for a lay patron (?) for use in Hildesheim: evidence of the calendar and litany. 1230

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