

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

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Seeing Time:

Boethius and the Ethics of Perspective in  
Chaucer's Dream Visions and *Troilus and Criseyde*

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requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in English

by

Gillian Adler

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**ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION**

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University of California, Los Angeles 2016

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This dissertation argues that Chaucer's early poems pluralize subjective experiences of time to challenge the singular, authoritative temporal models Chaucer inherited from antiquity, and to theorize about how the past serves the present. It emphasizes the distinctive deployment of anachronism and the philosophical intertext of Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*, as these formal features help Chaucer entangle past, present, and future dimensions in his narrative worlds to different ends, sometimes to highlight the virtues of remembering and forgetting, and at other moments, to solicit distrust of established historical and etiological texts.

Anachronism in Chaucer's works confronts readers with the simultaneity of past and present temporalities. Through anachronism, Chaucer familiarizes his readers with history, eliciting their sympathy with characters whose visions of time are fragmented by virtue of their position within the text. However, anachronism also links his readers' perspective to an omniscient eye by establishing a sense of temporal estrangement, which incites recognition of

the human individual's position in the scheme of time and encourages readers to make critical judgments about the uses of history. The fantastical realms of Chaucer's dream visions appear to transcend the confines of everyday human experience, and the world of ancient Troy seems distant from medieval London, but the constant interplay between past and present in all challenges the conventional ways in which readers and characters "see time."

Chaucer appropriates the notion and vocabulary of "seeing time"—wherein the literal ability to see determines the metaphorical insight into time—from the *Boece*, his Middle English adaptation of Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*. This dissertation argues that the metaphorical discourse of sight permeates Chaucer's poems, but beyond the religious parameters of Boethius's Latin original, displacing its transcendent authority. This work bases consolation on the premise that the human subject can use distance to ethicize the way in which he sees time, transforming the fragmented vision of time as a collision of temporal moments into a divine-like perspective in which past, present, and future appear as a continuous whole. Chaucer's poems show how the distant and idealized Boethian perspective helps to shape the past into an ethical dimension through which to understand the present and future. Chaucer's Boethius exposes the fragmented nature of the human perspective, which prevents characters within the narrative from foreseeing the macrocosmic patterns of rise and fall of human experience, and which forces readers to confront their own limited vision of time. Nevertheless, these poems also highlight the universality and adaptability of the *Boece*, occasionally validating the temporally-entrenched perspective and proliferating constructions of time. This dissertation thus seeks not to trace Chaucer's adoption of a single specific Boethian philosophical position, but rather to emphasize how multi-functional, plural, and disruptive Boethius is in Chaucer's works, and to argue that reading these works through the Boethian lens pluralizes ways of understanding time.

Finally, this dissertation pays special attention to anachronism and Chaucer's Boethian intertext, rather than to explicit content and allusion, in order to expose the profoundly political and social nature of Chaucer's early works. Scholars have tended to look for evidence of Chaucer's stake in political claims in his late *oeuvre*, the *Canterbury Tales*, given the obliqueness of direct historical references in his early works. However, anachronism and the Boethian intertext in the dream visions and *Troilus and Criseyde* reveal the pressure that Chaucer places on his contemporary readers to reflect upon their own position within the historical cycle. Particularly in *Troilus and Criseyde*, Chaucer blurs the temporal distinction between past and present to reinforce the political recursiveness that haunts Ricardian London and invites identification with an idealized Boethian perspective that demands distance from the political chaos of Troy and London alike. Simultaneously, these techniques resist the moralizing tendencies of the panoptic perspective and advocate the idea of making virtue out of necessity. By emphasizing the dialectical movement between positions of nearness and farness, Chaucer highlights his complicated relationship to his historical place and time. He ultimately suggests that he settles on the value of a loving distance from his city and time, and on a viewing position protected from the tumult of a politically-charged urban London and yet never fully aloof from its situatedness and chaos.

**THE DISSERTATION OF GILLIAN ADLER IS APPROVED.**

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2016

*To my parents*

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I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, who have supported my intellectual curiosities since I was very young and whose encouragement of my memory games undoubtedly shaped my interest in medieval mnemonics. While reading inspired my passion for literary study, my parents gave me the determination to pursue my formal education in English without any hesitation that I would succeed. The love I receive from my parents, my siblings William, Elizabeth, and Daniel, and my dog Hunter, reminds me of the warm and unconditional community I have even on the most solitary days of research and writing.

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## Introduction

*Now God knows all contingent things not only as they are in their causes, but also as each one of them is actually in itself. And although contingent things become actual successively, nevertheless God knows contingent things not successively, as they are in their own being, as we do, but simultaneously.*  
- Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*<sup>1</sup>

In the *Prima Pars* of the *Summa Theologica*, Thomas Aquinas establishes the classical idea of divine timelessness. From God's omniscient point of view, the events of the past, present, and future occur simultaneously. His perspective discerns no ontological difference between the time at which Aquinas's teacher Albertus Magnus writes his commentaries on Peter Lombard's *Magister Sententiarum* and the whole of eternity; God's eye envisions all temporal moments concomitantly. Aquinas explains that, while God sees all events at once (an idea that Augustine earlier conveys through his aphoristic phrase, "Your Today is eternity")<sup>2</sup>, human beings perceive events in succession, each contingent upon the state of the prior event, or, paradoxically, *ex nihilo*, by which events occur without sufficient cause.

Chaucer evokes Aquinas's theory of perspectivism in his dream visions and *Troilus and Criseyde*, in which he deploys anachronisms that activate his readers' divine-like ability to perceive the simultaneity of temporalities.<sup>3</sup> By mixing elements and characters from past and present, most notably classical antiquity and the medieval present, and depicting them together within a single narrative frame, Chaucer rewards his readers with a distance that his characters

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<sup>1</sup> "Deus autem cognoscit omnia contingentia, non solum prout sunt in suis causis, sed etiam prout unumquodque eorum est actu in seipso. Et licet contingentia fiant in actu successive, non tamen Deus successive cognoscit contingentia, prout sunt in suo esse, sicut nos, sed simul." Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, ed. Piero Caramello (Rome: Marietti, 1952-53). The English translation comes from Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica: Volume 1-Part 1*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Cosimo, 2007), Question 14, Article 13.

<sup>2</sup> "Hodiernus tuus aeternitas." Augustine, *Augustine: Confessions*, with commentary by James M. O'Donnell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992). The English translation comes from Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 11.13.16.

<sup>3</sup> By "perspectivism," I refer not to Nietzsche's philosophical theory as set out in *Joyful Wisdom*, but rather to the general idea that perspective, or point of view, shapes a particular understanding of the outer world; in this case, perspective determines a sense of time.

chiefly lack. While this distance enables Chaucer's readers to make critical judgments about the relationship between past, present, and future, Chaucer's characters fail to see events from a position beyond time, and thus appear less able to make useful connections between temporalities. Even if his characters' isolated meditations on destiny or the passage of time reflect some version of temporal consciousness, their entrenchment in narrative time blinds them to the patterns of historical repetition. Chaucer does not emphasize characters' fragmented perspectives only to moralize about the limitations of earthly experience in the tradition of *contemptus mundi* narrative. Instead, by highlighting the perspectival difference between characters and readers, he effectively contrasts senses and experiences of time, enabling him to theorize about the role history has in shaping individual consciousness, as well as the more varied effects the past can have on the present.

Some critics have said that the Middle Ages lacked a sense of historical distance and nuance. Gabrielle Spiegel defends the study of medieval historiography by calling attention to "the litany of errors of which the practice of historiography in the Middle Ages stands accused," including among them the "lack of sense of anachronism."<sup>4</sup> Indeed, Margreta de Grazia explores the Renaissance historians' idea that it was only in the Renaissance that thinkers developed a sophisticated understanding of historical change and anachronism, while authors and artists in the Middle Ages used anachronisms in such a way as to make history appear "uniform."<sup>5</sup> To historians, including the art historian Erwin Panofsky, "anachronisms abounded but were not

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<sup>4</sup> Gabrielle Spiegel, *The Past as Text: The Theory and Practice of Medieval Historiography* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 100. Lee Patterson also notes that it is "a mistake to assent too quickly to the common proposition that the Middle Ages lacked a historical sense" and would be better "to see the medieval historical consciousness as always at issue at times emerging toward an authentic apprehension of temporality and periodization, at other times retreating under the pressure of various ideologies toward reification and idolization," in *Negotiating the Past: The Historical Understanding of Medieval Literature* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 198.

<sup>5</sup> Margreta de Grazia, "Anachronism," in *Cultural Reformations: Medieval and Renaissance in Literary History*, eds. Brian Cummings and James Simpson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 29.

detected, not in the visual arts and not in textual criticism.”<sup>6</sup> However, this dissertation argues against the idea that medieval authors necessarily deployed anachronism erroneously and unconsciously. For medieval authors and especially Chaucer, the past does not flow into the present so seamlessly as to suggest “a continuous tradition with *Latinitas*”<sup>7</sup>; although Chaucer interweaves the past and the present, rather than declaring a break between his late-fourteenth-century world and what came prior, his poems suggest the functionality of anachronism.

Moreover, Chaucer’s anachronisms work deliberately and tactically to different ends in the dream visions and *Troilus and Criseyde*. The characters in these works do not belong to any single temporality, but rather are part of a heterogeneous spatial and temporal experience evocative of Michel Foucault’s heterotopia.<sup>8</sup> Chaucer presents in a single frame incongruous times and spaces, which change across Chaucer’s poems depending on the theory of time and sense of the past he espouses. At times, the intermingling of temporalities softens and makes more palatable pasts that otherwise seem distant, emphasizing cultural relativity. In an anachronistic scene, Chaucer’s readers are able to identify the subtleties of cultural and material details, such as customs, clothing, language, and architecture, and thus better access and enjoy the ancient world of Troy and the surreal dream worlds. Anachronisms function so effectively in the dream visions and historical epic because these are genres that allow Chaucer to represent time creatively. In the dream visions, characters transcend the confines of everyday experience and the framework of linear time. In the medievalized world of Troy in *Troilus and Criseyde*, characters play courtly lovers in an ancient city of pagan customs, never based fully in

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<sup>6</sup> Margreta de Grazia, “Anachronism,” 29.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias,” trans. Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics* 16 (1986): 22-27.

contemporary or ancient lived experience.<sup>9</sup> These narrative domains contrast the world of the frame-narrative of the *Canterbury Tales*, in which Chaucer's pilgrims, a cross-section of London society, are rooted in his material world and community, and in which Chaucer implies that he is bound to a particular sequence and order.

But Chaucer's playful use of time in his poetic narratives does not preclude his more thoughtful idea of history as purposeful. The flexibility Chaucer has in representing time in the dream visions and *Troilus and Criseyde* ultimately helps him to stimulate an ethical reading experience for members of his audience. While anachronisms help to familiarize Chaucer's readers with his narrative worlds, more often they alert his readers to jarring temporal disjunctions to invite them to pursue the ramifications of a different historical perspective. Shifting his readers from a position of historical nearness to a position of distance, Chaucer's deployment of anachronism implicates the present by actively engaging his readers in the process of historical mediation. In a sense, Chaucer characterizes antiquity as Paul Zumthor characterizes the Middle Ages: inclusive of "a past that is both close and distant, foreign but familiar," and "material but also spectral."<sup>10</sup> As a result of instilling an experience of both familiarity and estrangement, Chaucer's anachronisms ultimately give his readers an ideal perspective for discerning and constructing a new temporally-informed ethics.

The ethical questions generated by anachronisms are varied. For instance, while Chaucer's characters have limited insight into historical patterns, his readers are frequently invited to consider their own position in the scheme of time. In addition, anachronisms confound

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<sup>9</sup> C.S. Lewis argues that Chaucer "medievalized" Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato*, his account of Troy, in *Troilus and Criseyde* by introducing the conventions and principles of "courtly love," in "What Chaucer really did to *Il Filostrato*," *Essays and Studies* 17 (1932): 56-75.

<sup>10</sup> Paul Zumthor, *Speaking of the Middle Ages*, trans. Sarah White (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 28-9.

authoritative teleologies of progress, as represented in the works of Virgil and Cicero, and problematize the political work done by narratives of historical destination that pull time toward the future. Anachronisms also break obsessive repetitive patterns and interrupt the melancholic eddies elicited by sorrowful characters in Chaucer's poems; thus, they challenge the idea of time as stasis and stagnation, as well as narratives that pull time toward the past. In both circumstances, the explicit alternations between past and present ground Chaucer's works in the earthly rather than the transcendent, denying the dare—posed by Boethius and Dante—to escape into eschatology and imagine celestial worlds.

Furthermore, despite the analogy I draw between the readers' viewpoint in Chaucer's works and God's omniscient eye in Aquinas's perspectival model at the beginning of this chapter, Chaucer consistently reminds his readers that beyond the reading experience is a historical reality in which their vision is actually fragmented and their sense of the future limited to conjecture. While the readers occupy a distanced position in which they can oversee narrative time and observe past and present simultaneously, they—like the characters—belong to an earthly time and thus are profoundly unlike God. Chaucer uses the technique of anachronism not to celebrate the readers' momentary aspect of divinity, but rather to make them participate in a process of learning through the engagement with time. Ultimately, Chaucer's readers, not his characters, undergo the educational journey by which they learn to put the past in the service of the present. In *Troilus and Criseyde*, specifically, Chaucer reifies anachronism into a political tool for his readers that encourages them to consider the implications of seeing the past in the present and future. Overall, anachronisms prove more than an unexpected feature of Chaucer's

historical consciousness or an indication that Chaucer's understanding of the past encompasses fictional texts.<sup>11</sup>

The mixing of elements and characters from past and present temporalities in Chaucer's narratives calls attention to the process of learning how to "see time" ethically, but it is more than anachronisms in these works that elicit a useful vision of temporality. This dissertation argues that Chaucer's exploration of the experience of ethicizing one's vision significantly derives from a crucial source-text, Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*, some version of which Chaucer translated into Middle English in the *Boece* in the same years that he was composing his dream visions and *Troilus and Criseyde*.<sup>12</sup> In the *Boece*, sight, as the highest sense in the Platonic imagination, determines Boethius's metaphorical insight into God. Because the heightened consciousness of divine knowledge, or providence, indicates a clearer understanding of mortal time and transcendence, the literal ability to see also represents a valid mode of perceiving time. While Boethius less explicitly addresses the use of the past for the present than Augustine and Aquinas do, the basis of Boethian consolation is that the suffering subject can alter his vision to live more wisely in the present, assured by the prospect of a heavenly *telos*. The *Boece* resembles Augustine's and Aquinas's teaching on time in highlighting the pivotal role that memory has in

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<sup>11</sup> This claim counters not only Renaissance historical scholarship but also Morton W. Bloomfield's claim that there is little evidence for a sense of history in Chaucer's works written prior to *Troilus and Criseyde*, in "Chaucer's Sense of History," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 51 (1952): 305.

<sup>12</sup> The translation's primary sources include Boethius's *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, but also Jean de Meun's early-fourteenth-century Old French translation (*Li Livres de confort de philosophie*), and glosses from commentary traditions, though there has not always been scholarly consensus on the degree to which Chaucer relied on each of these sources. Chaucer himself acknowledges differences in texts in his gloss in Book 2, Pr. 1, 40-1: "But natheles some bookes han the texte thus: forsothe sche hath forsaken the, ne ther nys no man siker that sche ne hath nat forsake," in *Boece* in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987). According to Tim William Machan, "the *Boece* does not contain any internal evidence of the date of its composition, but it is widely accepted that 1380, just before the putative composition of the *Knight's Tale* and the Boethian poems, is the most likely time," in *Sources of the Boece*, ed. Tim William Machan with the assistance of A. J. Minnis (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 2005), 3.

the conception of prudence.<sup>13</sup> In the *Boece*, Lady Philosophy uses the discourse of the outward gaze, drawing on Platonic extramission theory, to express Boethius's understanding of God as He exists beyond Boethius's self. However, he also constructs seeing as an inward experience, presenting the clarification of vision as analogous to the process of Platonic anamnesis. In this form of spiritual recollection, the individual can recover the memory of his origin in God, rather than indulge in the earthly and historical memory of his position among politicians. Lady Philosophy advises Boethius as follows:

For yif thow remembre of what cuntre thow art born, it nys nat governyd by emperoures, ne by governement of multitude, as weren the cuntrees of hem of Atthenes; but o lord and o kyng, and that is God, that is lord of thi cuntre, whiche that rejoisseth hym of the duellynge of his citezeens, and nat for to putten hem in exil.<sup>14</sup>

Lady Philosophy spatializes Boethius's spiritual errancy, suggesting that he has strayed from his native country through the misuse of his memory. She offers a remedy by not only activating his powers of recollection, but also pluralizing his sense of the past: she tells Boethius to overlook a political history constituted by earthly emperors and crowds, in order to remember the more important lord and king, God. Lady Philosophy uses similar terminology to characterize these authority figures, but ultimately differentiates between the history of mortal rulership, which has contributed to his sense of oppression, and the memory of transcendent authority, which has created him.

Since Boethius admits, in his pre-transformation state, “dreyrynesse hath dulled my memorie,” Lady Philosophy's mission lies in precipitating Boethius's engagement with history

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<sup>13</sup> In an analysis of *De inventione*, Mary Carruthers writes that, for Aquinas, “Prudence comprehends not only all human knowledge but also temporality... its parts are temporally related, memory being of what is past; intelligence of what is; foresight of what is to come,” in *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 83.

<sup>14</sup> Chaucer, *Boece*, 1, Pr. 5, 9-12.

and understanding of the relationship between past, present, and future dimensions.<sup>15</sup> She seeks to make Boethius recognize that, while God possesses a total consciousness of time, human beings made properly in the image of God should occupy a comparable consciousness. As Norman Klassen writes, “one participates in the divine vision by recognizing personal limitations and coming to terms with the human place in the divine scheme of things.”<sup>16</sup> As demonstrated by the citation above, Lady Philosophy deploys spatial metaphors that help Boethius distance himself from mortal experience—that is, return to his true home from the exile of earthly life—so that he can gain a divine-like perspective.

In the final book of the *Boece*, Lady Philosophy points to the effectiveness of her teaching and the success of Boethius’s transformation by dominating the conversation she has with him. She resolves the dialectic by eliding Boethius’s voice of complaint and inquiry, collapsing his very persona with her own. This occurs, for instance, in Book 5, Prose 3, when Boethius expresses his frustration over the timeless philosophical paradox concerning the existence of free will in a universe governed and foretold by Providence. In response, and to cure his frustration, Lady Philosophy argues that divine foreknowledge, which differs from necessity, does not preclude human freedom, and that not all events occur because God destines them to occur.

Lady Philosophy more effectively demystifies the paradox through her discussion of the temporal-perspectival difference between God and human beings. Just as Aquinas theorized, beyond the human scheme of time, God conceives of past, present, and future as a continuous whole, envisioning human history as continuous, perhaps even uniform, with human present and

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<sup>15</sup> Chaucer, *Boece*, 1, Pr. 6, 41.

<sup>16</sup> Norman Klassen, *Chaucer on Love, Knowledge and Sight* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1995), 15.

future. Lady Philosophy prefaces her solution to the problem of Providence and free will by explaining the heavenly perspective and the nature of eternity in similar terms:

Eternite...is parfit possessioun and al togidre of lif interminable; and that schewethe more cleerly by the comparysoun or collacioun of temporel thinges. For alle thing that lyveth in tyme, it is present and procedith fro preteritz into futures (that is to seyn, fro tyme passed into tyme comynge), ne ther nis nothing established in tyme that mai enbrasen togidre al the space of his lif.<sup>17</sup>

According to Lady Philosophy, in eternity is infinite life, and from within it God perceives temporalities in perfect simultaneity. However, this perspective also represents the perfected gaze that Lady Philosophy wants for Boethius, who, as a result of being entrenched in earthly time, occupies a viewing position that prevents him from comprehending temporalities simultaneously, and simply from seeing the future: “thilke thing that suffreth temporel condicioun...ne enbraseth it nat the space of the lif al togidre it nat the space of the lif al togidre; for it ne hath nat the futuris (that ne ben nat yit), ne it hath no lengere the preteritz (that ben idoon or ipassed).”<sup>18</sup> Like all human beings, subject to the temporal condition, Boethius lacks an understanding of the eternal present, which Chaucer’s gloss—indicated by parentheses—emphasizes by stressing the fluidity between past and future temporalities, between “tyme passed” and “tyme comynge.” Still, while the *Boece* makes little indication that Boethius ever achieves an ideal vision, the text repeatedly invokes the divine gaze as a reminder of the different points of view determining temporal consciousness. The higher vision of intelligence sees more clearly and as such, Lady Philosophy implores Boethius to see what he cannot see, to understand the limitations of human sight in the context of divine foresight. The *Boece* does not end with a

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<sup>17</sup> Chaucer, *Boece*, 5, Pr. 6, 13-22.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 27-8, 35-9.

view unto Boethius's actual transcendence<sup>19</sup>; however, with Lady Philosophy's increased command of the dialogue, she hypothetically changes the way in which Boethius "sees time." The ending of the *Boece* suggests that Boethius develops his temporal consciousness—specifically, of how God's eternal present does not preclude the possibility of human free will—and that his perspective aligns more so with Lady Philosophy's than with that of the initial Boethius presented in the earliest passages of Book I. The culmination of Lady Philosophy's teaching in her discussion of "seeing time" indicates not only Boethius's educational process, but also his spiritual progress and reconfiguration of his original temporal framework.

Book V features Lady Philosophy's climactic demystification of the philosophical paradox most worrisome to Boethius, but the dialogue in the *Boece* prior to this moment mainly draws out Boethius's experience of blurry and fragmented vision, which serves as a metaphor for his lack of divine understanding. Again, because this divine understanding implies a sense of the operation of time, Boethius also suggests that vision is a metaphor for temporal consciousness. This metaphor is introduced at the outset of Book 1, which reveals an image of Boethius's tears and even blindness, representing a failed vision or uneducated perspective. Prompting the arrival of Lady Philosophy, Boethius's impaired vision requires a doctor's diagnosis so that he can see that he is plagued by spiritual misunderstanding and abuses his placebo painkillers, the strumpet muses. The allegorical figure arrives at her student's beside to alleviate his sense of despair by feeding him "medicine"; the second prose section of Book I opens: "'But tyme is now,' quod she, 'of medicine more than of compleynte.'"<sup>20</sup> Lady Philosophy's cure is linked to her

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<sup>19</sup> Boethius never actualizes a state of transcendence within the *Boece*, as Dante does in *Paradiso*. Chad D. Schrock poses the question, "What is consoling about an open-ended narrative form that, by definition, produces neither satisfaction nor understanding?" in *Consolation in Medieval Narrative: Augustinian Authority and Open Form* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 6.

<sup>20</sup> Chaucer, *Boece*, 1, Pr. 2, 1.

optometric knowledge. Suggesting that time can be available for either healing or complaint, Lady Philosophy decides that time should be a means to transforming Boethius's perspective, rather than an opportunity for him to prolong his indulgent expression of sorrow over what is lost and mutable. Lady Philosophy wishes to remap Boethius's consciousness of time by expanding his field of vision through distance, and by unembedding his perspective from earthly temporality. Administering "medicine" is a practice in instilling in her student an atemporal and providential perspective with which to confront the vicissitudes of earthly fortune.

Lady Philosophy intertwines the discourses of healing and "seeing time" from the moment she enters Boethius's cell, continually reinforcing the prospect of consolation through philosophical exploration. When Lady Philosophy confronts Boethius with lessons on the inconstant nature of Fortune in Book II, she suggests that Fortune *nourished* Boethius from the time he emerged from his mother's womb.<sup>21</sup> Earlier, she implies that the curative process, dependent on "the manere of [his] curacioun," will begin with lighter medicines and later will test the patient's strength with stronger medicines.<sup>22</sup> Once more referring to time as a way to stress the urgency of Boethius's treatment, Lady Philosophy tells Boethius, "But now is tyme that thou drynke and ataste some softe and delitable thynges, so that whanne thei ben entred withynne the, it mowe maken wey to strengere drynkes of medycines."<sup>23</sup> Finally, in Book V, when the stakes of "seeing time" are highest, Lady Philosophy claims she will "usen a litel

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<sup>21</sup> Speaking from Fortune's point of view, she says, "Whan that nature brought the forth out of thi modir wombe, I resceyved the nakid and nedy of alle thynges, and I norissched the with my riches, and was redy and ententyf thurwe my favour to sustene the – and that maketh the now inpatient ayens me," Chaucer, *Boece*, 2, Pr. 2, 15-20.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 1, Pr. 6, 3-4.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 2, Pr. 1, 37-41.

men doun ye cheare. The whyche only  
 ne affliggen nor his lordshes. Why no  
 remedies. but ye wolde fede a newliche  
 hen why slyte vanyng. Forsoye yse  
 den yo pat why pomes i pythynge of  
 calenz or affectiōns whiche pat den no  
 yng fructefull nor profitāble dethroye  
 ye comes plenteuous of frutes of reson.  
 For ye holden ye heeres of men i usase.  
 but ye ne delynce not folli fro mala  
 dyse. but if ye mylles hadde whydralben fro  
 me why zoure flateries. and vnkompnis  
 i vnytable man as men ben wont to  
 fynde commechy anonces ye people. I wolde  
 whene suffre ye lasse greuously. For why  
 in whyche vnytable man myne entea  
 tes weren no yng endamaged. But ze  
 whydralben me yis man pat have ben no  
 trashed in studies or scoles of Eleucia i  
 of achadmiris in grece. But sope nobl  
 myer whye ze more maydenes whyche  
 ben slyte til it be at ye laste i suffrey  
 yis man to be cured i heled by myne  
 nuses. pat is to say by nothul sciences.  
 And yis yis compaynyne of mylles. i  
 blamed caiten vropyty ye chere aduysand  
 to ye erpe i schelbyng by rednesse i  
 schame ye pasteden forabstyn ye puelche  
 fild. And i of ishom ye hixt plonged  
 i teres was derked so pat i ne myxt not  
 knowe what pat isoman was of so ipe  
 nal auctorite. I lye at a belid a alonad.  
 i castle my hixt aduine m to ye erpe.  
 i bygan fülle forto abnde what seche wolde  
 done afterwarde. No come seche nere i  
 sette hixt aduine vpon ye vterest corner  
 of my bedde. i seche byholdyng my chere  
 pat was cast to ye erpe hem i stonons  
 of whyngs coplenede why pise wouder i  
 i schal sey ye pbeacon of my pougt.  
**Noni pcepta uerla profimū.**  
**A**llas hoit ye pougt of mān dremt  
 An ouer walyng depnesse dulle

i folety hys wre derensse. myntyme to  
 gone m to folety ne derknesse as ofre as  
 hys anous bines wher why oute me  
 sure. i is dymen to i fro why woldy why  
 des. This man pat slytyme was fre to whyd  
 ye haene was open i knolben i was wont  
 to gone m haue whyche papes. i say ye lizt  
 nesse of ye red summe. i sue ye steres of ye  
 cold moone. i whyche sterte i haene vley  
 wandryng rades yfit by dmerle speres.  
 This man ouer conuert hadde cophendid al  
 yis by noumbe of acountyng m astro  
 noumye. And ouer yis he was wont to  
 seche ye causes wheremes ye sommyng why  
 des moeuen i bishen ye snore wāter of ye  
 see. i what spirt tynney ye lhable haene.  
 i why ye sterte rusep oute of ye reced rest.  
 to falle m ye bestren waibes. and whyat  
 attemyxy ye luthy houres of ye fwyte  
 somer sekon pat hixt i aparyte ye  
 erpe why colene floures. And why mayer  
 pat plenteuous antyne m fülle zores  
 flety why hem grapes. And eke yis mā  
 was wont to telle ye dmerles causes of  
 nature pat weren vhyde. Alas nobl hixt  
 he enupid of lizt of hys pougt. i hys nekke  
 is salid why hem cheynes i berey hixt there  
 enclined aduine for ye greet whyz. and is  
 constrymed to lobe on foule erpe.  
*Boethius in consolacion philosophice*  
**Sed medicine inquit tempus est.**  
**B**ut tyme is now qd seche of me  
 diane more yen of compleynte.  
 Forsoye yen seche entending to  
 me wāde why al ye lotyng of hixt euen  
 land. But not you he qd seche pat slytyme  
 i nothide why my mylke i fōdre why my  
 meetes were alcape i comen to corage  
 of a pfit man. Certys i zat ye whyche  
 armures pat zit you ya seif ne hadde  
 first castle hem alway. ye schylden haue  
 defendid ye m whyer nesse pat mān not  
 be ouer comen. Knollest you me not.

Boethius

Figure 1: London, British Library Add. MS 10340, fol. 4r. In the right-hand column, the scribe has used a red rubric to write the Latin, "Sed medicine inquit tempus (est)," a header to Book I, Prosa 2, that links medicine to time, and has used a three-line initial to begin the Middle English translation, "But tyme is now q(uo)d sche of medicine more pen of compleynte," initiating Boethius's curative process.

strengere medicynes.”<sup>24</sup> The process in which Lady Philosophy’s medicine cures Boethius corresponds to the metaphorical clarification of Boethius’s vision and reorientation of his gaze toward true goods, rather than mutable goods, and thus toward eternal bliss. Notably, as indicated by the increasing strength of the medicine over the course of Boethius’s spiritual and philosophical journey, this process is gradual. Lady Philosophy’s curative intervention steadily transforms Boethius’s perception of his cell as a place of solitary exile into the site of education and freedom from earthly mutability.

The Boethian discourses of sickness and healing, and of the contrasting visions of time, are significant to this dissertation because, while the *Boece* is Chaucer’s translation, it also represents a work with poetic purpose of its own, as well as a significant source-text for Chaucer’s poems. Examining the *Boece* and Chaucer’s early poems side-by-side particularly highlights Chaucer’s Boethian philosophy and vocabulary of perspective and temporality. Indeed, Chaucer’s definition of translator was more flexible than the modern idea of it. In the *Legend of Good Women*, Chaucer writes, referring to himself as author:

He may translate a thyng in no malyce,  
But for he useth bokes for to make,  
And taketh non hed of what matere he take,  
Therefore he wrot the Rose and ek Crisseyde,  
Of innocence, and nyste what he seyde.<sup>25</sup>

Here, Chaucer suggests that both his Middle English *Romance of the Rose* and *Troilus and Criseyde* represent translations, rather than original works of literature. Given that *Troilus and Criseyde*, in particular, exceeds the modern definition of a translation through its originality, precisely what Chaucer means by naming his *Boece* a “translacion” in his “Retraction” at the end

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<sup>24</sup> Chaucer, *Boece*, 2, Pr. 5, 1-2.

<sup>25</sup> Chaucer, *Legend of Good Women*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), G, 341-45.

of the *Canterbury Tales* must also be considered.<sup>26</sup> Tim William Machan's scholarship has invited re-examinations of the *Boece* as a work that in itself deserves attention. Making his argument that the *Boece* and *Troilus and Criseyde* are two different expressions of the same process of writing, Machan poses the question: "did translation for Chaucer exist on a continuum?"<sup>27</sup> Indeed, the generic term of "translation" is problematic given the conventional license that medieval authors took in the act of translation and given that Chaucer was working with more than one source-text in writing the *Boece*. In *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages: Academic Traditions and Vernacular Texts*, Rita Copeland discusses how the Middle Ages and medieval vernacular translations, specifically, redefined the discourses of classical authors. Chaucer evokes Copeland's argument when he rejects the rhetoric of fidelity in translating, displacing to some extent the transcendent authority of the Latin *Consolation* and creating his own version of an academic source-text or "academic reference" for his poetry.<sup>28</sup>

Reassessing the significance and function of Chaucer's translation, this dissertation seeks to show how Chaucer's glosses and his choice of vocabulary indicate a process of active and interpretive adaptation, particularly with regard to ideas of time. In a similar vein, in Eleanor Johnson's article, "Chaucer and the Consolation of Prosimetrum," she argues, "Chaucer

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<sup>26</sup> Chaucer, "Retraction," in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987).

<sup>27</sup> Tim William Machan, *Techniques of Translation: Chaucer's Boece* (Norman, OK: Pilgrim Books, 1985), 131.

<sup>28</sup> Rita Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages: Academic Traditions and Vernacular Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 143. Elizabeth Elliot's recent book, *Remembering Boethius: Writing Aristocratic Identity in Late Medieval French and English Literatures* (Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2012) also argues that the late medieval literatures that adapt from Boethius's *Consolation* "do not present themselves as translations or commentaries on the *Consolation*, but instead reformulate its teachings, locating it within the cultural context and current idiom of the later Middle Ages... effecting the displacement of their authoritative source," 16. For a comprehensive study of translation in the Middle Ages, see Zrinka Stahuljak, "An Epistemology of Tension: Translation and Multiculturalism," *The Translator* 10 (2004): 33-57.

recognized and amplified time's centrality in his translation."<sup>29</sup> Time helps by making "man's imperfect knowledge of causation easier to bear" and offers consolation<sup>30</sup>; Chaucer's use of glossing in the discussions of time in the *Boece* "strengthens [Lady] Philosophy's implicit claim that man should take comfort in time, by reminding us how time feels; he takes an abstract idea and concretizes it."<sup>31</sup> As demonstrated by the quote cited earlier on the nature of eternity, Chaucer also accents the fluidity between past and future in his glosses, which is, as in other places of the *Boece*, indicated by the phrase, "that is to seyn."<sup>32</sup>

In the *Boece*, as I have already suggested, the degree of order one perceives is deeply tied to the experience of vision. Lady Philosophy develops the distinction between perspectives when she defines the "hap" perceived by human eyes as "an unwar betydinge of causes assembled in thingis that ben doon for som oothir thing," to contrast the divine sense of order, "procedinge by an uneschuable byndinge togidre, whiche that descendeth fro the welle of purveaunce that ordeyneth alle thingis in hir places and in hir tymes."<sup>33</sup> Chaucer reinforces the link between order and clear vision by standardizing Boethius's shifting terminology for vision and perspective. The term "lokyng" in the *Boece* describes both material vision and an ability to see the operations beyond mutable Fortune.<sup>34</sup> "Lokyng" refers to God's providential knowing, which Boethius

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<sup>29</sup> Eleanor Johnson, "Chaucer and the Consolation of Prosimetrum," *The Chaucer Review* 43 (2009), 455.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 456.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 457.

<sup>32</sup> There are numerous instances of "that is to seyn," for instance in Chaucer, *Boece*, 1, Metr. 1, 9 and 25; 1, Pr. 1, 72; 1, Metr. 1, 5.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 5, Pr. 1, 90-2, 93-6.

<sup>34</sup> Despite that Chaucer has been accused of using a simple and inaccurate Latinate lexicon in the *Boece*, Chaucer's "lokyng" is Germanic in origin and suggests Chaucer's selective vocabulary. B.L. Jefferson, *Chaucer and the Consolation of Philosophy of Boethius* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1917; reprint. New York: Gordian Press, 1968), 26.

spatializes by imagining God peering from his tower, or to the enlightened individual's ideal vision of time. Chaucer also uses the verb "to behold" to characterize the atemporal perspective from which God comprehends creation: "byholdeth fro afer alle thingis, right as it were fro the heye heighte of thinges."<sup>35</sup> Boethius's incessant failure to understand the temporal order from a distanced position, to "see," as it were, in the way that God sees, draws attention to the degrees of distance relative to God's position in the universe. Fortune "is just a figment of perspective"—that is, of the temporally-entrenched perspective—and, despite that Boethius is not convinced for much of the *Boece*, Lady Philosophy uses spatial and perspectival metaphors precisely to relieve Boethius of the suffering associated with temporality, to distance him from earthbound concerns and broaden his perspective.<sup>36</sup>

In his poems, Chaucer adapts the *Boece* to different ends, notably relying on it as a source for the model of dialogic exchange between characters. From the *Boece* Chaucer also derives the vocabularies of Fortune, free will, and destiny, as well as the language used to express the experience of suffering from worldly woe. Among others, the lexicons and frameworks of the *Boece* suffuse the minor poems of the Boethian group, which tend to circulate in the same manuscripts as Chaucer's longer poems and his *Boece*.<sup>37</sup> Lyrics such as "Truth," "The Former Age," and "Fortune" foreground the theme of mutability and make sensitive exhortations for a better world; the philosophical dimension of these lyrics softens political convictions and reveals a blueprint of Chaucer's non-descriptive rhetorical approach to contemporary issues he might have wanted to explore.

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<sup>35</sup> Chaucer, *Boece*, 5, Pr. 6, 119-20.

<sup>36</sup> Carolyn Dinshaw, *How Soon is Now? Medieval Texts, Amateur Readers, and the Queerness of Time* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2012), 147.

<sup>37</sup> For instance, see the contents of Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Fairfax 16 and MS Bodley 638, and Aage Brusendorff, *The Chaucer Tradition* (London: Oxford University Press, 1925).

These effects demonstrate the varied ways in which Chaucer's Boethian aesthetic shapes his poems. Still, while considering the larger impact of Boethius on Chaucer, this dissertation focuses more specifically on how Chaucer adapts Boethius's discourse of "seeing time" in his dream visions and *Troilus and Criseyde*. Chaucer extracts from his *Boece* the metaphor and language of vision for temporal consciousness explored in earlier pages, but also extends them to earthbound ends, using Boethius beyond spiritual matter. In Chaucer's works, the act of perception and the orientation of perspective create the potential to indicate the individual's insight into the patterns of time, but Chaucer does not use these metaphorical formulations to necessarily value transcendence and the atemporal perspective over earthly experience and vision. Reading the *Boece* in the same tradition as the dream visions and *Troilus and Criseyde* reveals more broadly how Chaucer uses a Boethian terminology of sight and vocabulary of time to construct various theories of time and to activate the readers' sense of distance as a way to heighten their own temporal consciousness. Chaucer's adaptation of Boethius in the dream visions and *Troilus and Criseyde* thus helps to precipitate the plural anachronized vision of time. The poet transforms Boethius in his works to validate embedded perspectives in collocation with distant and transcendent perspectives. Lady Philosophy's lesson on the minute size of earth in relation to the expansive universe, once more spatializing the individual's relationship to earthly cares, intermittently arises in Chaucer's works, from Geoffrey's flight in the *House of Fame* to Troilus's ascent in *Troilus and Criseyde*.<sup>38</sup> The Boethian lesson is sometimes that taking the long view amounts to an ethical transformation because ultimate goods, causes, and costs can become visible and the viewer is not so lost in the visual limitations of the present moment; therefore, the viewer can make better long-term choices. Even if the viewer lacks Prudence in a complete

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<sup>38</sup> Chaucer, *Boece*, 5. Pr. 4.

sense, he can make smart judgments about the future through frequent exercises in distancing himself from time. However, Chaucer's poems also demonstrate skepticism of the emotional aloofness that comes with distance, and tends to advocate instead looking down at earth and thinking through the issues of the immanent, present world. The experience of becoming distracted by false images and goods can be productive, moving the individual forward through time; Chaucer often represents the pleasures of forgetting and the illusion of total agency as empowering experiences in the face of mutability. The value Chaucer attributes to the present and the mortal process to some degree indicates a departure from Boethius's philosophy.

My examination of the dialectic of nearness and distance in this dissertation complicates traditional understandings of the Boethian trajectory in Chaucer's works, though it also builds on more recent scholarship challenging straightforward readings of the medieval Boethius. In the article, "Praying with Boethius in *Troilus and Criseyde*," Megan Murton argues, "Chaucer's writings bear witness to a more complex and expansive interpretation of Boethian thought"<sup>39</sup>, and in an essay on *Troilus and Criseyde* in *The Erotics of Consolation: Desire and Distance in the Late Middle Ages*, Jessica Rosenfeld writes that, as readers of Chaucer today, we "may have grown too complacent in our certainty about the absolutes [Chaucer] was subverting...[and] in moving from an exegetical perspective on Chaucer as a vehicle for pious Christian doctrine toward a Chaucer who resists that doctrine, or engages in a dialectic that shows its gaps, we may have missed an opportunity to think about the spaces for subversive or at least unconventional thinking in the writings of the men of 'gret auctorite' who provide Chaucer so much fodder for

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<sup>39</sup> Megan Murton, "Praying with Boethius in *Troilus and Criseyde*," *The Chaucer Review* 49 (2015): 297.

thought.”<sup>40</sup> Rosenfeld implies that Chaucer’s use of traditional works is more nuanced than scholarship has generally suggested. Eleanor Johnson’s recent book, *Practicing Literary Theory in the Middle Ages: Ethics and the Mixed Form in Chaucer, Gower, Usk, and Hoccleve*, envisions the range of influences of Boethius’s form on late medieval English writing, including Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*, in which Boethius is more than “an ideational springboard, a way of grounding its own amatory history in high-order philosophical discourse.”<sup>41</sup> *Troilus and Criseyde* also importantly engages in a dialogue with Boethius over the “drive for ethical renewal” that is implicit in the *Boece* and because it questions the guaranteed success of “protrepsis,” Johnson’s term for Boethius’s “combining of an autobiographical framework and ethically transformative function,” that lies at the heart of the *Boece*.<sup>42</sup> By presenting Chaucer as a deeply Boethian poet whose work neither explicitly conforms to Boethius’s philosophy nor entirely rejects it, but rather freely adapts his teachings on time to earthbound ends, I am also invested in recovering a more fluid understanding of Boethius’s place in Chaucer’s narratives. My dissertation seeks not to trace Chaucer’s adoption of a specific Boethian position, but rather to show how multi-functional Boethius is in Chaucer’s works, and how reading them through the Boethian lens pluralizes ways of understanding time. Chaucer at once participates in and doubts the visionary discourse by shaping the Boethian conventions of perception to new ends and re-conceptualizing the relationship between seeing and historical consciousness.

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<sup>40</sup> Jessica Rosenfeld, “The Doubled Joys of *Troilus and Criseyde*,” in *The Erotics of Consolation: Desire and Distance in the Late Middle Ages*, eds. Catherine E. Légú and Stephen J. Milner (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 42.

<sup>41</sup> Eleanor Johnson, *Practicing Literary Theory in the Middle Ages: Ethics and the Mixed Form in Chaucer, Gower, Usk, and Hoccleve* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2013), 93

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 94, 9.

This dissertation examines the pervasive trope of “seeing time,” elicited through both anachronisms and the adaptation of the *Boece*, as a means of exploring Chaucer’s commentary on his own time. Despite the tendency to look for evidence of Chaucer’s stake in political claims in the *Canterbury Tales*, in which the poet’s more direct historical references emerge through allusions, characters, and settings, it exposes a profoundly political and social pre-*Canterbury Tales*. This dissertation illuminates Chaucer’s discreet mode of address to his readers by paying attention to form over content, and by reading Chaucer’s early works in their historical context. That Chaucer would want to nuance his political message and stance is likely, given the historical circumstances of Ricardian London. In the 1380s, Chaucer, who worked as esquire in the king’s household, was involved in the Ricardian court (1377-1399). He was an ally to Richard II even when members of the aristocracy were actively undermining the king’s authority, and in ways that left many loyalists in precarious political and social positions.<sup>43</sup> Evidently maintaining an impression of neutrality, Chaucer kept his alliance with Richard’s royal party while minimizing his Royalist activity to avoid accusation from the Appellants. He was witness to the animosity of the Appellants, linked with many of their victims, including the chamber knights, who were punished for treason and partisanship with Richard.<sup>44</sup> Chaucer, who was a public servant first and a poet second, would have understood the risks involved in open discourse, giving him reason to show political reserve in his poetry.

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<sup>43</sup> Chaucer’s place within the civil service put him in contact with the court, and his advantageous marriage to Philippa de Roet, daughter of a knight of Hainault and sister of Katherine Swynford, who would become John of Gaunt’s mistress, led to his appointment to the royal household. Paul Strohm, “The Social and Literary Scene in England,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Chaucer*, eds. Piero Boitani and Jill Mann (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 3. Strohm argues that Chaucer should be regarded as one of the *mesnals gentils* of the 1390 statute, which bound him to Richard II, and “although not formally retained, as an esquire of the king’s household Chaucer must have enjoyed a status equivalent to that of indentured members of the royal retinue who lived outside the household,” in *Social Chaucer* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 21. Chaucer was even “available for royal service in a way that exceeded the definition of any particular post he occupied...he participated in peace and marriage discussions, and engaged in other secret business on behalf of the king,” 23.

<sup>44</sup> Strohm, *Social Chaucer*, 28.

By contrast, the Ricardian literary milieu, comprised of many authors whom Chaucer knew personally, put forth a “public poetry,” to use Anne Middleton’s term, a genre that could lead to either political condemnation or political favor.<sup>45</sup> John Gower crafted an ethical poetry that overtly addressed the failures of his contemporary world. In *Vox Clamantis*, Gower responds through the explicitly critical genre of complaint to the Great Uprising of 1381 and demonstrates his strategic approach to declaring political loyalties in the different versions of the *Confessio Amantis*. Perhaps as a result of Gower’s careful considerations, he remained unharmed by the parliamentary events of the 1380s; as T. Matthew N. McCabe recently wrote, Gower’s was “not the behavior of someone who feared his poem might be judged Lollardizing or seditious.”<sup>46</sup> By contrast, Thomas Usk’s writings—the Appeal of John Northampton for treason in 1384 and his *Testament of Love*, in which Usk models himself as a Boethian prisoner unjustly punished for his factional affiliations and betrayed by public authorities—less artfully and more explicitly convey the perceived weaknesses of his contemporary world. Gower envisions Usk as a “Talebearer,” spreading false rumors as a consequence of Northampton’s unethical governance, in an epithet that one might tie to justifications for his execution in 1388.<sup>47</sup> Regardless, Chaucer inevitably knew that authors of civically-oriented discourses could face public condemnation and, at the very least, acquire a kind of fame that Chaucer may or may not have wanted. He addresses the author of *Vox Clamantis* as “moral Gower” in *Troilus and Criseyde*, exhibiting his awareness of Gower’s commitment to public principles.

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<sup>45</sup> Anne Middleton, “The Idea of Public Poetry in the Reign of Richard II,” *Speculum* 53 (1978): 94-114.

<sup>46</sup> T. Matthew N. McCabe, *Gower’s Vulgar Tongue: Ovid, Lay Religion, and English Poetry in the Confessio Amantis* (Cambridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2011), 228. The plainness of Gower’s critique is emphasized by the turn in his writings after Richard II’s deposition from pro-Ricardian to bitterly anti-Ricardian in the *Tripartite Chronicle*, which was appended to the *Vox Clamantis*.

<sup>47</sup> Sheila Lindenbaum, “London texts and literate practice,” in *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, ed. David Wallace (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 292.

The absence of political and social commentary, as it appears in Gower's and Usk's writings, from Chaucer's pre-*Canterbury Tales* literature could suggest Chaucer's disengagement from the court during the 1370s and 1380s. His work hardly fits the parameters of Middleton's "public poetry," which celebrated ideals of communal responsibility and service, and established models for practical, outward improvement within the civic world. The "impassioned direct address" of contemporary writings represents one of the more identifiable "social and literary values" of the genre.<sup>48</sup> As Strohm writes, whereas Usk "sought to turn literary form to personal account" and "embraced the politics of faction completely," "Chaucer sought ways of containing and moderating the impact of its all-or-nothing approach."<sup>49</sup>

Yet, in spite of the appearance of separation between Chaucer's political life and his poetic production, Chaucer's early works evoke civic discourse, if not in content, then in form. Strohm's emphasis on Chaucer's role as a "social poet" invites a consideration of his poetry within historical contexts such as the Great Uprising of 1381, but also asks that Chaucer be imagined in relation to "the structure of late medieval social relations," as conveyed by contemporary texts, including statutes and political treatises.<sup>50</sup> This dissertation implements Strohm's historicist approach, contending that Chaucer the poet and his readers are central to the production and purpose of the early works. However, it does so not by looking to explicit content and allusions, but rather by showing how Chaucer's formal techniques of anachronism and the Boethian intertext alternately distance readers from his poetic narratives and embed them, in a

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<sup>48</sup> Middleton, "The Idea of Public Poetry," 94. Also see Kathryn Kerby-Fulton and Steven Justice, "Langlandian Reading Circles and the Civil Service in London and Dublin, 1380-1427," *New Medieval Literatures* 1 (1997): 59-83.

<sup>49</sup> Paul Strohm, "Politics and Poetics: Usk and Chaucer in the 1380s," in *Literary Practice and Social Change in Britain, 1380-1530*, ed. Lee Patterson (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), 84.

<sup>50</sup> Strohm, *Social Chaucer*, ix.

dialectic that incites them to see the past as a productive ethical dimension for thinking about the present. Chaucer's poetry advocates neither total detachment from public life nor full immersion in the tumultuous affairs of the present; while the past sometimes represents a time to remember, Chaucer at other moments elicits the pleasure of forgetting. Through anachronisms, in particular, the poet both makes the past palatable and represents it as a relic that lingers or even disrupts the present.

Experiments with Boethius and anachronism suggest that Chaucer found ways of nuancing what he saw in his own world at the time that he was composing his early works, as well as "translating" Boethius's Latin work into Middle English. These elements, which again foster the dialectic of historical familiarization and estrangement, illuminate Chaucer's own approach to his time. His physical movement in and out of London pertains to this dialectic, as well, spatializing not only the distance he encourages of his readers, but also the philosophical distance he might have needed to both protect his position—and his life—and to create his literary works. After all, the Boethian practice of looking, which his poems and the *Boece* elicit, requires a distance from history.

Chaucer's years out of the city of London additionally evoke the situation of Dante after he is condemned to perpetual exile from Florence in 1302. At this moment in Dante's life, as Giuseppe Mazzotta writes, Dante "makes of exile a virtue and a necessary perspective from which to speak to the world and from which he can challenge its expectations and assumptions."<sup>51</sup> For Dante, the position of exile removed him from his community, but meanwhile fostered a productive transformation of perspective and enabled his poetic vision. During the 1380s, Chaucer also might have acquired an exilic subjectivity, which impacted his

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<sup>51</sup> Giuseppe Mazzotta, "Dante and the Virtues of Exile," in *Exile in Literature*, ed. Maria-Inés Lagos-Pope (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1988), 54.

poetics of distance and even disguise. In 1386, Chaucer resigned from his two controllerships—of the wool custom and the petty custom—and left his residence at Aldgate, changes which were, according to Derek Pearsall, “planned and deliberate,” and probably a result of Chaucer’s foresight that the “controllerships were likely to come under attack as one of the obvious targets of a more vocal opposition.”<sup>52</sup> Thomas Frederick Tout suggests, slightly differently, that Chaucer’s career change was forced, rather than a result of Chaucer’s choice; the efforts of parliament’s reforming commissioners “in purging the administration of undesirable elements” are why “Chaucer lost his two posts in the customs and was reduced to such financial straits that he had to give up his house in Aldgate and barter his pension for an advance of cash.”<sup>53</sup> Whichever biographer is correct, the circumstances that distanced Chaucer from London differed from those of Dante in that Chaucer’s departure from Aldgate to Kent helped to remove him from potential crisis, while Dante’s exile was a manifestation of the disastrous results of political factionalism that had already befallen him.

Still, despite the disparity between the two authors’ historical situations, both Dante and Chaucer use the position of distance to explore a broader understanding of time and space within their writings. It was in exile that Dante was able to create a unifying narrative of his experiences and the universe in the *Commedia*, rather than to convey what he witnessed in a partial and fragmentary way. He claims to have a transcendent vision. In *Paradiso* 17, Cacciaguida prophetically alludes to Dante’s work, in which Dante will narrate from a God-like perspective:

Contingent things, which do not extend beyond the pages of your material world, are all depicted in the Eternal Sight, yet are by that no more enjoined than is a ship, moved downstream on a river’s flow, by the eyes that mirror it. And thus, as harmony’s sweet

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<sup>52</sup> Derek Pearsall, *The Life of Geoffrey Chaucer: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992), 205.

<sup>53</sup> Thomas Frederick Tout, “Literature and Learning in the English Civil Service in the Fourteenth Century,” *Speculum* 4 (1929): 385.

sound may rise from mingled voices to the ear, so rises to my sight a vision of the time that lies in store for you.<sup>54</sup>

Dante evokes the contrast between the human perception of contingency (“la contigenza”) and God’s foreknowledge, which is central to the thought of Boethius and Aquinas. Furthermore, like these authors, Dante imagines the sense of time in terms of vision, suggesting Cacciaguida’s divine-like foresight. Cacciaguida foresees Dante’s construction of a narrative world that concerns more than the contingencies of the material world, and thus, Cacciaguida implies, Dante’s authorial success depends on his physical and philosophical distance, which enables a totalizing perspective.

Being removed from the city arguably enables a more optimal viewing position for Chaucer, as well, as he continually conveys the message that perspectives broaden through distance. It may be that those who “reinvented [Chaucer] as a rural poet” in periods after his death interpreted Chaucer’s distance from the city of London as a pastoral retreat, but this dissertation contends that Chaucer played with ideas of nearness and distance to produce a more educated perspective for when both he and his readers were to fall back *in media res*, returning to their fragmentary viewing positions in history, and with luck, still equipped with the transcendent Boethian perspective implicit in Chaucer’s works.<sup>55</sup> While Chaucer’s transition from Aldgate to Kent did not occur until 1386, the anachronisms and the Boethian perspective he uses in the poems he composed before this year demand a more expansive field of vision in

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<sup>54</sup> Dante, *Paradiso*, trans. Robert Hollander and Jean Hollander (New York: Random House, 2007), Canto 17, 37-45. “La contigenza, che fuor del quaderno / de la vostra matera non si stende, / tutta è dipinta nel cospetto eterno; / necessità però quindi non prende / se non come dal viso in che si specchia / nave che per torrente giù discende. / Da indi, sì come viene ad orecchia / dolce armonia da organo, mi viene / a vista il tempo che ti s’apparecchia.”

<sup>55</sup> Ardis Butterfield, “Chaucer and the Detritus of the City,” in *Chaucer and the City*, ed. Ardis Butterfield (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2006), 20.

which to see temporalities occurring simultaneously, and signify his awareness of the value of distance, even while he was living in London amid the chaos of growing factionalism.

Indeed, Chaucer's historical circumstances illuminate the mode of indirect address he develops in the dream visions and *Troilus and Criseyde*, and suggest why he would be interested in working through theories of time and perspective. In the context of political division, frequent accusation within court circles, and threats against the very idea of monarchy, Chaucer's consistent use of intertemporality seems a subtle reminder to readers to proceed cautiously in the present, with an eye to past turmoil. Chaucer does not aim to reproduce the eternal and synchronic vision of history often found in Dante's *Commedia*; in fact, he parodies the very possibility of achieving a Dantean vision in the *House of Fame*. Anticipating the twentieth-century theorist Michel de Certeau more so than he evokes Dante, Chaucer validates the fragmentary perspective of the urban walkers in his dream visions and *Troilus and Criseyde* at the same time that he acknowledges the virtues of the distanced viewer's panopticism.<sup>56</sup> This latter figure, like the figure in *The Practice of Everyday Life* who can discern the whole city from a position of elevation, essentially models the perspective of a metaphorical exile, and, synthesizing his own perspective with the rationalized distant viewpoint of a Boethian seer, Chaucer invites readers to consider the benefits a longer vision might bring. However, Chaucer's sense of history is also more malleable than Dante's and poses questions, rather than offering answers, concerning the benefits of "seeing time" in both fragmentary and totalizing ways.

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<sup>56</sup> Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. by Steven F. Rendall (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984). De Certeau explores "the pleasure of 'seeing the whole,' of looking down on, totalizing the most immoderate of human texts," comparing the reader's position to the viewer's position at a state of elevation, 92. Using a different vocabulary that stresses discontinuity and a fragmented, rather than comprehensive, vision, De Certeau then analyzes "the ordinary practitioners of the city" who "are walkers, *Wandersmänner*, whose bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban 'text' they write without being able to read it" and who "make use of spaces that cannot be seen," 93.

Chaucer's obsession with vision permeates not only his poems, but also his prose and prosimetrum. He gives literal expression to the metaphorical treatments of perspective in *A Treatise on the Astrolabe*, a guide to the function and uses of the astrolabe that he was writing in the early 1390s. As Marijane Osborn explains, the purpose of the astrolabe is "to locate objects in the sky and use the bearings thus obtained to determine time or location on earth," and while, she says, "it is unlikely that Chaucer would have used the astrolabe to implement a grand philosophical scheme like Dante's," Chaucer's understanding of planetary motions and imagination of "the movements of stars and planets in the celestial sphere from the point of view of a stationary earth" arise in the metaphorical representations of space and time in his poems.<sup>57</sup> In addition, the *Boece* shows a love of astronomical subjects; Lady Philosophy discusses the stars and the sun as a preface to her distinction between the stable figure who "knyttest alle boondes of thynges" and the "see of fortune" that torments human beings.<sup>58</sup> Her poem on the contrast between the human mind past and present—once a mind that sought the causes of things, but now a mind that is dulled by anxiety—draws on astronomical images and specifically indicates the correlation between the enlightened man and his clear vision of the sky:

This man, that whilom was fre, to whom the hevene was opyn and knowen, and was wont to gon in hevenliche pathes, and saughe the lyghtnesse of the rede sonne, and saughe the sterres of the coolde mone...this man, overcomere, hadde comprehendid al this by nombre (of acontynge in astronomye).<sup>59</sup>

Chaucer's interest in celestial phenomena thus prompts him to pursue philosophical explorations of the individual's place in the universe. Lady Philosophy reminds Boethius of what astronomy

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<sup>57</sup> Marijane Osborn, *Time and the Astrolabe in the Canterbury Tales* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002), 11. Osborn explains that astronomy in the Middle Ages "was chiefly concerned with the apparent turning of the celestial vault overhead...[it] attempts to measure and explain these movements and other celestial phenomena in terms of 'celestial mechanics,'" 12.

<sup>58</sup> Chaucer, *Boece*, 1, Metr. 5, 50-1, 54.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, Metr. 2, 6-15.

can teach him about his existence: “as thou hast learned by the demonstracioun of astronomye...al the envyrounyng of the erthe aboute ne halt but the resoun of a prykke at regard of the gretnesse of hevene.”<sup>60</sup> According to Lady Philosophy, Boethius’s study of celestial objects should instill a sense of the literal minuteness of earth in relation to the universe and of the relative unimportance of earthly affairs in the greater scheme of things. Chaucer develops Lady Philosophy’s teaching to different ends throughout his poetic works, emphasizing distance as a way to use the past to serve the present and remembrance as a practice that can either cure present woes or hinder the ability to live normally. Through the Boethian intertext, Chaucer also meditates on the question of fame and the literal and metaphorical implications of historical and textual transmission.

The following chapters of this dissertation offer a series of unique interconnected readings of the dream visions and *Troilus and Criseyde*, highlighting Chaucer’s deep investment in the role of the past in present consciousness. They treat Boethian questions of time as inseparable from Chaucer’s perspectives on the past and show how the entanglement of past, present, and future dimensions through both the Boethian intertext and frequent anachronism helps Chaucer to construct plural theories of history. The multiple temporal perspectives also undermine inherited historiographies that posit one singular framework for understanding time. The malleability of time across his dream visions and *Troilus and Criseyde* defy any totalizing notion of Chaucerian history. Simultaneously, the unsettling of orderly understandings of time in these works allows readers to understand Chaucer the poet in relation to his own period of history in a more sophisticated way. Reluctant to avoid his historical moment, but also cautious about embedding himself within political affairs, Chaucer offers evidence through this fluid

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<sup>60</sup> Chaucer, *Boece*, 2, Pr. 7, 23-7.

philosophy of temporality that he wished to advocate a loving distance, reserving judgment rather than casting aspersions on those deeply entrenched in urban and political affairs. Anachronisms and a Boethian perspective could lead to total aporia, but this loving distance makes Chaucer both a historical and social poet, and a poet who appealed to readers throughout time.

Chapter 1, “Rewriting Boethius in the *Book of the Duchess*: The Consolation of Anachronism and the Pleasure of Forgetting,” argues that Chaucer parallels narratives of loss to explore the paths that characters take to overcome grief. The Black Knight’s session of mourning has led to scholarly preoccupations with the effectiveness of elegy in this poem. However, the less-often considered journey of the dreaming narrator, whose encounters with anachronism ask him to forget his sorrowful past, pluralizing his experience of history, suggests an alternative reading of the poem’s message: movement, distraction, and social connection may facilitate the recovery from grief, where indulgent anamnesis and the attempt to revive the dead through solitary song cannot. The failed Boethian exchange at the heart of the poem reinforces the possibility of finding consolation through the temporal disjunctions of the dream world, reminding the narrator of the “processe of tyme.”<sup>61</sup>

In Chaucer’s second dream vision, the *House of Fame*, history is not so much a thing to be forgotten or pluralized as it is an unstable source of knowledge. Chapter 2, “Deconstructing History and Making Poetry in the *House of Fame*,” traces the encounters between the protagonist, Geoffrey, and the material records of the past, as well as the immaterial evocations of eschatological historiographies. Anachronisms in this poem facilitate Geoffrey’s active engagement with historiographies, entangling him within the past so as to provoke a reaction to

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<sup>61</sup> Chaucer, *Book of the Duchess* in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), 1331.

it, and through them Chaucer is able to deconstruct the idea of history as teleological and absolute. Chaucer draws out Geoffrey's interactions with Virgilian, Boethian, and Dantean historiographies, in particular, to solicit distrust of historical narrative and show how it can be constantly deflected into textual epiphenomenon. Confronting records of the past invites Geoffrey to proliferate story lines and inform authoritative narratives with other texts stored within his mental library, as well as with his own impulsive, sympathetic voice. Following the changing material surfaces of the poem and the writings that are full of gaps and fissures, this chapter shows that divergent understandings of the story lead Geoffrey to transform the material of the ancient book, resulting productively in renewal through textual recension and adaptation. Textual instability essentially enables Geoffrey to exercise agency over the past. In addition, the process of reading activates the process of dreaming, as Geoffrey acclimates himself to the unfamiliar space of the dream by crafting aspects of it as he moves forward through it. As he does so, he emphasizes a countermodel of sound to emphasize the variety of sensory perceptions through which to perceive "truth," complicating the transcendent model in which sight offers sole access to temporal knowledge.

Chaucer continues to explore the agential dynamics of the protagonist's journey in the *Parliament of Fowls*, where the dream manipulates the conventions of the authoritative book, Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis*, or the *Dream of Scipio*, and undermines its transcendent notion of Platonic recursivity by emphasizing the present and experiential temporality of the protagonist. Chapter 3, "Platonic Time and the Temporality of Reading in the *Parliament of Fowls*," shows that while the protagonist has been called a more passive reader than Geoffrey in the *House of Fame*, his somnambulant and discontinuous journey suggests that reading does not always require a single, physical book; in his dream, multiple intertexts and plural voices exploit the

freedom, rather than constraints, of the dream vision genre, and emphasize process over finite product within mortal experience. Chaucer activates the Boethian framework in this poem not to reinforce the *contemptus mundi* position of Scipio Africanus in Cicero's work, but rather to celebrate the idea of free will in a providential universe.

In Chapter 4, "'Lokyng' into Time: Boethian Subjectivities and the Construction of Temporality in *Troilus and Criseyde*," Chaucer deconstructs the notion of a singular Boethian perspective by presenting a cast of characters who construct time differently and, moreover, whose constructions of time change over the course of the narrative. These plural and changing ideas of time elicit the multiple and differentiated perspectives of time found in the *Boece*, proving this philosophical work to be more open-ended than closed and teleological. Rather than use a Boethian framework to condemn his characters for their earthly interests, Chaucer exposes the relatively fragmented vision of time in order to emphasize the limited agency of human beings against the forces of historical necessity. This is not to say that Troy does not become a cautionary tale; by blurring temporal boundaries, Chaucer implies the danger in formulating a genealogy between ancient Troy, a city that fell, and Chaucer's own London, a city in which, during the 1380s, factional conflicts posed a severe threat to civic stability.

My chapter argues still that anachronisms only do part of the work in eliciting the readers' response to issues of temporality within *Troilus and Criseyde*. Boethianisms complicate the simple lesson of anachronisms by inviting both an emotional nearness and a sense of distance, and ultimately, they show that Chaucer's poem critiques Troilus's scornful attitude toward earth at the end of the poem. The Boethian complaints on mutability, reflecting the chaotic but situated perspective, warrant as much sympathy as the moralizing foresight of the

Neoplatonic panoptic perspective, and encourage readers to focus on the historical pressures that shape the characters' emotions and choices.

Ultimately, then, this chapter suggests two key points. First, Chaucer's multiple Boethian subjectivities challenge the lines of causality leading to the Trojan fall; these are the narratives established by literary tradition and particularly exploited in Chaucer's source, Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato*. Second, the anachronisms and the implicit perfected Boethian perspective invite readers to discover the importance of historical distance, from not only Troy but also their own moment. The discourse of "seeing time" permeates Chaucer's poetry beyond Boethius's religious parameters and once more helps to reveal Chaucer's role as a political and social poet, who uses these formal techniques as an oblique way to recommend a loving distance. This chapter reintroduces the issues of the previous chapters on Chaucer's dream visions by showing how these techniques inculcate an awareness of perspectival difference, a tool or heuristic for considering social, civic, and political ideas of history.

**Rewriting Boethius in the *Book of the Duchess*:  
The Consolation of Anachronism and the Pleasure of Forgetting**

INTRODUCTION

The *Book of the Duchess*, Chaucer's earliest surviving dream vision, parallels the narratives of sorrowful characters that have undergone traumatic experiences. However, in aligning their experiences of loss, the poem also explores how the search for consolation manifests differently across the characters' stories. This chapter argues that, by presenting the contrasting journeys at work against grief, Chaucer distinguishes between the individual who envisions the past singularly, as the time that occurred before experiencing loss and the source of nihilistic abyss, and the individual who discovers a plural sense of the past by virtue of his encounters with the narratives and relics of history. Chaucer suggests that, while the focus on history stifles, rather than invigorates the individual to action, the fragments of a more collective past offer opportunities for movement, activity, and above all, the ability to forget the trauma of personal loss.

At the heart of the *Book of the Duchess* is the grief of the Black Knight, who, in an exchange with Chaucer's dreaming narrator, mourns the death of his beloved Lady White. Many scholars have looked to this central scene as evidence that Chaucer had two purposes: first, to offer the poem as an allegorical elegy to John of Gaunt, Chaucer's patron and Duke of Lancaster, whose wife Blanche, Duchess of Lancaster, died from the Black Plague on 12 September 1368; and second, to re-enact the dialogic model of consolation found in the *Boece*.<sup>1</sup> In an allegorical

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<sup>1</sup> For instance, see Bertrand H. Bronson, "The *Book of the Duchess* Re-Opened," *PMLA* 67 (1952): 863-81; and, Ruth Morse, "Understanding the Man in Black," *The Chaucer Review* 15 (1981): 204-8.

reading, Gaunt's literary surrogate is evidently the Knight, inviting a comparison in which Gaunt's historical experience of the loss of his wife Blanche is reflected in the Knight's mourning for his deceased wife, Lady White. However, this narrative mirror is deceptive as an endpoint. While the Knight's melancholy might encourage both an elegiac tribute to Blanche and a bid of sympathy for Gaunt, it also reveals the danger of constructing the present through nostalgia for the past. Through the Knight's indulgent anamnesis, in which he regurgitates his memory of Lady White to the narrator, Chaucer asks Gaunt to consider the detriment of an extended period of immoderate grief to both him and his political body, rather than using the poem to grieve with him.

Chaucer hyperbolizes the Knight's suffering by suggesting his likeness to the character Boethius; appropriating Boethius's language of lament, Chaucer's Knight meditates on the patterns of mutability, linked to the variability of Fortune, and the transience of earthly happiness. However, the poem departs from Boethius's process of lamentation very precisely through the response to grief that it offers. In the *Boece*, Lady Philosophy's teachings on overcoming the effects of mutability and loss balance Boethius's grief, but the narrator in the *Book of the Duchess* acts differently as an anti-Philosophy to the Knight, entirely missing the point of his sorrow. By dismantling the anticipated role of a consolatory intercessor, Chaucer only exaggerates the Knight's symptomology of traumatic stasis. The failed Boethian exchange leads not to elegiac consolation but to a reiterative realization of the original loss, leaving both the narrator and the Knight trapped with a form of history akin to Boethius's strumpet muses, which, as Lady Philosophy teaches at the beginning of the *Boece*, "ne asswagen noht his sorwes with none remedies...[and] woldyn fedyn and norysen hym with sweete venym."<sup>2</sup> Better

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<sup>2</sup> Chaucer, *Boece*, 1, Pr. 1, 50-3.

considered as a negative exemplum of mourning for the past than as a ratification of grief, the scene of Boethian dialogue challenges scholarly preoccupations with the functionality of elegy in the poem.

The poem benefits Chaucer's readers in its entirety where the dialogue, standing alone, falls short: while the Knight memorializes Blanche, to see the *Book of the Duchess* as little more than a monument to a historical figure is, ironically, to miss the poet's broader theorization of history and of the influence the past has on shaping present consciousness. Chaucer's anti-elegiac message emerges through the lonesome remembrance of the Knight. In addition, as the first section of this chapter argues, Chaucer presents the narrator's experiences, which initially parallel the Knight's, but ultimately undermine the Knight's meditative response to grief, as they imagine a way to escape the burden of the past. By first tracing the narrator's experience in and out of the dream world, and then deconstructing the Boethian dialogue in the central scene, this chapter exposes that the poem plays grief in two keys: first, the narrator's initial stasis, which conduces to movement, distraction, and social connection with the Knight; and second, the Knight's, which reinforces immobility and even death. The narrator's journey from waking experience to the dream world offers a productive counter-model to the sorry spectacle of a failed, if not humorous, dialogue, and contributes to the anti-elegiac strain of the poem. His process of overcoming his eight-year "sickness" occurs not through the Boethian cure of talking woefully about loss, but through his ability to recognize a world of history besides his own personal past (36).<sup>3</sup> The dream signifies the sleep that literally cures the narrator's insomnia. In addition, though, its "medicynes," to use Lady Philosophy's vocabulary, lies in a splintering set of

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<sup>3</sup> Sarah Kay uses the term "talking cure," acknowledging that "it is Philosophy and not the patient who does most of the talking," which is rational given that she is, after all, the authoritative figure who diagnoses the patient and administers the medical treatment to his unhappiness, in "Touching singularity: Consolation, Philosophy, and Poetry in the French *Dit*," in *The Erotics of Consolation: Desire and Distance in the Late Middle Ages*, eds. Catherine E. Legu and Stephen J. Milner (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), 23.

anachronisms, or medicinal ingredients, that widen the narrator's potential to find emotional consolation and even inspiration for the creation of new narrative.<sup>4</sup> These anachronisms pluralize the narrator's sense of past time. By interposing antique books and figures in the narrator's fourteenth-century world, abstractly imposed on the dream setting, Chaucer incites recognition of the multiply traumatic but incessantly moving aspects of life, and offers the narrator opportunities to reconcile himself to the patterns of mutability and to reengage with daily activity. The *Book of the Duchess* confronts both Gaunt and other readers with the ethical implications of seeing the past narrowly, a theme that runs throughout Chaucer's subsequent poems. Correcting the Knight's notion that the past is always traumatic, the poem also opens wider sets of ethical possibilities. While anti-Boethian in one sense, the poem plays a deeply Boethian game: turning the narrator's (and readers') eyes not to what exists beyond the stars as a permanent and transcendent anchor, which is the goal of the *Boece*, but to the very circulations of Fortune's wheel, Chaucer shows how he spurs them to less fixated and more multifarious realizations of history and narrative.

#### 1. DREAMING ANACHRONISMS: THE NARRATOR'S CURATIVE PROCESS

In the opening scene of the poem, the narrator offers a first-person account of his insomnia, expressing "gret wonder" at his ability to stay alive under the dire conditions of his depression (1). The narrator constructs a set of binary oppositions anticipating the Knight's self-description, claiming difficulty in experiencing life "day" or "nyght," desiring neither "joye" nor "sorowe" (2, 10). These binaries suggest not a sense of ambivalence concerning how to live, but instead a permanent state of purgatorial dejection: incurably stuck in the past, he continually

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<sup>4</sup> Chaucer, *Boece*, 1, Pr. 2, 1.

endures suffering that has culminated in the “longe tyme” of eight years (20). Despite his claim to indecision (“I not what is best to doo”), the narrator cannot escape his waking consciousness, and his “sorwful ymagynacioun” further prevents him from falling asleep. These conditions stagnate the narrator’s literal movement (“defaute of slep and hevynesse / Hath sleyn my spirit of quyknesse”), but also his metaphorical movement forward into the future, even if “ymagynacioun,” as Aristotle defined it in *De Anima*, represented “a movement [rather than stasis] generated by the activity of sense perception” (29, 14, 25-6).<sup>5</sup>

The scene displaying the narrator’s insomnia is textually syncretic, almost immediately revealing Chaucer’s imitation of Jean Froissart’s early narrative *Le Paradis d’Amours* through the use of “gret wonder,” a translation of Froissart’s “grant merveille.”<sup>6</sup> The narrator also evokes the suffering Boethius, who, in the first meter of Book I of the *Boece*, welcomes death. Boethius complains that death, which he personifies, refuses to prey on “wrecches” like himself<sup>7</sup>; the victims of death are luckier than him, Boethius argues somberly. Fortune, which once favored Boethius, now cheats him, forcing his days to drag on: “the sorwful heure (that is to seyn, the deth) hadde almoost dreynt myn heved.”<sup>8</sup> Boethius’s condition invites the medicine and

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<sup>5</sup> Aristotle, *De Anima*, ed. Michael Durrant (New York: Routledge, 1993), 428b 10.

<sup>6</sup> Chaucer adapts the opening account from the first twelve lines of the *Paradis*, in Jean Froissart, *Le paradis d’amour; L’orloge amoureux*, ed. Peter F. Dembowski (Textes Littéraires, 339) (Geneva: Droz, 1986): “Je sui de moi en grant merveille / Comment je vifs quant tant je veille / Et on ne poroit en veillant / Trouver de moi plus traveillant / Car bien saciés que par veillier / Me viennent souvent travillier / Pensées et merancoles / Qui me sont ens au coer liés / Et pas ne les puis deslyer, / Car ne voeil la belle oublyer / Pour quele amour en ce travail / Je sui entrés et tant je veil.” Chaucer departs from the French vocabulary, translating the French “merveille” which for long had found itself in the English vocabulary with “marvel,” by using the Old English “wonder.” See Michael Hanly, “France,” in *A Companion to Chaucer*, ed. Peter Brown (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 160-61. Chaucer also uses “mervailles” later in line 288 of *The Book of the Duchess*.

<sup>7</sup> Chaucer, *Boece*, 1, Metr. 1, 22.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 24-6.

consolation of Lady Philosophy, who tells him that the “tyme is now” for recovery from woe and, moreover, misunderstanding.”<sup>9</sup>

Chaucer’s narrator resembles Boethius in his complaint, but unlike Boethius, he never is granted an ear to Lady Philosophy’s disquisition on spiritual and emotional medicine found in Book I of the *Boece*. While alluding to a hypothetical single physician that may recuperate him (“For there is phisicien but oon, / That may me hele; but that is don”), the narrator abandons the Boethian consolatory strategy of lamenting, followed by educational healing (39-40). Instead, he has his servant reach him a “book, / A romaunce,” effectively replacing Lady Philosophy as a medium of consolation and associating medicine newly with multiply-mediated story (47-8).

Reading indeed initiates a series of useful distractions from woe, offering the narrator a textual freedom and narrativity that fends off the corrective intimacy of Lady Philosophy’s curative dialogue with Boethius. Chaucer’s romance introduces a historical exemplum privileging recovery from suffering, which produces “felynge in nothyng” (11). Likely adapted from the *Metamorphoses*, Book XI, 410-750, the romance of Ceyx and Alcyone narrates the grief of a recent widow, anticipating the scene of mourning at the center of the *Book of the Duchess*. Nevertheless, Chaucer subtly manipulates the Ovidian tale, rearranging narrative sequence and interpolating dialogue to place a new demand on the widow to recover. In Ovid’s original story, King Ceyx departs from his faithful wife Alcyone to find out from the Delphic oracle the news of his brother Daedalion. The mutual devotion between Ceyx and Alcyone is unquestionable, and when Alcyone ultimately learns that Ceyx has drowned at sea, she grieves violently and prays to die so she can be reunited with him. Upon witnessing her grief, the gods transform her and Ceyx into halcyon birds, preserving their mutual love. By transforming Ovid’s

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<sup>9</sup> Chaucer, *Boece*, 1, Pr. 2, 1-2.

a souffrir son flaid mais confidars q  
liu tu as en son casement. A ce propos  
deste sage *Esse quod tibi applicatum  
fuerit accipe et in dolore sustine et in  
humilitate pacenciam habe ecclesi  
astica. n.º capitulo*



**S**e par mer tu deus entepndre  
voyage peulleux et prendre  
roy le conseil de Alchione  
de Ceyx te sur l'effome  
*Esse. . . . .*

**C**es fu un roy moult peudoms et  
moult ame de Alchione sa femme de  
uacion prist au roy d'aler par mer en  
un moult peulleux passage par temps  
de tempeste se mist en mer mais Al  
chione sa femme qui trop l'amoit

de quant amour se mist en quant peine  
de lui desnoouor d'icellu voyage et a  
quans pleurs et larmes moult les priot  
d'aler par elle ny pot estre remede ms  
ne avec lui aler ne la doit laisser et que  
elle doulent a toutes fins Et desens la  
neff se vint au departir mais le roy  
Et cys la reconforta et la fist a force de  
mandre dont moult fu angouisseuse  
et adoulee car trop esfort et quant soucy  
dont tant doit Et d'us le dieu des deus  
meu sus la marine Et cys le roy desce  
beche tous peuy en mer dont quant  
Alchione saut l'auenture se gita en mer  
Et dit la fable que les dieux en occit  
pire et muerent les corps des .ij. amans  
en .ij. ostraus affm que de Teny quant  
amour fist memoire perpetuelle.  
Si dolent ancore sus la mer les .ij.  
aubs qui alchionees sont nommez  
de blanc plumage sont et quant les  
marmiers dem les voyent Adonc se  
certains de tempeste auoir La droite  
exposicion de ceste fable peut estre que  
.ij. amans furent amereit p semblable  
manere en mariage que le poete a  
comparez aux .ij. ostraus et fu leur  
cas et leur auenture reale. Si deult  
dire que le bon cheualier ne se doit met  
re en peulleux voyage oultre le conseil  
de ses bons amis Et dit assauoir le  
sage sefface de songner domage  
et le fol met peine a le trouuer

*allegorie. l'opie.*  
**Q**ue Alchione d'oye avoit cest d'esse  
le bon espeit est par male temptation  
empesche d'aucune erreur ou doute  
en sa pensee que il se doit rapporter

Figure 2: London, British Library MS Harley 4431, fol. 131r. Appearing in the manuscript containing Christine de Pizan's French L'Épître Othéa, adapted from Ovid's Metamorphoses, this miniature illustrates Ceyx parting from his wife Alcione, accompanied by her royal ladies.

original text, compressing it into 153 lines, Chaucer better parallels Alcyone's torment and his narrator's sickness. In omitting Ovid's details about Ceyx's concern for his brother, Chaucer also focuses the Ovidian intertext almost exclusively on Alcyone's response to love-loss. Indicating a temporal turn in the narrative, the narrator reads, "Now for to speke of Alcyone, his wif," and continues the tale by describing the symptomology of Alcyone's grief: Alcyone's "herte began to [erme]," she started to lead a "hertely sorowful lif," and the sounds of her grief reverberate, evoking the narrator's sympathy ("she...wepte that pittee was to here") (76, 80, 85, 106-7). Chaucer exaggerates the distance between Alcyone and her dead husband through the repeated image of "home," to which Alcyone is bound and to which Ceyx will never return: "This lady, that was left at hom, / Hath wonder that the king ne com / Hom, for it was a longe terme" (77-9).

Chaucer's version focuses on the challenge that is posed to the griever to face mortality by drawing on the medieval dream theory that the dreamer can find truth in the dream.<sup>10</sup> Alcyone's "sweven," collaboratively designed by the gods Morpheus and Juno, indeed answers her prayers for information on her husband, revealing that Ceyx has drowned (119). However, the conjuring of Ceyx's ghost also emphasizes a less expected lesson. The ghost encourages his widow's reengagement with life, telling her,

...My swete wyf,  
 Awake! Let be your sorwful lyf,  
 For in your sorwe there lyth no red,  
 For, certes, swete, I am but ded.  
 Ye shul me never on lyve yse.  
 (201-5)

Whereas in Ovid's original text, Alcyone is transformed into a bird to be with her beloved upon waking from her dream, Chaucer ends the tale before staging a reunion through metamorphosis. Chaucer thus forgoes the scene in which transformation appeases Alcyone's grief, using Ceyx

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<sup>10</sup> See Steven F. Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

instead to remove her from the painful and delaying process of mourning. The sight of Ceyx's "dreynte body," hard proof that there is no remedy ("red"), forces Alcyone to grapple with the cruel patterns of Fortune (195). The rhymes ending the couplet—"... 'Allas!' quod she for *sorwe*, / And deyede within the thridde *morwe*"—are temporal indicators that establish the debilitating relationship between grief and the present (213-14; my italics). Furthermore, the narrator's attempt at *occupatio* to disrupt the text from its focus on the swooning symptoms of anguish—"But what she sayede more in that *swow* / I may not telle yow as *now*"—suggests the exigency of recovery in the Ovidian poem-within-a-poem (215-16; my italics).

Chaucer does not explicitly expose the links between multiple stories of loss as much as he emphasizes what the grievors ought to *do* with loss. The Ovidian exemplum effectively distracts the narrator from concentrating on the potential for insomnia-induced death, symptomatic of his alleged lovesickness, as he claims:

I had be dolven everydel  
And ded, ryght thurgh defaute of slep,  
Yif I ne had red and take kep  
Of this tale next before  
(222-25)

Upon closing the book, the narrator feels encouraged to explore the possibility that ancient gods might relieve him of sleeplessness, imagining himself in parallel with Alcyone. Contemplating a suitable bribe for Morpheus, he suggests that a feather bed, satin fabric, and soft pillows, would compel the god of sleep to accept his plea for sleep. The narrator also surmises that he could make Juno feel well "payd" for granting him sleep (269). These hypothetical supplications confirm that sleep, and more specifically dreaming, lead to Alcyone's consolation, but also that the narrator embraces the possibility of his own recuperation through dreaming. Here, by fantasizing about an interaction with Morpheus and Juno, as they function in Ovid's text, he also

foreshadows the way in which creativity, fiction, and anachronism foster recovery from grief and stagnation. The narrator adapts the story to his personal narrative and effectively recognizes that his is not the only experience of grief.

The prayer to Morpheus helps the narrator fall into his spatially and temporally diverse dream world, speeding up his recovery time. Having replaced Boethius's physician Lady Philosophy with the Ovidian romance, Chaucer continues to offer the narrator "cures" that parody the opening scene of the *Boece*, first inviting but soon dismantling the readers' expectations for a Boethian vision. In the dream, the narrator's bright bedchamber inverts the Boethian sickroom, where Lady Philosophy "com...ner and sette...doun upon the uttereste corner of [Boethius's] bed."<sup>11</sup> The sickroom of the *Boece* is visually imagined in the full-page miniature illumination on folio 27 of British Library MS Harley 4335, a late fifteenth-century French manuscript of *Le Livre de Boece de Consolacion*, an anonymous French translation of Boethius's *Consolation* (fig. 3). While in the *Boece*, this room is a "solitarie place of...exil," the illuminator of MS Harley 4335 reimagines Boethius in the company of women and books, suffering and despondent in spite of the opportunity for social interaction and learning.<sup>12</sup> In the *Book of the Duchess*, Chaucer shows a similarly humorous mis-imprisonment of the narrator, whose exile is only an exile from grief, rather than from life itself. The narrator becomes more distracted from his sorrow as he becomes more textually embedded and even partial to the strumpet muses that give Boethius false comfort in the *Boece*. As I have written, Chaucer refuses the narrator any single physician. Instead, he offers multiple stories that cure through distraction. In addition to the story of Ovid that initiates his process of consolation is a dream world

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<sup>11</sup> Chaucer, *Boece*, 1, Pr. 1, 84-5.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, Pr. 3, 10-11.



Figure 3: London, British Library MS Harley 4335, fol. 27r. This full-page illustration accompanies the text of *Le Livre de Boece de Consolacion* and features Boethius ill in bed in his cell, accompanied by not only Lady Philosophy, but also his books and other ladies.

characterized by pleasant sounds and vivid literary and historical narrative fragments that extend the duration of his relief from suffering. If only the Boethius represented in Figure 3 were to open his eyes, he would be able to recognize the chance for similar diversion.

In Chaucer's poem, the sweet sounds of the bedchamber startle the dreamer out of sleep ("affrayed me out of my slep"), inducing the pleasure of forgetting that removes him from the temporality of his personal past (296). A form of aesthetic delay, these melodies encourage the dreamer to take note of his environs. "Thorgh noyse and swetnesse of her songe," and, "al of oon acord," the birds' "swete entewnes" resemble the sounds "of heven" (297, 305, 308-9). Music here suspends movement to widen the duration of time in which the narrator can begin to escape the suffering he experiences in his waking present, very precisely through contemplation of his anachronistic atmosphere.

But first, the opening scene of the narrator's dream world recalls canto 2 of Dante's *Purgatorio*, the middle canticle in the *Commedia*, in which Dante requests that his old friend Casella sing in remembrance of earthly love.<sup>13</sup> This comparison reinforces the way in which Chaucer makes aesthetic delay a necessary precondition to playful and peripatetic movement, and to ethical progress, in addition to literal procession. Like the song playing in the narrator's dream world in the *Book of the Duchess*, Casella's song soothes the listening souls into a calm associated with "sweetness" ("la dolcezza").<sup>14</sup> The suspension of activity invites the rebuke of the lawgiver, Cato, who worries that the spellbound souls have not endured the painful, but ethically necessary journey. The song contemplating mortal *eros* distracts them from the love of God, whereas their forward and upward motion on Mount Purgatory is contingent upon

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<sup>13</sup> Dante, *Purgatorio*, eds. Jean Hollander and Robert Hollander (New York: Random House, 2003), 2, 110.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 114.

forgetting much of the mortal past. Despite Cato's functionality in helping the souls recover their pre-lapsarian, transcendent virtues, Dante acknowledges the value of earthbound preoccupations with the past and insists upon the balance between aesthetic and ethical production. He rejects the premise that all memories must be obliterated, purged by the waters of Lethe, when he creates the panacean river Eunoe, which ensures that souls remember their virtuous pasts in an echo of Cato's instruction. Later, in *Purgatorio* 8, just before descending into the Valley of Princes, Dante and the penitents listen to a soul who recites *Te lucis ante terminum*, "with notes so sweet" ("con sì dolci note") that they invite the audience to participate in singing sweetly ("dolcemente"), and this moment, too, exemplifies the necessary balance between ethical development and aesthetic experience.<sup>15</sup> Song temporarily delays purgatorial peregrinations, but it also unifies the souls in preparation for their heavenly ascent, fostering a spiritual community.

In both Dante's *Purgatorio* and Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*, the sweetness of music momentarily defers pedestrian movement, but ultimately motivates the forward motion of the listeners. As Mary Carruthers explains, "*Suavis* is cognate with the verbs *suadeo* and *persuadeo*, 'to persuade,' literally 'to sweeten.'"<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, according to Glending Olson in his discussion of medieval theory of recreation, "relaxation in the form of *gaudia* offers a temporary release, enabling people subsequently to return to their work and continue it more effectively."<sup>17</sup> Both Dante's *Commedia* and Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess* show how contemplating the aesthetic as an end in itself can lead to a journey forward that is not only physical, but also ethically-, spiritually-, and psychologically replenishing. Even in the *Boece*, in which Boethius

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<sup>15</sup> Dante, *Purgatorio*, 8, 14, 16.

<sup>16</sup> Mary Carruthers, "Sweetness," *Speculum* 81 (2006), 1008.

<sup>17</sup> Glending Olson, *Literature as Recreation in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1982), 94.

rests stationary in bed, told to brush away the strumpet muses, aesthetic ritual proves essential to his educational development. As Johnson writes, Boethius “would be nowhere without song, since song’s sweetness is what makes harsh order of prose easier to swallow...[and] aesthetic pleasure is a lynchpin of spiritual transformation.”<sup>18</sup>

Chaucer makes the dream out of not only song, but also textual and historiographical traditions, staging the narrator’s encounter with the past as a means of recovery. Perceptive to his new artistic surroundings, the narrator is faced with the glass windows and the chamber walls of his bedchamber, depicting the painting of the Troy story, and both the text and gloss—the script and commentary—of the allegorical Old French narrative, the *Romance of the Rose*, which was begun by Guillaume de Lorris between 1225 and 1245 and continued by Jean de Meun between 1268 and 1285, but also translated into Middle English by Chaucer in the *Romaunt of the Rose*.<sup>19</sup> The narrator continues to find consolation in this literal new space, which evokes the intersection of legendary, romance, and historical time:

And, sooth to seyn, my chambre was  
Ful wel depeynted, and with glas  
Were al the wyndowes wel yglased,  
Ful clere, and nat an hoole ycrased,  
That to beholde hyt was gret joye.  
For hooly al the story of Troye  
Was in the glasyng ywroght thus,  
Of Ector and of kyng Priamus,  
Of Achilles and kyng Lamedoun,  
Of Medea and of Jasoun,  
Of Paris, Eleyne, and Lavyne.  
And al the walles with colours fyne  
Were peynted, bothe text and glose,  
Of al the Romaunce of the Rose.  
(321-334)

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<sup>18</sup> Johnson, “Chaucer and the Consolation of Prosimetrum,” 459.

<sup>19</sup> Noah D. Guynn, “*Le Roman de la rose*,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval French Literature*, eds. Simon Gaunt and Sarah Kay (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 48. Chaucer, *Romaunt of the Rose*, *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987).

The narrator wakes up in a cell-like space that familiarizes him with a productive and plural understanding of time. By contrast, in the *Boece*, Boethius's prison-like cell narrows his sense of time, reminding him that he occupies a position of suffering and isolation from the social and political experiences of earthly time. Lady Philosophy, who links exile to all earthly existence, including life in and beyond Boethius's prison-cell, works to make Boethius "see" time from a transcendent perspective. In the cell, she teaches Boethius about divine ordinance, since his "syghte is occupyed and destourbed by imagynacioun of erthely thynges" and his eyes are "torned" toward "false goodes."<sup>20</sup> The physical space that encloses Boethius during his process of consolation metaphorically reorients his gaze toward God, eliciting his knowledge of the divine, which clarifies the idea of time as merely a function of limited human understanding. Boethius's spiritual education on how to "see time" is focused on displacing him from earthly ground and connecting him to the transcendent realm; unlike the bedroom of Chaucer's narrator, Boethius's cell is the site for taking him out of time, rather than re-enmeshing him in the historical world.

To understand how Chaucer plays with perspective in the bedroom scene opening the dream sequence of the *Book of the Duchess*, it is useful to look at folio 1 of Harley 4335 (fig. 4), which, again, contains a copy of *Le Livre de Boece de Consolacion*. The folio features a full-page illustration of Boethius's experience that seems at odds with the *Boece* in that it stresses the possibility of finding consolation through physical books, rather than the mental library of wisdom imparted by Lady Philosophy. In the predominant space depicted in the manuscript image, Boethius is a lectern-bound reader, gazing at an open-faced manuscript. He is angled toward a painting, hanging like a mirror on the wall, of a victim of imprisonment, living (in not

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<sup>20</sup> Chaucer, *Boece*, 3, Pr. 1, 37-8, 48.



Figure 4: British Library MS Harley 4335, fol. 1r. In this full-page illustration opening the text of *Le Livre de Boece de Consolacion*, Boethius as author examines himself in his reflection. This “mirror image” this reflection shows Boethius as he appears written in the text, a victim of Fortune visited by the white-garbed Lady Philosophy.

such prison-like conditions) in a luxurious boudoir. This second figure, in the painting-within-a-painting, also represents Boethius, though as a visionary subject in need of spiritual healing, rather than author and reader. Nevertheless, the Harley illuminator indicates that the two primary subjects in the illumination are indeed the same subject by positioning both in front of a book, and thus offering a reminder that the *Consolation of Philosophy* is a text both written by and about Boethius. In the sense that this illumination emphasizes the value of books, Boethius's cell and workspace resemble the bedchamber of Chaucer's narrator, revealing a world of books.

This illumination also nuances what Boethius presents in the text of the *Boece* through the way in which it represents perspective, and as a result, it suggests how Chaucer's narrator's cell in the *Book of the Duchess* functions differently than Boethius's cell. In the *Boece*, the protagonist contrasts his prison cell with his library at home, lamenting the bleakness of his new space, bereft of physical books. However, Lady Philosophy corrects his false conception of the library, asking him to think of it as a place within his own mind, rather than as a physical space in his home, "apparayled and wrought with yvory and with glas, than after the sete of thi thought."<sup>21</sup> The Harley illumination challenges Lady Philosophy's dismissal of the material text, even if it accommodates the allegorical figure in Boethius's bedroom scene, by staging both Boethius-as-visionary and Boethius-as-author in front of physical books. Furthermore, the space depicted evokes the idea that multiple perspectives, and not only the teleologically-oriented perspective, are fundamental to transformation. The visionary Boethius directs his eyes toward both the book he reads and Lady Philosophy, implying that he turns his gaze both inward or spiritually, and outward, and the author Boethius who appears at his desk looks at both his book and his mirror image. The multiple gazes suggest that this second figure practices a more

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<sup>21</sup> Chaucer, *Boece*, 1, Pr. 5, 40-2.

figurative self-reflection, which is tied to the production or revision of the book. In the context of the *Book of the Duchess*, this second figure resembles Chaucer's narrator, who finds consolation in the world of books, but also sets out to write his own verse by engaging with his visionary experience.

The proliferation of perspectives in the Harley illumination even suggests an alternative reading of Boethian eschatology in the *Boece*. In the bedchamber and study of the manuscript illumination, vision is both in and beyond the world in the book, but so it is in the *Boece*, as well: Lady Philosophy seeks to reorient Boethius's gaze upward toward the heavens and to distance Boethius from earthbound concerns, and yet the repeated use of earthbound images—of clouded vision, the mental and actual library, and the place of exile—also insists on a positive articulation of transformation that reminds readers Boethius is still within an earthly temporality, even if it is liminal. The illumination is a reminder that the *Boece* is unresolved and highly dialogic, concerned as much with the process of transformation as it is with the *telos* of Boethius's educational and spiritual journey.

This process, which involves the potential consolatory function of books in both the Harley illumination and the *Boece*, indicates that enclosure for Boethius hardly means stasis. In Chaucer's poem, likewise, the walls enclosing the narrator actively engage him with narrative, and even become constructive to his health. Chaucer's narrator begins as the sufferer reflected in the Harley mirror or the Boethian figure in the *Boece*, but, acquiring distance from his woes through the anachronistic dream world bedchamber, he comes to resemble instead the detached Boethian figure in the study, involved with the book before him and even authorizing it. Moreover, in Chaucer's narrator's dream, the narrator's Ovidian book contains the initial call for his recovery, but is displaced by a plurality of narratives, and eventually a text of the narrator's

own devising. His gaze, unable to resist the opportunity “to beholde” these stories, is grounded in the dream world aesthetics, shifting between stories, rather than turned upward toward an abstract and transcendent celestial bliss (325).

The image of the stained glass wall attempts to efface signs that it is made of various glass segments, and in this way, it has the same effect as Chaucer’s anachronism, appearing alternately as disparate and whole, depending on the viewer’s perspective. The painted glass has “nat an hole ycrased,” suggesting that its fragments are perfectly fitted together, but the very rhetorical act of negation prevents readers from forgetting that the story appears on stained glass (324). “Ywrought” in glass is “*hooly al* the story of Troye,” according to the narrator, but quickly the narrative shifts to juxtaposing this “whole” depiction with the more contemporary narrative of the *Romance of the Rose*, creating a textual universe of historiography and romance made up by a proliferation of times. Integrating diverse textual worlds and temporalities, the bedchamber represents a Foucauldian heterotopia and, like many of the French *dits amoureux* by Guillaume de Machaut, Jean Froissart, and Oton de Graunson, it visualizes “slices of time” that, to even more explicitly productive ends than Foucault intended, distract the narrator from the burden of a single and totalizing past. Through the ekphrastic Troy story, Chaucer immerses the narrator in a Golden Age, faraway from his own time. Simultaneously, by presenting the *Romance of the Rose*, Chaucer removes the narrator from history altogether, especially since this text is a reminder of how the dream can free the dreamer from the constraints of ordinary temporal experience.<sup>22</sup> The anachronism of the setting and the plural experiences of time it

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<sup>22</sup> As Emmanuèle Baumgartner writes, in the *Romance of the Rose*, like other dream fiction, Guillaume de Lorris “anchored his narrative to a moment impossible to locate or to situate in historical time because it does not exist, nor did it ever exist except in the consciousness or subconscious of the dreamer,” in “The Play of Temporalities; or, The Reported Dream of Guillaume de Lorris,” in *Rethinking the Romance of the Rose: Text, Image, Reception*, eds. Kevin Brownlee and Sylvia Huot (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), 22.

evokes suspend the narrator's temporality of suffering, once more facilitating his distance from grief.

The combination of stories—an antique “text,” a thirteenth-century Old French narrative, and a gloss presumably composed at an even later date—produces a feeling of “gret joye” for the narrator, which his sickness in his waking state had prevented him from experiencing (325). Seeing the history of Troy, as I have suggested, expands the narrator's sense of the past, even if his eyes falsely assume the painting to represent the past “hooly,” and it enables him to escape his own fragment of history, a history of loss. With the *Romance of the Rose*, Chaucer displaces the narrator from time entirely. When Chaucer's narrator takes note of the text and gloss, readers are reminded of how the narrator of the *Romance of the Rose* fell into his dream vision; this narrator's transition from waking world to dream world mirrors the transition that Chaucer's own narrator makes between such “spaces” and “times.” The parallels between the protagonist of Old French literary creation and Chaucer's narrator reinforce the experience in which the play of the dream vision and its uncertain trajectories create opportunities for consolation. While the *Romance of the Rose* posits a singular quest for the rose, the narrator's adventure consistently delays and thwarts the achievement of the sought object; the development of his journey, although predicated upon absence, depends on his diversion from this focus.

The *Romance of the Rose* thus contrasts the idea posited in Hugh of St. Victor's twelfth-century *Didascalicon* that wandering aimlessly is less productive than wandering with a clear focus. In Book Five, Chapter Five, setting out to describe the objects that interfere with study, Hugh of St. Victor uses the metaphor of drifting through a forest to convey one particular trajectory of reading and learning. If two people, with equal talent and exerting equal effort, pursue the same study, they do not necessarily attain the same goals; “the one penetrates it

quickly, quickly seizes upon what he is looking for” (“alter cito penetrat, cito quod quaerit apprehendit”), but “the other labors long and makes little progress” (“alter diu laborat et parum proficit”).<sup>23</sup> Hugh of St. Victor sets up this comparison particularly by using the following metaphor:

two men both traveling through a wood, one of them struggling around in bypaths but the other picking the short cuts of a direct route: they move along their ways with the same amount of motion, but they do not reach the goal at the same time. But what shall I call Scripture if not a wood? Its thoughts, like so many sweetest fruits, we pick as we read and chew as we consider them. Therefore, whoever does not keep to an order and a method in the reading of so great a collection of books wanders as it were into the very thick of the forest and loses the path of the direct route.<sup>24</sup>

Hugh of St. Victor’s metaphor, which offers instruction in finding meaning through Scriptural exegesis, becomes a counterpoint to the celebration of polydirectionality in the *Romance of the Rose*. The narrator’s loss of focus in the dream world, which differentiates him from the “successful” reader of Hugh of St. Victor’s model, becomes productive to his journey. Chaucer’s suggestion of a parallel between the dream journey in the *Book of the Duchess* and the journey in the *Romance of the Rose*, then, emphasizes his narrator’s ability to move forward by indulging in distractions and the involuntary act of forgetting. Reading the writing on the wall in the bedchamber of his dream, which acquaints the narrator with both an authoritative history and a narrative that rejects a traditional temporal sequence entirely, ironically induces his loss of the

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<sup>23</sup> Hugh of St. Victor, *Didascalicon, De Studio Legendi: A Critical Text*, ed. Charles Henry Buttimer (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University Press, 1939), Book 5. The English translation comes from Hugh of Saint Victor, *The Didascalicon of Hugh of Saint Victor: A Guide to the Medieval Arts*, trans. Jerome Taylor (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961, 1991), 126.

<sup>24</sup> “aspice duos pariter silvam transeuntes, et hunc quidem per devia laborantem, illum vero recti itineris compendia legentem, pari motu cursum tendunt, sed non aequè perveniunt. quid autem scripturam dixerim nisi silvam, cuius sententias quasi fructus quosdam dulcissimos legendo carpimus, tractando ruminamus? qui ergo in tanta multitudine librorum legendi modum et ordinem non custodit, quasi in condensitate saltus oberrans, tramitem recti itineris perdit, et, ut dicitur, semper discentes, numquam ad scientiam pervenientes.” Hugh of St. Victor, *Didascalicon, De Studio Legendi*, and translation from Hugh of Saint Victor, *The Didascalicon of Hugh of Saint Victor*, 126-27.

memory of his personal past. This is indeed the memory he needs to forget in order to initiate his peregrinations through the forest.

Just as Chaucer's narrator resembles the narrator of the *Romance of the Rose*, his journey proves similarly accidental and unexpected. The narrator's meditation on his artistic surroundings is cut short by the sounds of a huntsman's blow, "wonder lowed," which further distracts the narrator from the "gret wonder" he feels at his ability to live (344). The repetition of "wonder" here shows the effectiveness of this distraction, as a sensory experience that replaces his earlier feeling. This interruption—signifying one of the many discontinuous moments of the narrator's passage through the dream world—draws the narrator deeper into an adventure characterized by diurnal routine, diverting him from the abnormally extensive spell of excessive grief (344). The huntsman's call reiterates the possibility of being awakened out of a state of perpetual remembrance; the blow not only replaces the narrator's woe through its repetition of "wonder," but also revives the sound of the messenger's horn in Chaucer's Ovidian romance, sent by Juno to return Morpheus to his circadian rhythms. The sound wakes up Morpheus, bidding him to show Alycone Ceyx's ghost, which represents a turning point in her narrative of grief. But in addition, Morpheus himself derives consolation from the reverberations of sound. Sleeping within a "derke valeye"—a landscape in which "ther never yet grew corn ne gras"—Morpheus regularly produces only "dedly" noises, and his sleep prevents him from producing the "other werk" that comes with wakefulness (155, 157, 162, 169). In an arrival, "fleyng faste," that evokes the energy of the animals rushing through the narrator's dream forest, the messenger repeatedly commands, "Awake," to prompt Morpheus's reengagement with normal patterns of living (178-9). Of course, "awake" is also the command that Ceyx uses to stir Alcyone out of her melancholic condition. Chaucer thus ricochets sounds across his poetic narrative, as

stimulants to cure Morpheus's doldrums of sleep, the grief of the widow, and the endless sickness of the insomniac protagonist. He multiplies the aural experiences, as well as the possibilities for recovery, and finally the figures in his poem that require and undergo the processes of rejuvenation.

Returning to that wondrously loud blow of the horn, the narrator is drawn into the scene of the hunt, under the authority of "th'emperour Octovyen," who presumably refers to the Roman Emperor Augustus Caesar (63 BCE-14 CE) (368). Scholarship has traditionally imposed a rigid significance on Octavian.<sup>25</sup> However, in the context of the dream world's anachronisms that disassociate the narrator from his suffering, Octavian's role at the head of a medieval hunt represents a similar temporal disjunction in which the narrator can take pleasure. Through this character, Chaucer unites Augustan Rome with medieval England—imposing an "other space" (*espace autre*) on a "real space," in Foucauldian terms—to construct a heterogeneous encounter for the narrator that mixes up not only spatial experiences, but also chronologies, suspending the narrator's own temporality of loss. As a result of Octavian's familiar persona and historical distance from the narrator's fourteenth-century temporality, it is tempting to envision Octavian as a function of the adventure-quest logic of the narrator's dream vision; as Zrinka Stahuljak writes in her discussion of adventure time, "contingency of encounters and of recognition, and of failures to meet and non-recognition, is the rule, occurring along the path of the quest, itself not anchored in a geographical or spatial reality, but abstracted from it."<sup>26</sup> The hunting scene of Chaucer's dream vision evokes a "relational temporality" that implicates the narrator in a

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<sup>25</sup> For instance, Bernard F. Huppé and D.W. Robertson see "octo-vyen" as an allegory for Christ's coming in *Fruyt and Chaf: Studies in Chaucer's Allegories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 97.

<sup>26</sup> Zrinka Stahuljak, "Adventures in Wonderland: Between Experience and Knowledge," in *Thinking through Chrétien de Troyes*, eds. Zrinka Stahuljak, Virginie Greene, Sarah Kay, Sharon Kinoshita, and Peggy McCracken (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2011), 77-8.

“scansion of adventures.”<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, the narrator’s random encounters suggest the importance of being vulnerable to mutability and fortune. While these are characteristically Boethian themes, the sources of lament in the *Boece*, Chaucer presents them as the very mechanisms for recovery and revival.

Anachronisms, which become even more glaring in the forest than in the bedchamber in which the dream vision begins, show how the individual can simultaneously occupy the historical present, living immanently and immersively, and transcend temporalities as a productive distancing mechanism. Octavian appears not as an item in a catalog recording ancient characters, like Hector and Priam on the stained-glass wall, but rather as an active huntsman traversing medieval hunting grounds. At the same time as the emperor’s historical identity temporally distances him from the narrator, evoking a very particular ancient time and place, he cuts across temporal and spatial boundaries. The specificity of time and place thus fades from the narrator’s memory. In the light of the social ritualization of hunting, a leisure activity among the *artes venandi*, which linked hunting to regality,<sup>28</sup> Chaucer makes Octavian more familiar than his historical identity would suggest by demonstrating the emperor’s interest in the wood. The wood associated with Octavian, marked by its possibilities for diversion and medieval game, forms a natural scene that also naturally coerces the narrator to participate:

Anoon ryght whan I herde that,  
How that they wolde on-huntynge goon,

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<sup>27</sup> Stahuljak, “Adventures in Wonderland,” 77.

<sup>28</sup> See William Perry Marvin, *Hunting Law and Ritual in Medieval English Literature* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2006) and Anne Rooney, *Hunting in Middle English Literature* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1993). While the hunting scene here in the *Book of the Duchess* has no obvious analogs or sources, it would have seemed familiar to Chaucer’s readers, as hunting was among the countryside pleasures of the English aristocrat and was discussed through works like Gaston Phebus’s *Le Livre de la Chasse*, popular in the late 1380s. This text describes the life of hunters as the most pleasing life to God, and one particular manuscript of the text, Morgan Library MS M. 1044, features on folio 4 a miniature of a hart, the object of Octavian’s chase in the *Book of the Duchess*. In the early fifteenth century, John of Gaunt’s nephew, Edward, second Duke of York, translated this work into English (*The Master of the Game*) in honor of Gaunt.

I was ryght glad, and up anoon  
Took my hors, and forth I wente  
(354-57)

The narrator's phrase "forth...wente" is a repetition of the language used to portray the whelp racing ahead of the narrator and the bustling wild animals in the forest, reinforcing the image of the narrator in a ritual of movement, and suggesting his unknowing participation in the process of his own consolation.

Octavian's hunting party "fails" in that it never captures a hart, but Chaucer suggests that the conclusion of the hunt at the end of the day actually productively involves the hunters in an essential part of life's routine. Octavian sounds the horn to unleash his hounds, which discover the hart, but ultimately they "overshote hym alle," signifying the escape of the hart from the huntsmen's grasp (383). The emperor makes another sound, now "a forloyn," which signals the loss of the hart and summons the retreat of the members of the hunting party, but this repetition also notably recalls the sounds that help to awaken different characters from their state of gloom (386). Evoking Nietzsche's idea that grief has duration, Octavian's call for the hunt to end models Octavian as the griever who knows when to divert his attention from the past to the present. For Nietzsche, "cheerfulness, clear conscience, the carefree deed, faith in the future, all this depends...on one's being able to forget at the right time as well to remember at the right time."<sup>29</sup> The ability to live "unhistorically," or to live fully in the present, ensures activity following an experience of loss.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*, trans. Peter Preuss (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1980), 10.

<sup>30</sup> Highlighting the pleasure of forgetting, Nietzsche stresses this term, "unhistorically," to characterize the way in which the animal lives, "for it goes into the present like a number without leaving a curious fraction; it does not know how to dissimulate, hides nothing, appears at every moment fully as what it is...Man on the other hand resists the great and ever greater weight of the past: this oppresses him and bends him sideways," 9.

Octavian's forest constitutes a curative landscape, representing the type of history Chaucer prescribes to serve present life. As the next section will show, in dialogue with the grieving Knight, the narrator returns to the subject of Octavian's hunt to emphasize the huntsman's relentless pursuit of the hart and, with it, his forward-looking gaze, oriented toward the future. Misunderstanding the Knight's source of woe, the narrator ponders aloud the possibility that the Knight's grief stems from Octavian's inability to catch the hart, and announces, "Sir...this game is doon; / I holde that this hert be goon; / These huntes konne hym nowher see" (539-41). Revealing more than his inability to understand the loss at hand, the narrator suggests that the "game" can divert the player from a burdensome past. However, the Knight denies the ending of the hunt as the reason for his sorrow—"Y do no fors therof.../ My thought ys theron never a del"—and therein denies the opportunity to forget his loss, even temporarily (542-43).

The narrator's h(e)art mistake teaches that the experience of loss is not limited to a single individual. His remark at the end of the dream, "al was doon, / For that tyme, the hert-huntyng," suggests that the hunt for both the hart and the heart never ends conclusively (1312-13); the "tyme" of hunting both indicates and requires duration and routine. Whereas Octavian allots the hart hunt a fixed segment of time, the grieving Knight in the consolation narrative, which Octavian's hunt anticipates, searches endlessly for his love. By hoping for the recovery of Blanche on earth, he blinds himself to the reality of time, focusing only on his personal past and never on the potential opportunities of the present and future. Octavian models the productiveness of desire and the ability to overcome the reality of loss, helping Chaucer's narrator along the way, but the griever, as I show next, becomes vulnerable to the overpowering forces of mutability, revealing the dangers of escapism. It is in the mostly markedly elegiac

scene of the poem, then, that Chaucer theorizes about the encumbrance of an individual's personal history on present life.

## 2. THE TEMPORALITY OF LOSS IN THE CONSOLATION SCENE

In the “consolation” scene of Chaucer’s dream vision, the bumbling narrator, having grown accustomed to the unexpected trajectories of his dream world, stumbles upon a youthful man dressed all in black, sitting alone beneath the canopy of a giant oak tree. The narrator paints an incongruous image: a mourner amid the abundant elements of nature, his lament grating against the sweet songs of the birds, the dark palette of his clothing at variance with the sylvan green wood. His widow’s habit forms a narratively-constricting black hole, contrasting the broad and textually-rich narrator, wearing the “colours fyne” of his bedchamber. The courtly figure’s sounds of sorrow are a shock to nature, which, the narrator wonders, “myght suffre any creature / To have such sorwe and be not ded” (468-69). He makes the idea of being simultaneously grief-stricken and alive into an ontological paradox; “not ded” articulates an experience of time in which the Knight has remained present, but also in which his suffering has entrapped him within a past unable to be revived. In a state that is “agaynes kynde,” the Knight has what would have been considered a pathological medical condition in the Middle Ages (16).<sup>31</sup>

The Knight’s state of unnatural suffering mirrors the narrator’s condition, at least as he presents it before he falls asleep and into his dream world. However, in contrast to the narrator, who progresses temporally through his random itinerancy, the Knight is immobilized in a temporality that has itself undergone paralysis. His song of bereavement—“deth...toke my lady swete”—signifies his state of mourning, the deteriorating effects of which manifest in his

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<sup>31</sup> Olson, *Literature as Recreation*, 85.

lonesome recourse to the past (481, 483). His “dedly sorwful soun” reverberates loudly enough to physically halt the wandering narrator on his otherwise somnambulant journey (462). The Knight’s music deadens the voices the narrator hears upon first waking in the bedchamber, and his lack of social engagement baffles the narrator.

Missing the meaning of the Knight’s song, the narrator falls under the impression that he is diseased, rather than grieving, wondering, “What ayleth hym to sitten here?” (449). Pale and bloodless, the Knight appears at a liminal point between life and death. Drawing on the Galenic science of swooning, the narrator’s characterization of the Knight’s physiology dramatizes his melancholia and the active fragmentation of his body:

The blood was fled, for pure drede,  
Doun to hys herte, to make hym warm—  
For wel hyt feled the herte had harm—  
To wite eke why hyt was adrad,  
By kynde, and for to make hyt glad,  
For hit ys membre principal  
Of the body; and that made al  
Hys hewe chaunge and wexe grene  
And pale, for ther noo blood ys sene  
In no maner lym of hys.  
(490-99)

The Knight’s fear of forgetting his lost “lady bryght” produces a physiological reaction, in which his blood is imagined to feel terror on his behalf (477). His lament immerses him in his memories, not only detaching him from the time and space he occupies, but also initiating his corporeal transformation, from a body in weal to a body in woe. The sense of physical impairment makes the Knight’s body a place whose peripheries are abandoned to shore up the ailing heart. Moreover, anamnesis can only temporarily bring what is lost to life; the Knight’s memory competes too much with his present reality, leaving him in a temporality that is neither fully present nor fully past. Whereas memory might poetically or linguistically correspond to the

togetherness of the “membre principal / Of the body,” Chaucer’s language also hyperbolizes the connection between the memory of the lady and physical *dismemberment* (495-96). The memories of Lady White gnaw away at the body of the person who remembers. According to Mary Carruthers, writing on Dante, memory depends upon the body, as the soul “can form no new memories when it no longer has a body.”<sup>32</sup> Thus, whereas Dante proposes that memories produce the body, Chaucer shows an instance in which memories consume it. The Knight’s regurgitation of past experiences in his allusions to Blanche do not make her spirit present among the trees of the woods; he tries to revive his heart by reviving the image of Blanche herself, the dead, but his memory only entombs him along with her.

The language describing the Knight creates the impression that he is figuratively disconnected from the *locus amoenus* he occupies, but Chaucer also stresses the Knight’s unnatural condition and air of lifelessness using literal terms. Whereas the “wode was waxen grene” naturally with the coming of spring, the Knight “wexe grene” because the activity of his blood appears to stop; his development is paradoxically degenerative, in contrast to his surrounding world’s procreativity. As Albrecht Classen writes, “medieval landscapes within literary contexts...are a critical function of the operating protagonists and their subjective perception of the world around them.”<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, in the *Book of the Duchess*, Chaucer contrasts the journeys through grief by associating the Knight and the narrator with different seasons. Despite “that it was May,” a spring month in which most courtly love narratives occur, the Knight is associated with the season of winter, which, according to Classen, is spring’s

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<sup>32</sup> Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, 73.

<sup>33</sup> Albrecht Classen, “Winter as a Phenomenon in Medieval Literature: A Transgression of the Traditional Chronotope?” *Mediaevistik* 24 (2011): 126. Here, Classen also looks to Uta Stormer-Cayas, *Grundstrukturen mittelalterlicher Erzählungen: Raum und Zeit im höfischen Roman* (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 2007).

“distant background,” “an uncomfortable memory of the past months” (291).<sup>34</sup> May is more appropriately the setting for the narrator’s forward movement, which is enhanced by the continual natural rebirth in the forest. Chaucer’s narrator draws on antique mythology—Flora, the Classical goddess of flowers, and Zephyrus, the god of the west wind—to articulate his sense of abundant verdant life. Once more representing the aid of a temporality distinct from the personal pasts that haunt the narrator and the Knight, these allusions contribute to the sense that the spring proceeds from, or “forgets,” the winter: “All was forgeten, and that was sene / For al the woode was waxen grene; / Swetnesse of dew had made hyt waxe” (413-15). While the narrator, forgetting his own burdensome past upon entering his dream world, becomes associated with the springtime that “had forgete the poverttee / That wynter, thorgh his colde morwes / Had mad hyt suffre,” the Knight, who is entrapped by the past, symbolically corresponds to the wintry season that causes physical suffering (410-11). The comparison implies that the Knight’s sense of time is unnatural, since he is caught in a temporality that is neither current nor moving toward the future.

The Knight’s appearance of conflict with the present spring season, but also his idea that he occupies purgatory, dramatizes the immense, synoptic restrictions imposed on him by his longing for the past. He articulates his desire for death—that is, to complete the duration of his lifetime—so to end the seemingly endless sorrow he experiences. The Knight’s perspective on time evokes a Neoplatonic model in which earthy temporality compares to prison, a source of torture from which only the heavens can provide relief. The Knight repeats his wish to die throughout his speech: “Me ys wo that I lyve houres twelve,” and argues “with his owne thought, / And in hys wyt disputed faste / Why and how hys lyf myght laste” (573, 504-6). In this liminal

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<sup>34</sup> Classen, “Winter as a Phenomenon in Medieval Literature,” 128.

condition, a perpetual process of dying without ever reaching the finality of death, the Knight converses with the imagined, albeit unresponsive figure of death. Rather than claim, like John Donne did at least 200 years later, that death cannot take him (“yet canst thou kill me”), the Knight wishes that death had taken his life: “deth, what ayleth the, / That thou noldest have taken me” (481-82).<sup>35</sup> He confirms his detachment from life by apostrophizing death instead of speaking to the narrator who stands alive and well before him.

For modern readers, the Knight’s inability to see a future beyond grief invokes a framework of trauma theory. Following modern psychoanalysis, Louise A. Fradenburg states that a bad form of mourning consists of endless and painful grief, while a good form of mourning leads to a final cathartic instance, releasing the griever from pain.<sup>36</sup> Fradenburg’s notion of good mourning entails a grief that is “subject to an economy of moderation,” thus evoking an appropriate duration of time.<sup>37</sup> Immoderate grief prevents the individual from suspending the influence of history over his personal life, and in the potential for grief to paralyze one’s movement forward in time, Nietzsche says that history can burden rather than enrich the experience of the person who remembers. Traumatic history, in particular, breaches the continuous flow of time, while the act of forgetting may benefit the individual. Indeed, Fradenburg’s “economy of moderation” might require the mourner to experience forgetting in order to concentrate on the present and future temporalities.

In the *Book of the Duchess*, the Knight’s historical sense blinds him to the present and, in effect, uproots the future. He mourns violently, clinging to an illusion of life in death, believing

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<sup>35</sup> John Donne, “Holy Sonnet X,” in *John Donne’s Poetry: Authoritative Texts, Criticism*, ed. Donald R. Dickson (New York: W.W. Norton, 2007).

<sup>36</sup> Louise O. Fradenburg, “‘Voice Memorial’: Loss and Reparation in Chaucer’s Poetry,” *Exemplaria* 2, 1 (1990): 181.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.

in the presence of the lost figure, and defying the productive work that mourning can otherwise achieve. In addition to Fradenburg's different conceptions of mourning and Nietzsche's idea of the oppressiveness of history, Augustine's theory of historic distension sheds light on the role that memory can have in the revival of the self. The *Confessions* proposes how the individual can recover the self from the subjugation of earthly memory. Augustine's sense of history disarticulates the self to the point that only God can bring it together again, and inevitably it serves life, rather than encumbers it. His writings on the processes of remembrance evoke the Platonic conception of anamnesis, which returns the believer to God in an enactment of the soul's natural inclination. Augustine writes:

For I have found nothing coming from you which I have not stored in my memory since the time I first learnt of you. Since the day I learnt of you, I have never forgotten you. Where I discovered the truth there I found my God, truth itself, which from the time I learnt it, I have not forgotten. And so, since the time I learnt of you, you remain in my consciousness, and there I find you when I recall you and delight in you.<sup>38</sup>

For Augustine, to live in the present, while considering the past, represents "immediate awareness": "The present considering the past is the memory, the present considering the present is immediate awareness, the present considering the future is expectation."<sup>39</sup> While this ability to consider all temporalities in the present fosters a specifically spiritual enlightenment, it is one that Chaucer's Knight in the *Book of the Duchess* explicitly lacks, particularly by allowing earthly memory to consume his every thought. In an allegorical reading, his attempts to return to his lost wife miss the point of *memoria*.

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<sup>38</sup> "neque enim aliquid de te inveni quod non meminissem, ex quo didici te, nam ex quo didici te non sum oblitus tui. ubi enim inveni veritatem, ibi inveni deum meum, ipsam veritatem, quam ex quo didici non sum oblitus. itaque ex quo te didici, manes in memoria mea, et illic te invenio cum reminiscor tui, et delector in te." Augustine, *Confessions*, 10.24.35.

<sup>39</sup> "sunt enim haec in anima tria quaedam et alibi ea non video, praesens de praeteritis memoria, praesens de praesentibus contuitus, praesens de futuris expectatio." Ibid., 11.20.26.

### 3. REVISING BOETHIAN DIALOGUE: ANTI-CONSOLATION IN THE *BOOK OF THE DUCHESS*

A Boethian reading of the “consolation” scene invites the same attention to the Knight’s misguided sense of time as the modern psychoanalytic and Nietzschean readings do. However, it distinctively represents the Knight, who fails to see properly, as a figure suffering from the delusion of false felicity and Fortune’s Wheel. In the *Boece*, God’s omniscience is tied to His existence beyond time and his distance from the cyclical patterns of mortal experience. Boethius lacks God’s lengthened vision, and with it, the philosophical distance necessary to demystify temporal experience. The success of consolation is predicated on the idea that Boethius can abandon his fragmented perspective of time as a manifestation of Fortune’s caprice, in a universe in which events occur unjustly and arbitrarily. Encouraging Boethius to transform his field of vision, Lady Philosophy aims to correct Boethius’s self-involvement in the present and to guide him to make better long-term choices.

In the *Book of the Duchess*, the Knight is, like the narrator at the beginning of the poem, a version of the unlearned Boethius, only beginning to embark on his path to consolation. Chaucer and other medieval poets parodied the Boethian victim through amatory romances, and the scholar Ann W. Astell uses the oxymoronic phrase “Boethian lovers” to categorize the characters in these texts.<sup>40</sup> The manuscripts Oxford, Bodleian Library, Fairfax 16 and Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 638 only deepen the sense of connection between Boethius and Chaucer’s suffering protagonists, as they juxtapose the dream visions with the poems of Chaucer’s Boethian Group, including the lyrics “Fortune,” “Truth,” and “Lak of Stedfastnesse.” Within the *Book of the Duchess*, Chaucer suggests the parallel particularly through the discourse of vision. The narrator observes that the Knight is so enmeshed in the experience of love loss that he is

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<sup>40</sup> Ann W. Astell, “Visualizing Boethius’s *Consolation* as Romance,” in *New Directions in Boethian Studies*, eds. Noel Harold Kaylor, Jr. and Philip Edward Phillips (Kalamazoo, MI.: Medieval Institute Publications, 2007), 111.

literally bound to earth, unable to move, and visually impaired, a deeply Boethian problem. In his song, the Knight confuses what he really sees—in his present reality—with what is at the forefront of his memory. He uses the present tense when he introduces his subject, “Now that I see my Lady bryght,” later qualifying that she is “ded” and “agoon” (477, 479). Subsequently, while describing Lady White’s beauty, he says, “for be hyt never so derk, / Me thynketh I se hir ever moo” (912-13). In actuality, the Knight’s earthly memory—what in medieval theory was called the inward eye—occupies his gaze, preventing him from perceiving the dreaming bystander. The Knight asks the narrator to accept his distorted sense of time—to see what he sees—through assertions of conviction; his song abounds with phrases, including “y trowe trewly” (687) and “soth to seyen” (818, 856, 989, 1090, 1181, 1194, 1221). The Knight’s limited vision thus represents Boethius’s earthly vision, and with it, a temporally backward gaze, which is invested in the memory of his mortal past and its mutable goods. As Michael D. Cherniss points out, the Knight’s claim, “For y am sorwe, and sorwe ys y,” suggests “that he has forgotten his nature as a man” (597).<sup>41</sup> Chaucer indeed focuses on the Knight’s misuse of his memory; rather than remember his Platonic origins, as is necessary in the Boethian process of transformation, he contemplates only a particular and personal dimension of his past.

In a Boethian reading, the Knight’s lay evokes the antique tale of Orpheus and Eurydice; his preoccupation with his romantic past and his urgent desire to revive his lost Blanche resemble Orpheus’s pursuit of his deceased wife, which leads to not only tragic permanent separation, but also the destruction of the individual self. In emphasizing the Knight’s gaze in the *Book of the Duchess*, Chaucer specifically compares him to the Orpheus represented in Book 3 of the *Boece*. In the *Boece*, Orpheus is not the “blisful” man who “may seen the clere welle of

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<sup>41</sup> Michael D. Cherniss, “The Boethian Dialogue in Chaucer’s *Book of the Duchess*,” *JEGP* 68 (1969): 658.

good...that mai unbynden hym fro the boondes of the hevy erthe.”<sup>42</sup> The narrative of Orpheus’s quest to recover Eurydice instead exemplifies the Boethian injunction to avoid losing oneself to memories of the earthly past, as it can place a person “into the put of helle.”<sup>43</sup> This locus evokes the very “helle-pit” Chaucer describes in the *Book of the Duchess*, which Morpheus occupies in his world of sleep before waking up to produce consolatory change (171). Orpheus, the poet of Thrace, “hadde makid by his weeply songes...the ryveris to stonden stille,”<sup>44</sup> leaving the same effect on the world around him as Casella’s music, which freezes the penitent listening souls in their place, in early *Purgatorio*. But whereas Dante indicates the productive potential of the music-induced moment of stillness, this meter emphasizes the debilitating effects of setting one’s “thoughtes in erthly thinges.”<sup>45</sup> Boethius expresses the detrimental consequences of obsessing over loss by presenting Orpheus’s journey to hell not as a heroic and romantic gesture, but rather as a reminder that, while all creatures die in time, the individual who desires death because of sorrow contravenes the course of nature.

In the *Book of the Duchess*, the Knight more broadly evokes the victimized Boethius-persona himself, as he refers to Lady Fortune as an allegory of arbitration and injustice. Complaining about mutability, the Knight abandons himself to the strumpet muses of lament. He claims that Lady Fortune’s caprice produces a series of transformations, highs and lows, that turn his “hele” into “seknesse,” and “lyght” into “derke” (607, 609). These binaries recall the discourse of lightness and darkness in Book I of the *Boece*: upon feeling the curative folds of Lady Philosophy’s garments drying his eyes, Boethius narrates, “nyght was discussed and chased

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<sup>42</sup> Chaucer, *Boece*, 3, Metr. 12, 1-3.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 6-8.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 65-6.

away, dirknesses forleten me, and to myn eien repeyred ayen hir firste strengthe.”<sup>46</sup> In the *Book of the Duchess*, the Knight, still literally shaded by the canopy of the oak tree, lives more figuratively in darkness, his “day...nyght” (610).

The Knight’s Boethian speech, in which he laments his lack of control through the discourse of a chess game and makes an ugly characterization of Lady Fortune, seems to suggest the elegiac dimension of Chaucer’s poem. Elegy, as Fradenburg points out, allows the protagonist to grieve, because grieving is a necessary part of the healing process.<sup>47</sup> However, Chaucer insinuates that the Knight is unable to emerge from the darkness of the shade in his section of the wood to take part in a Boethian grieving process. He hardly notices the narrator, who is, in an allegorical sense, Lady Philosophy; the Knight cannot take comfort in the nearness of the figure that might otherwise become his new companion because he barely discerns his presence. Since the brightening of Boethius’s sight is contingent upon his active engagement with Lady Philosophy, it thus seems impossible for the Knight to cure the darkness of his vision.

The Knight finally does see the narrator, but the narrator’s role as listener only exaggerates his display of immoderate grief and retreat into his personal history, in such a way as to undermine the poem’s conformation to the generic conventions of elegy. In addition to this retreat, the narrator’s failure as a consolatory intercessor helps Chaucer to dismantle the consolation model. Chaucer introduces the possibility that the narrator will serve as a version of Lady Philosophy in the narrator’s first encounter with the Knight, where, asking the Knight which sickness he suffers from, he adopts the phrase used by Lady Philosophy to ask Boethius

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<sup>46</sup> Chaucer, *Boece*, 1, Metr. 3, 1-3.

<sup>47</sup> Fradenburg, “Voice Memorial,” 183.

about his condition: “What eyleth the, man?”<sup>48</sup> The narrator even appears “ryght at his fet,” in an imitation of Lady Philosophy, who descends to his bedchamber to sit at the foot of his bed (“uppon the uttereste corner,” as I have written) (502). However, the scene of encounter also makes it clear that the narrator differs from Lady Philosophy. The narrator’s impression that the Knight is ill evokes Lady Philosophy’s claim that Boethius “is fallen into a litargye, whiche that is a comune seknesse.”<sup>49</sup> Exposing the narrator’s inability to understand the loss at hand, as well, Chaucer suggests the ineffectiveness of dialogue as a form of relief. He never balances the Knight’s complaint of Fortune with an elucidation of providence. Instead, like Pandarus’s advice to Troilus on curing his love-sickness in *Troilus and Criseyde*, which I will discuss in Chapter 4, the narrator’s responses to the Knight’s complaints verge on the comedic. Because of the narrator’s interpretive inability and the Knight’s abstract and allegorical language, the narrator naively misses his opportunities to respond as a Philosophy-figure to the Knight’s complaints. He is a well-intentioned listener, and seeks to offer not just comfort to the Knight, but also healing: “For, by my trouthe, to make yow hool, / I wol do al my power hool” (553-54). The narrator here imagines himself as a physician and thus evokes Lady Philosophy’s claim to possess the powers of diagnosis. His desire to make the Knight “whole” indicates his recognition of the griever’s broken condition, or perhaps his fragmented perception. Nevertheless, the source of loss continually escapes him, even until the very end of the “consolation” scene. At this point, as his *interrogatio* reflects, he finally realizes the subject of the complaint: “Is that youre los? Be God, hyt ys routhe” (1310). The Knight must shed his speech of its courtly accoutrements, declaring literally, “she ys ded,” for the dreamer to understand (1309). The Knight, too, has

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<sup>48</sup> Chaucer, *Boece*, 2, Pr. 1, 47.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 1, Pr. 2, 19-21.

become “as ded as stoon,” recalling the image of his blood stopping its course through his body, but now fully degenerating from zombie, in the state of “nat deed,” to corpse (1300).

In *The Allegory of Love*, C.S. Lewis wrote that Chaucer intended the dialogue to elicit the “impatient self-absorption of grief on the part of the lover,” shaping the Knight into a “bore” and the dreamer, a “fool.”<sup>50</sup> The dialogue produced in the poem what Lewis figured as “comic effects which are disastrous, and which were certainly not intended.”<sup>51</sup> However, Lewis’s claim that Chaucer’s effects were unintentional discredits possibilities for reading the poem in a generic context other than elegy. The narrator’s inability to discover the reason for the Knight’s condition prevents Boethian recuperation, but the ineffective elegiac strategies only direct attention to sources of comfort lying elsewhere in the poem: anachronisms, rather than the consolation dialogue, enable the past to form a relief to the difficulties of the present, rather than to impede on them. Chaucer pluralizes the past, presenting temporalities in his poem beyond the suspended “time” of loss to offset the static isolation inflicted by grief, which is collapsed with death itself.

The narrator, a counterpoint to the Knight, finds a cure for himself in his efforts to interpret and empathize, diverting him from the present temporality of sickness and thus shortening the duration of his grief. Chaucer even suggests that the Knight *serves* the narrator by offering a model of suffering that is extreme and debilitating, forcing the narrator to question the naturalness of extended mourning. This re-reading of the scene that is traditionally interpreted as elegiac shifts the focus to the narrative world beyond the central scene of mourning, into the narrator’s journey through the woods. A reprise of similar invitations to distracting temporalities

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<sup>50</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1936), 211.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

that are allowed to go nowhere, the scenes that frame the Knight's lament challenge the validity of his self-indulgent anamnesis. Ultimately, while Chaucer never affirms or denies the success of the Knight's consolatory process, it is the narrator's journey that embodies an effective model, or countermodel, of recovery in the poem, illuminating the destructive and productive uses of the past for the present.

#### 4. REAPPRAISING THE OCCASION OF THE *BOOK OF THE DUCHESS*

Using the scenes that frame the Knight's Boethian lament to redirect his readers toward issues of temporal perspective and judicious social engagement, Chaucer invites a reappraisal of the occasion of the *Book of the Duchess*. Chaucer's preference for a history deflected into a wider set of textualities, which the Knight's mournful court lyric alone cannot provide, helps to undermine the exclusive generic identification of the poem as an elegy, intended only to console and commemorate Gaunt. This premise encourages a re-reading of the final lines of the poem, which have produced allegorical interpretations that set the *Book of the Duchess* more deeply and definitively within a specific historical and social context than Chaucer's other poems. By reconsidering the allusions to Chaucer's world within these lines, as well as the meaning of the action at the end of the dream sequence, I want to offer a more flexible understanding of the occasion. The poem, read not as an elegy, but rather as an exhortation to Gaunt to return to the court, accommodates this chapter's interpretation of the grieving Knight, whose vision of history is too narrow to praise, and of the narrator's forward procession through time, which Chaucer privileges before the retreat into memory.

The narrator finds himself at the end of the dream vision returned to a world beyond erotic complaint and interested in the future. After finally learning that Lady White's death is the source of the Knight's grief, the narrator says,

And with that word ryght anoon  
They gan to strake forth; al was doon,  
For that tyme, the hert-huntyng.  
With that, me thoghte that this kyng  
Gan homwarde for to ryde  
Unto a place, was there besyde,  
Which was from us but a lyte—  
A long castel with walles white,  
By Seynt Johan, on a ryche hil,  
As me mette; but thus hyt fil.  
(1311-20)

These lines have cemented occasional and elegiac readings of the poem. Scholars link them to specific historical subjects: “long castel with walles white” evokes the historical figure of Blanche, and “Seynt Johan” and “ryche hil” refer respectively to Gaunt and his title of the Earl of Richmond.

However, alternative considerations ambiguate Chaucer's references and complicate a straightforward allegory in which Chaucer helps Gaunt mourn the loss of Blanche by participating in his grief. For instance, the uncertain identity of the unnamed “king” in line 1314 raises the question of how to interpret the characters' return to the castle at the end of the dream sequence. In the broader context of the poem, this king may refer to Octavian or to the Knight, and thus allegorically Gaunt, who more metaphorically completes the activity of “hert-huntyng” mentioned in the previous line. If the referent is Octavian, then Chaucer here utilizes the Roman emperor once more to model the process of moving forward from the experience of loss. Structuring the physical transition of the narrator and Knight from the hunting scene to the castle, Octavian shows that the hunting pastime, while a diversion, is also a routine; even if the hunt

“fails,” the hunting party must suspend the temporality of adventure in order to resume everyday affairs in the political world, represented by the castle. Accepting that it is “tyme” for the search for the hart to end, Octavian—in the case that he is indeed the king in these lines—teaches the Knight, whose sees no end to his suffering, that the focus on loss must at some point be abandoned for life to go on.

Alternatively, Chaucer stages the “king” as the Knight, or Gaunt, who actively and independently returns to the castle, symbolizing the grieving subject’s reengagement with life and thus a shift out of his figurative purgatory. In an allegorical reading, Gaunt completes his period of mourning and resumes his business in the public sphere. Given that Chaucer’s *Book of the Duchess* appeared between the autumn of 1368, just after Blanche’s death, and September 1371, when Gaunt married his second wife, Constance of Castile, Chaucer would have known the benefits of Gaunt’s second marriage, granting Gaunt the status of king of Castile and Leon, while he was writing his early poem.<sup>52</sup> Chaucer was familiar with Gaunt’s international affairs, as well as the political expediency that governed Gaunt’s spousal decisions in both his first and second marriages; Gaunt’s control would re-establish an Anglo-Castilian alliance to offer new military protection to England against France after the Battle of Nájera in 1367, where Gaunt was successful as a military hero but ultimately did not thwart French dominance over Castile.<sup>53</sup> Whereas Chaucer may have used the Knight’s bodily dismemberment in the poem to represent Gaunt’s detachment from his historical, political, or social body, at the end of the poem, he

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<sup>52</sup> For the date of Blanche’s death, see J.J.N. Palmer, “The Historical Context of the *Book of the Duchess*: A Revision,” *Chaucer Review* 8 (1974): 253-61. Palmer rejects the previous conclusion that Blanche died on 12 September 1369 based on the evidence of a letter written by Louis de Mâle, count of Flanders, to Queen Philippa, Edward III’s wife and Chaucer’s patron. The year 1368 is particularly suggested by circumstantial evidence regarding Blanche’s funeral.

<sup>53</sup> See Anthony Goodman, *John of Gaunt: The Exercise of Princely Power in Fourteenth-Century Europe* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 111-43.

stages the Knight's return to the castle as an opportunity to envisage Gaunt as a forward-thinking politician, rather than a vulnerable widow. If Chaucer intended to encourage Gaunt's recovery, perhaps "longe castel" refers rather to the image of the castle of the heraldic coat of arms of Castile and Leon, and the king's ride to the "ryche hill" of "Seynt Johan" symbolizes the anticipation of domestic and international prosperity. It would take years after Gaunt's marriage to Constance to make peace with Castile, but Chaucer's proximity to his patron would have made him aware that Gaunt's reengagement with his political reality would benefit him and the Lancastrian court.

#### 5. RECONSIDERING THE MANUSCRIPT AND EDITING TRADITION

It is not only the allusions at the end of the *Book of the Duchess* that have encouraged scholars to envision the poem as an elegy. Even prior to the text, the manuscript and editing tradition of Chaucer's poem suggests why it has come to be defined as such. However, a brief comparison of the three surviving manuscripts and early editions shows the licenses editors have taken to justify categorizing the poem as an elegy, indicating the limits, rather than validity, of ascribing the poem to a genre so exclusively concentrated on the sustained lament for an individual's death. The manuscript and editing tradition challenges the elegiac identity of the *Book of the Duchess* inasmuch as it reveals how a finished edition and presentation of the poem can obscure ambiguities in the manuscripts, which might otherwise point to alternative readings.

The editor of any of Chaucer's works, in possession of none of the poet's original manuscripts, must try to reconstruct Chaucer's original composition by weighing variant readings. As Thomas R. Lounsbury wrote in 1892, a few years before the publication of the Globe edition and W.W. Skeat's edition, "In the absence of a copy coming from the poet's own

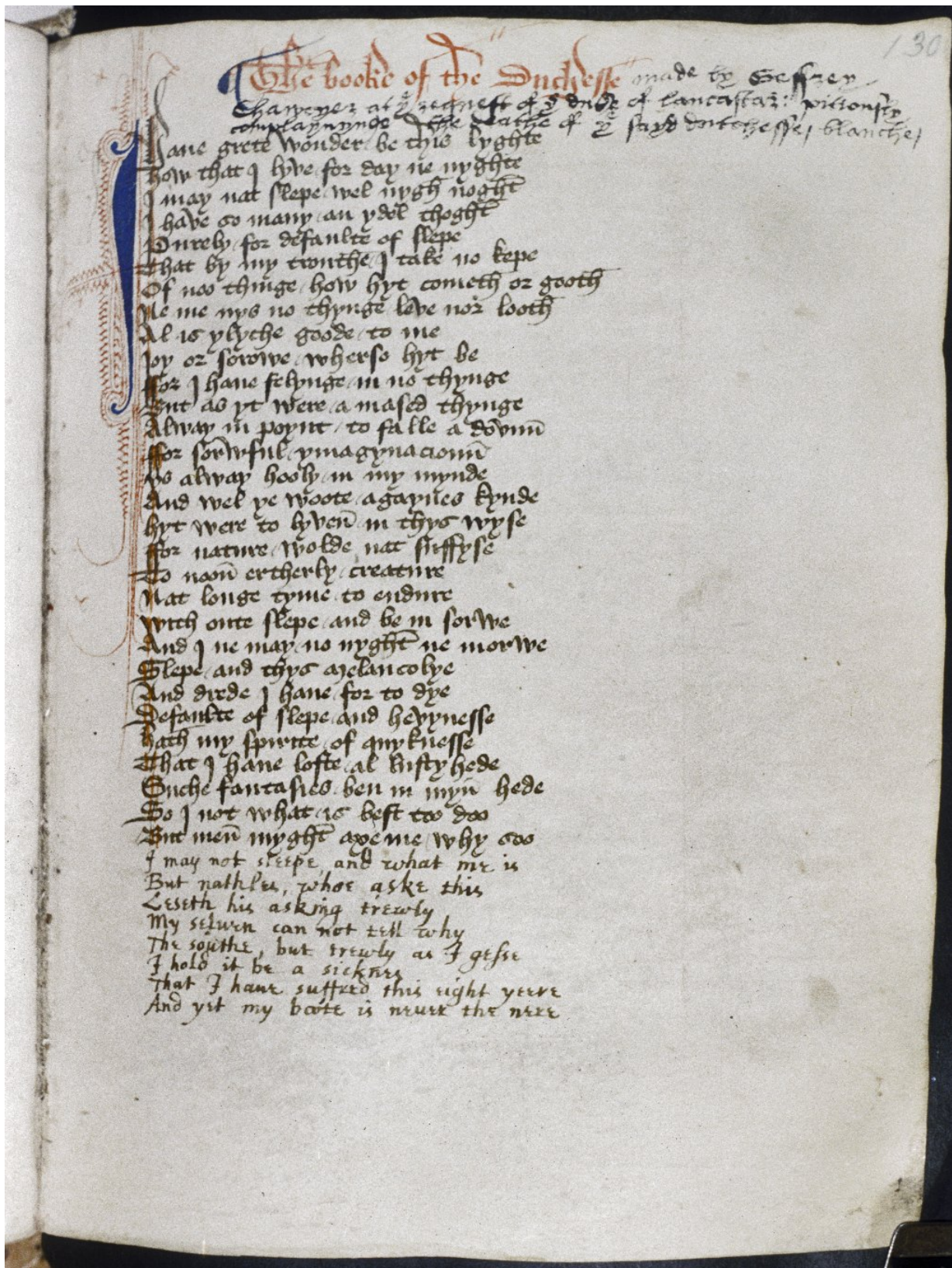
hand, the text must be made up; and, though one particular text may be taken as a basis, it will never do to trust blindly to its authority.”<sup>54</sup> This is particularly the case in the *Book of the Duchess*, which survives in manuscripts that are occasionally missing lines. These empty spaces have led editors and readers to recreate parts of the poem. Certain emendations in the editions result from a necessary engagement with some of the less authoritative aspects of the manuscripts. It is not always clear, let alone scalable, what parts of the poem are more or less authoritative, and yet it is inevitable that emendations and less authoritative features have altered critical interpretations of the poem.

One of the aspects less certainly able to be ascribed to Chaucer’s invention is the title of the poem. When Henry Frank Heath collaborated in the editing of the 1898 Globe Edition of Chaucer’s poetry, he entitled Chaucer’s dream vision *The Dethe of Blaunche the Duchesse*.<sup>55</sup> Given that the title refers to the historical figure of Blanche, Heath’s editorial decision reflects a departure from the contents of the extant manuscripts. Differently, the mid-fifteenth century manuscript Oxford, Bodleian Library, Fairfax 16, which is frequently used for editions of the *Book of the Duchess*, entitles the poem, “The Booke of the Duchesse” on folio 130r, in a presentation similar to the titles of adjacent texts in the manuscript, such as the “Envoy to Alison” and “The Chance of the Dice.” Despite the appearance of consistency, beneath the title on folio 130r appears a subtitle, which suggests the elegiac undercurrents of the poem: “made by Geffrey Chawcyer at ye request of ye duke of Lancaster: piteously complaynyng the dethe of ye sayd dutchesse / blanche.” Because this subtitle is written in a separate hand and ink color,

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<sup>54</sup> Thomas R. Lounsbury, *Studies in Chaucer: His Life and Writings*, 3 vols. (New York: Harper, 1892), 323.

<sup>55</sup> Chaucer, *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, eds. Alfred W. Pollard, H. Frank Heath, Mark H. Liddell, and W.S. McCormick (London: MacMillan and Co., 1928). Heath uses this title despite the editors’ claim to use “the most conservative treatment” of Chaucer’s texts and, thus, “to produce texts which...offer an accurate reflection of that MS. or group of MSS., which critical investigation has shown to be the best, with only such emendation upon the evidence of other manuscripts as appeared absolutely necessary,” ix.



**The booke of the Duchesse** made by Geoffrey  
Chaucer at request of the Duke of Lancaster: pilsions  
complaynynges **The Duchesse of E. sayd Dintogesse, blanchet**

I have grete wonder be this lyght  
how that I have for day ne nyght  
I may nat slepe wel nyght noght  
I have so many an ydel thought  
Durely for defaulte of slepe  
that by my trowth I take no lepe  
Of noo thinge how hie cometh oz gooth  
Ne me nis no thinge love nor looth  
Al is ylyche goode to me  
Joy oz sorowe wherso hit be  
for I have feynge in no thinge  
But as yt were a mased thinge  
Alway in poynt to falle a downe  
for sorowful ymagynaconne  
no alway hooly in my mynde  
And wel ye wote agaynes kinde  
hit were to gyven in thyo wyse  
for nature wolde nat suffyse  
to noon ertherly creature  
Nat longe tyme to endure  
wrech oute slepe and be in sorowe  
And I ne may no nyght ne morwe  
Slepe and thyo ayclancolye  
And drede I have for to dye  
Defaulte of slepe and hevynesse  
hath my spyrte of myknesse  
that I have losse al lusty hede  
Suche fantasies ben in myn hede  
So I not what is best to doo  
But men myght aske me why doo  
I may not slepe and what my is  
But natheles what aske this  
Lewith his asking trewly  
My setwen can not tell why  
The sooth, but trewly as I gesse  
I hold it be a sickness  
that I have suffered this ight yere  
And yet my boote is much the nere

Figure 5: Facsimile of Oxford, Bodleian Library Fairfax MS 16, f. 130r, displaying the subtitle to the *Book of the Duchess*.

scribbled in with barely enough space between the poem's title and the start of the poem, and added ostensibly at a later date, it raises questions about its purpose and place in the manuscript. It also undermines editorial decisions to lean on it as evidence of Chaucer's own interests as poet.<sup>56</sup> Returning to the Globe edition, Heath possibly entitled Chaucer's poem, "Dethe," after attributing significant value to the scribbled subtitle of Fairfax, deeming it available to interpreters as a reflection of Chaucer's unstated intentions.<sup>57</sup> Heath's use of this title requires him to historicize the poem, recognizing its patronage by the "piteously complaynyng" Duke of Lancaster, and asks readers to imagine Chaucer's poem primarily as an elegy.

The other surviving manuscripts also call the authority of editions of the *Book of the Duchess* into question and contribute to the sense of uncertainty underlying scholarship on it. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 638 uses "The Boke of the Duchesse," and Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Tanner 346 omits a title entirely. Even the poem in William Thynne's 1532 printed edition of Chaucer's *Works* begins under not "Death," but rather, "The Dreame of Chaucer," on folio 262v. In MS Bodley 638, the marginal glossing of "White" as "Blanche" in an additional hand forms the only concrete link between the poem and the occasion for its composition.<sup>58</sup> This gloss, along with the differences across the manuscripts in title, exposes the

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<sup>56</sup> Editors may also find Fairfax 16 less reliable because the lines 31-96 are absent; editors today are left only with the lines as they were filled in by William Thynne's 1532 printed edition, which seems to have relied on an exemplar now lost and which contains unique readings of parts of the poem. Chaucer, *The workes of Geffray Chaucer newly printed, with dyuers workes whiche were never in print before*, ed. William Thynne (London: printed by Thomas Godfrey, 1532). Also see Simon Horobin, *The Language of the Chaucer Tradition* (Woodbridge, Eng. and Rochester, NY: Boydell and Brewer, 2003), 77-95.

<sup>57</sup> Heath also may have considered Chaucer's late poem, the *Legend of Good Women*, which, in both versions of the prologue, refers to Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess* as "the Deeth of Blaunche the Duchesse" in a short list of poems he composed (F 418, G 406), or even John Lydgate's *Fall of Princes*, which calls Chaucer's poem, "the deth...of Blaunche the Duchess."

<sup>58</sup> The debate over the exemplars of these manuscripts reflects further limitations faced by editors. E.P. Hammond argued that Fairfax 16, Tanner 346, and Bodley 638 derived from the lost archetype, "Oxford." Norton-Smith and Brusendorff both argue to the contrary that the manuscripts derived from various independent booklets serving as

instability of the textual tradition that, in effect, causes ambiguity in editions of the poem. Stow's 1561 edition refers to the poem as, "The dreame of Chaucer, otherwise called the boke of the Duches, or Seis and Alcione,"<sup>59</sup> and Thomas Speght in his 1598 edition entitled the poem, "The booke of the Duchesse, or the death of Blanch; mistermed heretofore, Chaucers Dreame," casting doubt on the authority of Thynne's text and indicating the lack of clarity among editors concerning Chaucer's title.<sup>60</sup>

These choices suggest editorial fascination with an ethical Chaucer, resonating with fifteenth-century manuscripts interested explicitly in Chaucer's role as a solemn and morally-preoccupied poet. For instance, in the now lost Cotton Otho A. XVIII, supposedly completed or based on a manuscript by John Shirley, the Boethian poem "Truth" was accompanied by a note stating that Chaucer composed the poem "uppon his dethe bedde lyinge in his grete Anguysses."<sup>61</sup> Chaucer's editors even into the late nineteenth century stressed the portrait of Chaucer as a poet earnest to his death, whose poems offer moral counsel. These representations explain the desire to emphasize Gaunt's love-loss and the poem's association with nobility, and the process by which editors extracted and defined the qualities that make the *Book of the Duchess* appealing to these ends. The critical tradition that follows also takes a license, carrying ascriptions to claim

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exemplars. Brusendorff, *The Chaucer Tradition*, 187, and John Norton-Smith, *Bodleian Library MS Fairfax 16* (London: Scolar Press, 1979).

<sup>59</sup> Chaucer, *The workes of Geffrey Chaucer newly printed, with dyuers workes whiche were never in print before*, ed. William Thynne, printed and enlarged by John Stow (London, 1561).

<sup>60</sup> Chaucer, *The workes of Geffrey Chaucer newly printed, with dyuers workes whiche were never in print before*, ed. William Thynne and Thomas Speght (London, 1598). Steve Ellis also demonstrates the editorial biases in presentations of Chaucer's poems and calls attention to how they reflect the desire to pursue what he calls the "consolationist upturn" in readings of the *Book of the Duchess*, in, "The Death of the *Book of the Duchess*," *The Chaucer Review* 29 (1995): 253. Ellis concludes that to have both consolation and elegy within the same poem would be paradoxical, given that the poem would thus be trying to offer sympathy and reason for the mourner to feel better at the same time as it was "enshrining the perfection of what has been lost," 257.

<sup>61</sup> George B. Pace, "Otho A. XVIII," *Speculum* 26 (1951): 306-316.

that Chaucer's poem was intended first and foremost as a commemoration of Blanche. The critical consensus, culled by F.N. Robinson, that "the poem was...at once an eulogy of Blanche and a consolation addressed to her bereaved husband," seems positivistic.<sup>62</sup>

The variety of titles and editorial choices cast light on the complex reading history and editing tradition of Chaucer's dream vision, even as it survives in only a few manuscripts, but it also indicates how editors productively claim the poem for different registers. Thynne's title, "The Dreame of Chaucer," hooks the poem to a dream vision tradition extending beyond Chaucer's canon, whereas Stow's edition links Chaucer's authority to classical authority by including "Seis and Alcione" in his title. This addition implicitly makes the Ovidian intertext equally as important as the central part of the poem, the dream. The different titles thus reveal a multiplicity of readings, which attest to the poems' own plurality of vectors, as I have discussed in earlier sections. Ultimately, then, the fluctuation between titles over the few hundred years of Chaucer scholarship should invite readers to approach consolation in the poem more skeptically and resist totalizing readings of commemoration therein.

## CONCLUSION

The *Book of the Duchess* may be a poem of the court, but it is also a work representing Chaucer's broader experiments with the dream vision, a genre which he shows can have implications for a political and social poetry, but also more transcendent commentary on the experience of time. While the dream sequence in the *Book of the Duchess* concludes with a political figure returning to the court, the poem in its entirety closes with the scene of Chaucer's narrator as he wakes up from his dream to return to his literary career. Upon returning to waking

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<sup>62</sup> F.N. Robinson, ed. *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957), 266.

consciousness, the narrator finds himself lying in bed, reminded that he still grasps the *Metamorphoses*, only now unencumbered by the haunting of grievous thoughts. Renewed from an unfamiliar temporal and spatial patchwork, the narrator construes a plan to set his dream “in ryme” (1332). His return to labor and writing, another form of life, recalls once more the Harley 4335 manuscript image of Boethius the author at his desk, mirrored in the image of a suffering Boethius. It also evokes an illuminated detail in the late-fifteenth-century manuscript British Library Harley 4425. This illumination illustrates the concurrent process in the *Romance of the Rose* in which the narrator sleeps and the narrator wakes up in the dream world, walking out of bed to partake in an adventure, the quest for the rose. This latter figure, a lover, prepares to take a writing utensil from its case, anticipating his composition of the dream vision he is prepared to experience. Like the Harley miniature of Boethius, the illustration of the doubled narrator in the *Romance of the Rose* miniature suggests that the vision is both a mirror of reality and a source of distraction and composition.

In the *Book of the Duchess*, the narrator resembles both of the doubled figures from these two manuscripts—Boethius and the lover—and, in effect, he shows that precisely through self-referentiality the narrator will become author of his dream vision narrative, as he was agent of his dream. Having worked through his own grief through his dialogue with the Knight and disjunctive encounters with the past, the narrator discovers the ongoing “processe of tyme,” renewing his focus on the future (1331). As Fradenburg explains, “the recovery of dream from oblivion is, in Chaucer’s poetry, often the ground for further slippage,”<sup>63</sup> and indeed Chaucer’s narrator recollects the dream material that is threatened to be lost but that ultimately is vulnerable to the narrator’s bias. This “slippage” is productive, however: the narrator resembles the Knight,

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<sup>63</sup> Fradenburg, “Voice Memorial,” 171.



Figure 6: London, British Library, MS Harley 4425, fol. 7. This is a detail of a miniature of the *Romance of the Rose* narrator in two states, as a dreamer, asleep in bed, and as a lover, embarking on the dream world journey.

whose exaggerated anamnestic struggle belies a fear of forgetting the dead, but now, renewed, the narrator brings a sense of creativity to the act of recollection, willing to write his dream as best he can (“As I can best”) (1333). Like Chaucer’s other dream vision narrators, the narrator at the end of the *Book of the Duchess* “avoid[s] the ruptures of...beginnings and endings,” questioning the actuality of loss.<sup>64</sup> He engages in the act of creation, which effectively erases memory, at least the memory of loss; as Cathy Caruth shows in writing of trauma, history can emerge “as the performance of its own disappearance.”<sup>65</sup>

Anachronisms and the ability to forget, figured to some extent as a virtuous skill, help the narrator to develop a new poetic narrative, but also help him to “recreate” himself. The etymology of *recreatio* reflects the connection between recreation, as leisure, and re-creation, “a re-constituting of one’s normal physical and mental health which has flagged because of work and natural human frailty.”<sup>66</sup> In Chaucer’s poem, refusing to let his sorrows “slyde,” or pass away, the Knight rejects the healing power, or “remedyes,” of Ovid, Orpheus, Daedulus, Hippocrates, and Galen (567-68). By contrast, the narrator embraces the temporal disjunctions of the dream world interrupting his narrative of loss; narrative works effectively to “re-create” him, making him as “hooly” as the Troy story represented in the stained-glass bedchamber. In the playfulness of Octavian’s hunt and the luminous glass of the narrator’s bedchamber, Chaucer uses the narrator’s journey to remap his historical consciousness and expand his sense of history beyond the past of personal loss. In turn, the narrator’s state at the end of the poem reveals his familiarity with and distance from history, a paradox enabling him to use the past to serve both present and future.

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<sup>64</sup> Fradenburg, “Voice Memorial,” 178.

<sup>65</sup> Cathy Caruth, *Literature in the Ashes of History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), xi.

<sup>66</sup> Olson, *Literature as Recreation*, 102.

The narrator escapes the temptation to become enraptured by grief and the memory of his loss, in part because everything around him mimics the process of recovery, movement, and forgetting; even the puppy that does not know any better than to follow the narrator (“That hadde yfolowed and koude no good”) surprises him by fleeing his grasp as he attempts to pet him, running off on a path not well-trodden (390). The speedy pace at which the dog moves, like the wild animals who roam too swiftly to be counted, the hart that moves too quickly to be caught, and the hunters trying to catch up to it, reinforces the importance of moving forward through time.<sup>67</sup> Returning to Nietzsche, “history belongs to the living man...so far as he is active and striving.”<sup>68</sup> Even the narrator admits, “I never stente” (358). Furthermore, the parallel characters of Alcyone, Octavian, and Morpheus, stage a more productive experience of consolation that resists the idea of closure, which is often found in elegy. To read against the grain of scholarship interested in the poem’s elegiac use, then, widens the sense of possibility for understanding Chaucer’s plural and diverse idea of the past, not as a single text, but as a tangle of them.

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<sup>67</sup> John Block Friedman argues that the dog, or whelp, “is not only directly responsible for getting the Narrator from one place to another in the story, it is also indirectly responsible for the Narrator’s sympathetic communication with another person—for the dialogue which ultimately can bring him some measure of spiritual and physical well being,” in “The Dreamer, the Whelp, and Consolation in the *Book of the Duchess*,” *The Chaucer Review*, 3 (1969): 146. Friedman proceeds to examine the allegorical meanings of the dog and to argue, with some legitimate positivism, that the dog has a direct route in mind when he becomes guide to the narrator. Also see Beryl Rowland, “The Whelp in Chaucer’s *Book of the Duchess*,” *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 66 (1965): 148-60.

<sup>68</sup> Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*, 14.

## **Deconstructing Historiography and Making Poetry in the *House of Fame***

### INTRODUCTION

In the *House of Fame*, a golden-feathered eagle places Geoffrey the dreamer before a giant rock, on top of which sits the eponymous House of Fame. Evoking Dante's arduous journey of ascent on Mount Purgatory in the *Purgatorio*, Geoffrey uses his painful upward climb as an opportunity to examine his unfamiliar surroundings. He expresses surprise that ice, rather than steel, covers the rock, as the exposure of the surface material to the heat of the sun makes the edifice vulnerable to ruin. The sun's rays cause the ice rock to become a "feble fundament" for the House of Fame, leading Geoffrey to question why anyone would build such a tall building on so weak a foundation (1132). In addition, they thaw away the names of famous people recorded on the sloped sides of the rock that are not protected by the shade. The fragmentation of names into the contours of "lettres oon or two" inspires Geoffrey to philosophize about the ephemerality of fame: "But men seyn, 'What may ever laste?'" (1144, 1147). In only this brief observation, Geoffrey presents the rock as a monumental image of fragility and transience. Furthermore, his sweeping citation of "men" who "seyn" implies the axiomatic nature of his lesson, and suggests that he has acquired a philosophical distance allowing him to pose the more abstract question of what it means to make an edifice of the past. The implication that these men's words survive time in order to become a maxim only replicates the problem of historical production and transmission.

The anecdote of Geoffrey climbing to the House of Fame does not appear until Movement III of Chaucer's poem, but it perfectly represents how Chaucer develops the narrator's perspective of the material records he encounters in his dream world to deconstruct the myth

sustaining a meretricious epistemology of history. Because Geoffrey sees only the tangible remnants of the past, arbitrarily subject to destruction, the historical record he apprehends is partial, anti-teleological, and historically contingent. While Dante's climb up the seven-storied mountain in Purgatory allegorizes the purgative human path to the *telos* of salvation, ultimately suggesting the singular and authoritative claims of Dante's historiography, Geoffrey's parallel ascent forces a pause for suspicion and even for the outright renunciation of any hope for such totalities.

The following pages trace material and immaterial representations of history across the poem, all of which provoke skepticism about the pursuit of *fama*, and solicit distrust of self-proclaimed authoritative records and gnomic, generic speech. Historiographies and historiographical theories arise through the past narratives, citations, and figures that construct the external world of the dreamer's journey. Anachronisms collapse temporal boundaries between dreamer and history in this poem, enabling Chaucer to multiply senses of the past. In Movement I, the glass walls and stone tablet inscribing the *Aeneid* invite a response from Geoffrey that challenges the ability of any single discourse, no matter how epic and comprehensive, to mediate the past. In Movement II, Geoffrey's ascent from the desert, evoking parallels to a Neoplatonic flight but ultimately re-entrenching him in the material world of history, raises doubts about a Dantean or Boethian historiography concerned with eschatology, rather than the Virgilian eschatological preoccupation with earthly chronologies and sequence. Together, these movements show that Chaucer is more interested in confronting abstract notions of historical record and transmission than in refuting a particular secular or religious model of time. The issues of any providentially-determined historical process, secular or religious, re-

emerge in Movement III, which, while incomplete, foregrounds the arbitrary manner in which people achieve fame and undermines the bid for a place within history at all.

The anachronistic scenes and evocations of historical narrative suggest that, while the poem has sometimes appeared disconnected, the three movements of the poem cohere by pinpointing sites of rupture, deconstructing historiography, and pluralizing perspectives on the past.<sup>1</sup> By refusing to validate any single vision or voice of the past, Chaucer confuses the destinarian potential of history and shows how the creation and transmission of historical knowledge are always uneven and unfinished. History becomes a series of readings, making the poem itself into a Gothic-like glass temple, comparable to the “chirche” Geoffrey enters in Movement I (473); its fissures evoke the panels of medieval stained glass, assembled to create a pictorial pattern but revealing a process of arrangement rather than a finished product. Like the stained glass picture, which makes visible its own fragments, history breaks apart into stories as Geoffrey deflects it into the realm of poetic and narrative creation.

Ultimately, Chaucer theorizes about the narrativization of history, rather than about history in an ontological sense, to emphasize the subjective nature of experiencing time, allowing him to pose playful challenges to particular authoritative writings he used to shape his own writing and from which he also distanced himself. While this simultaneity makes Chaucer’s respect for literary and historical authority ambivalent, the poem nonetheless firmly presents the making of history as a relative and open-ended process, and exploits the figures of sight and materiality to do so.

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<sup>1</sup> Critics who have noted the sense of disconnectedness in the *House of Fame* include twentieth-century scholars Charles Muscatine, *Chaucer and the French Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), and E. Talbot Donaldson, *Chaucer’s Poetry: An Anthology for the Modern Reader* (New York: Ronald Press, 1958).

## 1. PROEM

The proem to Book I opens the *House of Fame* on a note of uncertainty. Geoffrey's protracted sentence extending from lines 2-52 hastily invokes the various forms, times, causes, and effects of dreams only to conclude with his admission of ignorance: "But why the cause is, nocht wot I" (52). Contemplating the categories to which his dream might belong—possibly, the "avision," "revelacion," "drem," "sweven," "fantome," or the category of "oracles"—Geoffrey draws on Macrobius's commentary on Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis*, an authoritative source for the late medieval system of classifying dreams, and thus inscribes himself within a genealogy of prestigious dreamers (7-9, 11).<sup>2</sup> His catalog suggests that the meaning of his dream pertains to his past or future, as these types in different ways reveal aspects of the dreamer's everyday experience, beyond the time of the dream. But also, Macrobius's commentary emphasizes the relative prophetic value of the various types of dreams.<sup>3</sup> In the Macrobian imagination, the "oraculum" tends to have a higher truth-value, usually featuring an important figure of revelation portending what will come to the dreamer upon waking,<sup>4</sup> unlike the *insomnium* and the *visum*, which, like illusions, lack utility and significance.<sup>5</sup> However, Geoffrey's difficulty in defining dreams ("For I certainly / Ne kan hem nocht") suggests the likelihood that the dream will evade its very "signifiaunce," and anticipates the temporal ambiguity of his dream world (14-15, 17). Recoiling in a statement of *dubitatio*, Geoffrey undermines his own visionary authority, while emphasizing the multiple and fluid possibilities of dream interpretation. Chaucer's *Romaunt of*

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<sup>2</sup> Macrobius's third chapter, which presents the classification of dreams, relies on the authority of Artemidorus. Macrobius, *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, trans. William Harris Stahl (New York and London: Columbia University Press), 13.

<sup>3</sup> A.C. Spearing, *Medieval Dream-Poetry* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 8-11.

<sup>4</sup> Steven F. Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*, 22-3.

<sup>5</sup> Jacques Le Goff, *The Medieval Imagination*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), 202.

*the Rose* similarly defies the singular truth of the dream. The text begins with a declaration of the truth contained within the anticipated vision: the “signifiaunce” of dreams refers to the signs therein of “ful many thynges covertly / That fallen after al openly.”<sup>6</sup> However, the dream vision makes the ironic point of citing the category-obsessed Macrobius because it ultimately fails to offer an overt and singular meaning. Despite that the *gradus* structure of the dreamer’s journey stages progress, almost like the steps of Dante’s journey through the world of the *Commedia*, the narrative confounds the possibility for the dream to signify. Like the early lines of the *Romaunt of the Rose*, the proem to the *House of Fame* cautions readers not to expect an absolute revelation of truth in the protagonist’s dream vision. Geoffrey’s doubt, questioning the Macrobian paradigm, suspends readers’ judgment of the dream he is about to tell and foreshadows the interpretive flexibility that Geoffrey will embrace upon encountering ostensibly categorical narratives of the past within his dream world.

## 2. MOVEMENT I

In the Temple of Glass, Geoffrey’s sight of multiple representations of the past similarly challenges an orderly schema of time. Mythological, literary, and historical narratives construct an anachronistic architectural framework for this early scene in the dream, in which “curious portreytures” of Venus and Cupid decorate the space and the story of “the destruction / Of Troye” illustrates the walls (125, 151-52). While later, in Movement II, the Eagle complains that Geoffrey’s studious pursuits have destined him to eremitic introversion, here, Geoffrey’s experience of reading is externalized as material images and artifacts, giving a pictorial dimension to his bookish knowledge. The temporal disjunctions between classical and medieval textualities, and between the mythological icons of antique past and Geoffrey’s fourteenth-century

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<sup>6</sup> Chaucer, *The Romaunt of the Rose*, 16, 19-20.

self, both alienate Geoffrey from the space and familiarize him with it, as when he recognizes the identities of the figures he sees: “For certeynly, I nyste never / Wher that I was, but wel wyste I / Hyt was of Venus redely, / The temple (128-31). Geoffrey’s oscillation—between nearness and farness, present and past—suggests the elusiveness of history in his grasp.

Geoffrey’s subsequent vision of a “table of bras,” which displays an English approximation of the opening lines of Book I of Virgil’s *Aeneid* (“I wol now synge, yif I kan, / The armes and also the man / That first cam, thurgh his destinee”), draws him into a more engaged encounter with historical narrative (142-45). This brass tablet is not as sturdy as it initially appears, which is the first indication that the narrative it records is more fluid than fixed. Geoffrey’s narration evokes an ambiguous and ever-shifting artistic medium. According to Geoffrey, the story recorded manifests as poetry etched into stone and as a full-scale painted mural, and it is represented on or within the walls “ymad of glas,” recalling the stained glass of the bedchamber in the *Book of the Duchess* and evoking the pictorial narrative illuminations that developed in Europe during the twelfth century (120).<sup>7</sup> Geoffrey notes that every heart would shudder to see what was “peynted on the wal,” but he also describes the images as “graven” in the stone, evoking the ruins of a classical past, which hint at the colors and faded moldings of the art of its initial creation (211-12). Two significant features of the surface material of the historical narrative—its fragility and its ambiguity—make it a physical counterpart to the

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<sup>7</sup> See Otto Pächt, *The Rise of Pictorial Narrative in Twelfth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962). According to Logan E. Whalen, illuminations could “narrate a story in linear progression solely through the use of images, the scene from each individual miniature recounting a particular episode of the story in question without the use of written text,” in *Marie de France and the Poetics of Memory* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2008), 64. In addition, David K. Cowley writes on how Chaucer’s place within the courts of Edward III and Richard II not only exposed him to the commission of stained-glass windows; “Chaucer’s literary production was largely bound to structures of patronage analogous to the philanthropic structures dictating medieval glass commissions,” making stained glass even more “suggestive” for the poet, in “‘Withyn a temple ymad of glas’: Glazing, Glossing, and Patronage in Chaucer’s *House of Fame*,” *The Chaucer Review* 45 (2010): 75. Finally, V.A. Kolve explores the interplay between the verbal and the visual in *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative: The First Five Canterbury Tales* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1984).

fractured historical narrative of Virgil's *Aeneid*, which, as Geoffrey will show, implies the uneven representation of the past, as well as the sense that the eyes cannot ever envision the entirety of history all at once and from a single perspectival position. The ambiguous synaesthesia of Geoffrey's depiction of the material amplifies the sense of anachronism, giving the impression that a transparent (medieval) stained glass overlays a graven (classical) Roman monument in stone, and anticipating a more narratively-grounded anachronism in which Ovid's narrative bisects Virgil's.

But before Geoffrey subjects the narrative sequence he reads to rearrangement, indicating his apprehensive relationship to textual *auctoritas*, he stages the process of reading as an unmediated transfer of historical knowledge, wherein he passively receives the material on the wall. The *ekphrasis* and sense of a linear narrative structure suggest the completeness and veracity of Virgil's story, legitimizing its role in mediating Geoffrey's consciousness of Troy. Geoffrey's narration traces the course of history from Sinon's treachery to Aeneas's escape and salvific shipwreck at Carthage, to Aeneas's violent love affair with Dido and finally his arrival on the shores of Latium, which validates the "destinee" of his journey (188). His repetition of verbs of seeing—with variations of the phrase, "sawgh I"—tempts readers to imagine Geoffrey's eyes shifting linearly with the progression of the story, and his language of sight gives the impression that the narrative is a trustful source of knowledge, since it invokes the medieval tradition in which vision can indicate a heightened consciousness of the divine and offer immediate access to truth (151, 162, 174, 193, 198, 209, 212, 219).<sup>8</sup> In the *Boece*, as I have

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<sup>8</sup> See Suzanne Conklin Akbari, *Seeing Through the Veil: Optical Theory and Medieval Allegory* (Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 3. Another good example is Dante's *Paradiso*, in which Dante collocates the pilgrim's acquisition of knowledge with ocular illumination as he reaches a new stage of mystical experience, beyond human temporality. Silenced at the moment of his encounter with the effulgent souls, Dante makes vision the primary sensory experience, for it stimulates the intellect. Dante's endless gaze upon Beatrice signals his acquisition of theological knowledge and transforms the courtly gaze into a religious and metaphysical experience. Dante, *Paradiso*, eds. Robert Hollander and Jean Hollander (New York: Doubleday, 2007), Canto 1, 70.

written before, the discourse of sight links Boethius's spiritual condition to his ability to see, and Lady Philosophy advocates the development of a telescopic and distanced vision akin to God's atemporal vision, the "eighe of intelligence" with "universel lokynge" over the fragments of temporal experience.<sup>9</sup> Geoffrey's reading in the Temple of Glass initially evokes God's "universel lokynge," making the story on the wall seem as continuous as past, present, and future temporalities are from the divine perspective.

However, while ocular metaphors link seeing to historical knowing, Geoffrey's reading quickly reveals the fragmented vision of time, not because of a deficiency on the part of Geoffrey's perspective, but rather because of the incompleteness of the story before him, on a surface that equally resists permanence and embodiment.<sup>10</sup> The sight of Virgil's narrative is new to Geoffrey and yet also familiar, like the portraits of Venus and Cupid he identifies upon first walking into the Temple. The illuminations become increasingly recognizable, jogging his memory, so that as he reads, he also ruminates, interprets, and re-composes.<sup>11</sup> Geoffrey does not often claim to wield the agency of a writer, except in the proems to Movements II and III, where he asks the goddess Venus to be his "favour" and the god Apollo to help him make his verses "sumwhat agreable" (519, 1097). However, situated before the illuminations, he reads and composes simultaneously in inventive ways. As Mary Carruthers writes, to make the text familiar in the Middle Ages meant to incorporate it into readers' own experiences, allowing them to tamper with the original text, even if that process defied "most of our [modern] notions

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<sup>9</sup> Chaucer, *Boece*, 5, Pr. 4, 160-2.

<sup>10</sup> The skepticism of historical narrative pertains to M.T. Clancy's historical study of the trust and distrust of written documents, in "Trusting Writing," in *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066-1307*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1993), 294-327.

<sup>11</sup> According to Carruthers, in medieval memory theory, reading benefits the act of recollection, which then helps generate the processes of *inventio* and composition. Carruthers writes, composition "is not particularly an act of writing. It is rumination, cogitation, dictation, a listening and a dialogue, a gathering (*collectio*) of voices from their several places in memory," in *The Book of Memory*, 245.

concerning accuracy, objective scholarship, and the integrity of the text.”<sup>12</sup> Dismissing the possibility of treating the text as a sole authority on a subject in the *House of Fame*, Chaucer uses Geoffrey’s active reading to construct an interpretive intertext of the record. He exaggerates the idea that reading is not an instance of passive “transfer,” as Wolfgang Iser writes, but one which “depends on the extent to which this text can activate the individual readers’ faculties of perceiving and processing.”<sup>13</sup>

Reading triggers Geoffrey’s response: he identifies gaps and, in an act of *familiaris intentio*, constructs spaces to accommodate more familiar narratives. For example, upon reading the episode of Juno’s vengeance, Geoffrey alters his mode of narration, inserting himself as an affective respondent into the story. He addresses Juno as if she were the subject of an apostrophe, and offers relevant background on the goddess not provided by the illuminations: “Ther saugh I thee, cruel Juno, / That art daun Jupiteres wif, / That hast yhated al thy lyf / Al the Troianyssh blood” (198-201). Geoffrey’s memory—here, constructed from other source-material concerned with what causes Juno to hate the Trojans—expands the given narrative.<sup>14</sup>

The dreamer’s gaze wanders across the illumination, but his reading experience is also shaped by a retreat inward, into the recesses of his memory. Geoffrey uses the more figurative eye of his imagination, which preconceives the past before the experience of ocular seeing, and, in effect, he shows the multiple perspectives and possibilities for reading a single text. He alternates

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<sup>12</sup> Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, 205.

<sup>13</sup> Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 107. Paul Ricoeur elaborates on the notion of the written work as a “sketch for reading”: “it consists of holes, lacunae, zones of indetermination, which...challenge the reader’s capacity to configure what the author seems to take malign delight in defiguring.” Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 77.

<sup>14</sup> Chaucer’s manipulation of the text evokes Pierre Nora’s conception of memory as “open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation,” privileged over the subject of history, “a representation of the past,” which fails to tie readers to an “eternal present.” Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux des Mémoire*,” *Representations* 26 (1989), 8.

between phrases confirming ocular perception and personal asides, simultaneously fragmenting and adding a new layer of text to the *Aeneid*. While Geoffrey's repeated variations on the interjective "loo" connote the experience in which the eyes behold an image or word, in addition to directing readers through the story, the term in context draws attention to how he feels about the narrative and, in this case, the subplot of Aeneas's betrayal and Dido's resulting woe: "Loo, how a woman doth amys / To love hym that unknowen ys! / For, be Cryste, lo, thus yt fareth: / 'Hyt is not al gold, that glareth'" (269-72). Geoffrey's moralizing gloss in this last line shows his emotional investment in Dido's story, but also, in the context of Roland Barthes's *Discourse of History*, his "utterances" mark his departure from chronological sequence.<sup>15</sup> Geoffrey's interpolations resemble the historian's reminder of his subjectivity in the narrative. The use of "Loo" and "lo," what Barthes might call "shifters," modifies the course of Geoffrey's narration and disrupts the temporality of the historical narrative to create space for his gloss.

Chaucer further complicates the transcendent model of sight by thickening the sensorium, widening the literary field of experience from authorized manuscript to situated and human-mediated performance. Having mentioned already that Aeneas took his wife Creusa and their son Julo with him upon escaping from burning Troy, Geoffrey articulates the story in terms of imagined sound, recalling the oral sense of the initial lines of the narrative, "I wol now synge." Expanding the story using the detail, "And eke Askanius also, / Fledden eke with drery chere, / That hyt was pitee for to here," Geoffrey lays claim to hearing, which further encodes inventive feeling in the narrative from the peripheries of his readerly position (178-80). In fact, Geoffrey's sympathy for the Trojans evidently exceeds that of the original text. Dramatically, when Juno

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<sup>15</sup> Roland Barthes, "The Discourse of History," trans. Stephen Bann, *Comparative Criticism: A Yearbook*, vol 3, ed. by E.S. Shaffer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 12. An example of the act of uttering in the historian's account is when the historian refers to his collection of testimony from other sources or to his judgment of the material.

contrives a tempest to exact her revenge on the Trojan people, Geoffrey uses aural *ekphrasis* to exaggerate the goddess's grief:

Ther saugh I thee, cruel Juno,  
That art daun Jupiteres wif,  
That hast yhated al thy lyf  
Al the Troianyssh blood,  
Renne and crye as thou were wood  
On Eolus, the god of wyndes,  
To blowen oute, of alle kyndes,  
So loude, that he shulde drenche  
Lord and lady, grom and wenche,  
Of al the Troian nacion  
Withoute any savacion.  
(198-208)

Geoffrey's description of sound dramatizes the characters' experiences, revealing that the plot points embedded in stone or glass suppress the more intimate details of history. Furthermore, his simile ("as thou were wood") and hypothetical ("so loude, that he shulde drenche") rely on Geoffrey's imagination and secondary reading of the text, indicating that he deflects history once again into a more familiar story, dissatisfied with the wall's representation of the past. Narrative incompleteness thus drives Geoffrey's poetic innovation. After first flattening it as history, Geoffrey re-crafts it as a story, carrying it into the realm of poetic "makyng," a term used in Chaucer's poem to his scribe Adam, in what is perhaps a more relentless exposition of narrative than of historical record.<sup>16</sup>

As Chaucer works in his awareness of the multiple redactions and adaptations of the Troy story, he focuses not only on the fractured state of the narrative, but also on the agency that comes to Geoffrey via his active memory. The etched-in brass plaque is transformed into a palimpsest, a manuscript on which traces of earlier texts remain despite attempts to wipe them

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<sup>16</sup> Chaucer, *Chaucers Wordes Unto Adam, His Owne Scriveyn*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), 4. Using the phrase, "my makyng," Chaucer stresses his ownership over his original authorial creation, which becomes vulnerable to change and destruction at the ends of his "scriveyn."

away, evoking Foucault's conception of genealogy as "gray...[operating] on a field of entangled and confused parchments, on documents that have been scratched over and recopied many times."<sup>17</sup> Geoffrey's rhetorical gestures, disguised as *occupatio*, reflect his mental library and identify ruptures, as when he ends his catalog of the figures he sees when Aeneas leaves Italy: "Which whoso willeth for to knowe, / He moste rede many a rowe / On Virgile or on Claudian / Or Daunte, that hit telle kan" (447-48). Here, he indicates strains left absent from the story illustrated. Evoking also Foucault's notion of counter-memory and counter-history, the dreamer's remembrance of alternative versions resists an official record of the past and newly emphasizes the role of the person who remembers over the singular voice and origin.<sup>18</sup> While the stone that Geoffrey reads represents a history that attempts to develop itself from a "document" into a "monument," as if a memorial, Geoffrey re-contextualizes the object, using allusions to a broader body of historiography, and stresses the process of creating narrative over the absolute narrative product.<sup>19</sup> The textual authorities cited by the dreamer, notably Ovid's *Heroides*, compete with the narrative in the Temple of Glass. The incompatibility of textual accounts undermines the heroic precedents that make Virgil's reconstructed origins so appealing to the politico-historical imagination of Rome and England alike. As I will return to in Chapter 4, in the 1370s and 1380s, the *Aeneid* offered a powerful secular historiography to Chaucer's London, legitimizing a genealogy linking Aeneas to Brutus through Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia*

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<sup>17</sup> Michel Foucault, *Language, counter-memory, practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. and trans. by Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 139.

<sup>18</sup> Foucault argues that genealogical narratives reject the possibility for an origin, privileging dispersed and discontinuous beginnings: "it rejects the metahistorical deployment of ideal significations and indefinite teleologies. It opposes itself to the search for 'origins.'" *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>19</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), 7.

*regum Britannie* and the other *Brut* histories.<sup>20</sup> Londoners even toyed with renaming their city “Troynovant,” celebrating the myth of Trojan origins.<sup>21</sup> While Virgil’s *Aeneid* tended to be categorized as *fabula*, which referred to untrue or fictional narrative, rather than *historia*, which referred to a narrative beholden to the truth of the past yet more interesting and continuous than annalistic documents, Troy occupied in Londoners’ imagination a “liminal location between history and fantasy...more significant for the way it [operated] than for its actual truthfulness.”<sup>22</sup> Geoffrey’s interruptions draw out the fictive nature of the *Aeneid* and encourage varying interpretations. As Geoffrey opens access to the past, he exposes the limitations of a one-sided perspective on this foundational narrative.

The dreamer’s re-reading of the story of Dido and Aeneas most conspicuously unfolds the perspectival layers obscured by the absolute narrative of the tablet. Chaucer knew Dido as she appeared in the vernacular textual and historiographical traditions surviving to him, and Geoffrey’s quick departure from the account of Dido as she appears in Book IV of the *Aeneid* suggests Chaucer’s desire to complicate a singular vision of the tragic heroine by re-introducing these different sources and traditions.<sup>23</sup> Despite Geoffrey’s plan to abbreviate the long chapter in Aeneas’s journey (“shortly of this thyng to pace”), when his narration turns from Aeneas’s arrival at Carthage to his love for Dido, he intervenes at length with an affective monologue (239):

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<sup>20</sup> Monika Otter, “Functions of fiction in historical writing,” in *Writing Medieval History: Theory and Practice for the Post-Traditional Middle Ages*, ed. Nancy Partner (London: Hodder and Arnold, 2005), 109-130.

<sup>21</sup> The fifteenth-century *Liber albus* records the history of the naming of London; according to this city handbook, London was founded by King Brut to create a “New Troy.” Sheila Lindenbaum, “London texts and literate practice,” 299.

<sup>22</sup> Sylvia Federico, *New Troy: Fantasies of Empire in the Late Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 3. The medieval academic discipline of rhetoric, Ciceronian in nature, encompassed both the fields of *historia* and *fabula*, as well as *argumentum*.

<sup>23</sup> Marilynn Desmond, *Reading Dido: Gender, Textuality, and the Medieval Aeneid* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 129.

What shulde I speke more queynte  
Or peyne me my wordes peynte  
To speke of love? Hyt wol not be;  
I kan not of that faculte.  
And eke to telle the manere  
How they aqueynteden in fere,  
Hyt were a long proces to telle,  
And over-long for yow to dwelle.  
(245-52)

Geffrey's *occupatio* suspends readers within this period of Aeneas's journey, rather than rushing toward the conclusion of foundation. Claiming that he lacks the "faculte" to discourse on love, he excuses his inability by saying the story would take too much time to tell anyway. Geffrey's concern that storytelling time faces the limitations of a particular duration has the effect of distancing readers from the narrative of Dido and Aeneas; they operate within the temporal framework of the fourteenth-century dreamer, in addition to that of the *Aeneid*. By pluralizing the senses of time in this way, Chaucer offers the idea that histories and, more broadly, temporalities are always entangled.

As Geffrey proceeds to develop the account of Dido and Aeneas, his use of *compilatio* not only reveals the scope of his knowledge of intertexts, but also multiplies versions of history. He begins by claiming to describe what he sees: "Ther sawgh I grave how Eneas / Tolde Dido every caas, / That hym was tyd upon the see" (253-55). However, Geffrey then adds in what is left out from the account due to the teleological imperatives of Aeneas's journey, showing his affective investment in the meaning of history. Subverting Virgil's image of a pious Aeneas, Geffrey demonstrates his concern with the misrepresentation of figures within history in his comment on Aeneas's treachery in love: "Allas! what harm doth apparence, / Whan hit is fals in existence! / For he to hir a traytour was" (265-67). He interrupts the message that "[Aeneas] was good, for he such semed," and offers the rest of the account of Dido without reference to what he

sees (264). Instead, he uses exclamatory language and moralizing asides, produced out of the affective dimensions of his own memory, to suggest what lessons readers may derive from the story:

For this shal every woman fynde:  
That som man, of his pure kynde,  
Wol shewen outward the fayreste,  
Tyl he have caught that what him leste,  
And thanne wol he causes fynde  
And swere how that she ys unkynde,  
Or fals, or privy, or double was.  
(279-85)

Geffrey's idea that both men and women can justify fault in each other indicates the "double" sense of his reading, as well as his passionate ambivalence about the account of Dido and Aeneas. Aeneas presides over all other characters as the true hero of Virgil's story, but in Ovid's narrative, to which he soon advises his readers to turn, Dido appeals through affect and a narrative of tragedy. According to Marilyn Desmond, Ovid's text "inscribes Dido's desire and lament within a readerly critique of *Aeneid* 4," helping Geffrey to model a more sympathetic reading of a woman's plight.<sup>24</sup>

Geffrey also plays the role of Lady Philosophy as he moralizes Dido's fault in loving a "gest" all too soon (288). He suggests his comparison to the allegorical figure by repeating a "proverbe, / That 'he that fully knoweth th'erbe / May saufly leye hyt to his yē" (288, 290-91). The medicinal herb, like the spiritual medicine Lady Philosophy administers in order to cure Boethius's philosophical dilemma, can help the eye; however, the proverb also implies that failed vision interferes with a prudent perspective, just as in the *Boece*, the misdirected gaze or inability to see signifies a lack of insight into temporality. Geffrey's intervention shows his active engagement with Dido's personal story and, in making allusions to even more texts,

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<sup>24</sup> Desmond, *Reading Dido*, 148.

located beyond the historiographical tradition, his commentary more broadly pluralizes interpretations of the Dido story. His reading of the Dido-Aeneas scene makes the search for historical truth endless and discontinuous. As a critique, the absence and ruptures that underpin the engraving show the unevenness of historical representation. In the light of Michel-Rolph Trouillot's ideas of history, they call to mind the problem in which "the production of historical narratives involves the uneven contribution of competing groups and individuals who have unequal access to the means for such production."<sup>25</sup> Trouillot shows how, within sources and archives, the "presences and absences" of figures and voices are not natural, but rather "created," as "one engages in the practice of silencing."<sup>26</sup> In the *House of Fame*, Geoffrey's intervention recalling Dido's story is a reminder of how the *Aeneid* silences Dido and pretends to forget her perspective in the telling of Aeneas's destined journey to Rome. As Jill Mann writes, "just as Ovid could isolate a female perspective from Vergil's story of male destiny, so Chaucer can reconstruct Dido afresh from the point where her story makes contact with common human experience as he knows it."<sup>27</sup>

When Geoffrey refuses to look at sections of the narrative, he explicitly departs from a discourse that figures vision as insight into truth, and instead suggests that the historical record projects a sense of estrangement. Here, he evokes the scene in the *Aeneid* in which Dido refuses to look outward into the world, anticipating the escape of Aeneas's ships from Carthage at dawn

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<sup>25</sup> Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), xix, 48.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 48. In Trouillot's discussion of Sans Souci and the Haitian Revolution, he writes, "mentions and silences are thus active, dialectical counterparts of history is the synthesis."

<sup>27</sup> Jill Mann, *Feminizing Chaucer* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2002), 14.

and confronted with the impossibility of her situation.<sup>28</sup> For Geoffrey, it is the historical record—what his eyes are forced to experience in the Temple of Glass—that becomes too alienating to encounter directly.

In this sense, Geoffrey compares not only to Dido, but also to Aeneas in Book I of the *Aeneid*. In Carthage, Aeneas interprets the wall mural for Dido and the Carthaginians, his journey temporally suspended by the act of mediating the past. He sees the historical record on the frieze, but his displays of *affectus* show the alienating influence of his experiences in Troy: “He broke off to feast his eyes and mind on a mere image, sighing often, cheeks grown with tears.”<sup>29</sup> Aeneas is ultimately motivated to leave Carthage in order to resume the course of his destiny, but also to avoid the very entanglement of the past and present, seen in this meditation on the mural, that could thwart this journey. In Chaucer’s *House of Fame*, the commentary, isolated from the engraved text, conversely promotes the shift in the readers’ gaze from center to margins. Geoffrey likewise suggests the turn of his own gaze from the narrative; resisting the defamiliarizing effects of Virgilian history, he presents a separate emplotment of the past that transforms the significance of its events for the present and helps him refamiliarize himself with a past from which the Glass Temple’s historiography has alienated him.

In Chaucer’s critique of an absolute record of history, it would only make sense that Geoffrey, mediating the history that is on the wall, would be an unreliable historical narrator. His interpretive quest for a more familiar history leads him to stitch together his sources discontinuously and impose his bias. Thus, while Geoffrey gives a sense of the proliferation of

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<sup>28</sup> “Regina e speculis ut primam albescere lucem / vidit et aequatis classem procedere velis” (“The queen caught sight of ships on the seaward reach with sails full and the wind astern”). Vergil, *Vergil’s Aeneid: Books I-VI*, ed. by Clyde Pharr (Wauconda, Illinois: Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, 1998, 2007), Book IV, 586-87. Translations are from Virgil, *The Aeneid*, trans. by Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 117.

<sup>29</sup> “sic ait atque animum pictura pascit inani / multa gemens, largoque umectat flumine vultum,” Virgil, *The Aeneid*, Book I, 464-65; translation, 20.

sources, he also exposes the limitations of different perspectival positions on the past. Virgil attempts to mediate Dido's story, Ovid to interpret Virgil's, Geoffrey to re-read both, and Chaucer's readers, to engage with a multiply-mediated narrative. Chaucer thus figures the creation of history in a final instance impossible and releases history, locked in stone, of its temporal absoluteness.

### 3. MOVEMENT II

While Movement I effectively deconstructs Virgilian authority, the proem to Book II reveals Geoffrey's familiarity and fascination with a venerated body of visionary works, a different authoritative written tradition. Geoffrey positions himself among visionary figures, confident that his readers will find pleasure in his own vision, and yet he makes an interesting subversion of authority when he claims that his dream has never before been dreamed by the famous sleepers of history: the biblical Isaiah, Pharoah, Nebuchadnezzar, and Elcanor, Cicero's Scipio, and Virgil's Turnus. Furthermore, his conventional epic plea to the deities of Parnassus, acknowledging his deference, quickly proceeds into an appeal to an internal source of knowledge and activity: his Thought, or memory. As the "tresorye" of Geoffrey's mind, his memory contains both his dream, which he hopes to write down with proper "engyne and myght," but also the creative and imaginative faculties for citing and exploring various textual forebears (524, 528). The proem prefaces a more extensive challenge to visionary authority in the account of Geoffrey's ascent above earth. It suggests that, just as Geoffrey's textually-constructed memory of the Dido-Aeneas account helped him to intervene in the narrative in the Temple of Glass, the second movement of his dream will compete with an age-old mythology of dreams.

But even before the proem and the second movement, which focuses on Geoffrey's experiences above earth, Chaucer offers a scene that contemplates the loss of the authoritative text. Geoffrey leaves the Temple of Glass and enters a desert, an ambiguous liminal space, in which he suspends explicit textual invocations to pray for deliverance from the illusion of his vision. The landscape is emptied of its familiar material structures: "Then sawgh I but a large feld, / ... / Withouten toun, or hous, or tree, / Or bush, or grass, or eryd lond" (482-85). The impression of utter desolation implies that Geoffrey here occupies not a land that has been untouched, in want of cultivation, but a kind of waste land space that has been abandoned, signifying loss, rather than the potential for creation. The surface of sand forms an unreliable site for foundation, suggesting shifting movement and even mutability, but furthermore, Geoffrey's comparison of the physical landscape to Libya invites a textual allusion to Dido's Carthage that reinforces the themes of change and loss. Geoffrey finds Dido's home ("the contree of Cartage") earlier in the Temple of Glass, and whereas there he evokes Dido's plight, omitted from the recorded narrative, in the desert Chaucer asks readers to remember the aftermath of Dido's tragedy, which parallels Geoffrey's situation in the aftermath of reading the story of the *Aeneid* (224).

Still, the Dido allusion in the desert scene does not raise the first and only sense of bewilderment and alienation in the poem, despite Geoffrey's declaration: "O Crist...that art in blysse, / Fro fantome and illusion / Me save!" (492-94). Geoffrey refers to the desert as the source of his hallucination, effectively suggesting that this landscape is starkly different from the trustful and concrete world of knowledge in the Temple of Glass. The irony of Geoffrey's surprise consists in his suggestions that he has not already encountered an "illusion" of history in the Temple of Glass. Mistaking the desert as the initial landscape symbolic of illusion, Geoffrey

experiences a panic, and poses the question of whether to mourn the loss of the singular authoritative text, when its presence, in fragments (as it appears in the Temple of Glass), is a phantasm anyway. Geoffrey's quick gaze to the heavens ("Myn eyen to the hevene I caste") only reinforces the basis of the illusion: the hope for totalizing schema (495).

When an eagle descends from the sky to sweep up Geoffrey, Chaucer playfully continues to explore the possibility that Geoffrey's dream will conform to a particular authoritative model. This time, he invokes the *somnium celeste*, a genre which "claims to convey absolute truth, unmodified by the personal consciousness of the visionary."<sup>30</sup> The eagle's golden feathers and the clap of thunder he produces in the sky mark him as an ethereal *deus ex machina*, arriving to relieve Geoffrey during his trial of feeling abandonment and delusion. Geoffrey's ascent with this figure of seeming transcendence stages the dreamer's distance from the world of substance. As if having entered an appropriate venue for mystical contemplation, Geoffrey eventually conjures up Boethius's process of transformation by quoting the *Boece*, Book 4, meter 1:

A thought may flee so hye  
Wyth fetheres of Philosophye  
To passen everych element  
And whan he hath so fer ywent,  
Than may be seen behynde hys bak  
Cloude—and al that y of spak  
(973-75)

Geoffrey's attempt to imagine his ascent as an opportunity for Boethian revelation invites a Boethian reading, in which Geoffrey's journey symbolizes the soul's transformation, and in which his elevation shows a perspectival distance and detachment that could release him from self-entrapment within mortal time and a material world. In a section of the *Boece* that appears earlier than the meter alluded to here, Lady Philosophy commands Boethius, "Byhoold the cours of the

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<sup>30</sup> Spearing, *Medieval Dream-Poetry*, 72.

hevene, and stynt somtyme to wondren on foule thynges,” reminding him to fix his gaze on the stability of the transcendent realm and to avert it from base goods.<sup>31</sup> However, despite Geoffrey’s Boethian evocations, the irony of his reading of his flight is dramatized by the fact that Boethius’s journey in the *Boece* “operates exclusively at the level of metaphor.”<sup>32</sup> According to Michael D. Cherniss,

Unlike some of his literary descendants, the visionary [Boethius] is never depicted as physically moving from one place to another...there is little here [in the *Boece*] that could be called action, and what action there is—Philosophy driving away the Muses or wiping the clouds from Boethius’s eyes—functions symbolically to further render mental states and processes concrete.<sup>33</sup>

In the *House of Fame*, Geoffrey shows that he reads the Boethian text too literally and adapts the journey to give meaning to his physical ascent.

Geoffrey’s private recitation of Boethian wisdom therefore shows not only that Geoffrey thinks he undergoes a transcendent experience, but also that his reading material deeply informs his imagination of transcendence. Drawing on different textual sources, Geoffrey connects to visionary figures in order to come to terms with what he believes is a divine experience. In addition to citing Boethius, he wonders, in a parody of St. Paul, whether he exists in body or in spirit, using metaphysical discourse: “Y wot wel y am here, / But wher in body or in gost / I not, ywys, but God, thou wost” (980-82). Metaphorical discourse also broadly recalls Macrobius, whose *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, on the dream vision at the end of Cicero’s *De re publica*, validates the possibility of ascent. Geoffrey claims his “entendement” has never been more “clere” than at his position of aerial distance, a recognition leading him to compare himself

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<sup>31</sup> Chaucer, *Boece*, 3, Pr. 8, 29-32.

<sup>32</sup> Michael D. Cherniss, *Boethian Apocalypse: Studies in Middle English Vision Poetry* (Norman, OK: Pilgrim Books, 1987), 22.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

to Martianus Capella and Alain de Lille, whose illustrations of heaven he can now corroborate (983). The ascent also evokes Dante's experience in *Paradiso*, where, having moved between a realm of mortal history and a divine realm of revelation, he sees the ineffable and intimates at apophatic discourse. Geoffrey's Eagle vaguely resembles Dante's eagle, which flies toward the visionary's teleological end, emphasizing the future temporality—or atemporality—in which the soul accesses the spiritual dimension, and manifests God's justice in earthly time. Geoffrey thinks to himself, now in an explicit invocation of Canto 2 of Dante's *Inferno*, "I neyther am Ennok, ne Elye, / Ne Romulus, ne Ganymede" (588-89).<sup>34</sup> All of these citations and allusions help Geoffrey to articulate his impression that he experiences a Platonic movement of transcendence. While Geoffrey boasts the superiority of his vision to those of Isaiah and Scipio, he leaps to position himself among them as a potentially transcendent seer.

However, Chaucer teases the mystical experience only to re-entrench the dreamer in a temporal and physical world. Geoffrey's lines read differently than Dante's in the *Inferno* and, as Helen Cooper points out, Chaucer shifts Dante's focus on the biblical and the quasi-historical "to the overtly mythological and fabulous...there is no claim here of a real journey to heaven."<sup>35</sup> In addition, according to John M. Fyler, Chaucer breaks off the Boethian quotation cited above with the word "cloude" to contrast the perspective of Boethius's Thought and Geoffrey's narrower vision: "Chaucer...quite definitely stays within the sublunary world; the House of Fame is in the air, traditionally a realm of turbulence and confusion, and it shares the qualities of its kindred

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<sup>34</sup> Dante writes, "Ma io, perché venirvi? o chi 'l concede? / Io non Enēa, io non Paulo sono; / me degno a ciò né altri 'l crede," which translates, "But why should I go there? Who allows it? I am not Aeneas, nor am I Paul. Neither I nor any think me fit for this," in Dante, *Inferno*, eds. Robert Hollander and Jean Hollander (New York: Doubleday, 2000), Canto 2, 32.

<sup>35</sup> Helen Cooper, "The Four Last Things in Dante and Chaucer: Ugolino in the *House of Rumour*," *New Medieval Literatures*, 3 (1999), 53.

element.”<sup>36</sup> The air through which Geoffrey soars fails him as a source of ethereal knowing and experience.

Furthermore, the Eagle in the *House of Fame* does not replicate the ethereal bird of the *Commedia*—in fact, he bears better comparison to Dante’s Virgil, made imperfect by his pagan status, than to the transcendent imperial Eagle—and he refuses to legitimize Geoffrey’s entry into a phenomenological “cloude.” Instead, he literally and figuratively brings Geoffrey back down to earth and begins to expose the productive possibilities of de-authorization. The Eagle refuses to occupy the role of spiritual guide, there otherwise to heighten Geoffrey’s consciousness of the divine, by disrupting his meditation and calling the nebulous Boethian moment a mere “fantasye” (992). His talons, the “grymme pawes stronge” and the “sharpe nayles longe,” grip Geoffrey tightly in an experience of physical abruptness so jarring that all the feeling in his head deadens (541-42); he shows numbness, rather than revelation. The Eagle’s revivifying call, “Awak,” which evokes the wake-up calls summoning characters from the slumber of grief in the *Book of the Duchess*, is similarly dissonant, suppressing Geoffrey’s moment of epiphanic illumination (556). The Eagle’s voice, moreover, proves too familiar to Geoffrey’s ears to be otherworldly (“Ryght in the same vois and stevene / That useth oon I koude nevene”), and, bossy and boisterous, he mocks spiritual contemplation and distance “withoute any subtilite” (561-2, 855). When Geoffrey imagines himself in relation to a continuum of Biblical, antique, and mythological figures, imitating Dante, the Eagle thwarts the dreamer’s simultaneous quest for stellification and quickly rebukes him by telling him that his environs are constituted by natural elements, rather than deities: “For Joves ys not therabout” (597). His teachings on the Aristotelian theory of gravity contain the truth preserved by Boethius and Dante in their own

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<sup>36</sup> John M. Fyler, in “‘Cloude,’—And al that y of spak’: *The House of Fame*, v. 978,” *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 87 (1986): 565-568.

expositions on the laws of physics, but they manifest comically through overt pedantry and pompous interjections: “A ha!...lo, so I can / Lewedly to a lewed man / Speke, and shewe hym swyche skiles” (865-67).

The Eagle’s guidance comes also in the form of lectures on the stars and the Milky Way, dismantling the visionary experience. While, according to Linne Mooney, the flight demonstrates Geoffrey’s “resistance to learning the science of astronomy,”<sup>37</sup> the Eagle does not allow his student to cling to the illusion of transcendence nor enacts his transfiguration as if he were beyond earthly time.<sup>38</sup> Chaucer critiques the sense of certainty with which authors like Dante and Boethius use similar astronomical details authoritatively to demonstrate historical transcendence and an absolute concept of time. Rather than make Geoffrey see as a voyeur, through a distanced perspective in the sky in which history appears whole, he fragments and disrupts the totalizing viewpoint.

Chaucer uses these allusions and the Boethian intertext especially to challenge the idea that sight gives singular access to divine and temporal knowing. Whereas Dante stages his vision as a source of truth and Boethius implies the possibility for transcendence in his dialogue with Lady Philosophy, basing his educational journey in Platonic theory, Chaucer uses his loquacious bird to depart from their lessons. The Eagle directs his attention to the orientation of speech, which is governed by natural laws despite its upward inclinations. He emphasizes this point through the repetition of “kynde”: speech tends to move upward “of pure kynde,” just as each thing tends toward “his kyndelyche stede,” and the Eagle describes the “kyndely” way in which

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<sup>37</sup> Linne R. Mooney, “Chaucer and Interest in Astronomy at the Court of Richard II,” in *Chaucer in Perspective: Middle English Essays in Honour of Norman Blake*, ed. Geoffrey Lester (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 139.

<sup>38</sup> By contrast, Dante implies his transfiguration in canto 1 of *Paradiso* when he writes that he was changed within when he gazed at Beatrice, and uses the term “trasumanar,” or transhumanation, to refer to his initial experience in heaven.

the dwelling place of every spoken word has “his kynde place” in the air (824, 829, 831, 834). His stress on natural movement pertains not only to speech and sound, but also to “every kyndely thyng,” as he mentions earlier in his lecture (730). This academic lecture on the natural inclination of sounds evokes Boethius’s respected *De institutione musica*, but his focus on the details of their earthly foundation circumvent the final divine focus of Boethius’s work, or rather, the telos.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, while Boethius’s metaphors of physical ascent in the *Boece* imagine the soul’s upward movement, the “kyndely enclynyng” discussed by the Eagle actually denies the possibility for metaphysical transcendence (734). Chaucer here parodies the typological vision of history governing Lady Philosophy’s disquisition on the divine perspective. Thus, even though Geoffrey continually suggests that his dream will compare to the visionary experiences of the *somnium celeste* tradition, the Eagle’s emphasis on the natural subverts the expectation that vision will predominate as the sense in which to access truth and knowledge. The sounds of language in Geoffrey’s dream challenge apophasis and reinforce the idea that the sphere into which Geoffrey and the Eagle have ascended is not ineffable, but rather a constantly shifting point from which to perceive and talk about the world of history. Indeed, Chaucer links the impossibility of discerning truth to the inadequacy of vision as a transcendent source of knowledge. While some scholars point to Geoffrey’s failures as a “visionary” of history, this scene in fact coheres with the first movement of reading in the Temple of Glass in the way that it undermines the authoritative tradition, rather than the isolated reader.<sup>40</sup> The Eagle’s efforts to

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<sup>39</sup> Boethius’s *De Musica* begins with a chapter on *musica mundana*, the first aspect the fourfold classification of music, but ends climactically with a section on *musica divina*. Boethius, *Boethius: Foundations of Music*, trans. Calvin M. Bower, ed. C.V. Palisca (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

<sup>40</sup> For scholarship that emphasizes Geoffrey’s limited ability to know through the framework of the dream, see Jessica Barr, *Willing to Know God: Dreamers and Visionaries in the Later Middle Ages* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2010). Barr argues that the visionary conventionally plays an active role in the understanding of the vision and that the *House of Fame*, by treating authority as unstable and elusive, critiques the dreamer of the vision.

resist the spiritual journey ultimately prove successful: returning not to Platonic transcendent consciousness, but instead to familiar and earthly consciousness, Geoffrey remarks, “My mynde cam to me ageyn” (564).

When the Eagle does tell Geoffrey to use his sight, he intends it to transform the immaterial experience into a material one, and to more concretely bind the dreamer to earth. After the Eagle breaks from his lecture to check in on Geoffrey (“How farest thou?”), he instructs him to “now see,” as he guides his gaze “adoun” (887-89). He even makes a “game” of it, telling Geoffrey to notify him if he sees any familiar house or town so that he can impress him with his knowledge of its specific distance from them (886). But even more than a game, the viewing experience fosters a sense of intimacy between Geoffrey and the world he normally inhabits, precisely because this world is visible, concrete, and familiar, colonized and constructed by human beings. The Eagle asks Geoffrey, “seest thou any toun / Or ought thou knowest yonder doun?” (911-12). Chaucer here transforms the Boethian experience of distance, which enables a philosophical detachment from mortal affairs, into an opportunity to play. The Eagle’s instruction to gaze downward thwarts the progress toward a divine, ideal perspective located beyond time. He facilitates the expansion of Geoffrey’s visual field, but not so that it mirrors Scipio’s or Boethius’s; Geoffrey’s aerial, bird’s-eye view instead encompasses the urban and material worlds, and produces naturalist observations:

And y adoun gan loken thoo,  
And beheld felde and playnes,  
And now hilles, and now mountaynes,  
And now unnethes grete bestes,  
Now ryveres, now citees,  
Now tounes, and now grete trees,  
Now shippes seylynge in the see.  
But thus sone in a while he  
Was flowen fro the ground so hye  
That al the world, as to myn yē,

No more semed than a prikke  
Or elles was the air so thikke  
That y ne myghte not discerne.  
(896-909)

Geffrey's description of what he sees below him on earth emphasizes the rapid pace at which he moves, eliciting the poetry-in-motion that once more undermines the totalizing schema of visionary paradigms. The use of *repetitio*, or anaphora, particularly to emphasize "now" and other temporal indicators, suggests mobility, which always resists the possibility that he can possess an all-encompassing scopic view. It foreshadows the kind of action that the cultural anthropologist Michael Taussig discusses in his description of the sense of "everydayness"<sup>41</sup>; he says that it is "not so much contemplative as it is caught in *media res* working on, making anew, amalgamating, acting and reacting."<sup>42</sup>

On his journey, Geffrey identifies the world as a "prikke" in a metaphor that orients him, on his flight, in relation to the earth and thus that grounds him in the material world. Geffrey uses the term in a state of uncertainty about whether the apparent smallness of the world might be a hallucination caused by the opaque consistency of the air ("Or elles was the air so thikke"). However, the "prikke" also evokes Book 2, Prose 7 of the *Boece*, recalling the visionary context in which Chaucer situates Geffrey's flight and, in particular, Lady Philosophy's discourse on the philosophical distance that the enlightened individual must develop in relation to the mortal world. Lady Philosophy offers the following explanation as she denounces worldly fame:

Certeyn thyng es, as thou hast learned by the demonstracioun of astronomye, that al the envyrounyng of the erthe aboute ne halt but the resoun of a *prykke* at regard of the gretnesse of hevене; that is to seyn that, yif ther were maked comparysoun of the erthe to the gretnesse of hevене, men wolden juggen in al that the erthe ne heelde no space... And

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<sup>41</sup> Michael Taussig, "Tactility and Distraction," *Cultural Anthropology* 6 (1991): 147.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

ye thanne, that ben envyrouned and closed withynne the leeste *prykke* of thilke *prykke*,  
thynken ye to manyfesten yowr renoun and doon yowr name for to ben born forth?<sup>43</sup>

Lady Philosophy emphasizes the irrelevance of fame to the achievement of true goods. Drawing on astrological computation, she reminds Boethius that the whole circumference of the earth is a pinpoint—a “prykke,” translated from the Latin *punctum* of the *Consolation of Philosophy*—and a limiting enclosure in contrast to celestial space (“erthe ne heelde no space”). Beyond focusing on the physical limitations and narrow margins of the earth, Lady Philosophy stresses the philosophical insignificance of temporal existence. From a distant and cosmological vantage point within the infinite space of eternity, the history of any single man is finite in spite of the worldly fame he achieves. If the seer would “looke upon the brode schewynge contrees of the hevene, and upon the streyte sete of this erthe,” transforming his myopic perspective into an upward gaze, he would “be asschamed of the ences of his name, that mai nat fulfille the litel compas of the erthe.”<sup>44</sup> Not only does the “prykke” expose the minimal size of earth; it also shows that earthly temporality, a “prysone,” imposes restrictions, contrasting with the eternal realm transcending temporal experience.<sup>45</sup>

In the *House of Fame*, Geoffrey’s narration draws on the Boethian use of perspective to contemplate the smallness of earth, but the scene of the flight ultimately rejects Lady Philosophy’s *contemptus mundi* viewpoint in Book 2 of the *Boece*. The opacity of the air and the sense of motion obstruct his access to panopticism, a visionary benefit belonging to a Boethian or Dantean voyeur. Geoffrey lacks this totalizing perspective and stability, since his rapid movement—like that of De Certeau’s walkers—fragments the whole space into moving

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<sup>43</sup> Chaucer, *Boece*, 2, Pr. 7, 13-25; my italics.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-7.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

“networks.”<sup>46</sup> Geoffrey’s sight of the “prikke” thus helps Chaucer to reconfigure Lady Philosophy’s cosmic eschatology. Even when Geoffrey seeks to transform his position above the earth into a singular, prophetic, and authorial vantage point, the Eagle defeats him: he reintroduces the world into the heavens, comparing the Milky Way to Watling Street, the paved Roman road in London ostensibly imagined for Chaucer’s pilgrims as they traveled from Southwark to Canterbury in the *Canterbury Tales*. Thus, the Eagle uses an earthly point of reference to orient Geoffrey concretely in the wilderness of space and, furthermore, moves Geoffrey laterally, rather than upwardly.

That the “prikke” in Middle English refers also to a feature of the medieval book only reinforces the distinction between Lady Philosophy’s use of the term and Chaucer’s. In the process of book-making, marginal prickings constituted a temporary index, reminding the manuscript maker of the lines on which the scribe needed to write, but ultimately shorn from the leaf before binding and minimized by the central text. For Lady Philosophy, this marginal pricking would serve as a reminder of mortality, dramatizing celestial truth, precisely because it is shorn from the page, just as the earth appears as an obscure and minimal speck marginalized by the heavens. But for Geoffrey, the “prikke” is a reference point and valuable tool for orienting himself as a “reader” of the earth or even as a metaphorical scribe, who records what he sees before him. Indeed, in the *House of Fame*, the point of earth is insignificant next to the heavenly, authoritative, and impenetrable center. Like the human name, the “prikke” fades against the expanse of space, reduced to a mere *punctum* with increasing philosophical distance, and the metaphor aligning the earth with the margin and the heavens with the text spatialize the Boethian aloofness from history and time. However, simultaneously, the “prikke” is subject to the contingencies of movement and thus denies a state of transcendence in both the page and the

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<sup>46</sup> De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 93.

universe. In never entering the heavens, Geoffrey lacks a stable anchoring authority, and yet the sight of the earth from a distance prevents him from falling “between the lines” in a cosmological disappearing act.

Peripheries play a crucial role in Geoffrey’s ability to relate to the dream world, from Movement I, where his glosses accompany the central body of narrative discourse, to Movement II, where even from beyond the earth he always moves within the “margins” of mortal time and space. In the Temple of Glass, Geoffrey openly responds to the writing on the wall. On his flight, under the influence of a change in air pressure, Geoffrey fashions counter-memories differently, manipulating an inventory of proposed and inherited truths of the *somnium celeste* tradition to disperse the abstractions underpinning literary eschatologies. In this way, Chaucer similarly remakes history into textual epiphenomenon and deflects epistemological certainty into story and poetic “makyng.”

#### 4. MOVEMENT III

In the opening scene of Movement III, in which Geoffrey ascends the tall “roche” supporting the House of Fame, Chaucer’s description of material topography contributes to his project of deconstructing the myth of a complete and fully knowable historical narrative (1116). As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the edifice supporting Fame’s palace represents a memorial site, recording the names of famous people who enjoyed prosperity and fame, “wide yblowe” (1139). These individuals represent only a slice of human history, however; as Geoffrey suggests in his observation of the ice foundation, which makes the names susceptible to the heat of the sun, the writing that he sees is not indestructible and only partly performs its duties as a patron of remembrance. The appearance of melting ice instead makes the rock foundation a

symbol of the inevitability of forgetting the past. While the memorial edifice is meant to preserve the names of history, the fading inscriptions efface identities, turning the once known into the “unfamous” and eliciting the historically contingent nature of fame (1146).

Furthermore, while Geoffrey specifies that heat, rather than storm, threatens the historical record, his image evokes Walter Benjamin’s commentary on Paul Klee’s *Angelus Novus*, which elicits the idea of history as anti-progress.<sup>47</sup> In Thesis IX of *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, Benjamin evokes Klee’s angel of history, propelled forward through time by the assault of a storm, and wearing a melancholic face that is “turned toward the past,” highlighting the catastrophe, rather than success, of history.<sup>48</sup> The conditions that affect Chaucer’s names in the *House of Fame* resemble Benjamin’s “pile of debris,” violently thrusting apart the angel’s wings, in that they undermine the ability to perceive history whole, let alone as an illustrious dimension of time.<sup>49</sup> Geoffrey faces backward temporally, just as the angel, once a messenger of salvation, looks backward in an encounter with history, but this very gaze disrupts the sense of a dominant temporal order and warns that the past is always laid out in ruins.

In the *House of Fame*, monuments of historical record conceal the past as much as they attempt to reveal. While Chaucer deconstructs the transcendent experience characterizing Boethius’s Platonic development in Movement II, he evokes the counsel of Lady Philosophy more seriously in Movement III. The allusion to the *Boece* validates Geoffrey’s insight into the transience of worldly fame upon seeing the disintegrating letters. Returning to the aforementioned passage on fame in the *Boece*, Lady Philosophy poses rhetorical questions to

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<sup>47</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. by Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 257.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

Boethius concerning the status of figures once prominent in history: “Where wouen now the bones of trewe Fabricius? What is now Brutus or stierne Catoun?” and she concludes, “The thynne fame yit lastynge of here idel names is marked with a few letters.”<sup>50</sup> While Lady Philosophy’s “lettres” refers more likely to books than to characters of the alphabet, the image of “idel” or empty names confined to a few pages achieves the same effect as Chaucer’s names on his mountain of ice: both suggest the short-lived and ultimately negligible importance of figures that aspire to achieve celebrity. While individuals may believe they deserve the “glorie of fame” for pursuing lesser, earthly goods, Lady Philosophy collapses the illusion that it is possible to achieve historical transcendence when pursuing the goods of Fortune rather than the *summum bonum*.<sup>51</sup> Chaucer’s gloss of “the styntyng of the renoun of fame,” as, “the seconde dethe,” after the departure of the body and the soul, underscores the Boethian point on the ephemeral nature of fame.<sup>52</sup>

Chaucer continues to draw out this Boethian reflection at the site of Fame, where the Eagle drops Geoffrey. As the Eagle foretells in Movement II, Fame’s palace marks only the halfway point to heaven (“Ryght even in myddes of the weye / Bitwixen hevne and erthe and see”), a middle-way that grounds Geoffrey’s temporary destination in an earthly temporality and space, parodying once more a tradition in which the visionary departs from the world of materiality and finds immaterial, singular, and celestial truth (714-15). The Eagle’s perception of Geoffrey as a bookish drudge whose labor in writing needs reward from the world of experience further pivots the dreamer’s purposeful narrative work from achieving an end. As I mentioned at

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<sup>50</sup> Chaucer, *Boece*, 2, Metr. 7, 17-21.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 2. Chaucer elaborates on the difference between limited goods, which can only bring fleeting happiness, and the supreme good, in Book 3. Lady Philosophy lists the following among the lesser goods: money, honors, power, fame, and bodily pleasure. With regard to seeking fame, she says, “Axestow glorye? Thow schalt so bien distract by aspere thynges that thow schalt forgon sykernesse,” Pr. 8, 16-18.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 32-3.

the beginning of this chapter, Geoffrey's climb imitates Dante's ascent; however, here in the world of Fame, unlike the world of the *Commedia*, locating and identifying a singular truth are impossible. The perpetual and literally endless quest undermines the teleological narratives to which Geoffrey alludes earlier, narratives which legitimize origin through conclusion. As Geoffrey soon learns, Fame's dwelling houses mixed statements of truth and of lies. Eliciting again the Boethian condemnation of the human sense of self-importance, the physical features of the House of Fame—its “walles of berile, / That shoone ful lyghter than a glas”—give the impression of a magnifying glass: “And made wel more than hit was / To semen every thing, ywis” (1288-91). Materially and conceptually, fame makes things appear larger than they are. Thus, like the Temple's glass material, an external corollary to the illusion of Virgilian historiography, the physical structure of the House of Fame is symbolic, indicating that myths underlie it.

Fame's palace may be built partly of sturdy beryl stone, but it makes the idea of history flimsy and unstable in being the forum for celebrating fiction and art. Inside it, Geoffrey finds musicians and minstrels who “tellen tales” in a manner appropriate to Fame (1198). The anachronistic image of Orpheus with Orion and the Breton Glascurion by his side mixes up chronologies in a decidedly unhistorical and unrealistic way. Describing the harpers that “countrefete hem [the famous harpers] as an ape / Or as craft countrefeteth kynde,” Geoffrey deploys a language of imitation that reinforces the sense of fictionality in the House of Fame, unknowingly preparing him for a world of narrative creation, rather than of history (1212-13). Even Geoffrey's asides, his *occupatio*, meditate on the transience of historical time; he interrupts his description of the trumpeters and other musicians by explaining that he cannot continue to create verse about it, “For ese of yow and los of tyme: / For tyme ylost, this knowen ye, / By no

way may recovered be” (1256-58). Through Geoffrey’s direct address to his readers, he reminds himself that he faces the challenge of fixed narrative time.

Geoffrey’s narration shows that storytellers subjectively choose who survives history, but this point also makes Geoffrey himself comparable to Virgil writing the *Aeneid* or Ovid composing his *Heroides* in contest. Continuing to interweave notices to readers on the passage of time, Chaucer’s dreamer participates in the arbitrary process of historical creation represented by the fading names in ice. With his help, Fame’s palace forms at once a *lieu de mémoire*, a site of memory, and a *lieu d’oubli*, a site of forgetting<sup>53</sup>: while Geoffrey records Messenus, Joab, and Theodomas, he deliberately omits other musicians. Geoffrey’s next interlude, ending the catalog of conjurers, enchantresses, and other magicians, similarly calls attention to the active processes of remembering and forgetting; he makes a point of naming figures whom he can identify out of familiar traditions (Medea, Circes, and Simon Magus), but then asks, “What shuld I make lenger tale / Of alle the pepil y ther say, / Fro hennes into domes day?” (1282-85). Geoffrey’s desire for concision may reflect his innocent effort to leave time and narrative space available for his other observations, but his omission still evokes Virgil’s politically-driven exclusion of Dido’s “true” story from his narrative, as well as the problem, more broadly, of historical creation and transmission. It also recalls the way in which Dante, as the protagonist of *Inferno*, concludes his catalog of the famous Greeks, Romans, and Arabs he encounters in Limbo; he sees figures ranging from Electra and Camilla, to Socrates and Plato, to Avicenna and Averroes. Despite that Dante the author has in fact refashioned these historical figures into members of Limbo, in Canto 4, his literary persona defers his claim to control and says, implicitly turning to the readers, “I

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<sup>53</sup> Nora writes of particular *lieux de mémoire* as “the ultimate embodiments of a memorial consciousness that has barely survived in a historical age that calls out for memory because it has abandoned it.” He describes the “push and pull” of these *lieux*: “moments of history torn away from the movement of history, then returned, no longer quite life, not yet death, like shells on the shore when the sea of living memory has receded,” 12.

cannot give account of all of them, for the length of my theme so drives me on that often the telling comes short of the fact.”<sup>54</sup> Not only does Dante emphasize the literary nature of his aside through the reference to “theme” (“tema”), but also he suggests the larger goal of his project in Hell: to find material for a spiritual and imaginative narrative and, moreover, to organize it effectively in order to create a lofty aesthetic presentation. Dante includes and excludes historical personae, cutting and pasting famous figures, according to his own historiographical imagination and sense of priority. In the *House of Fame*, Geoffrey’s asides to the reader, ending his catalogs of recognizable figures, evoke and perhaps even parody Dante’s digression as an explicit reminder that the creation of history and the individual’s success in surviving time after death depend wholly on the subjective tendencies of the author and the historical record.

Proceeding through the interior hallways of the House of Fame, Geoffrey recognizes the paradox of historical creation, stressing the contrast between the material representations of literary figures that have achieved fame and those of moving, inchoate voices that seek fame. Beyond the castle gate, Geoffrey comes upon Lady Fame in an environment that he claims was not filled with “ful moche prees of folk” nor “crowdyng” of many people, but rather a variety of celebrity types (1358-59). In her hall, Lady Fame sits above Geoffrey on a high dais. Despite later evidence that she is anything but sturdy and reliable in the way she controls history, Geoffrey describes her as “perpetually y-stalled,” implying her eternal permanence, but also contrasting what readers soon learn are the transient lifetimes of those she governs (1364). He then finds colonnades of pillars that give enduring form to particular figures of literary authority, the “folk of digne reverence” including the authoritative writers Homer, Dares, Lollius, Guido delle

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<sup>54</sup> “Io non posso ritrar di tutti a pieno, / però che sì mi caccia il lungo tema, / che molte volte al fatto il dir vien meno,” Dante, *Inferno*, 4, 145-47.

Colonne, and “Englyssh Gaufride,” ensconced in time through diverse materials (1426, 1470).<sup>55</sup> The various surface materials evoke the hard brass tablet in the Temple of Glass, but having exposed the cracks and fissures in the brass tablet, Chaucer invites readers’ suspicion of such concrete authority. The distrust Geoffrey garners concerning the images of both Fame enthroned and literary authorities represented through materials like iron and metal make Geoffrey’s serious comment, “So hevye therof was the fame / That for to bere hyt was no game,” all the more ironic (1473-74).

Allusions to Dante in the scene of the calm gallery of *auctoritates* raise skepticism about the importance of fame and the likelihood of achieving it. When Dante passes through Limbo in Canto 4 of *Inferno*, he finds the loftiest of poets (“l’altissimo poeta”).<sup>56</sup> Although Chaucer jabs at Dante by not presenting him among the writers perched on columns in the hall, he figures Dante’s *Commedia* within the same authoritative tradition as Virgil’s *Aeneid* by putting a mirror onto Limbo. Furthermore, while Helen Cooper reads Chaucer, rather than Geoffrey of Monmouth, as the “Englyssh Gaufride,” Chaucer demonstrates his discomfort with literary authority throughout the poem.<sup>57</sup> Otherwise, as Nick Havely argues, “the very obliqueness of Chaucer’s self-identification here might once again recall Dante’s indirect and quickly qualified claim to fame as the successor to a line of vernacular poets” in Canto 11 of *Inferno*.<sup>58</sup> Havely’s point reinforces Chaucer’s deconstruction of an entire tradition of *auctoritates*, rather than any

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<sup>55</sup> Chaucer may be undermining the entire point of the pillars as a representation of poets who endure fame and time through his reference to Lollius, one of the worthies who supposedly wrote a Troy narrative. While Chaucer may have believed in an actual historical person named Lollius, it is also possible that the mention of him is an intentional mistake included to parody the authenticity of historical authorities. See George Lyman Kittredge, “Chaucer’s Lollius,” *Harvard Studies in Classical Behavior* 28 (1917): 47-133.

<sup>56</sup> Dante, *Inferno*, eds. Robert Hollander and Jean Hollander (New York: Random House, 2000), 4, 80.

<sup>57</sup> Cooper, “The Four Last Things,” 58.

<sup>58</sup> Nick Havely, “‘I wolde...han hadde a fame’: Dante, Fame and Infamy in Chaucer’s *House of Fame*,” in *Chaucer and Fame: Reputation and Reception*, eds. Isabel Davis and Catherine Nall (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2015), 49.

single author, effectively undermining the foundations of his own literary work and revealing his debt to classical and medieval traditions. More fundamentally, Chaucer suggests how partial those traditions have always been, never monumental, constituted instead by a poetry-in-motion and through time.

Geffrey's own resistance to attention only emphasizes Chaucer's uncertainty about his status as a writer and the very notion of authorial fame. While in Limbo, Dante is invited to join the company of Virgil, Homer, Horace, Ovid, and Lucan, and thus to become the sixth among the wise poets ("sesto tra cotanto senno"), Geffrey deflects the claim to *auctoritas* into an account of the disembodied noises and murmurings of a much less famous "compane," "of sondry regiouns" and "of alleskynnes condiciouns" (1528-30).<sup>59</sup> Too skeptical of fame to include himself as a statue on a pillar, Chaucer redirects attention from the immovable and almost allegorical gallery to the scattering of voices with undetermined figurations that cannot escape transience and contingency. As their material selves are floating, moving, tactile, and in transition, like the bees in their "tyme of out-fleynge," these voices and the process by which rumors are spread distract Geffrey from the immovable pillars, symbolic of some kind of eternal truth and transcendent literary fame (1523).

Lady Fame, who facilitates the pursuit of renown and surviving history in a dynamic and random process, confirms Geffrey's hypothesis that the disembodied voices represent the accident of survival. As Kathy Cawsey writes, Lady Fame, as Chaucer represents her, "draws on many medieval depictions of Fortune as capricious, two-faced, and unreliable, and a medieval audience would instantly grasp the implications of this conflation of Fame and Fortune: by linking Fame to Fortune, Chaucer is commenting on the impermanence and fickleness of worldly

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<sup>59</sup> Dante, *Inferno*, 4, 102.

fame.”<sup>60</sup> Lady Fame is indeed very honest about her fickleness, as she later claims, “al be ther in me no justice” (1820). But even before hearing from her directly, Geoffrey perceives her arbitrary process of assigning fame, witnessing the processes of historical creation. Hearing the murmuring voices beg for the boon of celebrity, Geoffrey explains how Lady Fame facilitates the achievement of fame on behalf of the lucky few and refuses it to others, repeating the referent “somme” in an emphasis on the randomness of those whose lives she determines. “Somme” also evokes the anonymity of the figures who do not survive time. In the late Middle Ages, authors sometimes viewed fame conceptually as “talk...fleeting, aspectual, and notoriously protean; it was a *process*, rather than the fixed, unchanging memory that written records necessarily convey to us.”<sup>61</sup> As a process, the notion of fame recalls Geoffrey’s process of “makyng” in Movement I, where he deconstructs histories and reconstructs stories, rather than passively receives unmediated narratives of the past. Differently, however, Geoffrey cannot offer any metaphysical justification for Lady Fame’s work. As if Chaucer’s readers were imploring him for a rationalization of Lady Fame’s choices, Geoffrey declares that her causes genuinely elude him (“ynyste”) (1543). He resumes his role as active reader and demonstrates his pity in an intertext driven by *affectus*; recalling his reading of the Dido story, Geoffrey feels for those who suffer the “aventures” of Lady Fame’s command (1631):

“Allas,” thoughte I, “what adventures  
 Han these sory creatures!  
 For they, amonges al the pres,  
 Shul thus be shamed gilteles  
 But what, hyt moste nedes be.”  
 (1631-35)

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<sup>60</sup> Kathy Cawsey, “‘Alum de glas’ or ‘Alymed glass’?: Manuscript Reading in Book III of *The House of Fame*,” *University of Toronto Quarterly* 73 (2004): 973.

<sup>61</sup> Thelma Fenster and Daniel Lord Small, eds., *Fama: The Politics of Talk and Reputation in Medieval Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 6.

Geffrey emphasizes an anti-causal sequence of events, exposing a myth at the core of historical production. His theory of history contrasts the idea posed in Boethius's text that causation is part of time's order, thus undermining the point of Boethius's complaint on Fortune's unjust wheel. Boethius's perspectival transformation, if achieved, would help him see that Fortune's wheel is a figment of his imagination, which fails to account for divine agency and providential knowing. But the premise of arbitrary causes appears much more valid in the *House of Fame*, which features Lady Fame in vivid physical detail. Lady Fame's announcement, "Good werkes shal yow noght availle / To have of me good fame as now," undermines the successive nature of causality; if one cannot attain eternal glory by doing good work, time itself is disordered (1616-17). This scene, which removes the notion of beginnings and endings by showing the multiplicity of narratives and the discontinuousness of Geffrey's journey, hearkens back to the frustrated search for causes in the proem to Movement I or to the random survival rate on the "memorial" of the ice foundation that feebly supports the House of Fame. It contravenes the emphasis on destinarian progress in the *Boece*, too, which dramatizes the Christian idea of the spiritual exile seeking to reach home, embodied by heaven itself and true goods. In Book I, Lady Philosophy reminds Boethius that his estrangement from true goods, which signifies that he has forgotten his divine origins, causes his suffering.<sup>62</sup> Boethius adheres to Platonic philosophy in his emphasis on the *meminere sui*, the recovery of the individual's proper nature in God, as a means to finding "home." In the final book of the *Boece*, which contemplates the place of human freedom in the context of providential determination, Boethius creates a scenario in which his suffering protagonist achieves this recollection and abandons his belief in the scattered and random nature of time. Lady Philosophy's lesson demystifies happenstance for him, rationalizing the seeming

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<sup>62</sup> Chaucer, *Boece*, 1, Pr. 6, 73-6.

fortunes and misfortunes of temporal existence, and as I have earlier discussed, her dominance of the dialectic in Book 5 suggests that Boethius ultimately acquires her perspective.

Despite echoes of Lady Philosophy's metaphors of the home in Chaucer's poem, the increasingly mobile Geoffrey avoids home, the "verray fyn of blisfulnesse."<sup>63</sup> Even as he reaches the house at the end of the poem, his journey evades a Boethian destinal home. Mediated by not one text alone but many texts, Geoffrey's journey evokes Petrarch's story of ascent on Mount Ventoux, published in his *Epistolae familiares*.<sup>64</sup> While proposing Augustinian mediation as an option for himself, Petrarch never reveals an opened book on his adventure. According to Giuseppe Mazzotta, for Petrarch, wandering:

is neither a journey with a destination, nor is it quite an exile, for 'home'—whether Platonic or biblical, a place of departure and arrival one longs for—is not the issue. To wander is a pure adventure in pursuit of the ghostly traces of time, a moving about which allows a worldview to emerge.<sup>65</sup>

Chaucer's dream visions broadly affirm the Petrarchan experience of wandering and adventure; as I discussed in Chapter 1, the protagonist in the *Book of the Duchess* resists the "reading" journey of Hugh of St. Victor's *Didascalicon* in validating the experience of the reader who metaphorically wanders without purpose or a teleological aim. Geoffrey's adventure in the *House of Fame*, accelerated by the Eagle's speed and the disembodied voices' sense of movement, enables a kind of transformation in Geoffrey's worldview, but in the sense that his single way of seeing—and "seeing time," in particular—proliferates into innumerable and sometimes incompatible perspectives.

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<sup>63</sup> Chaucer, *Boece*, 3, Pr. 3, 5-6.

<sup>64</sup> Petrarch, *Le familiari di Francesco Petrarca*, eds. Vittorio Rossi and Umberto Bosco (Florence: G.C. Sansoni, 1933-42).

<sup>65</sup> Giuseppe Mazzotta, *The Worlds of Petrarch* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 19.

Chaucer uses the scene of Lady Fame not only to reflect upon the fates of others, but also to contemplate the survival of his own authorial identity. After Aeolus's final blast of his trumpet, an unidentified figure approaches Geoffrey, asking for his name and inquiring if he has arrived at the House to win fame. Geoffrey responds by circumventing his claim to celebrity status:

“Nay, for sothe, frend,” quod y;  
“I cam nought hyder, graunt mercy,  
For no such cause, by my hed!  
Sufficeth me, as I were ded,  
That no wight have my name in honde.  
I wot myself best how y stonde;  
For what I drye, or what I thynke,  
I wil myselfen al hyt drynke,  
Certeyn, for the more part,  
As fer forth as I kan myn art.”  
(1873-82)

Self-conscious about his place in the scheme of fame, Geoffrey prefers that his name be forgotten posthumously. This scene once more parodies Dante's attempt to fit himself in among the *auctoritates* in Limbo; also, it echoes the *House of Fame's* recurring image of the erosion of the literary name, a shadow of the literary self, which represents a failure of prosopopoeia and raises questions about Geoffrey's and Chaucer's own status as author. Geoffrey reacts anxiously to the possibility that the anonymous figure misunderstands his intentions, just as Chaucer worries about the transmission of his language in his little poem to his scribe Adam. Cawsey argues that the image of the House of Fame's rock of ice resembles one of the manuscripts that have been distorted by over-use and misuse—“handled, torn, spilt upon, written in, exposed to the elements, recopied poorly, and textually corrupted”—and that, as a result, it enables Chaucer to raise questions about the historical transmission of famous people and writers, specifically, who trust their scribes and the handlers of books to ensure the preservation of their names, dependent

on their literary creation.<sup>66</sup> Geoffrey claims to have come as an observer, denying his active participation in the processes of making by removing himself from among the voices that beg for a lasting name. He explains that he knows himself best, excusing his very need for fame.

In refusing to make Geoffrey appear as important as a classical *auctor*, Chaucer exercises a topos of humility that affirms Lady Philosophy's denunciation of earthly fame. After all, Lady Philosophy chides Boethius, "Is there anythyng more precyous to the than thiself?," pointing to the "errour and folie" of mortal egotism.<sup>67</sup> While, in Movement II, the parodies of Boethius seem to mock the self-importance behind conceptions of transcendence, here the Boethian intertext lends a degree of authority to Geoffrey's renunciation of authorial fame. The *House of Fame* is the one dream vision in which Chaucer explicitly names the protagonist after himself, and yet this detail in the context of the poem only clarifies how Chaucer willingly confines himself to a literary space that may or may not preserve his "art": the margins of the page (1882).<sup>68</sup> Through Geoffrey, who has arrived not to pray for fame, but instead to gather "somme newe tydynges" for story material, Chaucer claims to compose at the "contours of texts," to use Foucault's language, a "function of discourse" that is "situated in the break" and "among the discontinuities" (1886).<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Cawsey, "Manuscript Reading in Book III of *The House of Fame*," 975. Cawsey argues that by emending "alym de glas" to "alymed glas," scholars can read the ice foundation in terms of manuscript illumination, shedding light on Chaucer's understanding that chance governs the survival of the book; "Far from being the eternal, stable, unchanging Word of God, or even an authoritative transmitter of the wisdom of the ancients, in this view a book survives by chance, is made famous by luck, and is subject to people chipping off the little gold bits from the illumination or cutting out the pictures," 977.

<sup>67</sup> Chaucer, *Boece*, 2, Pr. 4, 132-33.

<sup>68</sup> Ironically, according to Julia Boffey and A.S.G. Edwards, "none of the three surviving manuscripts [of the poem] names Chaucer as the poem's author in the paratextual material supplied with it," in "The Early Reception of Chaucer's *The House of Fame*," in *Chaucer and Fame: Reputation and Reception*, eds. Isabel Davis and Catherine Nall (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2015), 88. Boffey and Edwards note an incongruity between the naming of Geoffrey and the lack of recognition that Chaucer was the poem's author in the manuscripts: "The fact that *The House of Fame* is the only one of Chaucer's works to mention his own Christian name makes this absence of early scribal attributions all the more striking," 88-9.

<sup>69</sup> Foucault, *Language, counter-memory, practice*, 123.

In the *Commedia*, souls can disintegrate into a historical abyss, but Dante also recovers the literary figures he finds significant both to articulating and staging eternal truth: he gives life and shape to Virgil, Statius, and his ancestor Cacciaguida. In *Paradiso*, in the Fourth Sphere of the Sun, Dante meets Boethius, who illuminates “the world’s deceit,” and Isidore of Seville, the Venerable Bede, and Richard of St. Victor, among various *illuminati*.<sup>70</sup> The comparison of Geoffrey and Dante, two “visionaries,” reveals just how disjointed Chaucer makes the author’s identity in the *House of Fame*. Showing less faith in the preordained values of history than Dante does, Chaucer diminishes the transcendent truth behind authorial survival.

Geoffrey reconfigures Dante’s idea of the role of the author, but also productively validates a model of literary work in which the author relies selectively on prior and contemporary traditions. By claiming to have appeared in search of gossip, Geoffrey endorses the acts of transmission and compilation as crucial aspects of poetic and historical creation. Throughout his dream vision, Geoffrey reinforces the essential role that gossip plays in his construction of “new” narrative, but this certainly applies to Chaucer, as well, in his writing of stories. Susan E. Phillips writes, gossip “affords [Chaucer] a new method for handling his old sources...[becoming] the means by which the poet renegotiates his relationship to traditional literary authority.”<sup>71</sup> Like the process of fame, Geoffrey’s process of “makyng” in Movement I, where he deconstructs histories and reconstructs them as stories, marks him as both an active reader and an author, rather than a passive receptacle for unmediated narratives of the past. As protean as Fame, who judges which authors survive, Geoffrey similarly subjects his reality to a biased process of “makyng.” Authors are in charge of disseminating and organizing tidings and

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<sup>70</sup> Dante, *Paradiso*, Canto 10, 126.

<sup>71</sup> Susan E. Phillips, *Transforming Talk: The Problem with Gossip in Late Medieval England* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 71.

gossip, even if they are more selective and deliberate than Lady Fame, their eyes free of her blindfolds. Their characters similarly rely on them to survive history.

With its alternating claims to and deflections of authority, the poem leaves readers with a deep ambivalence about the pursuit of fame. In the House of Rumor, a space of motion, Geoffrey's resistance to participating in a process of achieving fame and his quick-paced movement dramatize the impossibility of finding a determinate identity. Here, truth and lies interact to make fiction, mirroring the labyrinthine nature of the house, "nas mad so wonderlyche, ywis, / Ne half so queynteliche ywrought" (1922-23). Movement accelerates not only with Geoffrey's jolting lateral shift between buildings, but also through the twirling of the house: "This queynte hous aboute wente / That never mo hyt stille stente" (1925-26). Tidings come in and out of the twig house in forms loud and whispering, on all subjects "of dyvers accident," from war and peace to famine and ruin, categories that Chaucer lists in what forms the longest catalog of the poem (1976). Chance, or "Aventure," governs the arrival of truths and falsehoods and their escape again through the windows of the house, thresholds marking a stage in their acquisition of names and lifespans (1982). Unlike the folk who, long dead, live permanently in Lady Fame's palace, the dispersed crowds in the House of Rumor are concerned with the present and future, the temporal and the temporary, functions of the discontinuous processes of historical making. Before they become artists, like Virgil, or art, like the static pillar into which Virgil is transmuted, the voices instead resemble the names of the melting ice, functions of the random activities of Rumor and Lady Fame.

The Eagle, reappearing where he left Geoffrey last, perched on top of a stone, seizes Geoffrey once more with his talons, his movements of gripping and loosening the dreamer evoking the back-and-forth movements of the House of Rumor. The image of Geoffrey in

constant motion links him to the voices, “wynged wondres faste fleen, / Twenty thousand in a route, / As Eolus hem blew aboute” (2118-20). And so, by the time the poem ends, with Geoffrey spying in a corner “a man of gret auctorite,” Chaucer has nearly effaced Geoffrey’s identity, having assimilated it into the moving crowds (2158). By closing the vision in the material space representing the source and origin of making, Chaucer once more stages the possibility for finitude and gestures toward a climax. However, like the ambiguous position of Fame’s dwelling, the final lines only leave readers curious, obscuring the teleological revelation that conventionally appears at the end of oracles (11). Chaucer leaves the question of the figure’s identity as open and undetermined as Geoffrey’s own.

The manuscript tradition of the *House of Fame* reinforces the idea that Chaucer sought to release his poem of closure, in a repetition of the statement he makes by exposing names to erosion and fragmentation on the rock of ice and by painting an image of the fissures of the brass tablet of history. On folio 193v of Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 638 (fig. 7), the final line of the poem appears mid-folio, suggesting that the decision to end the poem on “auctorite” was deliberate, at least on the part of the scribe.<sup>72</sup> The manuscript corroborates the notion that records of the past inevitably lack completion.

In a more productive light, history is open-ended, inviting of multiple perspectives, rather than validating any single, authoritative vision.<sup>73</sup> Chaucer reminds readers that history and text

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<sup>72</sup> The other two manuscripts are Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Fairfax 16 and Cambridge, Magdalene College, MS Pepys 2006. None of the three were produced before the mid-fifteenth century. Boffey and Edwards consider various justifications for the “chronological gap between the poem’s completion and the production of these earliest surviving copies,” including the possibility that “little sustained authorial attempt was made to shape the patterns of its circulation,” the idea that the poem “was conceived for some kind of coterie or for a specific occasion, and not initially released beyond this,” and the theory that “it was intended for some sort of live performance,” in “The Early Reception of Chaucer’s *The House of Fame*,” 88.

<sup>73</sup> Scholarship on Chaucer’s resistance to closure of various kinds includes Rosemarie McGerr, *Chaucer’s Open Books: Resistance to Closure in Medieval Discourse* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998), and earlier criticism, including Larry Sklute, *Virtue of Necessity: Inconclusiveness and Narrative Form in Chaucer’s Poetry*

are hardly distinguishable, the historical world ultimately inextricable from the narrativized universe. Within the records are layers of narratives perpetuating the quest for truth. Such heterogeneity allows for multiple viewpoints on the past, implying that the textual record's selective rather than realistic representation of the past. The poet alludes to the authoritative and allegorical paradigms of literary predecessors, which emphasize the truth-bearing nature of their narrative, but one doesn't need to be eschatologically-oriented to adopt the Boethian stance on the foolishness of pursuing fame. While Chaucer frequently underscores Boethian philosophy in his poem to reinforce the randomness of fame, he also exposes the situatedness of such master narratives like Boethius's and Dante's, breaking apart a totalizing model of experience into a variety of perspectives. In effect, Geoffrey's encounters with them function heuristically, encouraging recognition of the sheer plurality of voice in narrative.

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(Columbus: Ohio State University, 1984) and Donald W. Rowe, *Through Nature to Eternity: Chaucer's "Legend of Good Women"* (Lincoln, Nebr. and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1988).

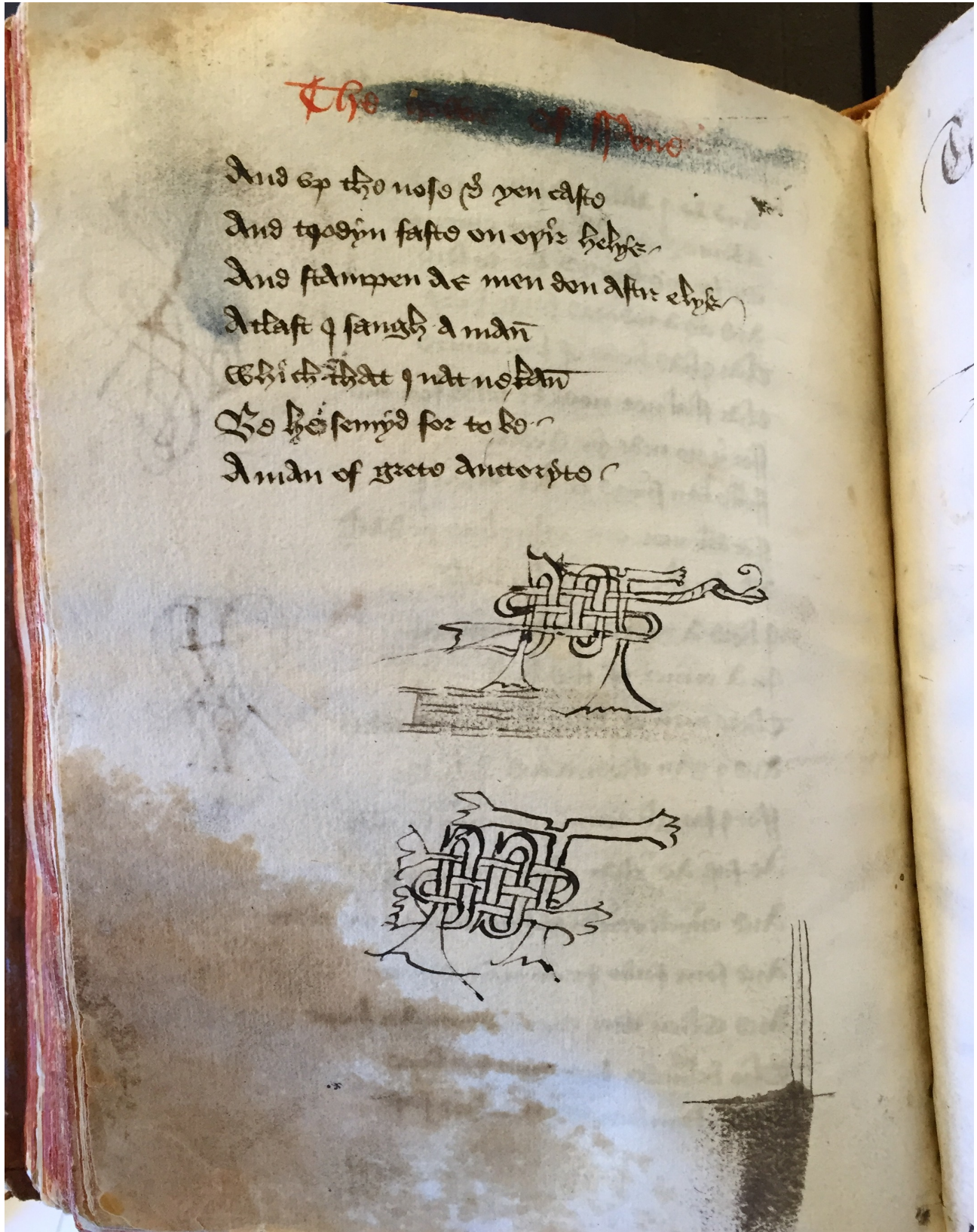


Figure 7: Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 638, fol. 193v. This folio features the abrupt final lines of the *House of Fame*, ending "A man of grete auctoryte."

### Platonic Time and the Temporality of Reading in *The Parliament of Fowls*

#### INTRODUCTION

In the *Parliament of Fowls*, Chaucer intertwines the experiences of reading and dreaming. The narrator in this poem reads Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis*, or the *Dream of Scipio*, but the narrative shift from his account of this master dream-text to the discontinuous encounters and observations within his own dream vision highlights the generative relationship between the book and the dream. Chaucer locates a narrative productivity in the narrator's reading of the established material, manipulating the conventions of the authoritative dream vision to emphasize the freedom and possibility of the genre and, more specifically, of the narrator's own story.

However, while Chaucer underscores the profits of reading, he also exposes the epistemological limitations of reading for a singular truth by deconstructing the Ciceronian model of time espoused by the *Somnium Scipionis*. Challenging the idea that it is possible and, moreover, useful to "see time" in a fixed way, Chaucer creates a sequence in which the transcendent Platonic recursive temporality of the one master dream-text gives way to an immanent present tense in the narrator's dream vision. This experiential and experimental dream temporality is filled with elements from both the classical and allegorical traditions, and it is the narrator's plural encounters that help Chaucer to explore the disjunction between the past and the present, and to theorize about the virtues of forgetting the past and immersing oneself in the present.

Indeed, the narrator's diverse and lively dream world emphasizes agential emotional connection developed through the routes of satire, love, and humor, which help to explain

Chaucer's deconstruction of the Ciceronian dream-text and representation of many of the classical figures in the narrator's dream world as barren and detached. The journey in which the narrator identifies and derives pleasure from the dream world contrasts the experiences of the staged anachronistic figures, which have been so estranged from the immanent temporality that their transcendence comes to represent disconnection, evoking what Walter Benjamin sees as a "decay of the aura."<sup>1</sup> Chaucer collides allegories to explore the often sterile consequences of anachronism, specifically as it represents the withdrawal of figures from their particular temporal context. By juxtaposing Lady Nature with the classical and allegorical figures around the Temple of Venus, Chaucer not only constructs a dialogue between different literary traditions, but also highlights the idolatrous and inaccessible nature of art when it is divorced from its historical circumstances. As in the previous dream visions, the pieces of history that emerge in the fourteenth-century dream worlds are most productive when they interact with the present and experiential temporality, and when they invite participation from their narrators. This chapter examines the narrator's changing degree of participation as he moves between allegories in the poem, arguing that this movement, and the corresponding perspectival shift, makes the return to Cicero's singular authority impossible. By showing the darker face of allegorical transcendence, Chaucer implies that Africanus's *contemptus mundi* in the *Dream of Scipio* is a little too detached to be of use within the world. With the help of the different allegories, and by contrasting different temporalities, Chaucer opens up the temporal model of the *Dream of Scipio* to multiple perspectives of time and distances his narrator from the scornful approach to the mortal process and time that accompanies the *Dream of Scipio*.

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 222.

Finally, as I will argue, the sense of productivity, connectivity, and fluidity associated with Lady Nature reinforces the particular allusion to Lady Philosophy of the Boethian allegory, which, in this poem, forms a productive intertext in the dream sequence. Chaucer uses the Boethian philosophy at the heart of the *Parliament of Fowls* not as a meditation on cyclicity in mortal time, but rather as a celebration of individual volition in a world controlled above all by God. The *Parliament of Fowls* shows Chaucer thinking through the questions of the *Boece* without making his narrative conform to the Boethian inclination to reject the world. The adaptation of Boethian philosophy to new ends emphasizes Chaucer's own ability to read his authoritative texts selectively and the idea, more broadly, that the quest for any single truthful interpretation of a text, and for the temporal construct it espouses, is futile given the highly subjective nature of reading.

Chaucer's interest in interpretive pluralism in the *Parliament of Fowls* evokes the *Prologue to the Wife of Bath's Tale*, in which the Wife of Bath's multiple claims to personal and subjectively-constructed authority attempt to defy singular and male-dominated bookish authority. Drawing on the genres of autobiography and confession, the Wife asserts her sophisticated knowledge of gender differences by citing her experiences in marriage and giving anecdotes of her encounters with her husbands. However, she also repeatedly undercuts her experiential authority by invoking the stories that she has learned from antifeminist books, such as Walter Map's *Valerie and Theofraste*. Chaucer leaves his position on the Wife of Bath open to interpretation by alternately affirming the Wife's experiential authority and exposing its limitations in contrast to age-old, exemplary, and male-authored texts. Although the narrator in the *Parliament of Fowls*, unlike the Wife, is well-read, his interaction with the *Dream of Scipio* anticipates the complicated relationship between written authority and the Wife's personal

authority. The analogy between these two figures underscores Chaucer's skepticism of the transcendent and singular truths of ancient books, as well as the way in which he elicits alternative "readings" of such books through his characters' experiences, rather than their literal act of reading alone.

#### 1. DISPLACING PLATONIC TIME: THE *DREAM OF SCIPIO* AND CHAUCER'S *ABBREVIATIO*

Like the *House of Fame*, the *Parliament of Fowls* invokes an authoritative model of time only to challenge and displace it. Chaucer introduces the Platonic lesson of the *Dream of Scipio*, which expresses a singular truth about the difference between transcendence and mortal time, and about the circular nature of Platonic experience. This section considers how the *Dream of Scipio* is put forward as a material record akin to the Virgilian narrative in the *House of Fame*, and how Chaucer's narrator changes and resists this record through his dream encounters, figuratively rereading and transmitting it. By undermining the objectivity of the temporal construct in the *Dream of Scipio*, Chaucer distances his narrator's perspective from that of the *contemptus mundi* tradition, using his mind, a more subjective reality, to confuse the frames of reference for conceiving of time and to question the transcendent nature of the visionary narrative.

Early in the poem, Chaucer invokes a singular model of temporality with which to engage his narrator, a bibliophile and student who reads the master dream-text in a state of apathy and distress. The narrator's reading material concerns the otherworldly experiences of Scipio the Younger and the divine injunction to common profit, which benefits not only the community on earth but also, and as a result, the individual who seeks to reach heaven. Chaucer suggests that the narration of the *Dream of Scipio* adheres faithfully to the original text, by

presenting the text linearly, beginning, “Fyrst telleth it,” and proceeding with a series of logical transitions marked by “thanne” (36, 43, 50, 57, 64, 67, 71). The impression of faithful reading recalls the narrator’s initial stance in the poem, even before he picks up his book, in that it is hardly challenging to the lessons of the dream-text. In this moment, the narrator represents himself as a gleaner, a metaphor strengthened by the comparison of learning to growing corn in the fourth rime-royal stanza of the poem:

For out of olde felde, as men seyth,  
Cometh al this newe corn fro yer to yere,  
And out of olde bokes, in good feyth,  
Cometh al this newe science that men lere.  
(22-5)

A regular book reader, “of usage—what for lust and what for love,” the narrator grows particularly eager when he encounters books “write with lettres olde,” which he reads with the special purpose “to lere” (15, 19, 25). By expressing his intention to find meaning in old books, by which he presumably means ancient texts, he differs from Geoffrey in the *House of Fame*, who approaches the ancient written tradition with suspicion. The *Parliament of Fowls* portrays a narrator who envisions books—and more specifically, the western philosophical tradition—as the source of new knowledge, and whose analogy innocently represents reading and learning as processes that are as natural, restorative, and even generative as the annual growth of crops. Thus, in addition to the narrator’s systematic presentation of Scipio’s dream, these metaphorical lines indicate that the narrator grants the dream-text in his possession a significant degree of authority (24-5).

The subtext of the *Dream of Scipio* follows the Platonic recursive temporal model and teaches of the singleness of the divine state of souls who, after a life of virtuous living, are granted a return to the fixed sphere. The narrator explains how, in his book, Scipio’s “auncestre,

Affrycan so deere, / Gan in his slep that nyght to hym apere,” and, invoking the tradition of visionary ascent, how this Africanus lifts Scipio into the celestial realm, a “sterry place,” in order to widen Scipio’s field of vision, enabling him to see Carthage and the whole of earth (41-2, 43). From among the stars, Africanus gestures toward Carthage, the city that both Scipio and Africanus fought against under Roman rule, to warn Scipio of the nature of “grace,” or fortune, in mortal experience (65). He advises Scipio,

...syn erthe was so lyte,  
And dissevable and ful of harde grace,  
That he ne shulde hym in the world delyte.  
Thanne tolde he hym, in certeyn yeres space,  
That every sterre shulde come into his place  
Ther it was first, and al shulde out of mynde  
That in this worlde is don of al mankynde.  
(64-70)

When stars or souls return to their place of origin, they escape the “harde grace” of human experience. Only the “likerous folk,” who do not love “commune profyt,” are destined to “whirle aboute th’erthe alwey in peyne,” forced to continue enduring cyclical experience in both motion and time for an undetermined period of purgatory (79, 47, 80). From Africanus’s viewpoint, this Sisyphian or Ixion-like torture characterizes imperfect mortal experience.

By contrast, Africanus says, immortality rewards the virtuous with an escape from cyclicity into a “blysfyl place.../ Ther as joye is that last withouten ende” (48-9). This virtuous category also includes the “lewed,” or uneducated, which suggests that reading is a form of hard work that is not particularly necessary to undergoing the Platonic journey and achieving a return to divine origins (46). Chaucer’s subtle detail anticipates the conflict between the *Dream of Scipio* subtext and the narrator’s own dream vision; while the narrator’s reading and interpretive abilities become crucial to navigating the temporally-disjunctive dream world of the poem, as I will show, the active learned engagement is not a critical aspect of enduring the Platonic journey

for Africanus. This idea once more invites comparison between the *Parliament of Fowls* and the *Wife of Bath's Prologue*, in which the protagonist faces limits in the form of the book. Chaucer implicitly suggests throughout the *Parliament of Fowls* that the better education stems from a more heterogeneous experience, which celebrates the dialogue between authority and personal experience, as well as the multiple and unpredictable experiences of time. Differently, in the Platonic model, cyclical time governs mortal experience until the soul returns to its origin beyond earthly time: the perpetual present of eternity, a timelessness that Cicero's dream vision celebrates before the mutability of earthly time.<sup>2</sup> Telling Scipio, "Know thyself first immortal," Africanus commands Scipio to privilege his divine origins—the state from which he descended to earth and to which he will return—over his mortal obligations (73).

Africanus's injunction is consistent with the Platonic paradigm of the narration of the *Dream of Scipio*; Chaucer's narrator conveys the central story of Cicero's original and Macrobius's Neoplatonizing *Commentary of the Dream of Scipio*, historically one of the most valued sourcebooks of medieval Scholasticism. In the *Commentary*, Macrobius records Cicero articulating the soul's natural return to the origin through the lesson to Scipio: "The governors and protectors of these commonwealths proceed from here [the sky] and return hither."<sup>3</sup> Macrobius's gloss of this passage corroborates the underlying Platonic framework of Scipio's dream vision:

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<sup>2</sup> According to William Harris Stahl, who translates Macrobius's *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, Cicero's *De re publica* is modeled on Plato's *Republic*, and the *Dream of Scipio* most obviously imitates the Vision of Er of Plato's *Republic*, particularly in arguing "that an orderly society is based upon a general acceptance of the principles of right and that the most effective way of instilling in a man a desire to lead an upright, law-abiding life is by revealing to him the habitations and rewards of departed souls." William Harris Stahl, "Introduction," in Macrobius, *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, trans. William Harris Stahl (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), 11, 13.

<sup>3</sup> Macrobius, *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, trans. William Harris Stahl (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), IX, 1.

The starry portion of the universe affords habitation for those souls not yet overtaken by a longing for the body; and leaving here they slip down into bodies. The deserving souls are allowed to return here.<sup>4</sup>

The movement in which the soul departs from and returns to the origin expresses a Neoplatonic experience of transcendence that would have been familiar to Chaucer through Boethius's work, as well. Modeled by Cicero's *De Republica* and Plato's *Timaeus*, Lady Philosophy's twofold conception of time is fundamentally Platonic. As I discussed in the introduction, the allegorical lady represents earthly experience as a period of exile from God, who exists in the proper "country," which "nys nat governed by emperoures...but o lord and o kyng, and that is God, that is lord of thi cuntre."<sup>5</sup> The *auctores* of the Neoplatonic intellectual tradition largely envisioned mortal experience as only a precondition or, less productively, a torturous delay to the experience of heaven; hence, in the *Boece*, Lady Philosophy stresses her injunction to Boethius to "remembre" his divine origins, which also resembles Africanus's command to Scipio to keep in mind his immortal self.<sup>6</sup>

In both the *Boece* and the *Dream of Scipio*, then, the Platonic figureheads advise their students to abandon their vulnerable positions within a cycle of inevitable collapse and renewal by dismissing the value of history. Lady Philosophy and Africanus diminish the importance of worldly fame. As I discussed in the previous chapter, Lady Philosophy compares the earth to a mere "prykke," lacking space, or surface area, in the larger cosmological scheme. Like Africanus, she exposes the fragility of earthly preoccupations in the manner of *vita mors est*, emphasizing the soul's potential freedom from the prison of the world. The proper way to achieve true happiness is to attempt to be more like God, to practice *imitatio*, which means

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<sup>4</sup> Macrobius, *Commentary*, IX, 10.

<sup>5</sup> Chaucer, *Boece*, 1, Pr. 5, 16-21.

<sup>6</sup> Macrobius, *Commentary*, IX, 1.

detaching or unbinding oneself from earth. This act evokes the *benedictus qui* of the Orpheus subtext in the *Boece*: “Blisful is that man that may seen the clere welle of good! Blisful is he that mai unbynden hym fro the boondes of the hevvy erthe!”<sup>7</sup> These lines stress the divorce between bliss and earthly experience, setting up the Orpheus story as a lesson on seeking happiness in permanent, transcendent goods.

The elevated perspective of the Platonic figureheads contrasts the perspectives of the characters unable to escape the movement from weal to woe throughout Chaucer’s works. In the Neoplatonic and Boethian traditions, divine cyclicity differs from the cyclicity of mortal history. Chaucer evokes the latter in the Boethian passages on the mutability perpetuated by Fortune’s turning Wheel, pervasive throughout his works. Specifically within the *Parliament of Fowls*, the cyclicity of mortal time is embodied by the image of lecherous folk who spin the earth endlessly in eternal torture. According to Lee Patterson, in Chaucer’s *Anelida and Arcite*, the “circularity of Theban history,” which evokes the recurrence of tragedy that binds mortal beings to the patterns of historical necessity, “stands in a complex and potentially subversive relation to the transcendental circularity of Boethianism.”<sup>8</sup> “Thebanness” represents “the other that Boethianism suppresses,” since it is “about disordered memory and fatal repetition, about the tyranny of a past that is both forgotten and obsessively remembered, and about the recursive patterns into which history falls.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Chaucer, *Boece*, 3, Pr. 12, 87-8; 3, Metr. 12, 1-3. In the next chapter, I will show how, in *Troilus and Criseyde*, Chaucer demonstrates his awareness of the centrality of the Orpheus story to Boethius’s central message depreciating the earthly gaze.

<sup>8</sup> Lee Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 23.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

The inescapable mutability within time also represents a thread connecting Chaucer's Boethian lyrics, including "Lak of Stedfastnesse," a poem concerned with variability.<sup>10</sup> While the poem has been considered one of serious moral counsel to King Richard II in a political period in which accusations and persecutions made figures of the court and parliament alert to the possibility of sudden change,<sup>11</sup> Chaucer abstracts the contemporary political allusion by demonstrating a Boethian nostalgia for a "stedfast and stable" time and laments the state of his own age in a broad manner<sup>12</sup>:

Trouthe is put down, resoun is holden fable,  
Vertu hath now no dominacioun;  
Pitee exyled, no man is merciabe.  
Through covetyse is blent discrecioun.  
The world hath mad a permutacioun  
Fro right to wrong, fro trouthe to fikelnesse,  
That al is lost for lak of stedfastnesse.<sup>13</sup>

In these verses, Chaucer implicitly gestures toward the stability engendered by the bond of love, a theme that permeates Lady Philosophy's descriptions of the divine in the *Boece*. However, his Boethian language primarily emphasizes the tumult of human history and the negative values that have contributed to the "lak of stedfastnesse": "covetyse"—namely, the desire for fame and riches—exemplifies the delusion of false felicity in the Boethian imagination. Recalling the anxiety over the flux out of "trouthe" in the climactic song of Book 3, Metrum 11 of the *Boece*,

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<sup>10</sup> Chaucer, "Lak of Stedfastnesse," 8.

<sup>11</sup> V.J. Scattergood writes that Chaucer's poem "is urging...that Richard II should maintain the prerogatives belonging to the crown," in "Social and Political Issues in Chaucer: An Approach to *Lak of Stedfastnesse*," *JEGP* 36 (1937): 472.

<sup>12</sup> "Lak of Stedfastnesse," 1.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 15-21.

Chaucer's lyric refers to a virtuous past, now eroded by false values.<sup>14</sup> In another lyric, "Fortune," Chaucer writes of "this wrecched worldes transmutacioun" between positive and negative experiences ("wele or wo"), characterizing a mutability that he further elicits through the image of the wheel "governed...by Fortunes errour."<sup>15</sup> These shifts are literally echoed by the narrator in *Troilus and Criseyde*, who describes Troilus's path—"Fro wo to wele, and after out of joie"—as a reiteration of the double movement and the cyclicity commonly characterizing the experiences of Chaucer's characters.<sup>16</sup> This exemplifies the very changeability and circularity to which the Boethian "transcendental circularity" is opposed.

Ironically, while mutability suggests movement and temporal change, it is also connected everywhere to the image of earthly bonds, implying entrapment and immovability. In *Troilus and Criseyde*, Troilus complains of the "snare" and "cheyne" that bind him, and in the *Legend of Good Women*, the narrator describes the effect of love on Antony in terms of prison-like bondage: "love hadde brought this man in swich a rage / And hym so narwe bounden in his las."<sup>17</sup> While Chaucer's characters concentrate on Love's binding chains, the Boethian and Ciceronian intertexts are a reminder that the entanglements of Fortune are a figment of the human perspective and experience, and signify differently in the context of God and the divine afterlife. These intertexts introduce a perspective located beyond Chaucer's characters; in the *Boece* and the Scipio account in the *Parliament of Fowls*, Chaucer elevates the viewing positions of Lady Philosophy and Africanus literally and metaphorically. Placed above their students,

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<sup>14</sup> Chaucer raises the anxiety over mutability in a similar way in the dialogue between Criseyde and Pandarus in Book III of *Troilus and Criseyde*.

<sup>15</sup> Chaucer, "Fortune," in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), 1-2, 4.

<sup>16</sup> Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, I, 4.

<sup>17</sup> Chaucer, *Ibid.*, 507, 509; *Legend of Good Women*, 599-600.

victimized by a shortsightedness that reinforces their attachment to the world, these authoritative figures illuminate the difference between Fortune and Providence, or between the false felicity, identified with the mutable, earthbound goods of wealth, power, and fame, and true happiness.

In the *Parliament of Fowls*, the figure of Africanus in the book the narrator reads before sleeping seems to propose a singular perspective on the proper behavior that the individual must practice to extract himself from the scheme of historical repetition and to position himself in the secure space of heaven. The *Dream of Scipio* illustrates cyclical time as a model that is as fixed and teleological as the linear time of the brass tablet in the *House of Fame*; both temporal models depend on the notion of destination, and in the case of the Platonic, destination as a return to the origin. In the early, sleepless portion of the *Parliament of Fowls*, Chaucer thus presents the frame of reference for time as external to, rather than as a function of, the narrator's mind. He omits the explicit "reader's response" found in Geoffrey's account of the Troy story in the *House of Fame*, differentiating his experience of reading the subtext of the *Dream of Scipio* from Geoffrey's reading of the *Aeneid*, but also leaving the singular temporal framework it espouses unchallenged.

Yet, while the narrator of the *Parliament of Fowls* seems quietly obedient to the content of his book, closer examination reveals that Chaucer alters parts of the original text. The subtle changes to the authoritative versions of the *Dream of Scipio* that Chaucer might have known suggest that the narrator functions as an active, rather than passive, reader and help to de-emphasize the singular temporal framework of the subtext. By indicating the narrator's working subjective consciousness before the act of dreaming is initiated, Chaucer prepares his readers to identify connections between the narrator's reading and dreaming experiences. As I have written, the meaning of Scipio's dream is contingent on the Platonic temporal model, so that Scipio's

ascent from mortal space and distance from mortal time may be viewed as a movement toward heaven. However, upon second glance, Chaucer's *abbrevatio* minimizes the impact of the *contemptus mundi* message. Presenting a more earth-friendly version, his retelling in the early portion of the *Parliament of Fowls* ultimately highlights the changes that occur to a text with rereading and emphasizes what Jill Mann calls "the dialogic creation of meaning" in Chaucer's poems.<sup>18</sup> The *abbrevatio* and the dream world that Chaucer illustrates later in the poem enable Chaucer to present but also resist the Ciceronian perspective in the book by collocating it with alternative experiences of time.

Chaucer's changes to the Ciceronian dream-text occur on the level of character and philosophical teaching. The version of Africanus that appears later at the narrator's bedside more starkly differs from Cicero's Africanus in the *Dream of Scipio* subtext. But Chaucer also uses this abbreviated version of the *Dream of Scipio* as an opportunity to make subtle adjustments to Africanus's original persona, as he is portrayed in the Ciceronian version of the *Dream of Scipio* with which he was working. His subtle changes to the original text, particularly with regard to time, also effectively minimizes the sense of likeness between Africanus as he appears in the narrator's dream-text and Lady Philosophy in the *Boece*, as well; Chaucer separates these two figures by making Africanus's attitude toward time more inclusive of earthly experience. While he foregrounds the timelessness of the afterlife, teaching "that our present worldes lyves space / Nis but a maner deth," he wanders from the subject of immortal bliss into a lesson on how to conduct oneself on earth (53-4). Although the original *contemptus mundi* position makes earthly temporality into a prison, in Chaucer's version of the *Dream of Scipio*, Africanus stresses the love of common weal as the precondition to eternal bliss, recognizing the need for Scipio to accept and endure human experience positively before entering heaven. Thus, although the

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<sup>18</sup> Jill Mann, "Chaucer and Atheism," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 17 (1995), 19.

guide's initially scornful attitude toward earth represents him within the *contemptus mundi* tradition, he also remembers the temporality of the "present" and the "space" of earth, which offer valuable opportunities for Scipio to prove himself "rightful." Africanus advises Scipio, "Know thyself first immortal," as I mentioned, but also, emphasizing the role of what is implicitly "second" and mortal, he says, "And loke ay besyly thow werche and wysse / To commune profit" (73-5).<sup>19</sup> As Minnis notes, Chaucer especially gives credit to the "common" in "common profit" by indicating the virtuous potential of the educated and uneducated, in "marked contrast with the intellectual élitism of Cicero's text."<sup>20</sup> C.S. Lewis makes a similar comment on the exclusivity of Cicero's contrasting version: "Cicero is making a heaven for public men, for politicians and generals" and not even "the Pagan sage (like Pythagoras), nor the Christian saint, could enter it."<sup>21</sup> Chaucer's edition thus emphasizes an even broader inclusivity of earthly experience, encompassing more lives than simply those of the elite.

Furthermore, the narrator's account of the *Dream of Scipio* is less a representation of an ascetic Christian perspective than a lesson on the loving distance that makes earthly experience more tolerable and that even lessens the throes of mutability. Chaucer achieves this by making a point to depart from the Boethian victim's vision of common profit and to grant this particular avenue of earthly experience much more value. In the *Boece*, under the guidance of Lady

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<sup>19</sup> Chaucer also likely drew on Macrobius's *Commentary*, explaining that the only way for a man to know himself is to "look back to his first beginning and origin," for "in this manner the soul, in the very cognizance of its high estate, assumes those virtues by which it is raised aloft after leaving the body and returns to the place of its origin." Macrobius's insight complies with Cicero's interest in justifying the practice of political virtue for the sake of the Republic, even when practicing Platonic thought.

<sup>20</sup> A.J. Minnis, V.J. Scattergood, and J.J. Smith, *Oxford Guides to Chaucer: The Shorter Poems* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 269. Generally, though, as R.F. Yeager points out, "reading is an activity that, without apparent self-consciousness, Chaucer locates in all 'three Estates' and their late medieval derivatives," in "Books and Authority," in *A Concise Companion to Chaucer*, ed. Corinne Saunders (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 52.

<sup>21</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image: An Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), 24.

Philosophy, Boethius seeks freedom from the bonds of earth, bitterly recalling how he strove “for comune profit” under the authority of King Theodoric, as Scipio is told to do, only to end up the subject of “accusacioun” and ultimately “condempned.”<sup>22</sup> “Comune profit,” Chaucer’s version of Boethius’s Latin “communis commodi,” is framed as an earthly pursuit, which leaves the figure who champions it in a position of misfortune. Boethius’s lament suggests that his own political activity through the pursuit of common profit only increased his vulnerability to the turns of Fortune’s Wheel.

In the *Parliament of Fowls*, Africanus abandons Lady Philosophy’s focus on the *telos* of heaven in favor of recognizing the process of mortal experience, and anticipates the pleasure that the narrator takes in the earthly plenty of the dream garden and the celebration of diversity across avian social strata. His injunction to pursue the welfare of the public community distracts Scipio from the reward of heavenly achievement, revealing an earthward vision. Moreover, Africanus’s dialectic of vision—between the perspective high in a starry place and a perspective on earth—challenges the Boethian gaze on the heavens alone. Chaucer’s Africanus is concerned with Scipio’s swift arrival at the celestial realm, and yet, by making common profit an acceptable pursuit during life, he emphasizes the Platonic ban on suicide. Framing earthly conduct in terms of vision by indicating that Scipio must “look” to common profit, Africanus makes being true to one’s moral principles contingent upon an earthbound gaze, a perspective oriented toward society as a moral place and construct rather than only the transcendent experience. He raises the notion of an ethical perspective with consequences not only for the past (one’s divine origin) or the future (the ascent and return to this origin), but also for the present (the state of knowing oneself and benefitting the common good). The view from above that Scipio accesses through his dream abets the mortal process insofar as it allows Scipio to return to his waking

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<sup>22</sup> Chaucer, *Boece*, 1, Pr. 4, 89, 97, 109.

consciousness with a more distanced perspective on temporal affairs, as well as a clearer understanding of what to make of the brief duration of temporal experience.

The *Dream of Scipio* posits the Platonic theory of cyclical time, preserving Cicero's original model, but Chaucer's abbreviated version also shows Africanus inducing Scipio to find mortal direction, and the narrator's earthbound dream journey, as I will show in subsequent sections, extends the emphasis on communality. Within the dream world, Chaucer continues to address the paradoxical lesson of the Ciceronian subtext: to disassociate oneself from the earthly body while simultaneously pursuing common profit. To R.M. Lumiansky, among other scholars, the *Parliament of Fowls* represents the division between the true felicity of the *Dream of Scipio* and the false felicity of the narrator's dream world, as it stresses the black-and-white contrast between the book and the dream.<sup>23</sup> The image of lecherous folk whirling in torture about the earth may seem an odd prelude to the *demande d'amour* of the dream world. However, as I will argue, Chaucer's poem embraces the dialectic staged between the earthly perspectives of characters, embedded in the dream world, and the distanced, heavenly perspective of Africanus in the *Dream of Scipio*. Furthermore, Chaucer uses the dream world to elicit a different face of Lady Philosophy. While her medicines for Boethius can be harsh, a rebuke to the student who fastens his gaze on earth, the process of healing Boethius also resists the rush to transfiguration and transcendence. Lady Philosophy focuses on human free will and, by calling attention to Africanus's likeness to her, Chaucer is able to better stress Africanus's zooming in on the substance of earth, adjusting Scipio's attention. He redeploys the earthly focuses in the dream world narrative to disrupt and dialogue with Platonic eternities. In doing so, Chaucer undermines the Platonic sense of temporal absoluteness and the focus on selfhood implicit in Platonic

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<sup>23</sup> R.M. Lumiansky, "Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowles*: A Philosophical Interpretation," *Review of English Studies* 29 (1948), 82-9.

redemption without fully abandoning the Platonic dream vision tradition, or entirely advocating the courtly one.

## 2. REVISING THE CICERONIAN DREAM NARRATIVE: THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF READING

Africanus appears in the bedtime book, but also in the narrator's actual dream vision. The following pages will focus on this second version of Africanus in Chaucer's poem, which represents Chaucer's deeper revision of the authoritative dream-text, as Africanus moves from Scipio's dream-subjectivity to that of the narrator. Beyond the book and in the dream, Africanus grants more freedom and agency to Chaucer's narrator, facilitating his turn into an independent "reader" by thrusting him into a disjunctive space in which the dialectic of temporalities facilitates the narrator's creative and writing processes. Chaucer stretches the boundaries of the dream vision tradition by using Africanus not to reinforce Cicero's original message, but rather to privilege the temporal journey. Eventually, on this journey, Chaucer shows that the narrator's *compiliatio* is predicated on time: within the anachronistic dream world, the narrator shifts between a passive and active role in what becomes a deeply dialogic narrative defying the teleological, Platonic, and singular temporal model.

Because Chaucer's narrator seems to accept the text of the *Dream of Scipio*, never interrupting it with a commentary akin to Geoffrey's gloss of the *Aeneid*, critics of the *Parliament of Fowls* have seen him as more passive than active, particularly with respect to the intellectual pursuits that characterize his initial focus in the poem.<sup>24</sup> The absence of an explicit display of textual engagement in the reading scene makes readers worry about the narrator's capacity to

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<sup>24</sup> For instance, J.J. Anderson writes, emphasizing "the superficiality of his intellectual life": "he appears to take in what he reads without questioning it in any way or attempting to relate it to larger patterns of meaning." He continues, "His thoughts are commonplace, and his inability to think independently makes him ineffective." J.J. Anderson, "The Narrators in the *Book of the Duchess* and the *Parlement of Foules*," *The Chaucer Review* 26 (1992): 224.

interpret text, particularly in the context of Chaucer's trope of "reading" dreams. It is worth returning to the first instance of this trope in order to understand how it works in the *Parliament of Fowls*. In the early portion of the *Book of the Duchess*, Chaucer's narrator boasts about the dream vision he plans to share and uses the verb "rede," which blurs the experiences of reading and interpreting, to suggest the active process in which his readers will need to confront his poem. The dream vision is so "wonderful"—literally, full of wonders—that "no man had the wyt / To konne wel [his] sweven rede."<sup>25</sup> In the case of the narrator's dream, not even Macrobius, an authority on dreams, would have the skill and expertise to "rede" its meaning:

Ne nat skarsly Macrobeus,  
(He that wrot al th'avysyoun  
That he mette, kyng Scipioun,  
The noble man, the Affrikan—  
Suche marvayles fortunethan),  
I trowe, arede my dremes even.<sup>26</sup>

By this point in the poem, the narrator of the *Book of the Duchess* has appealed to Morpheus for rest. Soon after, he falls asleep. However, in between, just before losing waking prayerful consciousness and entering his dream world, the narrator makes the above aside on the place of his dream in the *somniorum interpres* tradition. The departure from the natural chronological order by which waking turns to dreaming invites readers to approach the narrator's arriving dream vision with an interpretive, rather than passive, eye, akin to, if not striving beyond, Macrobius's.

This interlude—appearing in the narrator's state of drowsiness, which precedes a light sleep—addresses how readers should "rede," but also notably involves Chaucer's narrator. The narrator of the *Book of the Duchess* certainly finds opportunities to "rede," not outside of but

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<sup>25</sup> Chaucer, *Book of the Duchess*, 277-79.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 284-89.

within his dream vision, even if his response to the Black Knight's painstaking lament signifies a failure of understanding. Chaucer also facilitates his narrator's active and authorial role in the *House of Fame*, in which Geoffrey never concludes singularly on how to understand dreams, but instead catalogs possible interpretations and significations. Geoffrey reads so actively that he quickly turns to transforming the material of ancient books, resulting productively in renewal through textual recension and adaptation.<sup>27</sup> The process of reading activates the process of dreaming, as well; while sleep thrusts the passive sleeper into unfamiliar dream worlds with no apparent cause (as Geoffrey's dream theory catalog would conclude), Geoffrey acclimates himself to this unfamiliar space by crafting aspects of his dream, in conjunction with the texts, as he moves forward through it.

In the *Parliament of Fowls*, the narrator's interpretation is not so obvious, as he does not interact with the *Dream of Scipio* by arguing with its content. Nevertheless, the narrator transforms into much more than a passive reader and receiver of the text, a change contingent initially on the revised agency of Africanus, whom Chaucer literally and metaphorically brings down to earth, and subsequently on the narrator's own peregrinations through the dream world. Chaucer's revision also indicates a shift in perspectives, from the celestial to the embedded, which undermines a Platonic model of time. By presenting both Scipio and his own protagonist as dream vision narrators, Chaucer not only creates a parallel, but also suggests a sense of continuity between the two personae. The link between them gives the impression of a single "narrator" descending from the sky to earth, from the space of the Ciceronian vision to the place of the bedroom. In this descent, the narrator of the *Parliament of Fowls* begins his journey on the

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<sup>27</sup> Geoffrey shows how, as a dreamer, he can play the reader, literally tracing the narrative of the Glass Temple walls, but also, by implication, the interpreter and writer: his act of reading historiography inspires him to proliferate story lines and inform authoritative narratives with other texts stored within his mental library, as well as with his own sympathetic voice. As he reads, he composes text, showing divergent understandings of the story on the wall.

Platonic circular path, but as the poem shows, he never actually returns to the sky to complete the circular motion. In the process of coming to earth and immersing himself in his vibrant dream world, the narrator changes direction and excavates the ongoing work that is reading, interpreting, and writing in a very different, immanent key.

Returning to the initiation of this spatial and perspective shift, the narrator signifies that he has completed the activity of reading in the most literal sense by referring to the time of day. Darkness forces him to suspend the literal use of his eyes and thus lay down his book: “The day gan faylen, and the derke nyght, / That reveth bestes from here besynesse, / Berafte me my bok for lak of lyght” (85-7). The narrator likely sits at his desk, since he says next that he walks over to his bed and since the text he reads is, like many old books, the object of study and learning. The narrator’s description thus implies that the activity of reading is his daytime labor, recalling the language of industriousness in the opening stanza of the poem and refiguring the *Dream of Scipio* as a task, leaving him “fulfyld of thought and besy hevynesse” (88-9). The arrival of nighttime, which forces the narrator to close his book, suggests that Chaucer accommodates the pattern of reading and resting to the Platonic model, as the shift from light to darkness mirrors the motion of the soul’s descent to earth. In the framework of the Platonic circular model, daytime would signify the clear perspective one has in heaven, in addition to the enlightening experience of reading the *Dream of Scipio*. Nighttime would indicate a duration that forces the narrator to confront his own thoughts, without the guidance of the authoritative book.

However, the narrator’s early conception of reading as hard work undermines this perfect equation of Platonic circularity with reading and resting, where the authoritative book represents enlightenment and access to divine knowing, while the insomniac and dreaming periods signify mental obscurity and earthly woe. Chaucer’s narrator speaks a generative metaphor for book-

reading, cited earlier, but, in all its “good feyth,” the naturalness that the narrator attributes to learning is a surprise and a stark divergence from the opening truism on the strenuousness of developing a craft and his allusion to the Latin phrase, *ars longa vita brevis*: “The lyf so short, the craft so long to lerne” (1-2). The conflict between the extensive duration of time it takes to learn a craft and the short span of human life redirects emphasis to the technical and artificial dimension of learning, which requires, “Th’assay so hard, so sharp the conquerynge,” and culminates in a “dredful joye alwey that slit so yerne” (2-3). The narrator’s complaint on the struggle to acquire knowledge competes with the feeling of pleasure he identifies in learning by reading.

The narrator’s ambivalent approach to learning not only prepares for the dialectical nature of the poem, but also suggests that the production of “newe science” entails an active revision of “olde bokes.” Chaucer links the activity of reading to the activation of the narrator’s dreaming consciousness, but makes it clear that the authoritative physical book is not required for his journey. Indeed, despite the narrator’s closure of the book and “lak of lyght,” his process of reading does not end; while the physical objects surrounding him, including the book, are lost to darkness, the content of the book remains visible, only now reconfigured within the mind of the narrator, replaced by the beginning of a narrative filled with new images.<sup>28</sup> In fact, darkness shrouds what reveals itself ultimately as a bright and lively dream world.

In any case, like the narrator of *Troilus and Criseyde*, who does not care to mention his primary source of Boccaccio’s *Il Filostrato* for his Troy narrative, the narrator of the *Parliament of Fowls* segues into a recreation of the narrative without suggesting his consciousness of it.

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<sup>28</sup> Georges Poulet re-conceptualizes the reader’s relationship to the physical book and suggests the more metaphorical implications of Chaucer’s narrator’s disappearing book: “Where is the book I held in my hands? It is still there, and at the same time it is there no longer, it is nowhere...For the book is no longer a material reality. It has become a series of words, of images, of ideas which in their turn begin to exist...There is only one place left for this new existence: my innermost self,” in “The Phenomenology of Reading,” *New Literary History* 1 (1969): 54.

Chaucer complicates the idea that reading effectively activates the production of the dream by showing the narrator's anxiety—his “fulfyld...thought and busy hevynesse”—over the fact that the *Dream of Scipio* has not been a particularly effective source of instruction, despite that, according to Wolfgang Iser, “the traditional form of interpretation, based on the search for a single meaning, set out to instruct the reader.”<sup>29</sup> Expressing dissatisfaction with his reading experience, implying a sigh of relief, the narrator says, “But fynally my spirit at the laste,... Tok reste” (92-4). The sense of irresolution and ambiguity with the close of the book begins to challenge the idea that literal reading, without the imaginative interpreting act implied by the verb “rede,” is insufficient in itself.

This point becomes even clearer as the *Dream of Scipio* quickly proves the foundation for the narrator's recension and adaptation, which defies the temporal closure of the Ciceronian lesson in the *Dream of Scipio*, as well as the concrete acquisition of “newe science” derived from it, and makes the reading and interpreting experiences duration-less. With the movement from one dream-text to another, Chaucer deconstructs the Ciceronian framework of time and the sense of reading time to pose again the possibility that his narrator keeps reading even without the physical book. The finality of the reading act implies that reading has a particular duration of time, in this case, the span of a “longe day,” and the idea of ending the reading experience at the close of the day adheres to the cyclical temporal framework of the text the narrator reads, it would seem, as the final lesson Africanus offers is that those forgiven for their sins will end up in the blissful place of heaven (21). This is the ideal place for the text to end because it implies the completion of the circular experience of life. However, again, the literal reading of the book does not in itself suffice as a practice that leads to divine knowing or even personal satisfaction. As

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<sup>29</sup> Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 22.

soon as the narrator withdraws his gaze from the letters on the page, his dreaming consciousness, which “reads” the dream vision and constructs a narrative offshoot of it, imposes a new sense of time.

Chaucer proliferates the singular time of the book into the different temporalities of the dream world, but first it is important to show how the narrator’s fall into the immanent present of the dream world shapes his perspective, given the interrelationship between temporal knowing and vision throughout Chaucer’s works. The revision of the book by dreaming entails a “down to earth” narrator; Chaucer lowers the narrator, embedding him on the ground floor rather than elevating him as voyeur, and fragments the more scopic and inclusive vision of the earth granted momentarily to Scipio in his dream. Before dreaming, while reading the *Dream of Scipio*, the narrator can indeed identify with Scipio, his book’s protagonist, who occupies an ideal position above the earth from which to contemplate its minuteness in the macrocosmic vision of the universe. Scipio’s elevation emphasizes the important association between space and perspective in the visionary genre. In the *Boece*, for instance, Lady Philosophy uses spatial metaphors to articulate the different ways in which Boethius can “see time,” and, hyper-aware of the clarity and orientation of Boethius’s vision, she attempts to lengthen and distance this vision in order to emotionally and philosophically detach the mortal figure from the patterns of weal and woe, which he thinks entrap him. It is thus fitting that as soon as Chaucer’s narrator speaks a Boethian couplet, contemplating the paradoxical state of his desire (“For bothe I hadde thyng which that I nolde, / And ek I ne hadde that thyng that I wolde”), Africanus appears at his bedside, evoking not only the appearance of Africanus in the *Dream of Scipio*, but also Lady Philosophy’s descent

to Boethius's bedchamber in the *Boece* (90-1).<sup>30</sup> As A.C. Spearing points out, Chaucer uses a similar phrase to Lady Philosophy, when she refers "to the general state of man, who seeks mistaken means to arrive at that ultimate good which is his goal, and therefore suffers from a perpetual anxiety."<sup>31</sup>

The Boethian quotation of Chaucer's narrator thus exaggerates his frustration with the reading process, which fails to yield, until this point, the epistemological "corn" he intends for it to bring. Moreover, the citation suggests that the reading process lacks the power to be in itself a sufficient form of relief, encouraging readers to look for transformative potential elsewhere. Nevertheless, while the Boethianism emphasizes what the narrator perceives as a futile labor, it also embodies the paradox by which the book becomes a source for the narrator's reading and writing, even as it appears futile.

Indeed, the book-to-dream turn begins when Africanus arrives to re-entrench the narrator in an earthly adventure as a reward for reading (112). Africanus moves vertically between the two "texts" of the *Parliament of Fowls*: he descends from the sphere of the stars in the *Dream of Scipio* to the earthly territory of the dream world of Chaucer's narrator, signifying a spatial, temporal, and perspectival shift. For Scipio, Africanus looks like an apparition, a feature of the oracle-type dream who suddenly "gan...apere" (42). By contrast, Africanus as he reappears in the poem presents himself materially to the narrator, turning up "ryght in the selve aray / That Scipion hym say byfore that tyde," and standing "right at [his] beddes syde" (96-8). The guide's corporeal manifestation and earthward focus now evoke not Lady Philosophy, appearing at Boethius's bedside as an emanation of the divine, but instead the figure of Geoffrey's Eagle in the

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<sup>30</sup> Chaucer, *Boece*, 3, Pr. 3, 52-55. Lady Philosophy earlier asks Boethius about his view of tangible, earthly things, "And was nat that...for that the lakkide somewhat that thow noldest nat han lakkid, or elles thou haddest that thow noldest nat han had?," 33-6.

<sup>31</sup> A.C. Spearing, *Medieval Dream-Poetry* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976, 2010), 91.

*House of Fame*, always orienting the dreamer in relation to the earth, even while distanced from the earthly landscape and vulnerable to losing himself in the cloud of timelessness above.

Africanus and the Eagle resemble each other as guides as they gesture toward the subjects of natural and moral philosophy, and away from that of metaphysical transcendence. In the *Parliament of Fowls*, Africanus helps to bridge the authority figure of the Ciceronian and Boethian imagination to the authority figure of the earthly *locus amoenus*, and the detached perspective of heaven to the naturalistic perspective of Lady Nature. Structurally, Africanus also occupies the narrative moment of transition between the “olde bokes” and “newe science,” telling the narrator,

Thow hast the so wel born  
In lokyng of myn olde bok totorn  
Of which Macrobye roughete nat a lyte,  
That sumdel of thy labour wolde I quyte.  
(109-112)

In this way, Africanus emphasizes the possibility of finding counterpoints between the authoritative subtext and the dream, and even raises the possibility that the earthly, corporeal world may prove more inviting than the *Dream of Scipio* suggests. Africanus implies in this quotation that the narrator may be able to locate the reward for labor partly (“sumdel”) in the dream world, revising the *locus* of the “blisful place” as earth, rather than heaven, and reminding the narrator of the ongoing, rather than fixed, experience of reading (127).

### 3. RE-READING THE BOOK THROUGH EXPERIENCE: THE NARRATOR’S DREAM

Chaucer engages with the theme of multiplying textualities and pluralizing temporal models through the narrator’s acts of reading and dreaming. Whereas narrators in the earlier dream visions interact with an authoritative book in order to leave it behind and go somewhere

new, leaving it up to Chaucer's readers to trace parallels between it and the other journeys, the narrator in the *Parliament of Fowls* keeps the *Dream of Scipio* upfront in his narrative by interpreting it through his experiences in the act of dreaming.<sup>32</sup> His form of interpretation—interpreting-by-dreaming—effectively subordinates the authoritative dream-text to the narrator's own historically-situated dream experiences in a narratively productive inversion. Furthermore, it replaces the echo of a dream with the present-tense dream experience, evoking a different temporality from the one in the subtext, which emphasizes connectivity rather than detachment and philosophical distance.

While the book that the narrator reads in the *Parliament of Fowls* emphasizes the pattern and repetition of divinely-constructed time, the dream vision into which the narrator falls privileges, from its initial moments, process, journey, and contingency as symptoms of mortal time. The distinction between the Ciceronian dream-text and the narrator's own becomes crucial to the plural and disjunctive experiences within the dream that cause the narrator to discover a greater sense of satisfaction, resulting in his being able to begin his own writing process, than the sense he acquires when he finishes reading his book before bedtime. Indeed, the narrator's dreaming experience distorts and manipulates the reflection staged in its narrative mirror. His literal act of reading evolves into Chaucer's second sense of "reading," that is, the act of interpreting, which not only sets up a dialogic relationship between reader and book, but also pluralizes perspectives and emphasizes the open-ended nature of the dream journey. Before describing his adventure through the gates opening to the garden, the narrator contemplates the various directions a dream can take, alluding to the different occupations that lead to wandering minds:

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<sup>32</sup> For instance, the narrator of the *Book of the Duchess* reads and then abandons his Ovidian dream-text for sleep and Geoffrey in the *House of Fame* verbally negotiates with the text within his dream, soon leaving it behind for a world beyond the Temple of Glass.

The wery hunttere, slepyng in his bed,  
To wode ayeyn his mynde goth anon;  
The juge dremeth how his plees been sped;  
The cartere dremeth how his cart is gon;  
The riche, of gold; the knyght fyght with his fon;  
The syke met he drynketh of the tonne;  
The loveere met he hath his lady wonne.

Can I not seyn if that the cause were  
For I hadde red of Affrican byforn,  
That made me to mete that he stod there  
(99-108)

In this catalog of visions, the narrator emphasizes the fecundity of dream and the sense of volition and possibility implicit in the act of dreaming. He shows the causality by which one's waking experience shapes his dream life through the repetition of a sequence of cause and effect. This causal logic applies to the narrator himself, advising Chaucer's readers to anticipate links between the narrator's reading of the *Dream of Scipio* and the dream he is about to narrate; as T.S. Miller writes, "As an ordinary dreamer assembles a dream out of fragments of everyday life, so the dream visionary assembles the text of the dream vision out of other textual sources, fragments of a literary life."<sup>33</sup> Chaucer's narrator later suggests the notion that the book sources or inspires the dream when he expresses his desire to "mete" again through another act of reading.

Nevertheless, the narrator's dream is not a repetition or direct consequence of the book. On the contrary, it continuously surprises with departures from it. The narrator's vision "reads" and responds to not one text, the *Dream of Scipio*, but rather to multiple intertexts, and thus it echoes and pluralizes the *Dream of Scipio*. While in recalling the theory of causes in the medieval dream tradition, the narrator evokes the authority of Macrobius and the *somniorum interpretes*, he also weakens the definitive influence of the book's content by suggesting his

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<sup>33</sup> T.S. Miller, "Writing Dreams to Good: Reading as Writing and Writing as Reading in Chaucer's Dream Visions," *Style* 45 (2011): 535.

uncertainty about its cause (“Can I not seyn”) and deflects the agency over his dream from the book to the goddess Cytherea (Venus), whom the narrator says “madest me this sweven for to mete” (115). The frequent use of the verb “meteth” pluralizes the sense of dream causality and challenges the idea of the predestination of dreams, whereby the occurrence of dreams is governed by one’s daily occupation. It also returns Chaucer’s readers to the complicated experience of interpreting dreams in the *House of Fame*; according to Spearing, the dream is a *somnium coeleste* on the literal level, as a dream inspired by the goddess of love, and a *somnium animale* on the metaphorical level, as one inspired by the narrator’s waking obsession with love.<sup>34</sup>

The narrator’s interlude stresses the ambiguity of the particular Macrobian paradigm that might categorize the narrator’s dream. But Chaucer continues to resist the possibility of classification as he unravels the book through the actual dream, almost as soon as the narrator enters the garden of his dream world. Despite his supplication to Venus, the narrator acquires a new sense of agency and eventually Lady Nature emerges as an authoritative leader who embraces process and polyvocality, rather than the monovocal lesson of a closed Platonic movement envisioned by an Africanus or Lady Philosophy guide. The variety of agents within the dream world allow Chaucer to appeal to the conventions of the dream vision, modeled on characters drawn from works including the *Dream of Scipio* and Alan of Lille’s *Complaint of Nature*. However, in their plurality, they also lend to the poem’s thematic undercurrents of openness and process.

For instance, when the narrator wakes up in his dream world, he describes his passivity at the hands of Africanus, recalling the experience of Dante the pilgrim under Virgil’s guidance in *Inferno*, particularly in cantos 1, 2, and 3, in which Dante, abandoned in the dark wood, is led by

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<sup>34</sup> Spearing, *Medieval Dream-Poetry*, 92.

his authoritative guide to the Gates of Hell. At this point in the *Parliament of Fowls*, Chaucer indicates that his narrator responds to not one text alone, just as Geoffrey uses multiple sources in the *House of Fame*. The narrator says, at the gates, “Affrican me hente anon,” and again, “Affrycan, my gide, / Me hente and shof in at the gates wide” (120, 153-54). When Africanus takes his “hand in his,” the narrator feels “confort,” as if he were a child being led by his parent, and his ambivalence reinforces the importance of Africanus in initially propelling the dream journey (169-70). It is as if Chaucer’s narrator envisions Africanus the way that Dante sees Virgil when he says to him, just before entreating him to guide him to the gates of St. Peter, “You are my teacher and my author. You are the one from whom alone I took the noble style that has brought me honor.”<sup>35</sup> Like Dante, Chaucer’s narrator arrives at the gate, and there he “gan astoned to beholde” the gold and black verses inscribed on it, where astonishment literally evokes the idea of being turned to stone and conveys the extremeness of the narrator’s immobility (142). Africanus reinforces the narrator’s lack of agency by telling him that, since he is not a servant of Love, there is no need for him to demystify the contradictory inscriptions. Chaucer here makes his unworthy narrator into a parody of Dante, who eagerly asks Virgil to decipher the meaning of the inscriptions that begin, “Through me the way to the city of woe,” and to whom Virgil responds by affirming the importance of Dante’s full comprehension.<sup>36</sup> The narrator’s fear in this scene of the *Parliament of Fowls* also contrasts the enthusiasm of the narrator in the *Book of the Duchess* as he sets out from his bedchamber; it overtakes his willingness to make a decision about whether to enter the gate “into that blysfyl place” or the gate “to the sorweful were” (127, 138). Paralyzed by choice, the narrator says, “No wit hadde I,

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<sup>35</sup> “Tu se’ lo mio maestro e ‘l mio autore, / tu se’ solo colui da cu’ io tolsi / lo bello stilo che m’ha fatto onore.” Dante, *Inferno*, 1, 85-87.

<sup>36</sup> “Per me si va ne la città dolente.” Dante, *Inferno*, 3, 1.

for errour, for to chese / To entre or flen, or me to save or lese” (146-7). Africanus confirms the narrator’s stupidity, telling him, “thow be dul,” but also encourages him to look and experience in the dream world under the circumstances that he can “not do,” or act (162-63). The guide thus excuses the narrator’s need for agency.

In this scene, Chaucer’s narrator approaches the point of being a caricature of Dante’s pilgrim, and yet, within the garden landscape, the narrator actually begins to reclaim his agency and to subvert the hierarchy that subordinates him. Reflecting the manifold sources of pleasure and activity in the green enclosure, he refers to himself as subject, rather than object, and as listener (“the bryddes herde I synge”), viewer (“I gan aspye / The dredful ro”), and walker (“I wente”), rather than a figure who does “not do” (190, 194-95, 253). While the visionary tradition stages sight as the primary means of accessing an “other” world, conventionally the transcendent realm, the narrator in the *Parliament of Fowls* engages his many senses. Africanus assures the narrator, “mayst thow se,” but as the journey proves, his ability to hear also increasingly shapes his experience, evoking Geoffrey’s attention to aurality in Movement II of the *House of Fame* (163). Drawing on the visionary tradition while undermining its idealism, Chaucer uses the narrator’s hearing experience to show how the narrator challenges Africanus’s lack of faith in his abilities.

Chaucer creates even more room for the narrator’s agency by gradually dismissing Africanus from the scene; the narrator’s new command over his perceptive abilities radically shifts him out of the role he virtually occupies in the *Dream of Scipio*, as a figure never actually quoted, wielding no palpable agency, and existing only for the purpose of eliciting his ancestor’s wisdom. Entering the gates, the narrator passes a metaphorical threshold, contingent on independence. Here, Chaucer remembers Dante’s pilgrim once more, but now at a much later

point in the *Commedia*; he recalls *Purgatorio* 30, when Virgil fades from Dante's side, leaving him to continue his journey through earthly paradise and into divine paradise itself without the established form of guidance. This allusion more seriously suggests the newfound volition and control of Chaucer's narrator, even if they do not entail his access to a transcendent realm of brightness.

#### 4. STERILE TIME: ALLEGORY AND THE DARKER FACE OF ANACHRONISM

The comparison between Scipio's vision and the narrator's vision underscores not only the multiple directions dreams can take and the volition of dreamers, but also the various ways of seeing and experiencing time. The agency of the narrator, released from Africanus's totalizing supervision, hastens the movement of his dream, particularly as his catalogs of nature suggest his rapidly shifting gaze and his accelerating pace of walking. His senses are fully operative: through his touch, he is sensitive to the mild temperature of the air ("th'air of that place so attempre was") (204); through his vision, aware of the day's clarity; through his hearing, attuned to the "ravysyng swetnesse" produced by harmonized stringed instruments (198); and through his smell, inhaling "every holsum spice and gras" of the place (206). According to J.A.W. Bennett, "the *topos* of a delectable region of the earth immune from the touch of time," like the one Chaucer describes in the narrator's dream world, "is not in origin identical with that of the *locus amoenus*, but has so much in common with it that the two easily fuse into one."<sup>37</sup> Chaucer's earthly paradise thus evokes the traditional *locus amoenus*, indicating the poet's use of a standard courtly dream vision convention. However, Chaucer's attention to the narrator's pace also suggests that the narrator imposes his personal sense of time on the seemingly timeless world of

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<sup>37</sup> J.A.W. Bennett, *The Parlement of Foules: An Interpretation* (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), 70.

the garden, and while he does not tangibly impact it, the place acquires a more active temporality as it is filtered through the storyteller's voice.

Chaucer pluralizes the narrator's personal experience of time in the *paradis terrestre* through textual allusions, which further muddle the readers' sense of absolute time. As I will show in the following section, he emphasizes temporal openness through the physical landscape of Lady Nature; however, before Chaucer arrives at her description, he juxtaposes the *locus amoenus*, which the narrator enters after leaving Africanus behind, with a space that is brimming with classical and allegorical figures. In doing this, Chaucer suggests the complex effects that allegory and anachronism have on the narrator and readers alike. First, Chaucer adapts images of health and pleasure from Boccaccio's account of Mount Cithaeron in Book VIII of the *Teseida*, the *Romance of the Rose*, and Alan of Lille's *Complaint of Nature* to illustrate the garden of the narrator's dream world. The multiple intertexts in the garden description raise the expectation that Chaucer's dream vision will obey one text or another only to deflect the actualization of conformity, once more challenging the singularity of the book-turned-dream premise introduced at the beginning of the poem.

However, Chaucer constructs an even more disjunctive sense of time by alternating the images of bounty and perpetual creation in the garden with figures that represent barrenness. The narrator's heterogeneous encounter with time highlights the idea that while allegory can be beneficial, as in the landscape of nature, it sterilizes the world around it when it is torn from the context of life. The portrait of immovable classical and allegorical figures in the narrator's fourteenth-century dream world thus evokes a darker face of anachronism, where history, even if it manifests through mythology, appears so detached from a living context that it also estranges its participant, the narrator, from its effects. The figures in the *Parliament of Fowls* differ from

Emperor Octavian who, in the *Book of the Duchess*, roams through the fourteenth-century forest of the dream world in active pursuit of the hart. Emperor Octavian emerges out of antiquity, resembling the classical figures of the *Parliament of Fowls*, and yet, deeply engaged with the immanent temporality of the dreaming narrator, he effectively distracts the narrator and the readers alike from the lingering atmosphere of loss, rather than reinforcing a sense of detachment from the present world. In the *Parliament of Fowls*, though, Chaucer's narrator encounters examples of barrenness early in his dream. In the stream, he finds, "there as the fish in prysoun is al drye," but at this point, he jumps from the natural scene in which the voices of angels constitute a kind of love and harmony that opposes Eros, into an allegorical world of Amor that elicits an impression of a sterilized time (139). Here, the separation between personified figures and the natural world suggest unproductivity and Benjamin's notion of the deadening "aura." In "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Benjamin critiques the way in which the mass reproduction of art detaches the initially unique artwork from its historical and spatial authentic circumstance; he writes, "Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be."<sup>38</sup> Within and surrounding the Temple of Venus of the *Parliament of Fowls*, the allegorical and classical figures represent the mechanical reproductions of Benjamin's imagination in that they lack this authentic "aura," which arguably belongs to Lady Nature in Chaucer's poem, as she, while transcendent and in ways anachronistic, a blend of traditions, is also attached to the specific temporality of the narrator's dream world. By contrast, the temporalities of antiquity and Amors disrupt the timelessness of the garden only to evoke the experience of fixed duration, rather than ongoing process; they not only displace the immanent

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<sup>38</sup> Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," 220.

time of the narrator in the garden, but also suspend the natural process of growth, evoked by the image of spices that “wex” (206).

The narrator’s sight of Cupid initiates the encounter with a darker face of allegorical transcendence. He identifies him by his bow, positioned ready beneath his tree, bringing up the poem’s central theme of love, which is raised earlier in the invocation to Cytherea and which reappears in the courting rituals of Lady Nature’s parliamentary session. However, the intention of Cupid’s daughter, the allegorical figure of Will, who notches the arrowheads with a file, so that “after they shulde serve / Some for to sle, and some to wounde and kerve,” makes Cupid’s occupation violent and potentially even fatal (216-17). The image of Will and Cupid side-by-side effectively align Cupidian love with the feeling of death evoked by the subsequent scenes of allegorical stasis.

Next, in a passage Chaucer appropriates from Boccaccio’s *Teseida*, the narrator encounters static and motionless allegorical figures sitting before the temple, which evoke different personal characteristics, cosmic forces, and attitudes:

Tho was I war of Plesaunce anon-ryght,  
And of Aray, and Lust, and Curteysie,  
And of the Craft that can and hath the myght  
To don by force a wyght to don folye—  
Disfigurat was she, I nyl nat lye;  
And by himself, under an ok, I gesse,  
Saw I Delyt, that stod with Gentilesse.

I saw Beute withouten any atyr,  
And Youthe, ful of game and jolyte,  
Foolhardynesse, Flaterye, and Desyr,  
Messagerye, and Meede, and other thre—  
Here names shul not here be told for me—  
And upon pilers greete of jasper longe  
I saw a temple of bras ifounded stronge.  
(218-24)

Chaucer leaves these figures primarily one-dimensional, not unlike many allegories, but when he does give them shape, he suggests that they are frozen in time. Undervaluing the notion of process, he finds Dame Peace, appearing “soberly,” “sytyngge” with the pale-faced Dame Patience, reinforcing the image of frozen time evoked by the pale and bloodless Black Knight of the *Book of the Duchess* (239, 242). To C.S. Lewis, these rather traditional medieval personification allegories have “nothing to do.”<sup>39</sup> These are not the personifications found in certain medieval narrative allegories that “participate much as characters participate in realistic fiction...where there is an integrated action” and where “the central figure...may participate along with the personifications.”<sup>40</sup> Instead, Dames Peace and Patience fulfill the expectations of the inscription on the second side of the gate, which reads:

Thorgh me men gon...  
 Unto the mortal strokes of the spere  
 Of which Disdayn and Daunger is the gyde,  
 Ther nevere tre shal fruyt ne leves bere.  
 This strem yow ledeth to the sorweful were  
 Ther as the fish in prysoun is al drye;  
 Th’eschewing is only the remedye!  
 (134-40)

“Disdayn” and “Daunger” oppose “mortal” temporality and make the natural, as well as human worlds barren. With the allegorical figures neatly arranged around the Temple of Venus, the space becomes deadening, where avoidance is necessary to endure the mortal process. The narrator’s catalog becomes so dulling, suggesting a sense of sameness across the allegorical figures, that he makes a gesture of *occupatio* instead of indicating the “other three” names; he implies that it is not worth his time to list the remaining allegories. The list here suggests what

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<sup>39</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1936), 217.

<sup>40</sup> James I. Wimsatt, *Allegory and Mirror: Tradition and Structure in Middle English Literature* (New York: Pegasus by Western Publishing Company, 1970), 42.

Stephen A. Barney calls a “museum-tour” when he describes Geoffrey’s narration of the *Aeneid* in the *House of Fame*.<sup>41</sup> Chaucer’s representation of allegorical figures in the *Parliament of Fowls* suggests a particularly muted version of the temporal world and evokes Paul De Man’s idea that allegory and symbol are antinomical. Allegory represents the finitude of human experience and the absence of individuality, whereas symbol evokes the transcendence of time.<sup>42</sup> In light of certain modern perceptions that allegory is a form that lacks depth and intimacy, Chaucer uses the particular personifications surrounding the Temple of Venus to represent immobility, in contrast to the movement elsewhere in the garden. He makes these figures idolatrous, highlighting stasis, and literally and metaphorically suggesting the dead ends of art.

The portraits in the overheated temple of Venus continue to elicit the fetishism in allegory. First, as the passage cataloging personifications indicates, Venus appears within a brass chamber, an architectural space with a surface material that is reminiscent of the tablet in the Temple of Glass in the *House of Fame*. Through allusion, Chaucer invites his readers’ curiosity about what this architectural space contains; like the brass tablet that records the *Aeneid*, giving the impression of an authoritative and incontrovertible history only to manifest its own fragility and incompleteness, the Temple of Venus is “stronger” and brass, but its surplus of diaphanous and insubstantial materials symbolizes the unproductiveness of its allegory. Painting a scene of artificial drapery and wall illustrations featuring suicidal lovers and virgin maidens, Chaucer’s narrator exaggerates the inactivity of the portrait of the Dames with a new emphasis on erotic sterility. Sitting with her doorkeeper “Richeesse” in a “prive corner,” Venus gives the impression

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<sup>41</sup> Stephen A. Barney, “Chaucer’s Lists,” in *The Wisdom of Poetry: Essays in Early English Literature in honor of Morton W. Bloomfield*, eds. Larry D. Benson and Siegfried Wenzel (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 1982), 205.

<sup>42</sup> Paul de Man, “The Rhetoric of Temporality,” in *Interpretation: Theory and Practice*, ed. Charles Singleton (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1969), 173-209.

of a sensuality that must be kept hidden, recalling Boccaccio's representation of the same lustful Venus (260-61). Chaucer's narrator suggests that her "coverchef" is anything but subtle: "There was no thikkere cloth of no defense" (272-73). Venus lies naked and in a manner "untressed," or loose, but in the same line the narrator portrays her hair as "ibounden" with golden thread, conveying an image of a body closed and unnatural, even contrasting the dancing women outside of the temple for whom the description, "al dishevele," conveys unbound hair (268, 235). Notably, while the hair of Boccaccio's Venus is naturally golden, here, Chaucer describes the manmade objects that she wears and that surround her, including her gold bed. Thus, Chaucer concretizes Venus's associations with an artificial world and creates an ekphrastic portrait that aligns the readers' viewpoint with the narrator's as he gazes upon Venus, as other "men myghte hire sen" (270). While most assessments of Chaucer's Venus, notably Bennett's, interpret Chaucer's Venus as a portrait of sensual excess, she simultaneously evokes infecundity through these ambiguous images of her body and artifices, and in the context of other images of sterility within and about her temple.<sup>43</sup> Even the "thousand savours sote" filling the space of the temple convey an unnatural scent, different from April's "shoures soote," which tempt Londoners to commence a season of pilgrimage at the beginning of the *Canterbury Tales* (274).<sup>44</sup>

Returning to Benjamin, the narrator's disconnected position in relation to Venus evokes the effects of mechanical reproduction on the social world in which it operates. In Benjamin's essay, the viewer of art transforms from a participant into a fetishistic spectator as the art loses its authentic aura and becomes detached from a historical reality. In the *Parliament of Fowls*, Chaucer's narrator indeed gives the impression that he is a voyeur or an intruder upon the scene,

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<sup>43</sup> In addition, D.S. Brewer argues that this Venus, in contrast to the Cytherea who appears in lines 113-19, forms the immortal counterpart to moral Nature, in his "Introduction," in Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Parlement of Foulys*, ed. D.S. Brewer (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1972), 31.

<sup>44</sup> Chaucer, *General Prologue* in the *Canterbury Tales*, 1.

where love is not accessible, but rather an utterly sterile and impenetrable aesthetic. The curtains and veils that drape over Venus represent the boundaries of art, its limits when it tears away experiences of things like love from their living contexts.

Beyond the portrait of its eponymous deity, the Temple of Venus presents anachronistic images and figures that stress a fixed and tragic duration of mortal experience, reinforcing the idea that the brass walls create a border between the different allegorical representations of the poem. In the temple, Venus rules over an array of figures who died from various circumstances, such as Pyramus and Thisbe, who committed suicide, and Cleopatra, who also took her own life, after the loss of her beloved Antony. Underlining the sense of death and sterility, the walls of Venus's temple feature broken bows belonging to the "maidens swiche as gonne here tymes waste" in the service of Diana, the goddess of chastity and hunting (283). It is as if Cupid's bow shoots arrows that thwart rather than stimulate the union of lovers and generate procreation; the broken bows on the temple walls, symbolizing the virginity of the maidens, hang in contempt ("dispit") of their mistress-goddess Diana (281). These maidens, who wasted their time, will contrast the collection of regenerative birds that the narrator will meet during his very first experience in the garden of Lady Nature ("some besyede hem here bryddes forth to brynge") (192). The "fewe" of the maidens, including Callisto and Atalanta, who were initially intent on preserving their chastity, were punished for their desire and transformed into wild animals (286). Diana forbids and condemns the pursuit of procreation, obstructing the process of mortal time and continuity.

The anachronistic wall painting reinforces the theme of sterility in the Temple of Venus by featuring antique figures whose love had catastrophic results, from the incestuous queen Semiramus to Rhea, imprisoned for giving birth to Romulus and Remus. Desperation drives

many of these lovers, who rush the process to create bonds of love. Rather than dramatizing the immortality of the ancient gods and goddesses, Chaucer represents men and women whose lives and loves ended prematurely; the catalog concludes matter-of-factly, “they dyde” (294). The brevity of this statement is fitting for a description of the conclusive lifespans of the figures within the temple, a space that the narrator must leave in order to re-engage with this own, more natural temporality.

Before he does, however, Chaucer underlines the association of Venus’s temple with a state of barrenness when he mentions Priapus, the rustic fertility god of ancient Greek mythology. He implicitly evokes the god’s physical inability to procreate by making Priapus appear “In swich aray as whan the asse hym shente,” recalling Book 1 of Ovid’s *Fasti*, where a donkey interrupts his attempt to rape the virgin goddess Hestia (255). Like Cupid’s bow, this mythological figure does not reveal the potential for a productive temporally-grounded love, but instead embodies an *eros* culminating in impotence and, as Minnis writes, “virility made to look ridiculous, male desire mocked.”<sup>45</sup>

Whether through the representation of Priapus or the catalogs of end-stopped loves, Chaucer associates the space of the temple with a limited duration of time, making the natural world he soon re-enters ever more markedly open and generative. The sterility of allegorical figures divorced from context contrasts the impression of fluidity in the outdoor space, where Lady Nature emphasizes the connective powers of love; if love is an allegory, unperformed in the Temple of Venus and in the figures of Priapus and Cupid, in the *locus amoenus*, it manifests as a concept so active that it cannot find resolution. While the *Romance of the Rose* stages the narrator’s encounters with personified figures to elicit his love-quest, in the *Parliament of Fowls*, it is the birds within the narrator’s same immanent temporality, rather than the embodiments of

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<sup>45</sup> Minnis, Scattergood, and Smith, *Oxford Guides*, 286.

abstract ideas, that trigger his exploration of amorous desire, as well as the more Boethian love that binds together things in the world.

##### 5. DEFERRING TEMPORAL CLOSURE IN LADY NATURE'S *LOCUS AMOENUS*

This section reinforces the sense of juxtaposition between the *paradis terrestre* and the anachronistic temple, only this time through the examination of Lady Nature's physical place/space and the plurality of voices within her parliament. By colliding allegories in the dream vision, through the Temple of Venus, its allegorical figures, and Lady Nature, Chaucer emphasizes connectivity. Unlike Cupid, Lust, and the other personified figures in the narrator's dream world, Lady Nature embodies an allegorical structure that not only personifies the abstract and transcendent idea of nature; her allegory actually fosters in more literal terms the qualities of openness, love, interaction, and pleasure that constitute nature. In the Benjaminian framework, Lady Nature maintains the authentic aura because, as the embodiment of nature, she "is never entirely separated from [her] ritual function," that is, from her role as a facilitator of propagation and natural communion.<sup>46</sup>

The narrator's emergence from the chapel into the garden space evokes the pattern of movement found in the journeys of the narrators in Chaucer's earlier dream visions: in the *House of Fame*, Geoffrey exits the Temple of Venus and enters "a large feld," which he compares to "the desert of Lybye," and in the *Book of the Duchess*, the narrator shifts from the bedchamber to the expanse of the "forest," also referred to as a "feld."<sup>47</sup> Both of these narrators move from anachronistic architectural places—that is, medieval stained-glass buildings decorated by colorful stories of antiquity—to open, natural spaces. In the *Parliament of Fowls*, too, the

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<sup>46</sup> Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," 224.

<sup>47</sup> Chaucer, *House of Fame*, 482, 488; Chaucer, *Book of the Duchess*, 363, 359.

narrator departs from a place constructed by ancient mythology and historiography. However, in contrast to the anachronistic places of the *House of Fame* and the *Book of the Duchess*, the Temple of Venus that the narrator of the *Parliament of Fowls* abandons glaringly elicits a negative representation of anachronism, in which chronological inconsistencies within a single place have a deadening rather than animating presence and effect. As I have written, whereas the Temple of Glass in the *House of Fame* and the glass bedchamber in the *Book of the Duchess* lead the narrators toward either creative production or forward movement, inviting them to mix up chronologies, to become distracted by temporal singularity, and to notice lacunae within historical records, the anachronistic place of the *Parliament of Fowls*, which is appropriately opaque, represents torpidity and prevents the narrator from having access to the otherwise productive material of anachronism. Moreover, after leaving the Temple of Venus, the narrator repeatedly describes where he enters to be an architectural “place,” more structured than the space of a desert or forest and so crowded the narrator claims there is hardly any “space” (315, 314). The suggestion that there is a second “place” in the *Parliament of Fowls* also insists that there be a revision of the first; the focus on the physical structure, which I will discuss further in the next paragraph, asks readers to compare the Temple of Venus with the world of Lady Nature and thus to see the different functions of allegory in relation to temporality.

In the second “place,” the narrator, having “come ayeyn,” suggests the return to the origin of his dream, recalling the paradisiacal elements of nature, from the blossoming boughs to the streams cool enough for fish to swim through happily, and, to be sure, “nothyng dede” (295, 187). This return also raises the idea that the narrator performs a circular journey within the dream world, accommodating the garden-temple-garden movement to the Platonic cycle by which the soul moves from heaven to earth to heaven. Nevertheless, the garden of Lady Nature

differs from a Dantean earthly paradise, like the one discovered at the top of Mount Purgatory, signifying Dante's return to his "origins"; in fact, Chaucer's narrator's journey undermines the Platonic expectation of temporal recursivity. The images of health that abound within the garden instead convey a sense of temporal progress, reminiscent of the forest in the *Book of the Duchess*, which always bustles with the activity of wild animals. At the same time, the description reveals a place characterized by human interaction and crowded by voices. Lady Nature's clearing represents both freedom and natural domesticity, inviting the narrator's agency and action, but also giving him "a calm center of established values," a description that Yi-Fu Tuan attributes more broadly to place.<sup>48</sup> Chaucer describes the setting:

And in a launde, upon an hil of floures,  
Was set this noble goddesse Nature.  
Of braunches were here halles and here bourse  
Iwrought after here craft and here mesure;  
Ne there nas foul that cometh of engendrure  
That they ne were prest in here presence  
To take hire dom and yeve hire audyence.  
(302-8).

Chaucer's descriptions fluctuate in their allusions to accessible and confined places, and this spatial ambiguity or indecisiveness undermines the dream world's concrete sense of time. Accordingly, the space-place dialectic enables Lady Nature to impose structure on the birds over which she presides, but also to avoid demanding temporal closure on the mating process. Her "braunches" reflect her "craft" and "mesure"; in addition, though, they allow for natural lacunae to appear within the structure of the edifice, symbolizing the openness and fluidity of her government over the birds. The physical details of Lady Nature's abode suggest it to be a place and space simultaneously, which encourages temporal experience to occur and never demands that it wholly conclude.

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<sup>48</sup> Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 54.

Lady Nature's environs indeed create a suitable climate for the avian community over which she presides. The description of the birds in Lady Nature's assembly magnifies the premium that the *Dream of Scipio* puts on communal participation: Chaucer's abbreviated version of the *Dream of Scipio* at the beginning of the poem accepts the "lered or lewed" into heaven, where Cicero does not, but here it also incorporates "the briddes alle; and foules of ravyne" into the "pleyn eleccioun" (527-28). Chaucer's array of birds reflects the notion of common profit in the *Dream of Scipio* in its social comprehensiveness and communality, but also undermines it in its air of disorderly participation. While the *Dream of Scipio* presents common profit as the straightforward notion of an ideal that offers universal access to eternal salvation, Chaucer complicates it by presenting the birds under Lady Nature's wing, so to speak, as chaotic, hardly model servants of her law. Avian subservience would be appropriate to the Ciceronian ideal. For instance, the classification of birds originating with Aristotle and appearing in Vincent of Beauvais's thirteenth-century *Speculum naturale* is followed by a deconstruction of the hierarchy of the birds through the emphasis on the individualism of voices.<sup>49</sup> The birds deploy different ways of communicating and their chatter represents the avian social spectrum—as widely as the speech of the pilgrims in the *Canterbury Tales* represents the cross-section of Chaucer's London.<sup>50</sup> This variety challenges the likelihood that only particular elite, or "lered," characteristics survive, such as the fidelity of the turtle-doves ("turtle trewe"), or the intelligence and brightness of the eagles (577). The sound of "laughter" arises from among the "gentil foules," and the sparrowhawk accuses the goose of having a "tonge loos" (575, 570). The duck tells the embarrassed, red-faced turtle-dove that she quacks well ("Ye queke...ful wel and

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<sup>49</sup> Vincent of Beauvais, *Speculum naturale* in *Bibliotheca Mundi Vincenti Burgundi* (Douay, 1624, 1964).

<sup>50</sup> Spearing writes at greater length about Chaucer's humanization and socialization of the birds which, "like men in medieval society, ... are divided into several broad classes," *Medieval Dream-Poetry*, 97.

fayre!”), and the falcon claims that his speech to the tercel-eagles is not done (“my tale is not ido!”), implying endless noise (594, 542). As Barney writes, the birds, “unlike the trees [that Chaucer also catalogs], refuse to rest content as merely a list—a display in species of the genus ‘bird.’”<sup>51</sup> This statement exaggerates the difference between the allegorical stasis of the figures around the Temple of Venus and these simultaneously wild and civilized avian creatures, reiterating the idea that the engagement with an immanent temporality, rather than the isolation from time entirely, proves fecund for all figures involved.

Furthermore, through their sounds and claims to speech, Chaucer deliberately exploits the possibilities and limitations of each class structure, which suggests that the poem values difference and perpetual dialogism. The focus on class structure raises the idea again that Chaucer’s social model in the *Parliament of Fowls* differs from Cicero’s in the *Dream of Scipio*. Scholars have discussed the parliament of birds in the historical context of 1381, in which the Great Rising exposed the breakdown of social control and hierarchy; as David Aers writes, “a reader of the 1380s would be likely to recall that the very term ‘common’ had been appropriated both by Parliament and by the rebels who challenged the legal apparatus to which it belonged, as well as its specific legislation.”<sup>52</sup> By scattering the avian voices in his own parliamentary scene and “inventing voices which speak a language quite antagonistic to the chivalric and courtly rhetoric” of the birds, Chaucer alludes to the lack of order in his own time, if not to be explicit about current events then to suggest the reductive tendencies of Africanus’s lesson.<sup>53</sup> In contrast

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<sup>51</sup> Barney, “Chaucer’s Lists,” 216.

<sup>52</sup> David Aers, “*Vox populi* and the literature of 1381,” in *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, ed. David Wallace (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 445.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 447.

to Africanus's method, Lady Nature's quiet acceptance of their disputes signifies the poem's openness to dialogism.

If the avian community subverts the model of common profit, it also undermines the expectation of Platonic temporal recursivity at the heart of Africanus's lesson in the *Dream of Scipio*. In the garden scene, Chaucer at once suggests a repetitive pattern and a discontinuous, open-ended experience. When Chaucer's narrator, despite encountering the birds for the first time, acknowledges that "they were wonted" to conduct these courtship festivities, he emphasizes the sense of routine in the annual celebration (321). Yet, describing their present endeavor, Chaucer suggests the individual birds' entitlement to choice and the role of the will, which inevitably complicate the predictability of routine and suggest the sense of plural possibilities concerning the way that time can operate: depending on the birds' choices, time can be stretched or compressed. The narrator emphasizes the birds' volition in his rhetorical question to the readers and recollection of the parliamentary assembly:

What shulde I seyn? Of foules every kynde  
That in this world han fetheres and stature  
Men myghten in that place assembled fynde  
Byfore the noble goddesse Nature,  
And ech of hem dide his besy cure  
Benygnely to chese or for to take,  
By hire acord, his formel or his make.  
(365-71)

As this passage suggests, Lady Nature's embrace of difference and free will, even while offering an established and relatively systematic forum for the birds to communicate with each other, contributes to the open-endedness of the parliamentary session and the dream journey more broadly. Each bird under Nature's metaphorical wing is encouraged to select his mate, as the guide—differing from Africanus, who denies the narrator agency—announces, "Ye come for to cheese" (388). In fact, this choice is mandatory, "By [her] statut and thorgh [her] governaunce"

The parliament

The sealoe morderer of the feche fmalde  
That makyn homy of flomye flesh of helbo  
the weddid Truyll with his herte trewe  
The peock with his Amgelic fetheys byght  
The ffarante stoner of the coe bo myght

The waler goe the lulloc onyr bynde  
the papenyay full of deluacye  
The Drake stoner of his owne bynde  
The stake wreker of Inocetye  
The hote comerante of glotonye  
The Panenc & the crocie with her voice of cro  
The threofull olde & the frosty feldfay

What shulde q sey of public ony bynde  
That in this world han fetheys & fayne  
ayen myght in that place asembled fynde  
Before that noble goddess of Natyve  
And ech of hem did his besy cro  
Bemygho to chese or fe to take  
bi his accorde his formel or his mate

But to the roynto Natyve hild, on hiz honde

Figure 8: Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Bodley 638, f. 102r. The scribe here uses underlining to emphasize the diverse catalog of birds.

(387). Lady Nature sits back before the rowdy dynamic of the parliament as a sort of Deistic god, choosing to remain distanced from her creation. Showing that she privileges the birds' volition over the act of wielding some totalizing control, the narrator reinforces the decision-making abilities of the birds. Lady Nature repeats the verb "chese," describing, with reference to the locale of the assembly, how "every foul cometh there to chese his make" (310). The narrator hears Lady Nature invite the birds to choose their mates, albeit "by ordre...[and] after youre kynde," and the royal tercel at once acknowledges his deference to Lady Nature ("my soverayn lady, and not my fere") and proves his power of choice: "I chese, and chese with wil, and herte and thought" (400-1, 416-17). With "wil" and "herte," the royal tercel recalls the image of the juxtaposed figures of Cupid and Will, suggesting the difference between their unfulfilled embodiments of love and the authentic forces that drive the birds that exist within Lady Nature's order.

The agency of the individual birds is also reminiscent of the narrator's own development of choice, from the moment he emerges from beneath Africanus's supervision, in yet another indication of the immanent temporality of the dream world that undermines the Ciceronian model of temporal closure. The narrator's response to the birds shows the active effects the birds have on the world around them. The quantity of avian creatures overwhelms him physically; "so ful was al the place" of the garden that the narrator struggles to find a position in which "to stonde" among them (315). The experience of listening strongly defines the narrator's agency at this point in the dream; his ability to become attuned to the voices of the birds gives him an identity within the world of the parliament. Noise becomes a better indicator of the environment than sight, dominating as much of the portrait of the birds as their physical features: the size of the body of birds is suggested not by the narrator's tactility or sight, but rather by the amount of

noise they produce, “so huge” that it causes “erthe, and eyr, and tre, and every lake” to become, once more, “so ful” (313-14). While the narrator becomes merely “war” of the allegorical figures in the temple scene, in the assembly of birds, his narration becomes embedded among their voices, a point emphasized particularly by the alternation between his observations and the birds’ dialogue. After hearing the third tercel eagle speak his “luf-talkyng,” the narrator emphasizes his participation in the activity of listening<sup>54</sup>:

Of al my lyf, syn that day I was born,  
So gentil ple in love or other thyng  
Ne herde nevere no man me beforn—  
Who that hadde leyser and connyng  
For to reherse hire chere and hire spekyng  
(484-88)

The birds’ clamor and unruliness undermine the traditional sense of heavenly harmony found in the Ciceronian dream-text and challenge the recursivity of Neoplatonic time, with the overlapping voices continuously making noise, and their contrary opinions evoking the pedagogical procedures of the *quaestio* and *disputatio*, a dialectic that is never resolved.<sup>55</sup>

As this scene suggests, the narrator in the *Parliament of Fowls* accesses his dream world through his ears, acquiring an active identity without the traditional visionary emphases of the dream vision tradition, and able to absorb the dynamics of the courtly game. Indeed, according to Tuan, hearing is one of the “essentially nondistancing senses,” in contrast to the “spatializing” faculties of sight and touch,” and yet sounds “can convey a strong sense of size (volume) and of

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<sup>54</sup> In *The Origin and Meaning of Courtly Love*, Roger Boase discusses courtly love lyric, or “luf-talkyng,” as a game or social activity. He cites John Stevens in *Music and Poetry in the Early Tudor Court* (1961), explaining that “luf-talkyng” could include telling riddles or creating love problems, debating, or participating in seasonal activities, such as those taking place at St. Valentine’s Day. Roger Boase, *The Origin and Meaning of Courtly Love: A Critical Study of European Scholarship* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977), 46.

<sup>55</sup> Minnis, Scattergood, and Smith, *Oxford Guides to Chaucer*, 292.

distance,” even if they are “vaguely located.”<sup>56</sup> Chaucer shows this in the second movement of the *House of Fame*, where Geoffrey learns about the motion of sounds from his Eagle-guide. Chaucer uses the narrator’s hearing experience in the crowd of birds to construct an auditory space in which birds can wield agency simultaneously in a single narrative moment. The sense of overlap contrasts the more singular experience of sight, wherein one’s optical range in a single moment is limited, tending toward a focal point, which, in the visionary tradition, represents the means to a single, absolute truth. The narrator, less visionary than a Boethian subject, appears more sensitive to sound, and thus derives agency from his capacity to hear. To this effect, Suzanne Conklin Akbari notes, “it is when darkness falls that the sound springs forth,” suggesting that Chaucer means to diminish the value of sight, which perhaps can only capture the essence of the scene singularly.<sup>57</sup>

Undermining the singularity of conventional visionary experience, the narrator gains more agency than is ever expected by Africanus, who, upon thrusting the narrator through the gates opening into the garden, assures the narrator that their inscriptions are intended for lovers (referring to the birds in the parliament) rather than the narrator himself. Africanus also tells the narrator, “that thow canst not do, yit mayst thow se,” but the narrator proves he can also experience by hearing (163). The guide implies that the narrator’s selfhood is unimportant to the scene of his own dream. However, surrounded by the birds and their noises, the narrator not only moves out of the passive role that Africanus attributes to him, but also engages in an auditory experience that challenges the master dream-text he reads before falling asleep. The proliferation of sound on the ground floor of the garden differs from the melodious “melodye” of the nine spheres that the narrator reads of in the *Dream of Scipio*, appropriately in the ninth stanza of

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<sup>56</sup> Tuan, *Space and Place*, 12, 14.

<sup>57</sup> Akbari, *Seeing through the Veil*, 201.

Chaucer's poem (60). Listening to the *demande d'amour*, the narrator finds that voices overlap in a cacophony distinct from the invariable oneness of the heavenly "musik" (60, 62). In their diversity and vitality, then, the birds organized around Lady Nature transform the music of the book.

The narrator's auditory agency shapes his particular representation of space, which enables Chaucer to elicit the benefits of connectivity where the original *Dream of Scipio* primarily advocates distance and detachment. The narrator's experience of hearing a plurality of sounds corresponds to his embedded position among the birds. Being one among many, a figure in a crowd that is "so ful" as to convey great size and depth, naturally alters the narrator's perspective (314).

In this scene, Chaucer thus manipulates the focus on the Ciceronian or Boethian perspective he presents in his book before bedtime. While the *Dream of Scipio* reinforces, through repetition, the "lytel" or "lyte" size and nature of the earth, Chaucer grounds the avian perspectives in the material world and in time, which is organized around the present task of fulfilling the Saint Valentine's Day obligations, and immerses his dreaming narrator in the cacophonous garden of the dream world (57, 64). The birds' and the narrator's embeddedness opposes the position of distance of Scipio and Africanus; while the birds themselves might conceivably have an elevated and scopic vision, given their natural height in a more realistic world and evoking the perspective of the Eagle in the House of Fame in the *Dream of Scipio*, Chaucer makes a point to lower the birds from the sky and stage an encounter.

In the light of Michel De Certeau's theory of perspective in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, the change in the narrator's position from the book to the dream produces a shift in perspectives, from that of the voyeur to that of the walker, which enables his more natural

experience of his dream world. For De Certeau, the voyeur's elevated position transfigures his viewpoint so that he can see the earth cohesively, contrasting the walker's perspective, which instead reflects the space he navigates, fragmented and always moving. The differentiation of perspectives in De Certeau resembles the Boethian visionary model, as well; to Lady Philosophy in the *Boece*, the astronomical interest, representing an upward gaze, reflects Boethius's "propre cleer nesse," whereas he plunges into "dirknesses" when he looks downward and backward at the world, "constreyned to loken on the fool erthe."<sup>58</sup> In the *Parliament of Fowls*, the narrator's immersion in the garden challenges the benefits of voyeurism identified by Africanus initially in the *Dream of Scipio* and, implicitly, Lady Philosophy in the *Boece*. The narrator's experience suggests that Chaucer saw it as important to learn by experience rather than distanced, bookish education. Releasing himself from the guiding arms of Africanus, the narrator ultimately occupies a more productive role as a leisured walker when he is independent; as an autonomous individual within an earthly domain, he makes choices and is able to celebrate the mortal process to which the guide alludes in his brief mention of common profit.

A consideration of the relationship between space and time in this scene further demonstrates the productive openness to difference in the earthbound space of the garden, in contrast to the sense of closure attached to the vision of a minute place deserving "litel" attention. Lady Nature's dialectical space-and-place dwelling determines the open-ended sense of time in the garden, as I have written, but this spatial correlative for time is contingent on the idea that space and time are "transposable measures of the same experience."<sup>59</sup> As Chaucer transforms the narrator's distance in relation to the dream world, he alters the narrator's experience of time. This occurs, for instance, in his attendance of the annual parliamentary

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<sup>58</sup> Chaucer, *Boece*, 1, Metr. 2, 4, 31-2.

<sup>59</sup> Tuan, *Space and Place*, 119.

meeting, which suggests an ongoing process. The formel's choice to defer her decision-making at the end of the meeting implies the impossibility of truly ending the mating cycle. The "eleccioun" advocates the notion of preference to such an extent that the custom of choosing proves continuous "fro yer to yeere" (409, 411). Unlike the chaste Diana, who wasted the "tymes" of virgin maidens, Lady Nature emphasizes the significance of the current election, the present time.

In proposing the election as a mortal process, Lady Nature temporalizes the experience of bliss, making it an experience of "tyme" rather than only "place." She says to the birds, "And whoso may at this tyme have his grace, / In blisful tyme he cam into this place," where having "grace" refers to finding favor, but also recalls Africanus's characterization of earthly experience as "ful of...harde grace" and thus the negative turns of fortune (412-13). In addition, Lady Nature's mention of the "blisful tyme" evokes the "blysfyl place.../ There as joye is that last withouten ende," and specifically equates divine bliss with temporality, once more departing from the discourse of the bedtime book (48-9). Chaucer thus deploys language similar to that of the *Dream of Scipio* subtext, but, revising the sense and context, he implies that the allegorical guide in the garden offers the opportunity for the birds, earthly creatures, to experience a different kind of "grace," contingent on mortal impermanence and yet ensuring love. While this version of love is not transcendent, it is more circumstantial and organic than the love embodied by the sterilized allegories of the Temple of Venus.

Chaucer suggests the subjective experience of time, which is crucial to his project of deconstructing authoritative temporal frameworks that set the pace of both human life and narrative. Just as the inscriptions over the gates to Lady Nature's paradise declare, an individual can find in the garden the site of bliss, "Of hertes hele and dedly woundes cure," or the site of

decay (128). One can find sterile time, natural time, or endless mortal time in the dream world. These paradoxical inscriptions dramatize the power of subjectivity in the construction of time, for, as the greater part of the dream vision shows, an individual can perceive time as generative and healing or deadening.

The Boethian paradox already cited, which prepares for the narrator's inability to choose during the early moments of his dream vision, is central to understanding Chaucer's emphasis on the narrator's personal agency and choice here in the framework of Boethian philosophy. In *Chaucer's Philosophical Visions*, Kathryn L. Lynch explores the place of the *Parliament of Fowls* in the context of medieval voluntarism. Lynch argues that Chaucer redefined Thomas Aquinas's concept of choice, "contending...that all choice is based on some felt or perceived superiority of one object to another," in terms of will rather than knowledge, thus drawing on voluntarism, "the philosophical movement that involved the severing of choice from reasoned evaluation, of will from intellect."<sup>60</sup> Lynch explains the viewpoint of John Duns Scotus, who elevates the will over the intellect, and points out that the narrator's Boethianism reveals both "volition and nolition," showing "his cognizance of the stasis of what Scotus calls a will 'neither willing nor unwilling with respect to [an] object.'"<sup>61</sup> Chaucer was writing in an intellectual milieu that expressed philosophical interest in the capacity and relevance of the will to one's agency and morality, and Lynch's remarks reinforce the Boethian attention to the issue of reconciling free will and predestination, an ostensible paradox that Lady Philosophy concentrates on in Books IV and V of the *Boece*. Chaucer subtly imparts this paradox in the scene of Lady Nature's garden and parliamentary assembly, which, allegorically, represents the contrary forces of determinism and free will. In the *Boece*, Lady Philosophy attempts to resolve the paradox of a

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<sup>60</sup> Kathryn L. Lynch, *Chaucer's Philosophical Visions* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2000), 98.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 101; Lynch cites Scotus, *God and Creatures*, Q. 16. 19, p. 374.

universe governed by free will and determinism, two seemingly contrary forces, but Chaucer avoids verbose philosophical disquisition and instead illustrates the Boethian conversation.

The possibility of having free will under the order of an organizing guide—here, Lady Nature—strongly evokes Lady Philosophy’s discourse in Book IV of the *Boece*, showing that Chaucer alludes to Boethius’s allegorical figure in order to validate the process of human volition. In fact, Lady Nature becomes analogous to Lady Philosophy, as her ability to govern omnipotent while allowing her birds to make their own choices resembles Lady Philosophy’s verbal reconciliation of the ostensibly paradoxical concepts of predestination and human free will. In the *Book of the Duchess* and the *House of Fame*, Chaucer creates caricatures of Boethius’s serious guide, making the narrator in the *Book of the Duchess* appear weak in his rational perception of the mourner’s sorrow and using the Eagle in the *House of Fame* to poke fun at the mystifying aura of transcendence. However, in the *Parliament of Fowls*, Chaucer draws on Boethius’s allegorical lady to different and perhaps more thoughtful ends: to celebrate mortal freedom, as Boethius is taught, in a world that always lies beneath an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnitemporal gaze. Rather than condemn human experience, exposing the limits of human opportunity in a world governed by tragic cyclicity, Lady Nature operates her garden in such a way as to embrace the assembly of voices and create desire on the ground floor of earth. Defying dualism, she permits irresolution, accepting it as a possible consequence of mortal choice.

Chaucer’s Boethian message here also suggests the complex allegorical tradition to which Chaucer’s presiding figure belongs. Lady Nature evokes not only Lady Philosophy, but also Lady Nature of Alan of Lille’s twelfth-century dream vision, the *Complaint of Nature*, complicating the relationship between the narrator’s book and the narrative he dreams. Chaucer

makes her at once “the vicaire of the almyghty Lord” and an earthbound lady, an image which he says he finds in “Aleyn, in the Pleynt of Kynde,” claiming to adapt the description of her physical features from his work (“Devyseth Nature of aray and face”) (379, 316-17).<sup>62</sup> The seeming dichotomy between the allegorical figures of these two different texts is a reminder of how Chaucer collides allegories in the previous scene of personified figures around the Temple of Venus. However, rather than collide them to highlight the positive and negative consequences of certain allegories, Chaucer’s practice of *compilatio* in the creation of Lady Nature reinforces his desire to avoid reinvention through any single authoritative text, as the generative metaphor of the early lines of the poem proposes. As Piero Boitani notes, Chaucer’s readers’ “memory of another book” upon coming to the second section of the dream, “offers only a partial solution to the problem...more reading is required.”<sup>63</sup> Hence, Boitani concludes, “the endless quest, the search for an ever-receding object that the reading of books implies.”<sup>64</sup> Considering the interplay between the texts that inform Chaucer’s Lady Nature, Alan of Lille begins the first prose section of the *Complaint of Nature*, despite using the same primary source as Macrobius’s, Plato’s *Timaeus*, with an allusion to the elegiacs at the start of the *Boece*. This section sets up a comparison between the narrator and Boethius. However, Alan of Lille quickly abandons a Boethian trajectory as he offers a lengthy physical characterization of the woman who descended from “an inner palace” (the heavens), describing her luminous golden hair, her milky-hued skin,

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<sup>62</sup> Chaucer likely assumed that his readers know Alan of Lille’s description thoroughly, never giving a summary equivalent to the summary of Macrobius’s text.

<sup>63</sup> Piero Boitani, “Old books brought to life in dreams: the *Book of the Duchess*, the *House of Fame*, the *Parliament of Fowls*, in *The Cambridge Companion to Chaucer*, eds. Jill Mann and Piero Boitani (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 71.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

her uniformly ivory teeth, and her bewildering dress, “kaleidoscopic in its various colours” and in a constant state of change.<sup>65</sup>

Differently, Boethius describes Lady Philosophy as a “womman of ful gret reverence by semblaunt, hyr eyen brennyng and cleer-seyng over the commune myth of men.”<sup>66</sup> Where Alan of Lille elaborates on Lady Nature’s physicality, Boethius’s account of Lady Philosophy focuses specifically on her divine-like sight. In the *Boece*, Lady Philosophy’s dress is bewildering, but also troubling; her clothing shows signs of neglect and tear, symbolizing the human oversight of her philosophy. Taking it further, “the language Boethius uses makes it quite clear that Lady Philosophy has been the victim of an attempted rape,” which does not make her seem vulnerable as an authority as much as it highlights the depravity of her critics and failed students.<sup>67</sup> The fragments of different allegorical figures attest to the idea that the act of poetic creation depends upon more than one tradition, narrative, and frame of reference, just as not only but multiple birds, who dialogue with each other, influence the process of natural creation.

Lady Nature in the *Parliament of Fowls* is disjunctive, representative of different philosophies, traditions, and allegories; she resembles Lady Philosophy, but also, as an extension of Alan of Lille’s Lady Nature, she challenges the Boethian precedence of vision, and thus time. Lady Nature’s power to convoke the birds relies on sound and the plural voices she harbors in her garden help to diffuse the univocal conception of time. Like Lady Philosophy, she displays artisanship, continuously weaving together the natural world (“That hot, cold, hevvy, lyght, moyst, and dreye / Hath knyght by even noumbres of acord”), evoking not only the discussion of

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<sup>65</sup> Alan of Lille, *Plaint of Nature*, trans. James J. Sheridan (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1980), Book VIII, Pr. 1.

<sup>66</sup> Chaucer, *Boece*, 1, Pr. 1, 3-4.

<sup>67</sup> Bridget K. Balint, *Ordering Chaos: The Self and the Cosmos in Twelfth-Century Latin Prosimetrum* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 45.

the elements in Book 3, Metrum 9 of the *Boece*,<sup>68</sup> but also and more uniquely Lady Philosophy's explanation of the "destinal ordenaunce," "ywoven and acomplissid" (380-81).<sup>69</sup> However, while Lady Nature governs, like God, according to her own "rightful ordenaunce," her priorities concern the choices of the birds beneath her and the courtly competition grounded in time. The "prikke" Lady Philosophy uses to express the philosophical distance one must keep from earthly affairs is irrelevant; Lady Nature says, under the condition that the birds choose their mates, "I prik yow with plesaunce," this time giving "prik" a sexual connotation (389). Instilling pleasure defines Lady Nature's "governaunce," a counterpoint to Lady Philosophy's condemnation of worldly pursuits (387). Drawing on Alan's Lady Nature, under whom "the firmament in its daily revolution makes all things go round with it," Chaucer's Lady Nature seems to accommodate the value of the earth to the value of the heavens.<sup>70</sup> Her dialectical representation of these two figures shows the relevance of both earthly and heavenly perspectives.

Aside from Lady Nature's make-up of different and sometimes opposing allegorical traditions, her final gesture in the dream vision of the *Parliament of Fowls* upholds the sense of incompleteness and validates the idea that time does not always need a *telos*. The absence of decision at the end of *The Parliament of Fowls*—Lady Nature's proposition to make an exception to the yearly ritual of choosing a mate by extending the formel eagle's time—challenges the need for a revolution implicit in the Platonic model invoked by the poem. Rather, Lady Nature is concerned above all with sustaining the process of the parliament, precisely

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<sup>68</sup> In a prayer to God, Lady Philosophy sings, "Thow byndest the elementis by nombres proporcionables, that the coolde thinges morwen accorde with the hote thinges, and the drye thinges with the moyste; that the fuyer, that is purest, ne fle nat over-heye, ne that the hevynesse ne drawe nat adoun over-lowe the erthes that ben ploungid in the watis. Thow knytest togidere the mene soule of treble kynde moevynge alle thingis, and divydest it by membrys accordynge." Chaucer, *Boece*, 3, Metr. 9, 18-26.

<sup>69</sup> Chaucer, *Boece*, 4, Pr. 6, 100-1.

<sup>70</sup> Alan of Lille, *Plaint of Nature*, Book VIII, Pr. 4.

through the eagle's unfinished process of choosing. She says to the male eagles, forced to wait patiently:

Beth of good herte, and serveth alle thre.  
A yer is nat so longe to endure,  
And ech of yow peyne him in his degre  
For to do wel, for, God wot, quyt is she  
Fro yow this yer; what after so befalle,  
This entremes is dressed for yow alle.  
(660-65)

Here, Lady Nature differs from Africanus in the *Dream of Scipio* subtext by being a function of the process by which the narrator's dream unravels the book to emphasize an immanent and discontinuous temporality. Through her conducting of the election of birds, Chaucer simultaneously stages and subverts the possibility for temporal closure. As Rosemarie P. McGerr writes in *Chaucer's Open Books: Resistance to Closure in Medieval Discourse*:

Nature declares an end to the parliament (655), and the roundel sung by representatives from each group of birds (680-92) provides an image of harmony that balances the earlier debate. But the narrative involving the choice of mates among the eagles remains unclouded and stands as strong testimony against the narrator's assertion of closure.<sup>71</sup>

McGerr recognizes the way in which Chaucer invokes a closed model only to undercut the need for it. Lady Nature actualizes the common profit described by Africanus in the *Dream of Scipio*, but here grounds it firmly in the mortal process. "A yer is nat so longe to endure" pertains to a larger message of the narrative: time is not to be rushed, and in time, we are free. Furthermore, while Lady Nature stresses the intertext of Genesis 1:28—"Increase and multiply, and replenish the earth"—she does not, as David C. Fowler writes, insist that Chaucer's birds be joined only for the purposes of reproduction.<sup>72</sup> Rather, her acceptance of dialogism and an open ending

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<sup>71</sup> Rosemarie P. McGerr, *Chaucer's Open Books: Resistance to Closure in Medieval Discourse* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998), 82-3.

<sup>72</sup> David C. Fowler, *The Bible in Middle English Literature* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1984).

shows that she values volition, above all; the decision to extend the time before which mating can occur, deflecting this evermore into the foreplay of courtly ritual, denies the closure implied by a religious reading.

In this sense, Lady Nature evokes the dialogic process of Boethius's educational journey as Lady Philosophy attempts to lift Boethius's gaze in an initial step toward the return to God. Because the *Boece* features an exchange of ideas, it also stresses the process of learning; as I have written before, Lady Philosophy theorizes the transformation of Boethius's perspective, but never entirely achieves its turning and Boethius's transcendence. She anticipates Boethius's transformative "end" as the escape from earthly time to heaven and offers her parting words in Book V:

Withstond thanne and eschue thou vices; worschipe and love thou vertues; arise thi corage to ryghtful hopes; yilde thou humble preieris an heyhe. Gret necessite of prowesse and vertu is encharged and comaunded to yow, yif ye nil nat dissimulen; syn that ye worken and don (that is to seyn, your dedes or your workes) byforn the eyen of the juge that seeth and demeth alle thinges.<sup>73</sup>

The Boethian dialogue thus ends with a rearticulation of the Ciceronian logic of the *Dream of Scipio*, in which Africanus, reminded of the mortal process, advises Scipio to practice virtue, providing it as the only answer to the question of how to reach a state of transcendence. It is a similar injunction to "know thyself," but this is also the very injunction that re-situates Scipio in earthly time, as I have argued. Chaucer's allegorical inventions in the *Parliament of Fowls*—his revised iteration of Africanus in the narrator's dream and the persona of Lady Nature—actually elicit the aspect of Lady Philosophy that is more nurturing toward the experience of process and a gradual healing process. Africanus's opening of his grip to allow the narrator to enter the garden world on his own does not facilitate the same effect that Virgil's release of Dante has in

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<sup>73</sup> Chaucer, *Boece*, 5, Pr. 6, 171-76.

*Purgatorio*, but instead ushers him into an utterly non-transcendent scene that values the humor and desire of human time. Through Africanus and Lady Nature, Chaucer shows a face of Lady Philosophy that resists ascent in the Platonic model, or at least authorizes mortal experience before the timelessness of the afterlife.

#### CONCLUSION

The *Parliament of Fowls* has often been considered one of the most closed (and “most polished”<sup>74</sup>) of Chaucer’s dream visions in that it ends in the frame-narrative with which it begins. It also stages natural, astronomical, human, and divine revolutions that appear to accommodate a Platonic order to earthly experience. However, as this chapter has shown, Chaucer manipulates the closed conventions of the dream vision and alters the course of circularity to stress the discontinuity of dreaming and reading experiences. Chaucer claims the genre for his poem, but reveals how the form and the nature of the dream vision free him from constraints. As a microcosm, the dream world is modeled after the dream of the book, which establishes a certain framework, and even remains under the sphere of its influence; ultimately, however, the dreamer departs from the content and form of the book. Chaucer tests the difference between reading the dream and experiencing the dream, particularly with regard to the knowledge one receives. According to Piero Boitani, the vision and the dream reveal “a penetration of the human spirit into a realm beyond the confines of ordinary experience, into a dimension where one discovers absolute truths and ontological realities...nearly always there is a

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<sup>74</sup> Kathryn L. Lynch, “Introduction to *The Parliament of Fowls*,” in Chaucer, *Dream Visions and Other Poems*, ed. Kathryn L. Lynch (New York: Norton, 2007), 93.

prophecy to be extracted and decoded.”<sup>75</sup> However, Chaucer resists the inevitability of the genre’s powers by showing the relative success of learning in the narrator’s process of reading and, by contrast, the narrator’s process of dreaming. The Ciceronian subtext demands an attention to where and when learning takes place.

Furthermore, Chaucer shows that the phenomenological temporality of reading undercuts the chronology of the book that is read, to challenge the ideas of duration, volition, common profit, experience, temporal and atemporal. The sequence of reading-turned-dreaming challenges the sense of closure implicit in the completion of a Platonic revolution, opening the circle up to more discontinuous and sporadic movement and experience. By undermining the temporality of the old book, the peregrinations of the narrator’s dream world function similarly to Geoffrey’s reading in the *House of Fame* and, like Geoffrey, the narrator grows able to create his own narrative—to “rede” and write—in a way that articulates the malleability, rather than singularity of time.

In the poem, Chaucer moves toward the plurality of perspectives by exploiting both the literal cacophony of the birds and the more metaphorical sense of diverse and layered voices. The narrator’s dream progressively deconstructs the univocal authoritative voice of the Ciceronian narrative and relies on other texts of the narrator’s evidently multilevel mental library. Therefore, it is less useful to characterize the poem in terms of binaries—for instance, of “Ciceronian ethics or amatory escapades, earnest or game, profit of play”—than to imagine the poem modeling an always shifting dialectic of perspectives by placing the dreamer in varying

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<sup>75</sup> Piero Boitani, *English Medieval Narrative*, trans. Joan Krakover Hall (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1982), 71.

physical orientations to the earth, through which he can “see time” differently.<sup>76</sup> After all, the ability to experience time at all, in Aristotelian theory, depends on motion.<sup>77</sup> Working against the totalizing perspectives of allegory and the upward movement of transcendence, the dream instead draws the dreaming narrator back down to earth in a humbling act of defiance against visionary voyeurism. Shifting perspectives show something that perhaps reading old books cannot achieve in itself; to “rede” has many values and seems to encompass the act of experience.

Indeed, the *Parliament of Fowls* in its entirety shows the extent to which the activity of reading is dynamic, not idle; the narrator reads intently (“ful faste”) and eagerly (“yerne”) (20-1). And yet, it is the narrator’s dream that leads Chaucer to reconceive of the cyclical process as a journey, generating possibilities for new narratives resistant to temporal singularity and moreover the necessity of destination. While the poem begins with the certainty that *auctores* will guarantee new knowledge and ends with the use of the frame, it also concludes with a sense of the optative, the “hope” that the narrator will read something in the future to improve his condition. The narrator reinforces the book as the source of the dream; having awoken from it, he says:

I wok, and othere bokes tok me to,  
To reede upon, and yit I rede alwey.  
I hope, ywis, to rede so som day  
That I shal mete som thyng for to fare  
The bet, and thus to rede I nyl nat spare.  
(695-99)

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<sup>76</sup> Minnis, Scattergood, and Smith suggest also that this “binary thinking” is “inadequate,” in *Oxford Guides to Chaucer*, 253.

<sup>77</sup> Aristotle, *Physics*, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation, Volume One*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), Book IV.

Thus, despite its recognizable frame-ending, the closing passage of the *Parliament of Fowls* proves open-ended, like the broken-off lines at the end of the *House of Fame*, similarly undermining the men of great authority. In the *Parliament of Fowls*, Chaucer's resistance to temporal closure is grounded in the meaning of the poem, rather than its form, defying the sense of an ending.

The narrator here emphasizes how the reading and dreaming acts constitute not so much a teleological process of circularity as a prospective future. These acts are deeply connected to literary production; the opening proverb of the poem emphasizes the labor of writing poetry, stressing process rather than product and anticipating the perpetual deferral of debate in the garden of love in the dream world. The "craft" of writing is figured as a task inviting a long commitment of labor, or "dredful joye," but the frustrating experience of incompleteness extends the duration of time in a way that is ultimately productive. Chaucer's narrator, whose somnambulant journey through the dream world is in direct opposition to the goal-oriented journey of the *Dream of Scipio*'s Platonist protagonist, evokes what David Lawton notes as Michel de Certeau's equation of "walking with writing," where he presents walking "in terms of pedestrian speech acts and rhetoric, with its turns (tours) and detours," revealing "less of the architect's sense of a predictable teleology than the archaeologist's mood of not knowing what may be found."<sup>78</sup>

As a result, the Boethian philosophy at the heart of the poem might manifest not as a lesson on cyclicity in mortal time, but rather as a celebration of individual volition in a world controlled above all by God. In Book V, Boethius anxiously addresses the paradox of free will and predestination: "It semeth...to repugnen and to contrarien gretly, that God knoweth byforn

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<sup>78</sup> David Lawton, "English literary voices, 1350-1500," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Culture*, ed. Andrew Galloway (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 246.

alle thinges and that ther is any fredom of liberte.”<sup>79</sup> Boethius imagines that this “freedom,” or free will, can only be destroyed with the “purveaunce of God.”<sup>80</sup> Lady Philosophy responds, referring to the *auctoritas* of Cicero, “I suppose that ther be prescience, but that it ne putteth no necessite to thingis; thanne trowe I that thilke selve fredom of wil schal duellen al hool and absolut and unbounden.”<sup>81</sup> She resolves the dialogue, preoccupied with proving the existence of free will, in favor of the existence of free will. This notion of agency implies that an individual constructs his own sense of time; although Boethius fears his lack of control and choice in the time of necessity, Lady Philosophy ensures the multiplicity of mortal paths before the Platonic postmortem return to God in the afterlife. Chaucer’s dream thus celebrates not the Boethian rejection of the mortal gaze, but rather the Boethian concept of free will, and through not only the narrator who wanders, increasingly undirected, through the dream world, but also through the birds whose right to choice Lady Nature repeatedly emphasizes and even extends through the extension of time.

Finally, the narrator’s reading of the *Dream of Scipio* seems to foreshadow the complex engagement with the Platonic conception of time and perspective in Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*, and the intersections between natural and divine philosophy in *A Treatise on the Astrolabe*. Astronomical references in *The Parliament of Fowls* play a role in characterizing the temporality of the narrator’s dream world, naturalizing the Platonic conception of time and movement by figuring the experience of circularity in mortal terms. Africanus’s explanation that every star returns to its origin evokes both Platonic philosophy and Ptolemaic astronomy, in which the earth, fixed and motionless, is the central sphere surrounded by revolving heavenly

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<sup>79</sup> Chaucer, *Boece*, 5, Pr. 3, 5-7.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 72-3.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, Pr., 4, 51-5.

bodies. Astronomy enables readers to see that Scipio's celestial perspective and the narrator's grounded viewpoint are not necessarily binary, as the Platonic model suggests, since it calls attention to the limitations of the totalizing perspective of Boethian-Ciceronian voyeurism, even if this perspective is productive in reminding the student of the place of an individual in the cosmos. While Chaucer resists this feature of the *contemptus mundi* tradition, he shows the benefits of an astronomical interest that reorients an individual more concretely in earthly time and space, albeit without focusing on transcendence alone.

The *Parliament of Fowls* thus anticipates the ending of *Troilus and Criseyde*, in which Troilus's ascent, while not fully an experience of transcendence, still offers an opportunity for Chaucer to describe the materiality of the spheres. In Book V of *Troilus and Criseyde*, after Diomedes defeats Troilus in battle, Troilus moves from earth to the heavens:

And whan that he was slayn in this manere,  
His lighte goost ful blisfully is went  
Up to the holownesse of the eighth spere,  
In converse letinge every element;  
And ther he saugh, with ful avysement,  
The erratik sterres, herkeninge armonye  
With sownes fulle of hevenish melodye.

And doun from thennes faste he gan avyse,  
This litel spot of erthe, that with the see  
Embraced is, and fully gan despise  
This wrecched world, and held al vanitee  
To respect of the pleyn felicitee  
That is in hevene above; and at the laste,  
Ther he was slayn, his loking doun he caste  
(1807-1820)

As Troilus ascends into a voyeuristic position above earth, Chaucer insinuates the arrival of a Boethian perspective by calling attention to the "litel spot," which bears resemblance to Lady Philosophy's characterization of the earth as a mere "prikke." The immensity of the universe deems the earth, by comparison, unimportant, and Troilus's feeling of spite for the "wrecched

world” suggests that his ascent has conditioned him to adopt the viewpoint of an authoritative figure within the *contemptus mundi* tradition.

I will return to this moment in the next chapter on *Troilus and Criseyde*, but in the framework of the *Parliament of Fowls*, the scene of Troilus’s ascent illustrates how Chaucer, while often temporarily offering his characters otherworldly perspectives, and thus inviting comparisons to works within the medieval visionary tradition, also consistently re-situates his characters in relation to the earth. Chaucer includes the detail of the eighth sphere, which, to his contemporaries, referred to the sphere of fixed stars, and the “holownesse” of the sphere he temporarily occupies indicates that Troilus is positioned on the concave side of the sphere, causing him to face the convex surface of earth and look physically downward and temporally backward. Troilus’s so-called celestial perspective temporarily resembles the viewpoint of Scipio and Africanus in the *Dream of Scipio*, but the astronomical allusions in this scene help Chaucer to resist closed and moralizing readings of Troilus as a triumphant Boethian or Ciceronian figure, who is no longer beholden to earthly concerns and who has achieved a level of transcendence that not even Boethius achieves at the end of the *Boece*. Chaucer hints that Troilus actually fails to detach himself from the mundane world; rather than using ascent as an opportunity to escape the tragedy of his past life, Troilus is left literally “loking doun” and sneering at his enemies. Troilus’s disdainful laugh only reinforces the idea that he lacks the loving distance that would otherwise enable a productive engagement with the world.

Unlike Dante, who emphasizes his dreamer’s experience of transcendence by actually and cataphatically visualizing the afterlife in the *Commedia*, Chaucer refuses to detach his dreamers from mortal time. He teases the experience of divine vision and knowing only to re-entrench his protagonists in more earthly and temporally disjunctive worlds, which elicit the

plural and generative possibilities of an immanent temporality. By undermining the dream vision as a medium that necessitates the dreamers' escape from earth into the future of immortal bliss, Chaucer looks ahead to *Troilus and Criseyde*, a narrative which, as I will argue in the next chapter, explores the virtues of Fortune's wheel as much as it exploits the more terrifying turns of history.

**“Lokyng” into Time: Boethian Subjectivities and the  
Construction of Temporality in *Troilus and Criseyde***

INTRODUCTION

Chaucer weaves histories, or what he calls “old tyme,” into the worlds of his dream visions, confronting the narrators who stem from Chaucer’s fourteenth-century context—if not from Chaucer’s own persona—with figures of antiquity, conjured ghosts of the past, and fragments of historical records.<sup>1</sup> The previous chapters demonstrate how these encounters vivify the past so as to make it, in its many versions, simultaneous with the present, and how this simultaneity helps Chaucer pose questions about the uses of the past for the present. In the *Book of the Duchess*, the griever’s meditation on a personal past reveals the limitations of remembrance, whereas the narrator’s detachment from a private, traumatic past in favor of a more plural experience of time suggests instances in which living with history can be productive. In the *House of Fame*, gaps in material records widen the space for alternative textual temporalities, raising doubts about the status of historiography as a trustful source for knowledge. The *Parliament of Fowls* multiplies ways of seeing out of “olde bokes” to celebrate the perspectives of characters embedded in the historical, earthly temporality of the poem’s dream world while recognizing the benefits of a distanced, transcendent vision.<sup>2</sup>

In *Troilus and Criseyde*, Chaucer not only focuses on perspective as a figure for thinking about time, but also reifies anachronism into a political heuristic for his readers; the act of perceiving multiple temporalities highlights the crisis of his readers’ own historical moment

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<sup>1</sup> Chaucer, *Miller’s Tale* in the *Canterbury Tales* in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), 50. Also in the *Boece*, Chaucer refers to, “the olde age of tyme,” Book 3, Pr. 5, 6.

<sup>2</sup> Chaucer, *Parliament of Fowls*, 24.

within the broader temporal scheme, forcing them to recognize the ramifications of the past upon the future they cannot perceive themselves. Spatial anachronisms, in particular, blur the boundaries separating ancient Troy, the primary setting of Chaucer's poem, and fourteenth-century London, Chaucer's own city, to expose the precarious implications of the popular claim that London descended from Troy and, generally, the illustrious linear model of *translatio imperii*, or transfer of power. In *Bloodless Genealogies of the French Middle Ages: Translatio, Kinship, and Metaphor*, Zrinka Stahuljak discusses *translatio imperii* as a legitimizing tool for rulers in the Middle Ages:

The coincidence of *translatio* and genealogy, in particular of *translatio* and dynastic genealogy, has often been read as a propaganda tool of reigning dynasties, in particular of the French Capetian kings in the High Middle Ages; in other words, the uninterrupted Trojan origin legitimizes the French monarchy in its claim to power, as well as in its claim of continuous hereditary succession to the throne and of superiority in learning above all other kingdoms.<sup>3</sup>

While the twelfth-century romances of antiquity that inscribed the genealogical connection between the Trojan past and the medieval present “seem to perpetuate the image of transfer, of *translatio*, as that of a stable hereditary structure,” Stahuljak notes that these texts also, simultaneously, “show the transfer of power that occurs following the annihilation of the cities, as well as a near genocide of their inhabitants.”<sup>4</sup> The medieval historiographical tradition of Troy legitimized English rule, as it did French monarchical power; however, like the French claims,

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<sup>3</sup> Zrinka Stahuljak, *Bloodless Genealogies of the French Middle Ages: Translatio, Kinship, and Metaphor* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2005), 143. Stahuljak also makes the argument that “genealogy functions as a metaphor for *translatio*.”

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 147. The romances to which Stahuljak refers are *Le Roman de Thèbes*, *Le Roman de Troie*, *Le Roman d'Enéas*, and *Le Roman de Brut*. Together these texts expose the conflict within *translatio imperii*: “the model of *translatio imperii* that the romances generate is at odds with the genealogical frame that it constructs and that the royal ideology adopts.”

Londoners' sense of entitlement to a Trojan origin during the years of Chaucer's lifetime was as problematic as it was politically authenticating.<sup>5</sup>

In light of this historical and historiographical context, while the anachronisms in *Troilus and Criseyde* evoke what were considered fashionable genealogical connections between Troy and London, they also make the poem into a cautionary tale for London. Given Chaucer's familiarity with the affairs of his city, he might have thought London to be on the precipice of a Trojan collapse, given the civic instabilities and shifting political loyalties in Richard II's court.<sup>6</sup> Chaucer wrote the poem between two particularly violent and disruptive events in London's political and social history—the Great Rising of 1381 and the Wonderful Parliament of 1386—and while he stages it as a retreat from London's tumultuous present into a noble and ancient past, the poem's preoccupation with the patterns of historical repetition reinforce instead the haunting nature of the Troy story. A constant reminder that ancient Troy operates within a macrocosmic pattern of rise and fall that threatens to perpetuate beyond its particular moment in history, anachronisms in *Troilus and Criseyde* force Chaucer's readers to keep the present in mind as they escape into the past. Emphasizing a cyclical model of time, Chaucer places Troy on a continuum with not only the readers' own fourteenth-century London, but also ancient Thebes, evoking once more the transfer of power articulated by medieval genealogical narratives and the

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<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of the *appeal* of Troy in fourteenth-century London, see Sylvia Federico, *New Troy: Fantasies of Empire in the Late Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

<sup>6</sup> Concerning the Troy tradition, Francis Ingledew argues for a Virgilian narrative that legitimizes reigns in "The Book of Troy and the Genealogical Construction of History: The Case of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae*," *Speculum* 69 (1994): 665-704. However, James Simpson exposes an "Other" tradition of Troy narratives, including Guido delle Colonne's *Historia destructionis Troiae*, which is "anti-Galfridian insofar as it makes no serious play with the genealogical potential of the Troy narrative" and "anti-Virgilian insofar as it holds out no hope whatsoever for the divinely sanctioned foundation of empire," in "The Other Book of Troy: Guido delle Colonne's *Historia destructionis Troiae* in Fourteenth- and Fifteenth-Century England," *Speculum* 73 (1998): 404. Chaucer follows a Trojan narrative template that challenges imperial determinism and "holds no promise of transition from catastrophe to empire." See also C. David Benson, "'O Nyce World': What Chaucer Really Found in Guido delle Colonne's History of Troy," *The Chaucer Review* 13 (1979): 308-315, and Lee Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 90-99.

way in which the model not only reveals a precarious link between these cities, but also in itself “contaminates” the genealogy.<sup>7</sup>

Chaucer also puts additional pressure on readers to “see time” wisely and ethically by calling attention to the characters’ different constructions of temporality. Unlike Chaucer’s readers, who are able to see the temporalities of the Trojan narrative from a distance, the characters within *Troilus and Criseyde* are trapped by the beleaguering forces of history and, with the exception of the city’s soothsayers, are too enmeshed within the affairs of Troy and their personal lives to expand their vision of Trojan time. The situatedness of their encounters prevents them from identifying the echoes reverberating between the spheres of romance and history until all too late, when the inevitable turn of public affairs breaks down the microcosm of the lovers’ bliss. What Chaucer’s readers see as the single temporal dimension of the past, the Trojan characters perceive distinctly as past, present, and future, and they repeatedly use a vocabulary of temporality that reveals their fragmented sense of the future, always partially contingent and never fully knowable. Unlike the readers, they lack the acute sense of the interrelationship between past and present that would otherwise help them perceive a pattern of historical repetition and make ethical judgments, as a result.

Chaucer articulates the perspectival differences between characters and readers by invoking Boethian ideas of vision and temporality throughout his poem. Between Criseyde, Troilus, and Pandarus, the repeated allusions to failed vision and temporal understanding indicate that the characters lack the ideal perspective of Boethius’s work; their failed vision becomes a function of their inability to use the past to deploy judgment for the present and future. Chaucer suggests that always overshadowing their disjointed visions of time are the narrator’s and readers’ perfected Boethian perspective; *these* seers know the ending of the Troy story before the

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<sup>7</sup> Stahuljak, *Bloodless Genealogies*, 153.

beginning. As I have written earlier, in the *Boece*, this latter perspective belongs to the Boethius who hypothetically succeeds in his “consolation” project, acquiring the consciousness and distance to see past, present, and future as a continuous whole in the vein of Neoplatonic philosophy. By implicitly aligning his readers’ perspective of time in *Troilus and Criseyde* with Boethius’s perspective in the *Boece*, Chaucer asks his readers to occupy a position of philosophical distance and to think critically about the place of both Troy and London within a broad and recursive temporal pattern.

However, Chaucer does not develop the Boethian intertext of his poem to an endpoint, where he moralizes about the ancient characters’ epistemological deficiencies and celebrates the contemporary readers’ and narrator’s ethical high ground. The contrast between pre- and post-transformation Boethian perspectives does not privilege the celestial and distanced viewpoint, disentangled from the web of mortal experience, or doom the characters to moral censure when they fail to understand the implied philosophical school of the poem. Even in the *Boece*, readers can see how the journey is not always about the *telos*; as Johnson writes, the *Consolation*, Boethius’s original work in Latin, “shows the gradual *process* by which nourishing and salvific lessons take hold in the mind of a narrator-protagonist-author” and offers “a real-time performance of Boethius’s own psychological renewal.”<sup>8</sup>

Using Boethius, Chaucer presents different ways of “seeing time” that refocus attention on the logic governing the characters’ decisions. Criseyde’s regrets and Troilus’s complaints are both articulated through metaphors of limited sight and temporal consciousness. When Criseyde laments her lack of prudence, she articulates it as an issue of a “lakked” eye, regretfully hinting

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<sup>8</sup> Johnson, *Practicing Literary Theory in the Middle Ages*, 8. More broadly in her book, Johnson uses this idea of a real-time “spectacle” of transformation to trace “a parallel process of transformative consolation for a reader by facilitating identification between that reader and Boethius himself,” as well as other parallel instances of ethical education in medieval works, 8.

that foresight would have protected her name within historical records (V, 745). Her humble resignation to her inability to see—to know time—invites readers to sympathize with her position. While active remembrance would have changed the outcome of Criseyde’s story, Chaucer also uses the Boethian metaphor of vision to suggest the importance of forgetting. As I discussed at the end of Chapter 3, Troilus’s gaze from his heightened and distanced position in the eighth sphere is backward, facing the earth and inciting Troilus to cackle at the human figures below. In the *Boece*, remembering the true “home” of God requires Boethius to forget his earthly memories, but the passage in *Troilus and Criseyde* stresses the orientation of Troilus’s sight to suggest that history continues to haunt his consciousness and that Troilus at this moment has not yet attained the transcendent, celestial eye, despite having been lifted into an ethereal atmosphere.<sup>9</sup> In contrast to the eponymous characters, Calchas and Cassandra have eyes that peer into the future, as if equipped with a lengthened Boethian perspective; Calchas can even act on his prophetic visions.

Despite the firmly Neoplatonic bent of the *Boece* independent of Chaucer’s other works, in *Troilus and Criseyde*, the Boethian framework validates even the flawed constructions of time, never condoning the *contemptus mundi* philosophy of particular contemporary works. In fact, Chaucer often undermines the notion that the prophetic visionary inherently possesses an ethical uprightness. The frame of the poem, which centralizes the narrator’s voice, advocates both the nearness to and distance from the Troy story; the narrator, hardly detached from the characters whose lives inspire his storytelling, does not see earthly experience as wasteful, even if it is pitiable. Instead, he appears to comprehend Lady Philosophy’s lesson that time requires “the sweigh of [Fortune’s] turnynge wheel,” if human beings are to obey her “governaunce,” and

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<sup>9</sup> Troilus here evokes the Black Knight’s destructive privileging of past time in the *Book of the Duchess*.

thus that mortal history is inseparable from Fortune's instability.<sup>10</sup> Not only would Fortune elude her own essence if she were stable ("Yif Fortune bygan to duelle stable, she cessede thanne to ben Fortune"<sup>11</sup>); in addition, removing conversion and change would eliminate the possibility for the miraculous and unexpected experiences instigated by Cupid's arrow, the events that seem to occur *ex nihilo*.

Chaucer capitalizes on the metaphor of Fortune to dramatize the weals and woes of his Trojan characters, whose interpretations of human experience find validation in the universal notion of mutability. When Troilus falls in love, he becomes "subgit" to change, and the narrator, excited for Troilus, exclaims, "Blissed be Love, that kan thus folk converte!" (I, 231, 308). After this change, Troilus discovers a (temporary) flat plane of stability on the top of Fortune's wheel, as foreshadowed by the song of Antigone, whose declaration of the security of love ("Now woot I wel, ther is no peril inne") helps Criseyde "converte" to loving Troilus (II, 875, 903).

According to Jessica Rosenfeld, readers of *Troilus and Criseyde* have wanted to interpret the Boethian terms that the characters use to articulate worldly felicity of Book III as either sincere or ironic, and thus as reflections of either the narrator's misidentification of erotic desire with true happiness or the characters' mistaken understanding of the path to true bliss. But this either-or tendency of scholarship ignores more "complicated problems," such as the fact that Boethius's text "also gives voice to the impossibility and undesirability of renouncing earthly attachments."<sup>12</sup> In fact, Chaucer uses the *Boece* as a source from which to appropriate familiar

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<sup>10</sup> Chaucer, *Boece*, 2, Pr. 1, 112, 108.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 113-14.

<sup>12</sup> Rosenfeld, "The Doubled Joys of *Troilus and Criseyde*," 41. Alastair Minnis also argues that commentaries on Book 1 of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* reassessed the value of practical goods to make room for the possibilities of mortal happiness in, "The Biennial Chaucer Lecture: 'I speke of folk in seculer estaat': Vernacularity and Secularity in the Age of Chaucer," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 27 (2005): 25-58.

and relatable expressions of woe, communicating the tumultuous nature of love in Troy in terms his readers would know. Moreover, Aristotelianizing commentaries of the late Middle Ages would have validated what Chaucer also celebrates: the idea that “instability and shared happiness go hand in hand.”<sup>13</sup> Rather than serving as a condemnation of courtly, secular love, Book III of *Troilus and Criseyde* shows how the “conversions” of earthly affairs can offer pleasure and education.

I argue that, while the characters show a limited sense of historical recurrence, they intermittently demonstrate a degree of temporal consciousness that may determine their decisions across the narrative. More specifically, it is the Boethian use of vision as a metaphor for insight into time, which is absent from Chaucer’s main source-text for the Troy story, Boccaccio’s *Il Filostrato*, that helps Chaucer construct a logic between the historical circumstances that influence perspectives and the choices characters make as tragedy unravels. This development shapes how readers should interpret the characters in *Troilus and Criseyde* next to a wider tradition of Troy narratives, and does away with the notion of a single Boethian subjectivity. Chaucer dispels the myth that his eponymous characters should elicit conclusive moralizations.

Chaucer instead multiplies Boethian subjectivities by drawing out the characters’ very different senses of time, chance, and the forces of destiny. In doing so, he proliferates the theories of time posed in the dream visions. Furthermore, the philosophical discourses of chance and fortune throughout the poem seem Foucaultian in the sense that they show how the characters miss the “search” that “assumes the existence of immobile forms that precede the

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<sup>13</sup> Rosenfeld, “The Doubled Joys of *Troilus and Criseyde*,” 45. In addition, Boethius’s commentaries on Aristotle’s *Categories*, *Peri hermeneias*, *Prior Analytics*, *Topics*, and *Physics* show his own interest in Aristotelian exegesis.

external world of accident and succession.”<sup>14</sup> Accident and succession become guiding principles for Chaucer’s characters, ultimately distracting his readers from the need for etiological origins and teleological ends, and redirecting attention to the process of finding distance amid the currents of history, which draw them into positions of temporal entrenchment.

This chapter will return to the way in which anachronisms serve an important function for the readers, in that they make the past into an ethical dimension for thinking about the present, and, specifically, how to live in Chaucer’s London. The first and second sections establish the idea of the dialectic of nearness and distance in Chaucer’s poem. The Boethian intertext, which I discuss in the subsequent sections, furthers the cautionary role of anachronism, implying the universality of the Boethian experience for *anyone* entrenched in historical time, including Chaucer’s readers, who, upon withdrawing from their books, resume their lives in mortal history, beset by a similarly fragmented vision of their own time. But Boethian perspectivalism also functions more broadly, showing how Chaucer undercuts the absolute and incontestable nature of the historiographical tradition. In the context of his earlier works, it is another example of his skepticism of the accuracy of historical transmission. Thus, while anachronisms are central to this chapter, the conflation of past and present sets the ground for a more nuanced exploration of temporality vis-à-vis Boethian philosophy.

Ultimately, this chapter returns to the specific context of Chaucer’s London and argues that *Troilus and Criseyde* uses Boethius to advocate the readers’ loving distance from Troy. The distance is necessary for Chaucer’s readers to value prudence and to perceive temporal patterns, and yet Chaucer retains moral ambiguity and loving sympathy, humbly acknowledging the challenge of instrumentalizing visions of time.

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<sup>14</sup> Foucault, *Language, counter-memory, practice*, 142.

## 1. CHAUCER'S BOETHIAN NARRATOR AND THE DISTANCE OF STORYTELLING

Chaucer's Boethius arrives immediately at the opening of *Troilus and Criseyde*, through both the narrator's allusion to the structure of the forthcoming narrative and his evocation of Boethian suffering. In the first stanza, the narrator compresses the essential story of Troilus and Criseyde into only four lines and then invokes the fury Thesiphone in an epic plea for help with his writing, while shedding tears onto his page:

The double sorwe of Troilus to tellen,  
That was the kyng Priamus sone of Troye,  
In lovyng, how his aventures fellen  
Fro wo to wele, and after out of joie,  
My purpos is, er that I parte fro ye.  
Thesiphone, thow help me for t'endite  
Thise woful vers, that wepen as I write.  
(I, 1-7)

The narrator concludes with the Boethian conceit, "Thise woful vers, that wepen as I write," mirroring the first line of Meter 1 of the *Boece*: "Allas! I wepyng, am constreyned to bygynnen vers of sorwful matere...and drery vers of wretchidnesse weten my face with verray teres."<sup>15</sup> In *Troilus and Criseyde*, Chaucer uses the same alliteration that he uses in the lines of the *Boece*, but here he reaches his point on the subject of his weeping more quickly, replacing the phrase "vers of sorwful matere" in the *Boece* with actual verses that explain, however summatively, the sorrowful matter to be explored.<sup>16</sup> This final line suggests the complexity of the narrator's Boethian subjectivity. His suffering stems not from his personal trauma of loss—his own history—but instead from the tragic dimensions of the Troy narrative. His storytelling role, rather than his individual experience as a victim, produces his tears.

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<sup>15</sup> Chaucer, *Boece*, 1, Metr. 1., 1-4.

<sup>16</sup> According to Danuta Shanzer, Boethius, in his Latin *Consolation*, alludes to the proem to the *Aeneid* in his opening lines, "Carmina qui quondam studio florente," in "Interpreting the *Consolation*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Boethius*, ed. John Marenbon (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009). This point makes Chaucer's Boethian appropriation at the beginning of his Troy narrative all the more fitting.

The opening of *Troilus and Criseyde* strategically differs from that of *Il Filostrato*, in which the narrator's distress over Love ignites his desire to write about Criseyde's departure from Troilus. Boccaccio's detail about the narrator's personal experience comes only several stanzas later in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* when he, a self-proclaimed servant of the God of Love, declares to know the pain Love inflicts upon "Loves folk" (I, 34). His pity for lovers reaches such depths that he sacrifices his time and commits himself to the "travail" of composing a poem about them (I, 21). The narrator's ostensibly selfless endeavor "to pleyne"—to be "the sorwful instrument"—in order to help lovers is qualified by his humble phrase, "as I kan" (I, 10-11). This phrase not only parallels him with the narrators of Chaucer's dream visions who claim to do their best in storytelling, but also suggests his potential bias and feelings of attachment to the characters and the narrative (I, 10-11). Chaucer establishes that the narrator is a victim in his own right, even if he is made one through the privilege of omniscience and vicarious living granted by his storytelling occupation.

Nonetheless, Chaucer's repositioning of the narrator's personal details, shortly after explaining the purpose of his story, enables him to foreground the Boethian intertext. While the narrator intends to construct a story about lovers, the first stanza indicates this will be a narrative tracing the patterns of mutability in a scheme larger than *Troilus and Criseyde*. The movement "fro wo to wele, and after out of joie" describes human experience in terms of a Boethian cycle, a point that is reiterated in the structure of the narrative (I, 4). Chaucer suggests that the poem will imitate the five-book layout of the *Boece* and that its *forma tractatus* will parallel the movement of Boethius's work; the "double sorwe" is structurally significant, indicating a recursiveness at the core of Boethius's complaint (I, 1). In addition to indicators that the narrative ahead will evoke Boethius structurally, this stanza reinforces the Boethian focus on the

entanglement of personal and public lives within the historical world. It foretells that Troilus will be microcosm to Troy, as it features the formula of epic narrative, a genre concerned with national histories, and makes reference to Priam, recalling Troy as a city encompassing more victims than Troilus and Criseyde alone. Thus, while the narrator eventually immerses himself in the love story, his recognition of patterns and consequences in history reveal his fundamentally Boethian temporal consciousness, which reappears explicitly in the final book, when, echoing line 4 of the first stanza of Book 1, the narrator articulates the course of political history in terms of Boethian mutability: “as regnes shal be flitted / Fro folk in folk” (V, 1544-45).<sup>17</sup>

These examples show how the narrator of *Troilus and Criseyde* intermittently alienates himself from the emotional tumult of his characters to re-establish himself as all-knowing storyteller. He builds on the confidence of Geoffrey in the *House of Fame*, who questions the validity of the history inscribed on Venus’s temple walls: the narrator of *Troilus and Criseyde* knows with certainty the outcome of the Trojan narrative, expressing his sense of the future on multiple occasions. In Book I, he presents the background to the Troy story—the Greek siege on Troy precipitated by Paris’s affairs with Helen—as if universally known among his readers (“Yt is wel wist”) (I, 57). From the private experiences of lovers to the public transitions between the reigns of kings, he grasps the role of Fortune in the historical process and, unlike the narrators of the dream visions, who are wanderers in their own stories, he seeks to resist entrapment by Love, even if he may have once been its victim. The narrator’s statement of foreknowledge detaches him from the temporality of his characters, aligning his perspective with Boethius’s “devyne

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<sup>17</sup> Lady Philosophy conveys the political cycle in similar terms of passing time and change: “But, certes, the olde age of tyme passed, and ek the present tyme now, is ful of ensaumples how that kynges ben chaungyd into wrecchidnesse out of hir welefulnesse.” Chaucer, *Boece*, 3, Pr. 5, 2-4

sighte,” which “renneth toforn and seeth alle futures, and clepith hem ayen and retorneth hem to the presence of his propre knowynge.”<sup>18</sup>

The narrator’s distanced position of authority allows him to raise an ethical challenge to his readers. He asks the lovers among them to remember past adversity during their reading experience:

But ye loveres, that bathen in gladnesse,  
If any drope of pyte in yow be,  
Remembreth yow on passed hevynesse  
That ye han felt, and on the adversite  
Of othere folk, and thynketh how that ye  
Han felt that Love dorste yow displese,  
Or ye han wonne hym with to gret an ese.  
(I, 22-8)

The narrator’s plea to the readers to take pity on the characters foretells the dominant love story, in which amor makes characters susceptible to “mysaventure” (I, 706). In this gesture of *captatio benevolentiae*, in the vein of Virgil’s appeal to Cato through the remembrance of earthly love in Dante’s *Purgatorio*, the narrator shows that memory—here, the memory of their own misfortune—intensifies sympathetic response to the love story. When he insists, “remembreth yow on passed hevynesse,” Chaucer’s narrator invites readers to keep their memory at the forefront of their consciousness in order to keep a perspective on the present active at the same time as they submerge themselves into the past.<sup>19</sup> Seeing past and present simultaneously helps Chaucer’s readers “see time” occurring in a different way than is natural to them. And while here the narrator makes a connection between memory and love, the advice to activate the interplay between past and present ultimately pertains to a political consciousness, as well, since the world of *amor* quickly becomes subsumed by the world of public affairs. The narrator’s frequent

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<sup>18</sup> Chaucer, *Boece*, 5, Pr. 6, 266-69.

<sup>19</sup> The narrator’s instruction to remember recalls Lady Philosophy’s instruction in Book I to remember his origins as he begins his educational journey. Chaucer, *Boece*, 1, Pr. 4.

alternations of address further imply that his readership includes more than lovers alone, and that the narrator intends to do more than solicit sympathy for lovers; he speaks to everyone from these lovers to the “wise, proude, and worthi folkes alle” to the “yonge, fresshe folkes” to the scribe he implicitly warns to “moral Gower” and “philosophical Strode” (I, 233; V, 1835, 1856, 1857).

To remember actively while focusing on the present yields the same effect of temporal simultaneity that is produced by Chaucer’s anachronisms. The injunction to “see time” whole inhibits readers from forgetting the place of the Troy story within the larger scheme of history, and moreover, ensures their awareness of their particular place in relation to Troy. Chaucer secures a link between the readers’ perspective and the narrator’s temporally-omniscient viewpoint, even while Chaucer’s narrator, in inviting readers’ pity on the characters, encourages the experience of losing oneself to the emotional grips of a love story. Chaucer’s temporal tactics thus construct the past as an ethical dimension for understanding the present, and the anachronisms of the poem ultimately ask readers not to be, like Troilus and Criseyde, blind to grander historical movement.

## 2. SPATIAL ANACHRONISMS: TROILUS’S TROY AND CHAUCER’S LONDON

In the dream visions, which defy the constraints of reality and ordinary experience, Chaucer wields the freedom from sequential time to drop the antique emperor Octavian into a medieval hunting scene, or to feature Circe and Simon Magus side-by-side in a beryl-stone castle. But Chaucer appears to affix *Troilus and Criseyde* more so to the rules of the *Canterbury Tales*, which offers a social sketch of London evoking Chaucer’s historical time, than to those of

the dream vision category. The epic poem claims to retell a recorded historical narrative, as the narrator reminds his readers:

But how this town com to destruccion  
Ne falleth naught to purpos me to telle,  
For it were a long digression  
Fro my matere, and yow to long to dwelle.  
But the Troian gestes, as they felle,  
In Omer, or in Dares, or in Dite,  
Whoso that kan may rede hem as they write.  
(I, 141-47)

Even if the narrator deflects his interest in the concrete details of history, he establishes that the narrative will be set in a historical time and place and linked to an established historiographical tradition. As a result, *Troilus and Criseyde* anticipates a portrait of Trojan life.

Nevertheless, Chaucer reenacts the playful blurring of past and present found in the dream visions, now ambiguating the divide between ancient Troy and late medieval London through anachronisms of space and place. These anachronisms appear everywhere in the narrative, helping readers imagine a world in which Troy and London are collapsed cities. The love story of Troilus and Criseyde originates in a courtly spring festival at the Palladion, a scene Chaucer appropriates from Boccaccio but enhances by infusing details characteristic of medieval courtly lyric. The Trojan folk, themselves interested in past traditions, follow “observaunces olde” in April, the month in which “clothed is the mede / With newe grene,” and “swote smellen floures white and rede,” and in the ancient temple, amid the icons of pagan deities, are “so many a lady fressh and mayden bright, / Ful wel arayed,” as if medieval aristocrats, reinforcing the anachronism (I, 160, 156-57, 158, 166-67).

Through anachronisms, Chaucer every so often settles his readers into Troy, shaping the matter of an ancient city into a romance aesthetically available to his readers. Even the dramas of the characters’ individual consciousness are developed in terms familiar to readers of medieval

romance. The production that is Troilus's symptomology of love-sickness, for instance, draws on so many conventions of romance and Ovidian discourse that it helps to deflect the historical pulls cited in the frame of Book I. Chaucer also resists the imposition of history by constructing an architectural plan in which characters spiral inward until Book III: from within the town of Troy and the temple, to the dining room of Deiphebus's house, and finally to the intimate, enclosed space of the bedchamber. The lovers' physically narrowing path leads them to a private bower of bliss, but also directs readers away from the frame of Troy's impending fall to the crux of romance unraveling into the peak of an affair. Anachronistic representations of place reinforce the sense of nearness between medieval readers and characters occupying the domestic spheres of Troy.

However, by Book II, anachronisms also begin to raise questions about London's pride in a historiographical tradition that locates its origins in Troy. In the proem, Chaucer signals the shift from an innocent view of historical continuity to a perspective more deeply aware of the patterns of historical repetition. In the lines that open into Book II, he re-establishes the divisions between epochs:

Ye knowe ek that in forme of speche is chaunge  
Withinne a thousand yeer, and wordes tho  
That hadden pris, now wonder nyce and straunge  
Us thinketh hem, and yet thei spake hem so,  
And spedde as wel in love as men now do;  
Ek for to wynnen love in sondry ages,  
In sondry londes, sondry ben usages.  
(II, 22-8)

The narrator recognizes affinities between past and present, noting how the experiences in love are as familiar in old stories as they are in new ones. The repetition of "sondry" emphasizes the spatial and temporal universality of this experience; Morton W. Bloomfield even extracts a moral lesson from this passage, "we are all part of time's kingdom, and we are never allowed to forget

it.”<sup>20</sup> However, Chaucer’s narrator also indicates the changes that occur with the passage of time, making the behaviors of lovers seem less familiar (an odd point, given the medievalized courtliness of Chaucer’s Trojan lovers) and making words weird and even foolish (“nyce”). When the narrator explains how “in forme of speche is chaunge,” he features linguistics as another victim of time and mutability. Chaucer’s proem, interrupting the plot sequence of the romance, meditates on both the strangeness of the past and the connections between the past and the present. This fluctuation is an essential aspect of the storytelling strategy; given that the quality of being “sondry” is so universal, the narrator is able to insist that his story is worth paying attention to.

Along with the narrator’s own dialectic of attachment and detachment, the alternations of nearness and distance in this passage characterize the effects of anachronisms in Book II, where the boundaries between the bedroom and the battlefield begin to break down. Pandarus’s rhetorical associations between Troilus and military skill, and Criseyde’s obsession with the precarious state of Trojan affairs, elicit this sense of a breakdown. But the appearance of the haunting subtext of Thebes, in particular, strengthens the interconnection between public and private. Chaucer again settles his readers in the walls of Troy, this time by portraying a leisurely aristocratic reading of an ostensibly medievalized “romaunce” in a domestic drawing room of Troy (II, 100). Criseyde’s uncle, Pandarus, enters the reading club to inquire about the location of his niece:

Whan he was come unto his neces places,  
“Wher is my lady?” to hire folk quod he;  
And they hym tolde, and he forth in gan pace,  
And fond two othere ladys sete and she,  
Withinne a paved parlour, and they thre  
Herden a mayden reden hem the geste,  
Of the siege of Thebes, while hem leste.

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<sup>20</sup> Morton W. Bloomfield, “Distance and Predestination in *Troilus and Criseyde*,” *PMLA* 72 (1957), 17.

(II, 78-84)

This scene creates a parallel between Criseyde and Chaucer's own readers, as both read a historical narrative. However, this parallel also calls attention to the very differences between these readers. Criseyde's narrative is the story of Thebes. Furthermore, while the anachronisms in *Troilus and Criseyde* ultimately help readers perceive the pattern of historical repetition, Criseyde's embedded position in Troy fragments her vision of time and limits her ability to imagine the Theban tragedy as a precursor to her own experience. Chaucer's heuristic anachronism thus escapes Criseyde, whose terminological use of "romaunce" to describe her book, contrasting the narrator's more historicizing use of "geste," suggests her desire to deflect history into narrative epiphenomenon (II, 83)<sup>21</sup>:

This romaunce is of Thebes that we rede;  
And we han herd how that kyng Layus deyde  
Thorough Eddipus his sone, and al that dede;  
And here we stynten at thise lettres rede—  
How the bisshop, as the book kan telle,  
Amphiorax, fil thorough the ground to helle.  
(II, 100-105)

By offering Pandarus her synopsis, Criseyde demonstrates her knowledge of Theban political history. Alluding to the familial entanglements that precipitate internecine warfare, Criseyde says "we han herd how that kyng Layus deyde," where the verb "han herd" evokes a moment of the immediate past: together, the ladies listened to the selection on Laius's death. In addition, this verb, as it signifies a change from "we rede" in the previous line, conveys the sense that Criseyde has heard this story before. The collective "we" contributes to the impression of an oral culture

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<sup>21</sup> According to Ralph Hanna, the tradition of "gesta," or "public deeds," concentrates on "historical narrative, in which the past provides a model for the present," in "Alliterative Poetry," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Literature*, ed. David Wallace (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 504. The narrator's identification of Criseyde's book as a "geste," a sub-category of romance that would have attempted to create a sense of historical validity and a term evoking the sense attributed to the Theban War by medieval historians of universal chronicles, suggests that the narrator is attuned to historical precedent in this moment.

in which news spreads not by the physical encounter with the book, but instead by human sound and interaction, and in effect, it suggests that Criseyde knows the Theban story well. The public reading transitions from the portion on fraternal warfare to the tale of Amphiaraus, whom the earth swallowed, by Zeus's command, indicating further that Criseyde's expertise encompasses even the more detailed moments of the Theban narrative.

However, Criseyde's use of "romance" obscures the relevance of the story of Thebes to her own position and the community of Troy. "Romance" distracts from the fact of Cassandra's genealogical construction in Book V: that the ancestors of the Trojan characters in Chaucer's narrative participated in the war of the Seven against Thebes, another reminder that Thebes was not so distant nor so different from Troy.<sup>22</sup> When the narrator concludes his account of Cassandra's dream interpretation, he uses the term "gestes" one more time to refer to the Theban subject matter (V, 1510). Furthermore, Criseyde's point of noting the red rubric of her manuscript leaf—"thise lettres rede," where "rede" glaringly alludes to the act of reading and interpreting, in addition to signifying the pigment on the page—suggests her interest in a culture of reading, rather than in the historicity of these Trojan ancestors (II, 103).

The anachronism of the scene offers Chaucer's readers a degree of omniscience that in turn elicits a harsh view of Criseyde, but this view will be softened by her Boethian temporal consciousness, which helps to locate her in the reality of the present world. Besides, an examination of Pandarus in this scene shows how not only the pulls of "romance," but also his use of fiction and flippant disregard of history effectively thwart Criseyde's ability to "see time" from the distanced perspective of Chaucer's readers. Criseyde appears simultaneously in touch

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<sup>22</sup> In Book V, 1485-1511, Cassandra responds to Troilus's dream of the boar with several stanzas on the Thebes story.

with history and diverted from understanding its broader relevance to her contemporary world, from recognizing the fateful link between Thebes and Troy.

Notably, Criseyde's brief synopsis of her book includes the mention of not only King Laius and his son Oedipus, but also Amphiaraus, whose foresight of disaster impending within his own historical narrative provokes him to dissuade the Greeks from laying siege to the Thebans. However, the Greeks dismiss Amphiaraus's warning, mirroring, in *Troilus and Criseyde*, Pandarus's distraction of Criseyde from the opportunity to use history constructively for the present, as any proper "geste" would advise. While heuristically, Criseyde's reading material functions as a foreboding and cautionary tale for the Trojans in the drawing room, perhaps evoking the effect that Guido delle Colonne may have wanted to have on his medieval audience through his *Historia destructionis Troiae*,<sup>23</sup> Pandarus minimizes the specter of Thebes by turning away from history and into the world of courtly spring festival: "Do wey youre barbe, and shew youre face bare; / Do wey youre book, rys up, and lat us daunce, / And lat us don to May some observaunce" (II, 110-12). However, under the delusion that Troy rests in a period of civic stability, the characters see Thebes as a city of a distant past or merely as fiction for storytelling entertainment. Pandarus's hortatory lines suggest that history is contained not only in the form of the Theban book, which Criseyde should lay down to rest, but also in the symbol of her "barbe," or veil, a reminder of Criseyde's loss. Furthermore, Pandarus's claim to be an authority on Theban history, probably through the twelve-book collection by Statius—"Al this knowe I myselve, / And al th'assege of Thebes and the care"—reveals his progressive perspective of a past that does not repeat itself, but that rather triumphs over former tragedies ("sithe th'ende is every tales strengthe") (II, 106-7, 260). Pandarus suggests that his perception

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<sup>23</sup> As Simpson writes, the anti-Virgilian and anti-Galfridian *Historia* is part of a group of Troy writings "pitched from a clerical position that stood opposed to imperial enterprise," in "The Other Book of Troy," 397.

of the Book of Thebes accords more with history, contrasting Criseyde's sense that she reads a romance resembling the medieval *Roman de Thèbes*. Pandarus turns away from the exterior world of history to draw out the courtship protected within the walls of the city; as Eugene Vance writes, Pandarus "subordinates the horrors of the macrocosm to the frivolity of the microcosm" for the purpose of his love schemes.<sup>24</sup>

"Reading" is multivalent, and Pandarus's dismissal of Theban history represents his failure to "read" properly in the sense of both reading and interpreting. Pandarus's misreading evokes the idea found in Hugh of St. Victor's *Didascalicon*, which I raised in my chapter on the *Book of the Duchess*, that reading with a goal yields benefits, whereas reading for the sake of reading, as an aesthetic endeavor, buries the reader in convolutions, leaving him without any practical understanding.<sup>25</sup> Pandarus raises the question of how to read again in Book III, after he has swiftly united Troilus and Criseyde in bed, when he withdraws from the room, takes a lamp, and assumes the guise of a reader, as if "to looke upon an old romaunce" (III, 980). The ambiguous image of Pandarus gazing at an old romance stresses the superficial experience of sight rather than the in-depth act of reading and interpreting. It also confuses temporalities. Chaucer may be emphasizing the historical distance between his characters and an old book to call to mind the Theban-Trojan connection Pandarus dismisses in Book II. Or, he implies that this time Pandarus has created a romance in the scene he has just laid out for Troilus and Criseyde, in the present, and that it is the narrator explaining from his position of retrospection and distance that the romance is "old" precisely because it takes place in ancient Troy. As an

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<sup>24</sup> Eugene Vance, "Mervelous Signals: Poetics, Sign Theory, and Politics in Chaucer's *Troilus*," *New Literary History* 10 (1979), 319. According to Lee Patterson, "Thebanness" occurs in "a replicating history," which, "in its pure form has neither origin nor end but only a single, infinitely repeatable moment of illicit eroticism and fratricidal rivalry. Lee Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 113.

<sup>25</sup> Hugh of Saint Victor, *The Didascalicon*, 126-27.

intermediary between lovers, then, Pandarus also becomes a go-between in the scheme of temporality, invoking versions of present and past in a single narrative frame. While Pandarus's gaze upon romance reaffirms his devotion to the success of the lovers in the narrative, it also reinforces the idea that past and present are intertwined.

Returning to the scene at the beginning of Book II, Chaucer suggests that the reading of history informs the use of the past for the present only if the narrative is read with a critical eye. The verb "rede" signifies an interpretive act, as it does in the *Book of the Duchess*. For the good reader, the Theban subtext becomes a practical device foreshadowing Troy's fall, but also, more broadly, it meditates on the fluidity of times and on how political and civic events are always charged with the potential to recur. When Chaucer aligns his readers with Criseyde through the act of reading, he shows that Londoners can learn from the *exemplum* of Troy, just as she can learn from the lesson of Thebes before Pandarus's interruption. Chaucer gives his readers the opportunity to do what Criseyde ultimately cannot, given the boundaries of her foresight: to heed the lesson of historical recurrence and to imagine their place within the Theban-Trojan-London continuum at the basis of medieval historiography. By reminding his readers that Troy is a city haunted by the Theban precursor and by historical contingency, Chaucer also challenges the idea of Troy as a prelapsarian mythical Golden Age and suggests that London is vulnerable to the same patterns of historical repetition that make Troy a second Thebes. While Chaucer presents concerns about London in a distant space and time, anachronisms resist a unidirectional conception historical progress, thwarting the return to legendary beginnings. They implicitly counsel against an inward indulgence in the erotic subjectivities that find ample space in the private medievalized rooms of Deiphebus's house or the *hortus conclusus*, which compromise the lovers' consciousness of history.

Later, in Book IV, Chaucer's legal language and civic setting help him use his anachronisms to more explicitly challenge the sense of political distance between Londoners and Trojans. Images of the Trojans engaged in political activity in Book IV evoke the English court members on the verge of political insurrection in the 1380s. By 1386, many of Richard's allies—his chancellor Michael de la Pole, Robert de Vere, Simon Burley, and Nicholas Brembre—faced serious charges by the opposing Appellants, and the king himself faced difficulties approaching the people of the city.<sup>26</sup> Chaucer was witness to divisions in loyalty in government and his anachronistic representation of parliament in Book IV of *Troilus and Criseyde* suggests that he was thinking about the London parliamentary convocations ongoing during the time he was writing his poem, a subject to which I will return after discussing the characters of Troy.

As the next sections will show, anachronisms only do part of the work in *Troilus and Criseyde*; they make it possible for Chaucer to set the stage for his sophisticated use of Boethius, as the simultaneities of past and present make readers aware of the entanglements of temporality that become crucial to the function of Boethianisms in the poem. However, at the same time as anachronism makes Troy into a cautionary tale, the multiple Boethian subjectivities of the Trojan cast complicate a totalizing reading of this theory of history, since they blur the lines of causality that make any single character (and especially the often-charged Criseyde) responsible for the Fall of Troy. As in the dream visions, Chaucer reveals that the “objective” historiographical narrative is not the only frame of reference for understanding time. Chaucer's characters “see time” in divergent ways, wondering about possible futures and alternative pasts, and selectively

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<sup>26</sup> Lynn Staley discusses the generally negative discourse surrounding the members of Richard's circles, explaining how Thomas Walsingham's account of the Ricardian court represents Michael de la Pole, Robert de Vere, and Simon Burley as dangerous figures who sought to isolate Richard from the older nobility and his familial ties, how Jean Froissart “quite overtly ‘feminizes’ de Vere,” and how Henry Knighton's *Chronicon* refers to these figures and their associates as “seducers of the king,” in *Languages of Power in the Age of Richard II* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), 52.

engaging in the arts of memory, often deploying the language of Boethian hope or lament. While the characters sometimes attempt to control time, under the impression that they govern their own destinies, at other times, the illusion of agency vanishes and the threat of a predestined temporal framework seems imminent, eliciting speeches on the lack of free will. Bound by the preordained time of the narrative, they express the inescapable limitations of human agency against the forces of historical necessity. Nevertheless, the characters' theories and experiences of time are malleable and change over the course of the narrative, causing them to deploy different strategies to cope with romantic and historical circumstances. By predicating characters' experiences on their ideas of time, Chaucer enables readers to sense the urgency that impels them to act, and more broadly, to perceive the pressures of an external framework of time on their choices.

In his use of Boethius, then, Chaucer does not reach an endpoint, wherein time is always devastating and the gaze should always concentrate on what is beyond it. Chaucer avoids Boethian conclusiveness by presenting no single Boethian figure, but rather by pluralizing the Boethian experience and highlighting its universality and adaptability. The Boethian intertext develops the effect of anachronism in that it helps to contrast the characters' limited perspective on their place within the scheme of history with the readers' omniscient viewpoint, in order to invite readers to distance themselves from the tumultuous turns of mortal affairs and, in turn, develop a clearer perspective on the present. But the multiple ways in which Chaucer deploys Boethian language also challenges the black-and-white moralizations found at the heart of most narratives of the Fall of Troy, and eliminates the possibility for readers to form a bipolar view of right and wrong, of fidelity and betrayal. As I will argue, Chaucer asks readers to find a middle

ground between their sympathetic readings and their sense of detachment from and superiority to the Trojan characters.

### 3. CONSTRUCTING TIME IN TROY: CRISEYDE'S AMBIVALENCE AND THE ISSUE OF HER NAME

*Sometimes she did not know what she feared, what she desired: whether she feared or desired what had been or what would be, and precisely what she desired, she did not know. – Anna Karenina*

The domestic reading scene of Book II reveals how both Pandarus and the book challenge Criseyde's capacity to "see time" from a distanced perspective. However, in other episodes of *Troilus and Criseyde*, Chaucer suggests a more ambivalent view of Criseyde and reveals her complex temporal consciousness. Radically departing from Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato*, Chaucer allocates narrative space in which to showcase Criseyde's concerns about her position in the scheme of time and to expose details of her origins, which imply that Criseyde inherits a precarious position in Troy even before the poem begins. Highlighting the pressures of working within a specific written tradition, Chaucer underscores Criseyde's entrapment by the preordained narrative, despite her efforts to elude it. She expresses anxiety over her limited foresight and her inability to remove herself from the patterns of historical repetition, continually worrying that her name and reputation will determine not only how she lives in the present, but also how she will be perceived in the future or, depending on the point of view, in the historical record. Her use of hypotheticals—wishes that she could have used time more prudently and even changed the course of time—imply regret and good intention, opening up her character to nuanced and sympathetic interpretation.

Chaucer draws out Criseyde's perspective on time through the intertext of the *Boece*. Critics have tended to focus on Troilus in the Boethian framework, as his speeches, and notably the predestination soliloquy in Book IV, show Chaucer's active adaptation of passages in the

*Boece*. However, in addition to Troilus, Criseyde possesses a deeply Boethian subjectivity, which elicits her preoccupation with the themes of historical repetition, historical exemplarity, and the paradox of free will in a predetermined universe, found everywhere in the *Boece*. Furthermore, while an allegorizing Boethian reading might suggest that Criseyde represents a “failed” Boethius, I argue that Chaucer validates Criseyde’s situated perspective along with his readers’ momentarily omniscient and transcendent perspective. Chaucer highlights the historical conditions that victimize her and cloud her perspective, as they do Boethius, and emphasizes the logical way in which the choices she makes in the poem stem from circumstance and necessity. Although Criseyde lacks clairvoyance, in the sense of the divine “universel lokynge” invoked in the *Boece*, her sense of time helps explain her “good entente” and draws attention to the inescapable limitations of her agency, softening the harsh view of her found in written traditions (IV, 1416).<sup>27</sup>

From the very beginning of his Troy narrative, Chaucer locates the challenge of pardoning Criseyde in her genealogy, which binds her to the derisive literary treatments of her inconstancy that precede Chaucer’s own. In addition to these representations of Criseyde’s character throughout written history, Criseyde’s actual familial origins soil her place within the scheme of history before she ever speaks or acts. The first mention of Criseyde comes through the preface on her father Calchas, the subject to whom the narrator turns after revealing the purpose behind his storytelling endeavor. By prophesying the Fall of Troy, Calchas represents the perfect transition between the narrator’s historicizing frame and the introduction to the cast of Trojans who are impacted by the Fall. Possessing foreknowledge of Trojan events, but also entrenched in the city of Troy, and the narrative world, more broadly, Calchas crystallizes the perspectival distinction between Chaucer’s voyeuristic readers and the characters navigating the

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<sup>27</sup> Chaucer, *Boece*, 5, Pr. 4, 160.

urban spaces of Troy. However, Calchas's sense of the future also conditions his betrayal, structuring the narrator's turn to Criseyde, who suffers the consequences of his deed in the immediacy of the present time. As if beset by Virgil's Rumor, Criseyde "alday herde at ere / Hire fadres shame, his falsnesse and tresoun" (I, 106-7). The emphasis on hearing, a sense through which many people can rapidly learn new information from a single source, is a reminder that, in chivalric culture and literature, shame emerges through public knowledge.<sup>28</sup> The temporal indicator "alday" also conveys the easy and constant communicability of the crime, the news of which radiates across the gossiping mouths of Troy, explaining why Chaucer's readers find Criseyde in a state of disgrace. Even if Criseyde's initial lack of awareness ("al unwist") and her "gret penaunce" distance her from her father's deed, Criseyde cannot escape her genealogy (I, 93, 94).

When Calchas flees Troy, then, he abandons Criseyde in the adversity of "meschaunce" and at the center stage of the poem, in a political limelight that Criseyde would much rather avoid (I, 92). The narrator uses Calchas's departure as an opportunity to supplant historical time with romance time, but Criseyde knows well that the public world of the poem never ceases to permeate the private world, eliciting her sense of panic. Thus, both father and daughter respond to the prophecy of the Fall of Troy, but whereas Calchas shifts alliances, privileging his safety over his reputation as a loyal citizen of Troy, Criseyde seeks out heroic men of action and honor within Troy, valuing deed over genealogical status. Turning to Hector as "a widewe... and allone," and bidding his mercy "on knees... with pitous vois," in attempt to repair the damage Calchas incurs, Criseyde views the public figure as a source of refuge (I, 97, 110-11). In Book II,

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<sup>28</sup> In a discussion of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Derek Pearsall writes, "shame is not in the act but in the making public of what he thought was private," in "Courtesy and Chivalry in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*: the Order of Shame and the Invention of Embarrassment," in *A Companion to the Gawain-Poet*, eds. D.S. Brewer and Jonathon Gibson (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1997), 357.

when Pandarus begins to sketch Troilus as a virtuous Trojan hero, Criseyde cannot help but return to the subject of Hector, who works to protect the people of the city, connected to “arnes,” “hom,” and “every wight,” all of which stand metonymically for a civic Troy (II, 186-88).

While Chaucer hardly makes Hector into a soothsayer, the Trojan prince’s consciousness of the potential impact of Calchas’s betrayal on Criseyde’s status draws forth his progressive and optimistic sense of time. Hector insists that Criseyde can detach her reputation from her father’s, withdrawing her name from a shameful genealogical line, to reclaim the honor she had before the betrayal. His confidence that Criseyde can restore her status in the Trojan world emerges through his imperative: “Lat youre fadres treson gon / Forth with meschaunce, and ye youreself in joie / Dwelleth with us, whil yow good list, in Troie” (I, 117-19). Hector disassociates Criseyde from her origins, deploying the vocabulary of movement (“gon” and “forth with”) to emphasize how Criseyde’s refashioning of herself will send the misfortune out of the city and secure her in the safety net of Troy. His sense of certainty makes him an emblem of hope in a narrative of tragedy and his rhyming of “joie” and “Troie” offers a sense of shelter and warmth that compels even Chaucer’s readers to question the conventional outcome of Criseyde’s personal narrative. Hector momentarily invites Chaucer’s readers to accept his logic, tempting them to anticipate an ending for Criseyde that is different from the one preordained by history.

Nevertheless, Chaucer’s readers are prevented from enjoying too much of this idea of an alternative future, as both the narrator and Criseyde know that Hector’s promises of security rest on flimsy ground. It is no coincidence that later, after tragedy has befallen Troy, Troilus uses Hector’s same “joie/Troie” rhyme to subvert his idea of the city as a blissful asylum, describing how Fortune “Gan pulle away the fetheres brighte of Troie / Fro day to day, til they ben bare of

joie” (V, 1546-47).<sup>29</sup> At this point in the narrative, Chaucer’s readers know that Criseyde has every right to seek to protect and even conceal her public identity. Her black habit indicates that she is recently widowed, but also displays her shame, and she stays in protective domestic spaces, “as til hire honour nede was to holde” (I, 128). Attempting to curb the effects of gossip, Criseyde exaggerates the degree of privacy she needs, telling Pandarus that she would be better suited living “in a cave” (II, 117). Criseyde desires the quiet of interior spaces, but precisely because she cannot forget what lies beyond the walls of home, aware of the historical circumstances that condition her romance with Troilus in the first place. When Pandarus broaches the possibility of her union with Troilus, Criseyde worries that courtship could compromise her virtue and her public reputation, determining her name for posterity. As Alcuin Blamires notes, Criseyde’s desire to uphold her name distinguishes her from her counterpart in *Il Filostrato*: “For Boccaccio’s Criseida the concern for reputation is generally more of a front... whereas for Chaucer’s Criseyde it expresses a more deeply held principle.”<sup>30</sup>

Furthermore, moments in which Criseyde considers the impact of her romantic decisions in a broad temporal scheme present counterplots to Troilus’s erotic subjectivities and indicate the much more socially delicate role she occupies. Whereas her concern for civic Troy widens her field of vision, Troilus’s gaze is singularly placed on Criseyde; as Troilus is “lokyng” out onto the crowd of women in Troy, “his eye percede, and so depe it wente, / Til on Criseyde it smot, and ther it stente” (I, 269, 272-73). While Troilus tries to conceal his love to protect his public image as a noble knight, Criseyde anticipates facing severe consequences for an imprudent

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<sup>29</sup> I will come back to how Troilus’s own “fetheres” are pulled away as Love takes control of him, but for now, the metaphor confirms the idea that Troilus and Troy follow a parallel trajectory of loss.

<sup>30</sup> Alcuin Blamires, “‘I nolde sette at al that noys a grote’: Repudiating Infamy in *Troilus and Criseyde* and *The House of Fame*,” in *Chaucer and Fame: Reputation and Reception*, eds. Isabel Davis and Catherine Nall (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2015), 75.

decision in the wake of her father's treason. Troilus's self-consciousness manifests strictly in the context of courtship; exemplifying the notion that love "causeth moost to dreden vice and shame," Troilus "wax al reed for shame" when his lovesickness is made known to Pandarus (I, 252, 867). Still, his blush displays his embarrassment to Pandarus alone, while the private world of love emerges into the public space of Trojan knowledge to define Criseyde's name for all of history. In addition, the varied rhetorical techniques Pandarus uses to "cure" Troilus of his lovesickness differ from his approach to persuading Criseyde into loving Troilus. When Criseyde reflects apprehensively on civic Troy, claiming, "I am of Grekes so ferd that I deye," and asking if the siege has been lifted, Pandarus attempts to divert her attention from the escalating gravity of historical events (II, 124). Seeing that the Trojan War is at the forefront of Criseyde's mind, Pandarus invokes the war with the Greeks and Troilus's swift battlefield movements merely as a tactic to prove Troilus's worth as a lover: "Now here, now ther, he hunted him so faste, / Ther nas but Grekes blood—and Troilus" (II, 197-98). These diversions, emphasized by Pandarus's description of Troilus's alternating directions on the battlefield, are continuous with the effort to thwart Criseyde's attention in the drawing room scene I discussed earlier.

Nevertheless, Chaucer develops a sense of causality linking Criseyde's awareness of historical precedent to her political savvy. Criseyde's vision of time causes her to enter the union with Troilus with a different approach and an actual strategy. Troilus's instantaneous fall into love, characteristic of courtly literature, occurs through the narrowing of his perspective and his abandonment of public concern. However, Criseyde's decision to commit to Troilus is gradual, spanning the time in which she weighs the possible advantageous and disadvantageous outcomes of loving Troilus, and results through a broader perspective of civic matters. Love arrives for Criseyde, not piercingly through the eye, but as yet another threatening and entangling force,

bringing Criseyde more sharply into the public view than before. While Criseyde's logic is accessible to Chaucer's readers, the narrator remarks that there are "som" who "myghte...envious jangle," concerned that Criseyde's love is not the sincere love that Troilus has in return (II, 666). Nevertheless, the narrator quickly inserts himself into the debate through his response: "For I sey nought that she so sodenly / Yaf hym hire love" (673-74). His declaration ambiguates his judgment of Criseyde's "unsudden" love.

Chaucer keeps the case of Criseyde's innocence open and active through a focus on Criseyde's obsession with historical exemplarity, which offers further justification for her feeling of entrapment. As his readers know from the beginning, anticipating the moment when Criseyde "forsook" Troilus, the predestined timeline of events in Troy prevents her from eluding her narrative fate (I, 56). Initially, Criseyde enjoys the thought of pleasing Troilus by granting him her love and rationalizes Troilus's potential as a suitor by listing his appealing qualities. In a display of proto-feminism, she also boldly rejects the idea that love necessarily leads to a husband's ownership of his wife, declaring, "I am myn owene woman, wel at ese," and expresses confidence that she will maintain autonomy in her own marriage: "Shal noon housbonde seyn to me 'Chek mat!'" (II, 750, 754). However, just as the sun "chaungeth ofte tyme his face," a cumulonimbus of "cloudy thought" descends to question her sense of assuredness (II, 765, 768). Chaucer's use of clouds as a metaphor for change evokes the *Boece*, which figures Boethius's transformation of vision in similar terms:

Thus, whan that nyght was discussed and chased away, dirknesses forleten me, and to myn eien repeyred ayen hir firste strengthe. And ryght by ensauple as the sonne is hydd whan the sterres ben clustred (*that is to seyn, whan sterres ben covered with cloudes*) by a swift wynd that hyghte Chorus, and that the firmament stant dirked with wete plowngy cloudes...yif thanne the wynde that hyghte Boreas, isent out of the kaves of the cuntre of Trace, betith this nyght (*that is to seyn, caseth it away*) and discovereth the closed day,

thane schyneth Phebus ischaken with sodeyn light and smyteth with his beemes in mervelynge eien.<sup>31</sup>

The clouds initially obscuring Boethius's sight represent his inability to perceive the divine order, whereas the sun that emerges signifies his initiation into a process of temporal understanding. Reading Criseyde in the framework of this passage, her "cloudy thought" dismantles her positive appraisal of her union with Troilus and indicates her recognition of the graver consequences of loving him. Fear drives away Criseyde's "bryghte thoughtes," in a kind of reversal of the Boethian movement from darkness to lightness, as love now appears to be metaphorically overshadowed by "som mystrust or nice strif," just as the sun is literally by "som cloude" (II, 769, 780-81). Through the Boethian intertext, Chaucer thus complicates the idea that love improves earthly experience, validating Criseyde's more even and rational approach to her courtship with Troilus. Furthermore, given that Pandarus has already evoked the figure of Lady Philosophy in the *Boece*, asking Criseyde, "What aileth yow to be thus wery soone,"<sup>32</sup> Chaucer stages the possibility that Pandarus's efforts to persuade his niece are also analogous to Lady Philosophy's, but he muddles the readers' ability to draw this conclusive comparison by quickly associating Pandarus with Boethius's strumpet muses, instead of Lady Philosophy herself (II, 211).<sup>33</sup> With Pandarus playing the strumpet muse and Criseyde appropriating Boethian metaphor, Chaucer's Boethianisms undermine moralizations of Criseyde by situating her in a

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<sup>31</sup> Chaucer, *Boece*, 1, Metr. 3, 1-17.

<sup>32</sup> In Chaucer, *Boece*, 2, Pr. 1, 47-8, Lady Philosophy asks Boethius, "What eyleth the, man? What is it that hath cast the into moornyng and into wepyng?" As I mention in Chapter 1 of this dissertation, the narrator of the *Book of the Duchess* asks the suffering Black Knight the same question.

<sup>33</sup> In Chaucer, *Boece*, 1, Pr. 1, 50-3, Lady Philosophy discusses the detrimental effects of these "comune strumpettis," "the whiche nat only ne asswage nought his sorwes with none remedies, but thei wolden fedyn and norysen hym with sweete venym." The idea that medieval romance stages lovers as parodic Lady Philosophy figures has been explored in Katherine Henrichs, "Lovers' 'Consolations of Philosophy' in Boccaccio, Machaut, and Chaucer," *SAC* 11 (1989): 93-115; and Ann W. Astell, *Job, Boethius, and Epic Truth* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 127-58.

broader context of determinants. Her carefulness and logic in the early books of *Troilus and Criseyde* only temporarily deflect betrayal, but they do interrogate the readers' automatic assumptions about her character.

Criseyde's sense of the past shapes her consciousness and challenges the perception of her choices established by narrative tradition. Chaucer uses the natural metaphor of the *Boece* to suggest Criseyde's hesitation, but Criseyde herself also offers a natural image—"For love is yet the mooste stormy lyf, / Right of hymself, that evere was bigonne"—to stress her dismay and her level of self-consciousness (II, 778-80). Her compilation of evidence to prove that love brings women pain, even if that compilation derives from a "memory" of antifeminism constructed primarily by romance texts, indeed validates her metaphorical representation of love as a storm. According to Criseyde, sorrowful women can do nothing "but wepe and sitte and thinke," passively suffering the effects of "wikked tonges...so prest / To speke [hem] harm" (II, 783, 785-86). By focusing on historical precedent, Criseyde even legitimizes her argument for independence; she recalls the stories of "the tresoun that to wommen hath ben do," suggesting the tendency for history to recur (II, 793). Criseyde's Boethian understanding of the fluidity between past and future enables her to recognize the pattern wherein relationships form and end: "Ful sharp bygynnyng breketh ofte at ende" (II, 791). Chaucer uses this scene of isolated meditation to demonstrate how Criseyde's approach to love is fundamentally affected by her temporal consciousness, that is, her vision of where women tend to fall within the historical record.

Even in Book III, in which Pandarus completes his finishing touches on his matchmaking project, the narrator gives the impression of Criseyde's uncertainty, dimming the air of male confidence pervading the scene. When Pandarus invites Criseyde over for dinner, she responds

skeptically, unsure about her uncle's intentions. The narrator demonstrates a comparable ambivalence, unable to offer a more concrete sense of how much Criseyde actually knows concerning her uncle's plan:

Nought list myn auctour fully to declare  
What that she thoughte whan he seyde so,  
That Troilus was out of towne yfare,  
As if he seyde therof soth or no;  
But that, withowten await, with hym to go,  
She graunted hym, sith he hire that bisoughte,  
And as his nece, obeyed as hire oughte.

But natheles, yet gan she hym biseche,  
Although with hym to gon it was no fere,  
For to ben war of goosisssh poeples speche,  
That dremen thynges whiche as nevere were,  
And wel avyse hym whom he broughte there;  
And seyde hym, "Em, syn I moste on yow triste,  
Loke al be wel, and do now as yow liste."  
(III, 575-88)

While the narrator hesitates to assume Criseyde's position more "fully," he hints at her fear of being placed in danger. The temporal plurality of the hypothetical phrase, "That dremen thynges whiche as nevere were," is reminiscent of Criseyde's obsession with exemplarity and alternative sequences of time. Furthermore, by making his qualification with the transitional phrase, "But natheles," the narrator narrows his focus on the idea that Criseyde is aware of Pandarus's tactics, offering insight into her subjectivity and sense of foresight. Criseyde's admission of obedience to Pandarus's orders is contingent on his protection of her honor, revealing not her automatic complacency, but rather her strategic effort to manage her circumstances, as well as her hope that Pandarus has good intentions ("Loke al be wel"). Given Criseyde's anxiety about gossip, her appeal to her uncle to protect her from "goosisssh poeples speche" reveals an exertion of her control and, more implicitly, her attempt to change the course of history. However, Criseyde's

petition is also a reminder of the limitations of her agency before characters like Pandarus who act “as [they] liste.”

The ambivalence of Criseyde’s position imbues readers with a feeling of uncertainty about the “future” of the narrative, tempting them again to momentarily forget the ending of the Troy story, which they already know, in order to feel hope on Criseyde’s behalf. The request Criseyde makes to her uncle helps readers identify with Criseyde’s uncomfortable position, which also heightens the level of disappointment created by the tragedy that ensues. While Criseyde senses what the future can hold, she finds herself helpless to affect it when she comes up against the reality of Trojan affairs in Book IV, forced to emerge from behind the walls of domesticity.

Foregrounding historical time, Chaucer re-introduces Calchas, who is now as interested in using Criseyde as a pawn in the play for Greek wartime success as Pandarus is in using Criseyde to make Troilus victorious in love. Calchas speaks before the Greek council to broach the idea of the patriarchal transfer of Criseyde. Reclaiming the daughter he abandoned represents political strategy more than an act of fatherly love, a point emphasized by his language of temporality:

For by that cause I say no tyme er now  
Hire to delivere, ich holden have my pees;  
But now or nevere, if that it like yow,  
I may hire have right soone, douteles.  
O help and grace amonges al the prees!  
Rewe on this olde caytif in destresse,  
Syn I thorough yow have al this hevynesse.  
(IV, 99-105)

Given that Calchas earlier uses his knowledge of time, specifically futurity, to political ends, his repetition of temporal indicators, “tyme” and “now or nevere,” reinforces the sense that he

operates to improve his civic standing, even if it means entangling his own kin in a web of conflicting loyalties.

On the Trojan side, the narrator worries that Criseyde's position is dictated by a group of undiscerning men; while they may act democratic among themselves, they bind Criseyde all the more to her predetermined fate. Although Hector morally objects to the exchange of Criseyde for Antenor back in Troy ("We usen here no wommen for to selle"), the crowds of Parliament neglect Hector's Golden Age-chivalry and reason, proclaiming their unanimous vote to harbor Antenor over "this womman" (IV, 182, 188). Still, the narrator's repeated asides ask Chaucer's readers to ally with Hector, suspend judgment of Criseyde, and treat her as a victim, "For [Antenor] was after traitour to the town / Of Troye" (IV, 204-5). The allusion to the Great Rising of 1381—"the noyse of peple up stirte thanne at ones, / As bremes as blase of straw iset on-fire"—suggests the narrator's view of the destructive nature of populist politics in Troy, which only exacerbate Criseyde's position of weakness and lack of agency (IV, 183).<sup>34</sup> Once more implying the narrator's bias in favor of Criseyde, his interjection of a proverb from Juvenal into the description of the parliamentary scene highlights the imprudence of the collective's decision: "For cloude of errour let hem to discernen / What best is" (IV, 200-1). Fundamentally Boethian, the image of clouded vision teaches readers that the Trojans' decision to make the trade is an act of blindness, making them vulnerable within a macrocosmic cycle of rise and fall. Messy politics determine Criseyde's options and make the "chaungynge," or exchange, of Criseyde a condition for her later "slydyng of corage," that is, her change of heart (IV, 231; V, 825). By recalling the

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<sup>34</sup> See John M. Ganim, "Chaucer and the noise of the people," *Exemplaria* 2 (1990): 71-88.

“slydyng fortune” of Boethian meter, Chaucer reinforces the idea that Criseyde’s actions are deeply tied to the external circumstances under Fortune’s sway.<sup>35</sup>

Even if the final books of *Troilus and Criseyde* do not offer room for Criseyde to wield effective control, Chaucer apports sections in which to demonstrate Criseyde’s impression of history as an intrusion on the present and future, and as an obstruction to the plural possibilities of these uncharted temporalities. The news that political circumstances will force her separation from Troilus connects her inability to alter fate to Dido’s lack of agency over Aeneas’s journey in the *Aeneid*. Evoking the Rumor participating in the tragedy of Aeneas and Dido, the word of the trade of Criseyde for Antenor is spread by “swifte Fame” as it travels through Troy, (IV, 659). Criseyde’s intense display of distress over her position recalls the violence of Dido’s passionate grief and similarly shows a clear response to temporal circumstances: “Hire ownded heer...she rente, and ek hire fyngeres longe and smale / She wrong ful ofte” (IV, 736-38). The context for this passage stresses the overwhelming desire Criseyde has for Troilus; having finally submitted to her union with Troilus, Criseyde now appears deeply entrenched in her condition of lovesickness. In her apostrophe to Troilus, she proclaims that she will dress in all black, returning to the wardrobe that helped her signify her widowhood and her shame over her father’s treason in Book I: “my clothes everychon / Shul blake ben in tokenyng” (IV, 778-79). By cladding herself in black, Criseyde publicly declares her departure from the world, as she feels that she would rather face death than be estranged from Troilus.

The deeply Boethian language Criseyde uses in the face of historical necessity invites Chaucer’s readers to consider her seriously as a victim of political forces beyond her control. Criseyde’s position is relatable to that of the Boethius-subject, with whom readers would have been familiar through the text of the *Consolation of Philosophy*, or the *Boece*, but also to the

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<sup>35</sup> Chaucer, *Boece*, 1, Metr. 5, 19.

position of Boethius the author, whose historical circumstances conditioned his production of the text: according to Cherniss, “Boethius’s personal misfortune, his fall from a position of public eminence and trust into imperial disfavor, exile, and imprisonment, triggers his awareness of [his] existential dilemma.”<sup>36</sup> In Chaucer’s poem, whereas Troilus’s Boethian imagery of entrapment in Book I exaggerates his symptomology of love-sickness and suggests Boethian parody, Criseyde actually parallels the protagonist and author of the *Boece*. By characterizing her misfortune as “disaventure,” a return to the state which she occupied just before her blissful union with Troilus, the narrator suggests that it is not just Troilus but also Criseyde whose narrative is determined by the Boethian cycle invoked in the opening passage of Book I (“fro wo to wele, and after out of joie”) (IV, 755; I, 4). Criseyde herself uses Boethian self-deprecations, calling herself, “woful wrecche,” an epithet describing Boethius in the *Boece* at least ten times, and “infortuned wight,” which evokes the discourse of Fortune’s subjugation in several passages (IV, 744). Like Boethius, who remarks on the absence of order in the universe, inviting Lady Philosophy’s Platonic song on the irregular movements of the wandering planets, Criseyde figures herself in terms of celestial patterns, claiming to be star-crossed, “born in corsed constellacioun” (IV, 745).<sup>37</sup> She thus invites a much graver reading of her Boethian circumstance than Troilus.

Criseyde’s outlook is not always so grim, though, and the occasional tone of optimism in her speeches conveys her good intention. Criseyde makes an allusion to the ancient myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, in which she appropriates a Boethian subtext to indicate a more hopeful sense of the future. She dramatizes her devotion to Troilus by claiming she will join a religious

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<sup>36</sup> Cherniss, *Boethian Apocalypse*, 13.

<sup>37</sup> Chaucer, *Boece*, 1, Metr. 2.

order until she can meet him in the afterlife, and subsequently uses the myth to emphasize their intertwined fates:

Myn herte and ek the woful goost therinne  
Byquethe I with youre spirit to compleyne  
Eternaly, for they shal nevere twynne;  
For though in erthe ytwynned be we tweyne,  
Yet in the feld of pite, out of peyne,  
That highte Elisos, shal we ben yfeere,  
As Orpheus and Erudice, his feere.  
(IV, 785-91)

Criseyde's repetition of "twynne" demonstrates her feeling of connection to and even entanglement with Troilus. She suggests that their separation, which begs her to ask, "How sholde I lyve if that I from him twynne?," will denaturalize her condition, making her like a "fissh withouten water" (IV, 758, 765). Criseyde's Orphic subtext represents one of the only instances in which Criseyde conceivably imagines control over historical circumstances, distinguishing her from Troilus, who invokes the Orpheus myth but only to provide a pessimistic image of the future:

The deth may wel out of my brest departe  
The lif, so longe may this sorwe myne,  
But fro my soule shal Criseydes darte  
Out nevere mo  
(IV, 470-76)

Troilus anticipates Criseyde's monologue by alluding to his role as an Orpheus-type, the hero who embarks on a journey to rescue his abducted beloved, but he can hardly imagine a prospect of reconciliation and eternal love. Instead, reading the Orpheus narrative differently than Criseyde does, Troilus foretells his perpetual unhappiness.

The lovers' contrasting uses of the myth doubles the reading of the intertext. For Troilus, Criseyde is the earthly sin in which he mistakenly indulges, and her departure from Troy echoes Eurydice's descent into Hades, "fro heven into which helle" (IV, 712). By contrast, Criseyde

recognizes the pattern of separation and return, emphasizing Orpheus's reunion with Eurydice, rather than his experience of despair in the immediate aftermath of her death. It is as if Criseyde learned the myth through the Middle English adaptation, *Sir Orfeo*, in which the genre of the lay mandates resolution and thus the reunion of the lovers, and as if Troilus had learned it through Ovid's version or *L'Ovide Moralisé*.<sup>38</sup>

Furthermore, Criseyde's adaptation of the Orpheus myth in the passage she speaks is a manipulation of the Boethian presentation of the Orpheus myth, which Chaucer was likely using as he wrote the *Boece* and *Troilus and Criseyde*, whereas Troilus's invocation of the Orpheus myth suggests he pessimistically sees himself conforming to Orpheus's position in the *Boece*. In the Boethian interpretation of the myth, the "fable"—in which "Orpheus lokede abakward on Erudyce his wife, and lost hire, and was deed"—teaches that he who puts "his eien into the put of helle, (*that is to seyn, whoso sette his thoughtes in ertly thinges*)," as Orpheus does when he looks backward, renounces "al that evere he hath drawn of the noble good celestial."<sup>39</sup> Given that Lady Philosophy's mission in the *Boece* is to condemn the Boethian eye as it is turned to false goods and to reorient it in the direction of true goods, the Orpheus myth in *Boece*, Book 3, Metrum 12, becomes an exemplum for the entirety of the *Boece*: the "benedictus qui" opening the meter on Orpheus in the *Boece* implies the Christian moralization of the myth—"Blisful is that man that may seen the clere welle of good! Blisful is he that mai unbynden hym fro the boondes of the hevvy erthe!"<sup>40</sup>—and draws a connection between the backward gaze and earthbound preoccupations, locating freedom in the transformed perspective that focuses on true

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<sup>38</sup> See Christopher Cannon, "Chaucer and the Auchinleck Manuscript Revisited," *The Chaucer Review* 46 (2011), 131-46. For the Middle English lay version of the Orpheus myth, see *Sir Orfeo*, eds. Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995).

<sup>39</sup> Chaucer, *Boece*, 3, Metr. 12, 58-60, 64-7.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-3.

goods. According to Astell, in the light of the medieval commentary tradition that imagines Orpheus in a “double *descensus into temporalia*,” in *Troilus and Criseyde*, Criseyde represents the earthly sin in which Troilus mistakenly indulges.<sup>41</sup>

However, while Bernardus Silvestris’s commentary deems Orpheus’s love immoral, Criseyde’s choice to identify herself with Eurydice complicates the allegorical vision of her as a symbol of natural concupiscence, and her acknowledgment that she contributes to Troilus’s woe helps to exonerate her from a tradition that deems her responsible for the tragedy of Troilus. By setting up the analogy between Eurydice and herself, Criseyde suggests that she has fallen into hell, her departure from Troy echoing Eurydice’s descent into Hades. Upon hearing the parliament’s decision to have her leave Troy, she even acknowledges this descent “fro heven into which helle” (IV, 712). But Criseyde’s gesture toward identifying with Eurydice also suggests that she possesses foresight and hope, since in the Middle English version of the Orpheus story, a fall resolves itself in reunion, implying that Criseyde’s impending loss will be fixed by her ultimate return to Troilus in the afterlife. Criseyde locates freedom from the mortal history obstructing her union with Troilus in futurity. Her Orpheus allusion acknowledges what Ann Astell sees as a crucial lesson of the myth: “the paradoxical necessity of attaching oneself to earthly things, and then detaching oneself from them,” and the “human pain that belongs to those two contrary movements of love.”<sup>42</sup> Criseyde’s perspective seems particularly optimistic in light of the fact that she has been forbidden from grieving her separation from Troilus: Pandarus instructs her, “So lef this sorwe, or platly he wol deye. / And shapeth yow his sorwe for t’abregge, / And nought encesse, leeve nece swete!” (IV, 924-26).

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<sup>41</sup> Ann Astell, “Orpheus, Eurydice, and the ‘Double Sorwe’ of Chaucer’s ‘Troilus,’” *The Chaucer Review* 23 (1989), 286.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 286.

Chaucer emphasizes and pluralizes the characters' re-readings of the authoritative myth, in a literary gesture similar to the narrator's truncation of the Ovidian myth in the *Book of the Duchess*, to expose a divergence between the two lovers' sense of the future. But as the narrative of the separation between Troilus and Criseyde ensues, the distrust of how time unfolds more closely aligns the lovers. Criseyde's ambivalence turns to an admission of her inexorable fate within time, inviting the readers' sympathy; even as Criseyde fluctuates over the best choices to make in a highly exigent situation, her agency is too limited to impact the course of history. Having promised that she will return to Troy within 10 days, Criseyde warns Troilus at the end of Book IV that eloping would disgrace both of them: "And also thynketh on myn honeste, / That floureth yet, how foule I sholde it shende, / And with what filthe it spotted sholde be, / If in this forme I sholde with yow wende" (IV, 1576-79). Displaying confidence in her return, though, Criseyde insists that she may re-enter Troy untarnished, certain that Fortune will not deceive her plan ("Ne remuable Fortune deface") (IV, 1682). But in Book V, desperately searching for love and safety, Criseyde joins the Greek soldier Diomedes in a repetition of her flight to Hector and Troilus, as an act of caution at a time of historical crisis. Attentive to Diomedes's statements about the "perel of the town" and self-conscious about her condition of loneliness and friendlessness, Criseyde "bygan to brede / The cause whi, the sothe for to telle, / That she took fully purpos for to dwelle" (V, 1025, 1027-29). So, as Mann writes, Criseyde's "betrayal dissolves itself in the invisible flux of Criseyde's thoughts; the stanza concludes, not with a decision, but the mere germination of the *cause of a purpose*."<sup>43</sup> In *Il Filostrato*, Boccaccio omits Criseyde's moments of self-doubt and self-deprecation, but Chaucer emphasizes Criseyde's alternating thoughts of regret and hope, suggesting that she cannot visualize a sequence of causes.

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<sup>43</sup> Mann, *Feminizing Chaucer*, 23.

Criseyde's vacillation makes her more passive than active as her narrative prophecy is fulfilled. Historical necessity confines her to a fate she desperately wishes to avoid and a process of fulfillment she does not see taking place. As Mann writes, "we do not see Criseyde deciding to betray—we do not even see her betraying—we see her realizing that she has betrayed."<sup>44</sup> Even the narrator, claiming the objectivity and distance of a storyteller, swears by Criseyde's "good entente," and "that hire herte trewe was and kynde / Towardes [Troilus], and spak right as she mente" (IV, 1416, 1417-18). Criseyde's turn to Diomedes is, unfortunately, not one of the present affairs she is able to fully anticipate; Criseyde knows that the patterns of historical repetition will envelop her, as suggested by her earlier meditation on exemplarity and recurrence, but to know something is not to cause that something, as Troilus remarks in his predestination soliloquy, a direct citation of Boethius: "For nedfully byhoveth it nat to bee / That thilke thynges fallen in certayn / That ben purveyed" (IV, 1004-6). Criseyde's speeches increasingly emphasize her knowledge of her unknowingness, and the relationship between knowing and causing becomes crucial to how readers perceive her on an ethical level. As Chaucer writes, Criseyde "that nyste what was best to rede" (V, 18).

Unlike Boethius, whose broadening perspective over the course of his conversation with Lady Philosophy transforms his temporal suffering into an acceptance of the workings of the universe and alleviates the effects of Fortune, Criseyde only falls deeper into erotic tragedy and historical calamity as she develops a consciousness of impending change and the passage of time. Initially, Criseyde looks upon the towers and halls of Troy, lamenting the loss of "the plesance and the joie, / The which that now al torned into galle is" (V, 731-32). But her *ubi sunt* moment—an indulgence in earthly memory—elapses quickly, as she contemplates her limited

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<sup>44</sup> Mann, *Feminizing Chaucer*, 23.

foresight. In a Boethian dilemma, she recognizes that she cannot conceptualize time as eternal, with past, present, and future occurring simultaneously:

Prudence, alas, oon of thyne eyen thre  
Me lakked alwey, er that I come here!  
On tyme ypassed wel remembred me,  
And present tyme ek koud ich wel ise,  
But future tyme, er I was in the snare,  
Koude I nat sen; that causeth now my care.  
(V, 744-9)

In this passage, Criseyde claims her ignorance to the course of history by declaring that she “lakked” Prudence, a cardinal virtue in the medieval tradition, which, according to John Burrow, “looks in three directions: towards past time through memory, towards present time, and, with her third eye, towards future time.”<sup>45</sup> In the Middle Ages, while a third eye could not compete with divine foresight, it was believed to equip human beings with a deeper perception of the order of things; “Princes and heads of households, politicians and businessmen, soldiers and sailors, poets and cooks – all, in their different ways, depended upon *providentia* to make the best of their activities and affairs.”<sup>46</sup> On folio 125v of the mid-fifteenth-century manuscript London, British Library Harley 2392, which contains *Troilus and Criseyde*, a Latin gloss reading “praesenti, preterito, et futuro” appears to the right of the passage in which Criseyde laments her lack of Prudence, and emphasizes temporalities, the last of which is particularly hidden from her.<sup>47</sup> Central to Criseyde’s thought-process is the idea that Prudence—an allegory that is evidently meaningful to not only Boethius and Chaucer, but also glossators and readers—could

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<sup>45</sup> John Burrow, “The Third Eye of Prudence,” in *Medieval Futures: Attitudes to the Future in the Middle Ages*, eds. John Burrow and Ian P. Wei (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2000), 37.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 47-8.

<sup>47</sup> The glossator here continues to display his interests in issues of time in the text, for earlier in the manuscript, he makes a point to indicate “tempore” on fol. 118v, next to Pandarus’s discussion of time as a cure (V, 349-50), and on fol. 67r, glossing Pandarus’s lesson to Criseyde on time (III, 855).

influence an individual's political choices. Criseyde suggests that, without Prudence, she possesses limited instrumentality in determining future matters.

Criseyde's speeches continue to make her betrayal appear not so much a choice as an act fueled by necessity, reinforcing her experience of Boethian victimization. Her frequent hypotheticals imply regret, hope, and humility. Conversing with Diomedes, she imagines an uplifting alternative to Troy's collapse:

That Grekis wolde hire wrath on Troie wreke,  
If that they myght, I knowe it wel, iwis;  
But it shal naught byfallen as ye speke,  
And God toforn! And forther over this,  
I woot my fader wys and redy is,  
And that he me hath bought, as ye me tolde,  
So deere, I am the more unto hym holde.  
(V, 960-66)

The optative mood of Criseyde's speech and even her sense of demand—"it shal naught byfallen"—construct a fiction of hope, but worsening circumstances soon lead Criseyde to develop a more fatalistic position. Criseyde's situation triggers her recollection of books that feature women who were subjected to gossip, forcing her to recognize her future, or rather her destiny:

Allas, of me, unto the worldes ende,  
Shal neyther ben ywriten nor ysonge  
No good word, for thise bokes wol me shende.  
O, rolled shal I ben on so many a tonge!  
Thoroughout the world my belle shal be ronge!  
And wommen moost wol haten me of alle.  
Allas, that swich a cas me sholde falle!  
(V, 1058-64)

Although the narrator's previous language of "chaungynge" and "slydynge" suggests that Criseyde changes between the time at which she decides to love Troilus and the course that history takes in Book V, Criseyde's moment of reflection, contained here in this passage,

undermines the assumption that she is inconstant and a key player in the mutability that forces Troilus out of joy. As I have already discussed, Criseyde's gradual process of accepting Troilus reflects her careful approach to love. This passage additionally reveals that Criseyde has always worried about issues of historical representation, transmission, and exemplarity, and rightly so, as the narrator stresses hearsay as he presents the news of Criseyde's turn to Diomedes: "Men seyn—I not—that she yaf hym [Diomedes] her herte" (V, 1050). Given that the narrator has already proven his ability to see into Greek life, his effort to make a point of hearing the report helps him ensure that he still appears loyal to the Trojans, despite his ostensibly detached and omniscient perspective.<sup>48</sup>

Criseyde's own consciousness that women most of all will now hate her evokes her prior concern about historical exemplarity and the threat of her narrative falling categorically into a malicious tradition of "bad women." The impression of gossip, "rolled...on many a tonge," retroactively corroborates Criseyde's early fear that love would destroy her name. In her speech on Prudence, she admits her misjudgment, but also reminds Chaucer's readers of the different factors influencing her choices when she defensively claims that she was "nat the first that dide amys" (V, 1067). A deep sense of guilt plagues Criseyde in Book V, and yet her claim to experience "swich a cas" also ambiguates the degree to which she feels truly responsible and remorseful, and reinforces the unclear sense of causality in Chaucer's poem. Criseyde is as aware of her condition as Dido is in the *House of Fame*, when Dido laments not only the tendency for women to be betrayed, but also the idea that this perfidy will affect her reputation throughout history: "For thorgh yow is my name lorn, / And alle myn actes red and songe / Over al thys

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<sup>48</sup> At the beginning of Book IV, the narrator makes it clear that Calchas's speech comes from within the space of the Greek council, suggesting his desire to distance himself from the camp that is enemy to Troy.

lond, on every tonge.”<sup>49</sup> Like Dido, Criseyde feels concerned about the scornful reputation her literary iterations will inherit, but unlike Dido, she has known this as a possibility from the beginning of Chaucer’s poem. By offering insight into Criseyde’s anxiety-ridden consciousness, Chaucer shows that Criseyde’s “changeability” is located in behaviors that can be closely linked to historical circumstance and asks readers to strategize with her about her options, in order to grasp her limited possibilities.

By linking Criseyde to Cassandra, Chaucer further insinuates the idea that *women*, not Criseyde alone, are doomed to being embedded in a misogynist tradition with each version of history that records them. Criseyde’s paradox—of having a sense of time but being unable to act on it—compares to Cassandra’s issue of simultaneously having knowledge and lacking real agency. Cassandra possesses foresight that none of the men in Troy actually believe and, consequently, that cannot precipitate any action and change.<sup>50</sup> In Book V, not only does Troilus refuse to believe Cassandra’s interpretation, “Diomedes is inne, and thou art oute”; in addition, in all his irrational anger, he accuses Cassandra of being a “sorceresse” and “devyneresse” (V, 1519, 1520, 1522). While Chaucer does not develop Cassandra to the same extent as his eponymous heroine, Criseyde’s speech recognizes women’s lack of control on her behalf. Criseyde perceives her own “future tyme”—a fitting phrase, given that “future” is Chaucer’s neologism in the *Boece*—as a temporality filled by the past, tarnished by the stories of women that reduce her to stereotype. However, the victimized and accused position she shares with Cassandra indicates that this “future tyme” also belongs to many women in the narrative and throughout history.

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<sup>49</sup> Chaucer, *House of Fame*, 346-48.

<sup>50</sup> It is also possible that Chaucer himself relates to Cassandra, in that he worries that his London readers will fail to heed his subtle address.

Chaucer stresses the fact that Criseyde has *always* had anxieties concerning historical representation, transmission and exemplarity, in order to confront the assumption that she has changed for lack of constancy and to challenge the readers' instinct to follow the moralizations invited by literary tradition. In the *Legend of Good Women*, Chaucer is accused of characterizing women as traitorous through his making of *Troilus and Criseyde* ("Hast thou nat mad in Englysh ek the bok / How that Crisseyde Troylus forsok, / In shewynge how that wemen han don mis?").<sup>51</sup> But Chaucer's retraction makes him assume more guilt than he really deserves, since, in *Troilus and Criseyde*, he makes the subject of Criseyde's inconstancy ambiguous. If Criseyde is inconstant when it comes to loving Troilus, it is in the interest of self-protection in a world that repeatedly makes women suffer. Chaucer thus redirects attention to the historical forces that shape Criseyde's destiny, rather than her own failures.

Jamie C. Fumo draws attention to Pandarus's claim to hate Criseyde in Book V of *Troilus and Criseyde*, in a passage that impacts the later versions of the love story, which attempt to demonize and close off readings of her character. Pandarus says, "What sholde I seyen? I hate, ywis, Cryseyde; / And, God woot, I wol hate hire evermore!" (V, 1732-33).<sup>52</sup> Chaucer presents Pandarus's hatred as excessive and hasty, raising suspicion that his feeling toward Criseyde somehow developed earlier in the narrative, and is more than a hyperbolic display of support for Troilus in his agony. As I will show in the following sections, which focus on Troilus in the Boethian context, Chaucer attributes some responsibility for Troilus and Criseyde's circumstances to Pandarus, relieving Criseyde of blame and forcing readers to question the pull that the characters have at all when up against history. Attention to the role of Pandarus and other

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<sup>51</sup> Chaucer, *The Legend of Good Women*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), G 264-66.

<sup>52</sup> Jamie C. Fumo, "Hating Criseyde: Last Words on a Heroine from Chaucer to Henryson," *The Chaucer Review* 46 (2011): 20-38.

historical circumstances, but also to the Boethian framework, complicate the tendency to see Criseyde as a morally flawed character. While Boethian readings have wanted to moralize Troilus, either as the victim of Fortune or as someone who pursued a misguided path of worldly felicity, considering Criseyde's Boethian subjectivity helps readers see her consciousness of the instability and conversions that are occurring precisely as they occur. Criseyde's anxiety stems from her knowledge that while her future ought to be partially contingent, it is already manifested as historical record. Ultimately, by predicating Criseyde's experiences on her sense of time, Chaucer enables his readers to perceive the pressures of an external and "objective" framework of time, imposed by the historiographical tradition, on her free will. Furthermore, if, as Mann writes, "destiny...works through the will in the subtle coalesce of outward event and inward desire," Chaucer deliberately makes Criseyde's "inward desire" ambivalent, to challenge the readers' belief in her complicity.

Chaucer reinforces again and again how Criseyde wants to revise the essentializing tradition. In Book II, Criseyde worries that a history of suffering will recur and manifest in her own narrative, and in Book V, less situated because she has gained spatial and temporal distance from Troy, Criseyde declares that she will evade the epithet of inconstancy. Because she has failed Troilus, she says, "To Diomedes algate I wol be trewe" (V, 1071). While Criseyde's loyalty to Diomedes is precisely what scars her name, Chaucer advises that it simultaneously clear her name, as her declaration indicates her heightened self-awareness and sense of distance from mutable patterns. The narrator himself seeks to change the tendency of history writings, facilitating the escape of the future from the patterns of temporal recurrence. He refers to the bookish tradition that haunts Criseyde even before she is gone:

Ne me ne list this sely womman chyde  
Forther than the storye wol devyse.

Hire name, allas, is publysshed so wide  
That for hire gilt is oughte ynough suffise.  
And if I myghte excuse hire any wise,  
For she so sory was for hire untrouthe,  
Iwis, I wolde excuse hire yet for route.  
(V, 1093-99)

The narrator appears to sympathize with Criseyde as he suggests her “sufficient” sense of guilt, but this passage is also deeply ambivalent. While he can “excuse hire,” the narrator recalls “hire untrouthe,” implying that he finds her culpable, and later, he defers to the scornful tradition in which “hire name is publyssed,” when he directly addresses Chaucer’s readers, “Ye may hire gilt in other bokes se” (V, 1776). The narrator assimilates his particular account of Criseyde into the antifeminist bookish tradition from which he has repeatedly sought to remove it, reinforcing the idea that Criseyde must fulfill her own guilty prophecy. Distancing the narrator from Chaucer the author, the ending of *Troilus and Criseyde* thus meditates on the difficulty of revising history. Temporal recurrence plagues the act of textual creation itself, challenging Chaucer to resist historical-narrative tendency and aligning him with Criseyde in a final declaration of frustration that invites his readers to commiserate over the patterns and prescriptions of time.

#### 4. TROILUS AND HIS LADY PHILOSOPHY: PARODYING BOETHIAN DIALOGUE

Whereas Criseyde’s hesitation to comply with Pandarus’s schemes in Book I arises out of her fear of damaging her public reputation, Troilus’s initial skepticism about amorous relationships at the Temple of the Palladion pertains little to anxieties about his political status in Troy. It is his disgust of “nyce and blynde” lovers that causes him to dismiss a future of courtship and look scornfully upon all lovers with such arrogance that he compares to a “proud...pekok” (I, 202, 210). When Troilus does “convert” to love, his approach also differs from Criseyde’s: while Criseyde worries about how her choices in love will affect her honor,

Troilus separates private and public spheres, never suggesting that love could compromise his heroic status as a politician or soldier, or damage his name within historical records. Despite that Troilus's passion for Criseyde is aligned with Paris's love for Helen, it is "fatal" only inasmuch as it produces an interior drama of lovesickness; word of it does not escape Troilus's circle of friends into the public realm of history, and thus it never threatens the status of Troilus or the stability of Troy.

The absence of a "political Troilus" in the opening scene of courtship distances the protagonist from the civic problems lingering in Troy, but so does the patchwork of literary complaints that construct his speech. Troilus relies on the conventions of courtly discourse to express his suffering, and the prolonging of the unrequited state of Troilus's love—a duration opened up by descriptions of his symptomology and expression of love-sickness—adds fuel to his lament in the fashion of courtly love. This discourse is linked to a particularly individualized, personal experience, which he wants to keep private. For instance, Troilus's first song, the *Canticus Troili*, is adapted from Petrarch's Sonnet 88, or no. 132, of the *Canzoniere*, entitled, "S'amor non è." In addition, Troilus's lovestruck appearance threatens to make his passion for Criseyde known to the public world, but Chaucer again makes a point to emphasize the external and surface changes precipitated by love as if to suggest that the consequences of his love are less substantial than Criseyde's. To protect his reputation and his vow to avoid love, "his woo he gan dissimilen and hide" (I, 322). Practicing the defense of dissimulation, Troilus "fayned" the love that "bigan his fetheres so to lyme," telling people that it is "other besy nedes" that have precipitated his unusual appearance (I, 353-55). Despite their differences, like Criseyde, Troilus's knowledge of the past informs his decision to keep his love private, "remembryng hym that love to wide yblowe / Yelt bittre fruyt, though swete seed be sowe" (I, 384-85). And yet

despite this intention, Troilus's amorous expressiveness in his Petrarchan sonnet is, according to Christine Chism, "destined precisely for display, circulation, and comparison—to the narrator, to the reader, to Pandarus, and only incidentally if ever to Criseyde herself."<sup>53</sup>

Private or public, because Troilus's condition of suffering in love may only pretend to be as hazardous as Criseyde's love (and yet he deploys the serious, albeit conventional language of the *Boece*), it parodies Boethian suffering. The *Boece* shapes Troilus's literarily allusive speech, but Troilus's Boethianisms are sharply at odds with the courtly expression of Petrarch's poetry and lyric. Troilus emphasizes his agony using the Boethian imagery of entrapment: "O fool, now artow in the snare, / That whilom japedest at loves peyne. / Nor artow hent, now gnaw thin owen cheyne!" (I, 507-9). The Boethian lament darkens borrowings from a courtly love tradition, where the chains of love are metaphorical, as in Andreas Capellanus's *De arte honeste amandi*, or *The Art of Courtly Love*. In this treatise, "love is a certain inborn suffering derived from the *sight* of and excessive meditation upon the beauty of the opposite sex" and it "gets its name (*amor*) from the word for hook (*amus*), which means 'to capture' or 'to be captured,'" which explains why "he who is in love is captured in the chains of desire."<sup>54</sup> The courtly tradition exploits the metaphors of vision and imprisonment, but for Boethius, the actual fetters of the Ostrogothic king Theodoric's prison physically lock him into a place of enclosure, and his fall beneath Fortune's Wheel corresponds to his literal imprisonment and impending death. By employing the discourses of Boethius, Petrarch, and Andreas Capellanus, each out of different

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<sup>53</sup> Christine Chism, "Courtly Love and its Impossible Implementation: The Narrative Pragmatics of an Ideal," in *A Companion to British Literature*, vol. 1, eds. Robert DeMaria, Jr., Heesok Change, and Samantha Zacher (Wiley: West Sussex, UK, 2014), 134-35.

<sup>54</sup> Andreas Capellanus, *The Art of Courtly Love*, trans. John Jay Parry (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), 28, 31; my italics. This is a translation of the Latin: "Amor est passio quaedam innata procedens ex visione et immoderata cogitatione formae alterius sexus"; "dicitur autem [amor] ab amo verbo, quod significant capere vel capi"; "Nam qui amat captus est cupidinis vinculis," in Andreas Capellanus, *De Arte Honestae Amandi*, ed. E. Trojel (Copenhagen, 1892; reprinted München: Eidos Verlag, 1964).

traditions, Troilus attests to the personal nature of his dilemma, which is Boethian only in imitation.

Troilus's Boethian parody underscores his transformation into a "blynde" lover. Chaucer repeatedly uses a discourse of vision, eliciting medieval ideas of extromission and intromission, to show his narrowing gaze on Criseyde and, allegorically, earthly love. These focuses, like the metaphorical chains that bind Troilus, express his distance from Boethian clairvoyance. Troilus's practice of seeing, in which the gaze of the beloved transmits love into the heart of the lover, is the courtly antithesis to Boethian "lokyng"; it leads to madness, rather than composure, to blindness instead of clarity. When Troilus in the temple "caste up the browe, / Ascaunces, 'Loo!,'" the God of Love angrily uses his bow against him (I, 204-5). Turning his gaze upward, he is not rewarded with some Boethian realization of transcendence, which would otherwise broaden and elongate his perspective of mortal affairs. Instead, the piercing effects of love secure him in the context of earthly time and experience. Immediately after "his eye percede" the gathering of ladies, falling upon Criseyde, Troilus becomes "astoned," frozen by the sight of Criseyde (I, 272, 274). Again, Chaucer invokes a spiritual tradition—Augustine describes the *ictu cordis*, or piercing glance of the heart, in the *Confessions*—only to parody the experience and re-position Troilus within a courtly framework.<sup>55</sup> In the tradition of the medieval courtly meet-cute, the vision of Criseyde incites Troilus's love-sickness: "And of hire look in him ther gan to quyken / So gret desir and such affeccioun / That in his herte botme gan to stiken / Of hir his fixe and depe impressioun (I, 295-98). According to James Schultz, "the exogenesis of courtly love" is the process by which the external image, presumably that of the courtly lady, "enters through the eyes, lodges in the heart, and takes the lover captive," and Chaucer draws on this popular model of the lover, disordered and imprisoned by the experience of suffering, in his

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<sup>55</sup> See Augustine, *Confessions*, 9.10.

construction of Troilus.<sup>56</sup> Troilus's sight of Criseyde transforms his view of love, and Criseyde's "lokyng," or appearance, has such an effect on Troilus "that nevere thoughte [Troilus] seen so good a *syghte*" (I, 293-94; my italics). When Pandarus converses with Criseyde, persuading her to love Troilus, he reiterates the discourse of courtly looking, pointing out how Criseyde's "lokyng of hire eyen," though she was unaware of it, wounded Troilus in his heart (II, 534). Chaucer here fluctuates between using "an extramission model based on Plato's theories when he wishes to stress the power of the seeing subject, and intromission models...when he wishes to stress the power of the object seen."<sup>57</sup> Both models and a reciprocal gaze are at play to enhance the impression and degree of Troilus's devotion to Criseyde.

As Troilus's lovelorn subjectivity intensifies, he grows able to see Criseyde's image beyond real encounter through the powers of his memory, by means of the "mind's eye," which represents the narrowing scope of his vision.<sup>58</sup> By indulging in the inward eye, Troilus evokes Dante in the *Vita Nuova*, for whom, according to Akbari, "vision is not a fleeting glance of the real woman, but rather a permanent gaze at her image stored in memory and flashed upon the mirror of imagination."<sup>59</sup> Recalling the "impression" of Criseyde fixed in his heart, Troilus indeed sees Criseyde in "a mirour of his mynde," revising her mortal persona as holy, and thus evoking another courtly text: Chrétien de Troyes's romance, *Le chevalier de la charette*, in which Lancelot idolizes Guinevere (I, 365). According to Mary Carruthers, who seeks to forgive

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<sup>56</sup> James Schultz, *Courtly Love, the Love of Courtliness, and the History of Sexuality* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 71. Also see J.A. Burrow, *Gestures and Looks in Medieval Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>57</sup> Akbari, *Seeing through the Veil*, 116.

<sup>58</sup> As Mary Carruthers writes, "*video* can be translated as either 'I see' [something external] or 'I visualize' [something in my mind's eye]," in "Virtue, intention and the mind's eye in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*," in *Traditions and Innovations in the Study of Middle English Literature*, eds. Charlotte Brewer and Barry Windeatt (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2013), 74.

<sup>59</sup> Akbari, *Seeing through the Veil*, 116-17.

Troilus for his love-driven postlapsarian condition, calling it “ordinary rational behavior” at the time the poem was written, the making of a mirror in one’s mind was a “standard medieval procedure of analytical thought,” which came “prior to making informed judgments.”<sup>60</sup> Troilus, she says, remembers not “to prolong a moment of past passion,” but to achieve “a stated goal,” and Carruthers even credits Troilus with practicing “the power of prudence.”<sup>61</sup>

While Carruthers may see Troilus as a figure in full consciousness of this ethical dilemma and prepared to use his memory to uncover a way to thoughtfully respond to it, the possibility that Troilus possesses a perfected sense of time—an ability to use memory to gauge the future—is still undermined by the Boethian intertext. Without moralizing Troilus as a version of a failed Boethius, the hyper-emphasis on vision and the allusions to the *Boece* ask readers to approach these scenes with attention to the Boethian intertext. The narrator himself becomes caught up in Troilus’s change and uses the language of Boethian lament in an instance exemplifying how the anachronism of medievalized Troy, when not constructing distance, creates a sense of intimacy between readers and Trojan characters. The narrator presents an alternative image to Fortune’s Wheel in stairs that allegorize Troilus’s rise and fall<sup>62</sup>:

O blynde world, O blynde entencioun!  
How often falleth al the effect contraire  
Of surquidrie and foul presumpcioun;  
For kaught is proud, and kaught is debonaire.  
This Troilus is clomben on the staire,  
And litel weneth that he moot descenden;  
But alday faileth thing that fooles wenden.  
(I, 211-17)

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<sup>60</sup> Carruthers, “Virtue, intention and the mind’s eye in Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*,” 74.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 80. Carruthers even suggests that Troilus’s return to his chamber “to meditate” is “monastic.”

<sup>62</sup> The use of the ladder and alternative images, such as Chaucer’s stairs, were not uncommon in medieval literature, according to Howard Patch, who also finds it in the tenth-century Provençal *Boece*, in *The Tradition of Boethius: A Study of His Importance in Medieval Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1935), 60.

Here, the narrator's description of the "world" and "entencioun" as blind emphasizes the cruel and mutable circumstances that govern Troilus's experience, rather than the failed vision of Troilus alone; the narrator momentarily forgets the Boethian idea that, as Cherniss writes, "fate, the unfolding of Providence in the temporal world, may appear unjust, but this injustice is only apparent, not real, in its cosmic perspective."<sup>63</sup> Still, even as the narrator's apostrophe conveys his pity for the entrenched victim of mutability, his Boethian aside reflects his broader consciousness of the historical cycle, in which Troilus is not unique, but rather one of the many fools, making his condition communal or universal. While the narrator's reflection initially invites sympathy and familiarity with Troilus, the sense of exemplarity in the protagonist's experience ultimately helps detach readers from his woe and recognize his limited or fragmented view of history.

I will return to Troilus's Boethianisms, which become graver as the narrative turns from romance to tragedy, in the subsequent section ("Interpreting Troilus: Between Earthly Memory and Boethian Distance"), but here it is important to point out Pandarus's role in the early books, since, like Troilus, he distracts Chaucer's readers from history. The difference is that, while Troilus distracts the narrator and readers through his erotic self-subjugation, Pandarus diverts the story from history through the power he wields over language and fiction. Whereas Troilus bemoans his limited agency, Pandarus's insistence on romance time and his confidence in his own agency make him comparable to the narrator or author and, furthermore, show that he believes in the Boethian exertion of free will in a narrative already fixed and transmitted. Pandarus-qua-narrator may seem to indicate a false Lady Philosophy guise, but Chaucer actually softens the reading of his character by using him to celebrate the possibility of free will in a preordained universe, a major Boethian question, before readers come to Troilus's soliloquy on

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<sup>63</sup> Cherniss, *Boethian Apocalypse*, 14.

the subject in Book IV. His attempts to control time for the sake of his romance-driven agenda suggest his value in the world of the narrative, as someone whose agency purports to thwart the arbitrary turnings of Fortune's wheel. His fastidious management of the love affair assures Troilus of its potential for success, as the narrator articulates Troilus's optimism using the vocabulary of the *Boece* to describe divine foreknowledge: "And Troilus, that al this *purveiaunce* / Knew at the fulle, and waited on it ay, / Hadde hereupon ek mad gret *ordinaunce*, / And found his cause, and therto his aray" (III, 533-36; my italics). Chaucer tricks his readers into intermittently mistaking him for author and creator.

Pandarus's agendas to bring Troilus and Criseyde together indeed demand intricacies of plot and sophisticated rhetorical work. He shrouds Troilus and Criseyde's union in Book III through a dinner of Trojan politicians convening to assess potential threats to Criseyde's wellbeing, using political-historical material only to develop the private world of romance. But this scene highlights how anachronism can collapse the boundaries between past and present in a way that induces forgetting of historical precedent. Pandarus's arrangement foregrounds love and lovers' communication and in turn obscures their living memory of the Greek siege, which, in the background of the love plot, puts Troy on the precipice of collapse. Playing with disguises that effectively facilitate the characters' escape into romance, Pandarus reminds Chaucer's readers of how, in Criseyde's reading circle at the beginning of Book II, he misread the Theban fall as a story of the distant past, unlikely to recur and inconceivable as an exemplum. While Pandarus confidently makes Prufrock-like claims to know it all, the consequences of his imaginative inventions are always foreseeable.

Pandarus's dismissive approach to Theban history links him to the Troilus-centered Boethian parody in a way that, as I have written, is not always flattering. While Troilus compares

primarily to Boethius the victim and protagonist, Pandarus acquires his Boethian subjectivity through the qualities and ideas he shares with both Lady Philosophy and Boethius the author. In the dialogic tradition, the author tends to identify with one authoritative figure in the textual world, even if he is constructing a conflict of his potential ideas.<sup>64</sup> Boethius the author draws on his own painful experience to construct Boethius the character, but also, as an author, conveying a meaningful message about the *summum bonum* and the role of providence, Boethius occupies the role of Lady Philosophy; the author behind the text occupies both points of view. In *Troilus and Criseyde*, Pandarus differently capitalizes on his authorial role, creating fictions for the two titular lovers, rather than acting as a second voice to Lady Philosophy. His authoritative status, reinforced through his contrast with the sullen Troilus by temperament and age, mirrors the authoritative status of Lady Philosophy, whose physical presence dramatizes Boethius's helpless and sluggish persona: in Book I, Pandarus commands Troilus, "Awake!" as if he were Lady Philosophy, stirring Boethius from his slumber of woe (I, 729). However, despite representing himself as a physician, Pandarus insists on using the form of storytelling as he provides medicine to the lovesick Troilus and uses rational arguments to persuade Criseyde, whom he asks, evoking Lady Philosophy, "What aileth yow?" (II, 211).<sup>65</sup> Pandarus's self-fashioning as a doctor problematizes the Boethian model, in which the allegorical lady reveals the "medicine" of truth to the spiritually- and ethically-wayward protagonist. His advice, which seeks to arouse his patient's drive toward his lover, evokes not Lady Philosophy's transformative cure, but rather the

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<sup>64</sup> For instance, in Petrarch's *Secretum*, Franciscus represents the early Boethian figure whose judgment is clouded by mortal affairs and whose access to God is limited by his own spiritual inadequacies, and Augustinus evokes Lady Philosophy, condemning Franciscus's misplacement of spiritual affection, on Laura, rather than God. Petrarch seeks to reconcile his perspectives of earthly and divine loves, but the text suggests the author's greater affinity for the perspective of Augustinus. The Latin text is in Francesco Petrarca, *Il mio segreto*, ed. Ugo Dotti (Milan: Rizzoli, 2000), and the English text is in Petrarch, *The Secret*, ed. Carol E. Quillen (Boston and New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2003).

<sup>65</sup> As doctor diagnosing her patient, Lady Philosophy asks Boethius, "What eyleth the, man?" Chaucer, *Boece*, 2, Pr. 1, 47.

rhetorical strategies of the poetical muses that she pushes away in Book I of the *Boece*.

Pandarus's medicine does not educate lovers or direct them onto a path leading to the *summum bonum*, the ultimate goal, of God and transcendence, but instead makes them invested in the present earthly temporality, to the extent that he overlooks the potential consequences of his game on the future.

By the end of Book I of *Troilus and Criseyde*, Chaucer establishes the Boethian model of the exchange between Pandarus and Troilus, and while Troilus is receptive to his guide's advice, Pandarus is soon forced to amplify and tailor his strategies in a more particular way to tempt Criseyde to fall for Troilus in return. Criseyde's declaration that she will not accept any man's love, given the historical precedent of female enslavement by men, challenges Pandarus to improve his strategies of coercion.<sup>66</sup> In *Criseyde*, his "Boethius," or his patient, becomes more defiant, resistant to his "medicines" and skeptical of their effects. Whereas Pandarus functions to increase and properly channel Troilus's desire, which is spurred before Pandarus's arrival on the scene, Criseyde's anxiety causes Pandarus to manipulate a rational discourse of time in order to assure her of the safety of her name and of the opportune moment she has for true romance. Each time Criseyde imagines the characters of the poem in terms of how they relate to the state of Troy, Pandarus pivots the conversation away from public matters to focus on her pursuit of love. For instance, moving on from the topic of Hector, he presents Troilus in terms of his heroic and courtly qualities:

And ek his fresshe brother Troilus,  
The wise, worthi Ector the secounde,

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<sup>66</sup> I look to Michel de Certeau's terminology here, using "strategies," which refer to the type that "are able to produce, tabulate, and impose...spaces" and to "the calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships that becomes possible as soon as a subject with will and power...can be isolated," rather than "tactics," which "can only use, manipulate, and divert these spaces," in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 30. Strategy implies "a mastery of places through sight" and a "panoptic practice," which readers can nearly find in Pandarus, as well as the "ability to transform the uncertainties of history into readable spaces," 36.

In whom that alle vertu list habounde,  
As alle trouthe and alle gentillesse,  
Wisdom, honour, fredom, and worthinesse.  
(II, 157-61)

Pandarus's catalog of idealized traits evokes the paradigms of medieval knighthood, but even this litany of features is not enough to convince Criseyde. His optimism must also conceal the possibility of a negative outcome to their union:

For to every wight som goodly aventure  
Som tyme is shape, if he it kan receyven;  
But if he wol take of it no cure,  
What that it commeth, but wilfully it weyven,  
Lo, neyther cas ne fortune hym deceyven,  
But ryght his verray slouthe and wrecchednesse;  
And swich a wight is for to blame, I gesse.  
(II, 281-87)

Pandarus repeatedly claims the inevitability of good fortune, constructing time deliberately as a force that works to Criseyde's advantage. However, as a Boethian reader knows, from Criseyde's human perspective, fortune and destiny are at odds. To Chaucer's readers, Pandarus use of "aventure," while well-intentioned, paradoxically implies mutability and chance, and to Criseyde, a wider range of possible outcomes than Pandarus is able to consider. Pandarus's conflation of chance and destiny diverges from Lady Philosophy's careful distinction between the two in the *Boece*.

Furthermore, Pandarus's attention to the precise circumstances for joining Troilus and Criseyde undermines his concept of destiny ("som tyme is shape"); it is not the forces of the universe that bring the lovers together, but rather Pandarus, agent of love, who exploits free will, as well as his claims to knowledge and authority. Encouraging Criseyde to disrobe of her widow's garb and enter the world of love, Pandarus explains that this is *her* "tyme." Anticipating Andrew Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress," Pandarus reminds Criseyde of the effect of the

passage of time on her eligibility and desirability, and puts pressure on the immediate moment she occupies: “Thenk ek how elde wasteth every houre / In ech of yow a partie of beautee; / And therefore er that age the devoure, / Go love; for old, ther wol no wight of the” (II, 393-96). Pandarus manipulates the idea of time to fit his scheme: in one sense, timing manifests arbitrarily, but in another, events can be willed and deliberately “weyven.” For instance, Pandarus declares he will “fynde a tyme” in which Troilus can beseech Criseyde for her love, implying a precise moment in which the change of Criseyde’s heart will take place (I, 1064). In addition, the notion of predetermining by weaving (“wilfully it weyven”) ironically evokes Lady Philosophy’s description of the weavings of divine ordinance, which I mentioned in Chapter Three. The Boethian intertext thus reinforces the idea that Pandarus self-identifies as a divine-like figure, albeit an intrusive deity, meddling in the affairs of the characters and confident in the fiction of his own foresight.

Again, though, Pandarus’s certainty of a fortunate time contrasts the Boethian view of temporal recurrence and randomness. He omits the fact that, if Criseyde indulges in a good “aventure,” she actively participates in a history of rise and fall. Again, whereas for Lady Philosophy, mutable Fortune is subservient to Providence and “an abstract idea which the console must learn either to ignore or to overcome,”<sup>67</sup> Pandarus repeatedly praises the power of fortune, enticing Criseyde with the idea that it will work in her favor and benefit her happiness. Given that the Boethian subject who believes wholly in Fortune’s governance is blinder than the Boethian subject who understands that Fortune is merely an illusion of the human perspective, Pandarus effectively makes Criseyde blind to history by cultivating a fiction of time. He forces her to live in the present moment without contemplating the past, a temporal domain which would take her outside of the private, interior space. Pandarus’s speech reflects on Pandarus, too,

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<sup>67</sup> Cherniss, *Boethian Apocalypse*, 19.

though. Never looking beyond romance into the larger historical cycle, Pandarus confuses the teachings of Lady Philosophy and faces limitations as a figure with “authorial” control, as his sense of time is partial and confined to romance. Furthermore, while Richard Firth Green explores the pleasures of Pandarus’s play in *Troilus and Criseyde*, Tison Pugh also insightfully examines how “the play of courtly love partakes in the chaos of the fallen world by masking performative cruelties,” and how it leads the characters to become selfish with their own agendas.<sup>68</sup>

Nonetheless, indications that Pandarus has good intentions in the mission to unite Troilus and Criseyde destabilize his role as an ethically-wayward anti-Philosophy figure, preventing readers from moralizing his character and eliciting a more playful Boethian subjectivity in the poem. As I suggested, Pandarus’s expressions of his foreknowledge of the union of Troilus and Criseyde are Boethian in the sense that they represent a control evading Fortune’s own. At the end of Book I, “desirous to serve / His fulle frend,” Pandarus makes a plan and a pledge to Troilus in the custom of medieval oath-making: “Have here my trowthe” (I, 1058-59, 1061). In Book II, he premeditates Troilus’s meet-cute with Criseyde, again undermining the “aventure” by which something befalls a person unexpectedly. So, the Boethian intertext does not didactically shape Pandarus’s plan into a cautionary tale of the destructive or heedless behaviors within Troy. Pandarus’s multiple roles—friend, uncle, interlocutor, and adviser—complicate such an ethicizing reading, precluding his connection to any particular line of causality in the Fall of Troy; Pandarus instead offers temporary healing, not only to the lovelorn characters, but also to the readers who can find comedy and pleasure in the distractions from the tragedy that is about to unravel. Pandarus’s construction of time—not only in the abstract sense, but also as a

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<sup>68</sup> Tison Pugh, “Christian Revelation and the Cruel Game of Courtly Love in *Troilus and Criseyde*,” *The Chaucer Review* 39 (2005): 380.

concrete order that can be tangibly shifted—suggests that he resembles the narrator himself, re-crafting the Troy story and yet bound to particular, established storylines. As the next section will show, the characters’ re-making of destiny proves impossible, though Pandarus’s efforts, along with Troilus’s and Criseyde’s, may be compared to Chaucer’s very approach to re-writing the Troy narrative. By exposing the difficulty of writing a narrative anew, Chaucer ultimately comments on the incompleteness, the fixedness, and perhaps even the injustice of the historical record.

##### 5. INTERPRETING TROILUS: BETWEEN EARTHLY MEMORY AND BOETHIAN DISTANCE

The Boethian intertext in Books I through III of *Troilus and Criseyde* exposes the game-like nature of Pandarus’s plans and the comedic dimension of Troilus’s excessive woe. Pandarus attempts to deflect the historical narrative into a romantic plot, trying to shield Troilus and Criseyde from the public world by situating them in literal and metaphorical interior spaces. In Book III, where “alle the dores weren faste yshette,” the two lovers respond obediently, gradually moving inward to the most architecturally private space of the bedroom (III, 233). Pandarus succeeds in his nifty plan, resolving Troilus’s woe, and Criseyde newly finds a sense of security in Troilus’s love, mixing the imagery of protective armor with architectural metaphors to describe him: “That wel she felte he as to hire a wal / Of stiel, and sheld from every displeaunce” (479-80). The lovers appear to find a flat plane of stability. However, in Book IV, the unavoidable historical and political events of Troy begin to intrude on the romance and fiction of Chaucer’s narrative. These genres can only temporarily persuade Chaucer’s readers to forget the cataclysms of epic history. Instances of disorder, betrayal, and instability correspond to Pandarus’s progressive loss of his ability to frame history as irrelevant and precipitate the

characters' fall back into the course of both Trojan history and a more macrocosmic history of rise and fall.

This section will discuss how, in the light of this apparent shift of genre and turn of events within Troy, Troilus's changing conception of time exaggerates his sense of limited agency within the larger scheme of history. Notably, Troilus's sense of time reflects his attitude toward earthly affairs, which alters profoundly in the final books of the poem. Troilus's original position in the poem, after falling in love with Criseyde, is one of embeddedness: through his experience of earthly love, he becomes grounded in mortal time and experience, and even deploys the prison metaphors of Cappellanus's lovelorn discourse to suggest that he is a victim of captivity. However, when his death in the final book of the poem produces his physical elevation above the earth, he adopts a perspective out of the *contemptus mundi* tradition. The glaring shift of spatial positions and perspectives does not give way to Troilus's less severe sense of distance, a loving distance that Chaucer seems to recommend. Instead, it shows Troilus's extreme and polar positions in relation to mortal experience, positions that are ironically continuous in that they reveal his limited perspective. Through the Boethian intertext, Chaucer draws out not only Troilus's changing ways of "seeing time," but also his important questions about control and free will, which, remaining unanswered, ask readers to consider Troilus's epistemic and philosophical limitations.

While Troilus's speeches in the first three books of the poem allude to the *Boece*, his language of Boethian suffering intensifies and changes tone in Books IV and V, when "his adventures fellen...out of joie," as predicted by the narrator's opening stanza of Book I (I, 3-4). The parliamentary crisis preceding Criseyde's shift in loyalties, in itself representing a rupture in the narrative of romance, is the first political event that alters Troilus's perspective on history

after the scene of bedroom bliss in Book III. Troilus's inaction at the scene of the exchange reflects his awareness that his only two options—to speak out against the trade of Criseyde and to remain silent—will result in loss. By keeping silent, Troilus avoids the consequences of demonstrating his “affeccioun” for Criseyde to the public (IV, 153). Troilus's silence also protects Criseyde's political wellbeing, as an act concerned with the idea, “First, how to save hire honour,” and one that contrasts him with the legendary figure of Paris (IV, 153, 159). Catapulted from the private sphere of love into the public domain of politics, Troilus recognizes that he faces a problem of historical determinacy and falls into a state of sorrow; Troilus evokes “a ded ymage, pale and wan” (IV, 235). Immediately following the parliament, he also renounces his agency by refusing to prepare for the future, preferring to anticipate death: “O deth, allas! why nyltow do me deye?” (IV, 250). Troilus's apostrophe to death evokes the hyperbolic complaints of the Boethius-subject in the early portion of the *Boece*.

Troilus's laments emerge not at the scene of the parliamentary convocation, but instead in private conversations with Pandarus, whose response to Troilus's despair figures him once more as a Lady Philosophy figure. Pandarus resists Troilus's fatalistic response to the crisis, optimistic again about the possibilities of human control over the future. He attempts to ameliorate Troilus's sense of loss by imagining the young knight with a new woman:

For also seur as day comth after nyght,  
The newe love, labour, or oother wo,  
Or elles selde seyng of a wight,  
Don olde affeccions alle over-go.  
(IV, 421-24)

Pandarus here makes the discovery of a new love to replace an old love as natural as the arrival of day after night. His consciousness of the cycle of love and love lost does not, however, console his friend, “lest he for sorwe deyde” (IV, 429). Troilus is skeptical of Pandarus's

Philosophy-like healing strategy and reminds him of the promise he made to Criseyde, “She that I serve, iwys, what so thow seye, / To whom myn herte enhabit is by right, / Shal han me holly hires til that I deye” (IV, 442-44). Troilus’s incredulity at his friend’s advice becomes even graver when Troilus explains why he cannot have Criseyde back to himself, invoking the context of the Trojan War—“thow woost this town hath al this were”—and the plight of Paris and Helen as an obstacle to his union with Criseyde: “For ravysshyng of wommen so by myght, / It sholde nought be suffred me to erre” (IV, 548-49). Troilus’s conversation with Pandarus, which acknowledges the backdrop of the war in Troy, indicates that Troilus has reached a higher level of temporal consciousness. Pandarus’s proposal of a quick solution thus elicits Troilus’s mature recognition that his romance with Criseyde can never be independent of the larger context of civic Troy, which gives way to his anachronistic meditation on the paradox of free will in a providentially-ordered universe in the temple of pagan gods.

Troilus’s soliloquy on predestination represents Chaucer’s longest single borrowing from the *Boece* in the poem, but it is incomplete, conveying a fragment of Boethian philosophy—merely the philosophical predicament, rather than also the solution—to make Troilus appear all the more limited in his understanding of time. In the corresponding section of the *Boece*, Boethius is mystified by Lady Philosophy’s teaching that human beings have free will in a temporality foreknown by God: “It semyth...to repugnen and to contrarien gretly, that God knoweth byforn alle thinges and that ther is any fredom of liberte.”<sup>69</sup> Lady Philosophy, whose arguments across the next sections of Book V expose the differentiated levels of knowledge in the universe, and specifically the distinction between human epistemology and divine foreknowledge, explains and resolves the seeming contradiction between free will and God’s prescience. She addresses Boethius’s conundrum as an “olde question,” posed also by Cicero,

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<sup>69</sup> Chaucer, *Boece*, 5, Pr. 3, 4-5.

and one which, despite its evident link to *auctoritates*, stumps great thinkers because they refuse to accept that the human mind cannot approach the mind of God in order to understand “the simplicité of the devyne prescience.”<sup>70</sup> These thinkers fail to understand that foreknowledge does not imply predestination or necessity. So, in Troilus’s predestination soliloquy, Chaucer registers Boethian philosophy with his readers to show Troilus’s epistemic limitations, as Troilus notably omits the defense of free will. His monologue, evaluating clerical opinions, demonstrates his anguish at worldly loss, but not a Boethian distance:

For som men seyn, if God seth al biforn—  
Ne God may nat deceyved ben, parde—  
Than moot it fallen, theigh men hadde it sworn,  
That purveiance hath seyn before to be.  
Wherfore I sey, that from eterne if he  
Hath wist byforn oure thought ek as oure dede,  
We han no fre chois, as thise clerkes rede.  
(IV, 974-80)

The omission of any response to the predestination puzzle implies the absence of Boethian insight into the patterns of history. As Chaucer’s readers familiar with Boethius would have known, the actualization of Boethian insight would entail Troilus’s reconciliation of human liberty and the prevision of human actions by God. According to Etienne Gilson, “Boethius’s answer consists in dissociating the two problems of prevision and liberty. God infallibly foresees free acts, but he foresees them as free; the fact that these acts are foreseen does not make them become necessary.”<sup>71</sup> Gilson connects Boethius’s premise that God *provides* rather than *foresees* to the fact of God’s eternal perspective and perpetual present: “the immobile and permanent view that God has of our voluntary acts does not in the least detract from their liberty.”<sup>72</sup> The Boethian

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<sup>70</sup> Chaucer, *Boece*, 5, Pr. 4, 13-14.

<sup>71</sup> Etienne Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1955), 103.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

reconciliation in *Troilus and Criseyde* would also mean that, like Boethius, Troilus would move “from his concrete personal experience...to arrive finally at transcendental ideas and values which resolve rationally the problems and paradoxes encountered along the way.”<sup>73</sup> Troilus never reaches the Boethian answer, but instead ends his speech with the declaration, “We han no fre chois.” As Megan Murton writes, “[Troilus’s] argument lacks a key proposition—that divine knowledge is eternal and simple—and therefore leads to the false conclusion of fatalism, seen as a characteristically pagan error in medieval thought.”<sup>74</sup> Murton proceeds to argue on strong grounds that Troilus’s prayer defies the need for a rational Boethian reconciliation since it evokes Boethius’s turn from logic to prayer in the final book of the *Boece*.

While Chaucer may have wanted to parallel Troilus’s and Boethius’s turns to prayer, it is also significant that Troilus’s concluding thoughts are interrupted by external circumstances, rather than by his own natural intellectual abilities. Pandarus ends Troilus’s speech before he can resolve the issue and reconcile the paradox of free will and providence; he interrupts his philosophical meditation before he is able to reach Boethian consciousness. When Troilus speaks to Jove, he removes himself from a Christian theological context, reminding readers of the anachronism of the scene. Troilus demands that the deity end his life or bring him Criseyde, an echo of Dido, praying to her sister Anna in Book IV of the *Aeneid*, “Sister, be glad for me! I’ve found a way to bring him back or free me of desire.”<sup>75</sup> The Dido-Troilus parallel heightens the expectation for a resolution to Troilus’s problem, making Pandarus’s interruption of Troilus’s weighty private contemplation all the more apparent; the narrator says, “whil he was in al this

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<sup>73</sup> Cherniss, *Boethian Apocalypse*, 27.

<sup>74</sup> Megan Murton, “Praying with Boethius in *Troilus and Criseyde*,” *The Chaucer Review* 49 (2015): 298.

<sup>75</sup> “Inveni germana, viam (gratare sorori) / quae mihi reddat eum vel eo me solvat amantem,” Vergil, *Vergil’s Aeneid*, 478-79. Translation from Virgil, *The Aeneid*, IV, 661-62.

hevynesse, / Disputyng with hymself in this matere, / Com Pandare in” (IV, 1083-85). Chaucer thus opens up space in the narrative of Boccaccio’s *Filostrato* for Troilus’s lonesome complaint, and whereas Boccaccio shows a direct sequence in which Pandarus enters the temple to scold Troilus and summon him to see Criseyde, Chaucer introduces Pandarus’s agency to frame Troilus’s meaningful Boethian reflection on the order of the universe and to divert it from its conclusive and illuminative end.

This instance in which Pandarus prevents Troilus from finding even a provisional hope is a reminder of the domestic reading scene where Criseyde’s insight into historical recurrence is cut short by Pandarus’s bid to dance. The repetition of disruption of this kind suggests that forces greater than Troilus and Criseyde precipitate their actions. Pandarus’s desire for entertainment and conviviality has darker consequences for Criseyde, in particular, than he supposes. His entrance into Criseyde’s reading room typifies Hugh of St. Victor’s idea of *fortuna*, or “bad fortune,” a typical obstacle to study that thwarts readers from reaching knowledge.<sup>76</sup> As I have written, to Hugh of St. Victor, the order and method of reading matter, too, as anyone who does not maintain them “wanders as it were into the very thick of the forest and loses the path of the direct route” (“quasi in condensitate saltus oberrans, tramitem recti itineris perdit”).<sup>77</sup> Pandarus’s detour from reading into play here becomes a detour from the process of understanding historical time. Returning to the manipulative tactics Pandarus deploys in Book II, Pandarus persuades Criseyde that he would not help the lovers if it meant participating in a fraudulent cause, as he does not want to risk his own injury in the process: “I am thyn em; / the shame were to me, / As wel as the, if that I sholde assente, / Thorough myn abet that he thyn honour shente” (II, 355-57). Despite this momentary hypothetical, he repeatedly shows confidence in his control over the

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<sup>76</sup> Hugh of Saint Victor, *The Didascalicon*, 127.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

future; in Book II, when Pandarus plans Troilus's horseback ride past Criseyde's window as a fortunate accident, a second "happy" encounter to the first window-scene introducing Troilus to Criseyde, he takes credit for manipulating time to give the impression of chance. "Fondly imagining himself the omniscient and omnipresent director of the drama,"<sup>78</sup> Pandarus manages the love affair so fastidiously that he convinces Troilus of its potential for success.

Chaucer suggests that Pandarus repeatedly guides characters away from opportunities to utilize the past for the present and to explore theories of time. While imagining himself as divine purveyor, he actually entrenches his puppets Troilus and Criseyde in the haphazard turns of Fortune and manipulates their insights into time. "Chance" encounters participate in the confluence of the forces external to the characters' control, contributing here to the manifestation of narrative destiny. As I have written, Pandarus's calculations ultimately do not lead Chaucer's readers to demonize him. However, by resembling the narrator through his constant creation of fiction, Pandarus does become a reminder that the characters are bound to prescribed storylines—that, like Boethius, they cannot escape the fate that has been imposed on them by external forces.

These storylines confuse Troilus, who alternates between confidence and despair over his future. When Troilus abandons the Boethian dilemma of his soliloquy, he re-engages with the idea of a union with Criseyde, increasingly confident about Pandarus's assurances that Criseyde has a plan and that he ought to remain steadfast. In Book IV, feeling powerless, Troilus draws out his sword to kill himself and conveniently curses "Fortune adverse," but Criseyde calms him by taking over the role of Lady Philosophy temporarily and telling him that she will "fynde boote," or a remedy, to the woeful situation in which they find themselves (IV, 1192, 1259).

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<sup>78</sup> Jill Mann, "Chance and destiny in *Troilus and Criseyde* and the *Knight's Tale*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Chaucer*, eds. Piero Boitani and Jill Mann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 95.

Both Troilus and Criseyde deploy a discourse of time that reflects their respective attitudes to their relationship. Criseyde tells him, “It were al tyme soone to bygynne,” and Troilus, who argues that their separation from each other will be temporary, says, “And thynketh wel that somtyme it is wit / To spende a tyme, a tyme for to wynne” (IV, 1260, 1611-12). Troilus adopts a stance of optimism about future time resembling Pandarus’s position in earlier portions of the narrative; his message here relays his belief that he and Criseyde will need to be separated for a brief duration of time, a sacrifice necessary to acquire, or “wynne,” the longer period in which they can be together. Troilus’s repetition of “tyme” evokes precise intervals of time, but his phrase, “somtyme it is wit” also suggests that he relies on a relatively abstract concept of time to assure Criseyde of their future union.

Troilus’s optimism stems partly from Criseyde’s use of the Orpheus story and her assurances that their love will endure and transcend their political circumstances, but his attitude changes when he realizes that the period of separation has become a permanent state of loss. The proem to Book V first alerts Chaucer’s readers to the tragic turn of events, once more using a reflection on the role of fate in the outcome of the lovers’ story: “For which Criseyde moste out of the town, / And Troilus shal dwellen forth in pyne / Til Lachesis his thred no lenger twine” (V, 5-7). Lachesis, the particular Fate among the “angry Parcas, sustren thre” who spins the thread of life, ensures the permanent suffering of the hero (V, 3). Despite that Criseyde “was so loth... to fare,” the well-known sub-plot of Criseyde’s turn to Diomedes unravels, giving way to Troilus’s response (V, 21); he contemplates retaliating—“Whi nyl ich it redresse?”—and stealing Criseyde back, but his concern for Criseyde’s life prevents him from repeating Paris’s famous act (V, 40).

Instead of following through with retaliatory force, Troilus responds to his circumstances with a focus on the passage of time, in which he raises the issue of earthly memory described earlier in Chapter 1 on the *Book of the Duchess*. A refusal to forget entrenches Troilus in a model of temporal cyclicity and repetition. Nostalgic for his time with Criseyde, Troilus practices an exercise in “remembraunce” by returning to the “places of the town / In which he whilom hadde al his plesaunce” (V, 562, 563-64). This journey through Troy helps him to recall the material spaces of his encounters with Criseyde, and in a series of memorializing apostrophes, evoking the *ubi sunt* tradition, Troilus names the *loci* of his memory. He inadvertently demonstrates how Book V of *Troilus and Criseyde* mirrors Book I through the theme of remembrance, and that, now that history has disrupted earthly love, the characters are near a point at which they, too, can look back on a version of the Trojan past. Nonetheless, Troilus’s act of memory differs from the narrator and readers’ omniscient sense of Trojan history. Unlike the readers, at a distance from Troy, Troilus experiences how the passage of time makes the city into a “prisoun,” a literal landscape of desolation (V, 884). Troilus at once acknowledges mutability and forms an attempt to live on through memory. According to Astell, citing Book V of the poem, “he keeps ‘the proces’ of ‘past events ‘in...memorie,’ and reconstructs it as a narrative, observing that ‘men myght a book make of it, lik a storie.’”<sup>79</sup>

In “Prudence and Artificial Memory in Chaucer’s *Troilus*,” Susan Schibanoff argues that this scene relies on the theory of artificial memory developed in Frances Yates’s *The Art of Memory*, as Troilus revisits the *loci* specifically attached to images of Criseyde. He wanders through an empty Troy, consumed by desire for a tangible past, but incapable of recovering it, in part because it never fully existed. The spatial void—the inability to find traces of Criseyde, and thus his own past, within the city walls—symbolizes Troilus’s condition of dispossession.

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<sup>79</sup> Astell, “Orpheus, Eurydice, and the ‘Double Sorwe’ of Chaucer’s ‘Troilus,’” 294.

However, again, these places in Troy are not *loci* that Criseyde ever fully created for Troilus, despite that in Boccaccio's version of the narrative, Criseyde enact her trysts and meetings with Troilus through architectural spaces.<sup>80</sup> Chaucer's transformation of *Il Filostrato* thus changes the meaning of the past for Troilus: Troilus's historical imagination or memory dominates his field of vision, shifting the readers' focus from Criseyde's guilt in Troilus's pain to the worrisome degree to which Troilus's memory impedes his ability to live in the present. Recognizing this point of difference between Chaucer's narrative and Boccaccio's helps to exculpate Criseyde after the exchange in Book IV.

Whereas for Boethius, memory plays a role in the Platonic process of anamnesis to help him recover the "home" to which Lady Philosophy advocates return, Troilus's meditation on these *loci*, looking backward toward the image of temporary earthly desire, is viewed as idolatrous in the Boethian context. In a Christian reading, Troilus's personal theodicy falls short of resolution because he indulges in the mutable goods of the world and fails to keep the appropriate distance from his turbulent relationship that would make him understand its greater meaning and allow him to transcend his earthly suffering. The inability to know and rationalize the matters before them reflects a certain degree of blindness to history. Even as he wanders through what appears to be more a space than a place, given its emptiness and the sense of freedom implicit in it, Troilus's "preson" represents the confinement and the entrapment of the mortal world. Like Boethius, whose memory-retrieval is connected to his distance from earthly affairs, Chaucer's readers are encouraged to adopt a perspective on this scene of Troilus that is contingent on remembrance. They return with the hero to the scenes he conjures up in his speech,

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<sup>80</sup> As Barbara Nolan writes, "Strikingly unlike Boccaccio's heroine, Chaucer's Criseyde does not invite Troilus into her palace to enact *any* of the face-to-face, tactile stages in the *gradus amoris* leading to her seduction. . . Chaucer has Pandarus, not Criseyde, select and manage all the spaces that will bring the seduction process to its culmination," in "Chaucer's Poetics of Dwelling in *Troilus and Criseyde*," in *Chaucer and the City*, ed. Ardis Butterfield (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2006), 61.

but with a different memory of Criseyde and the love affair than the memory in Troilus's possession. The readers' narrative omniscience gives a visual picture of Criseyde as a widow dressed in black, of Troilus as scornful knight, and of the disastrous events that follow their period of intimacy, all at once, as Boethius's God sees past, present, and future. This is different than how Troilus remembers: images of Criseyde dancing, playing, laughing, and singing. The readers possess the prudence that Criseyde "lakked," as Prudence, says Schibanoff, is constituted by memory, intelligence, and foresight in the definition inherited by medieval thinkers from Cicero: unlike Troilus, who "has selected places and images which reflect a unified and joyful portrayal of his past with Criseyde," Chaucer's readers are "compelled by the poem to recall images which represent some less savory aspects of what ultimately produced the meeting at Pandarus's home...for us, the *loci* of the temple and town gates are not that far removed, since we have been prepared to see the lovers' meeting eventually end in parting."<sup>81</sup> The distinction between the readers' perspective and Troilus's perspective once more exposes his limited vision of time.

While Troilus does not seem to acquire a Boethian way of "seeing time," Chaucer suggests that Criseyde develops a version of philosophical distance by the end of the poem, hinting again at a reconsideration of her character within the narrative tradition. In Book IV, upon learning of her forced separation from Troilus, Criseyde had the "verray signal of martire / Of deth," and becomes distressed when she hears the gossip of women who have learned that she will be traded for Antenor (IV, 818-19). In Book V, Criseyde continues to show her remorse as she leaves behind the city:

Criseyde, whan she redy was to ride,  
 Ful sorwfully she sighte, and seyde "Allas!"  
 But forth she moot, for aught that may bitide;

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<sup>81</sup> Susan Schibanoff, "Prudence and Artificial Memory in Chaucer's *Troilus*," *ELH* 42 (1975), 513-14.

Ther is non other remedie in this cas.  
And forth she rit ful sorwfully a pas.  
What wonder is, though that hire sore smerte,  
Whan she forgoth hire owen swete herte?  
(V, 57-63)

This stanza represents Criseyde's conflict by combining a vocabulary of forward movement with the language of regret and of forced leave; the narrator repeats the word "forth," but also uses the modal verb "moot" to emphasize Criseyde's acquiescence to the inevitable course of her narrative, and again conveys her passive movement and slow pace through the phrase, "she rit ful sorwfully a pas." In this stanza, Chaucer reminds readers of the complexity of and reasons for Criseyde's betrayal of Troilus, and portrays her sympathetically by recognizing her victimized position: for her, "there is non other remedie."

While Criseyde admits her lack of prudence, this passage also suggests that she knows enough about her future to plan her switch in alliances. As strategic in terms of her location as she is earlier in the narrative when she tries to hide from the public view, as if "in a cave," Criseyde develops the foresight to relocate herself "out of the citee," her former town now deserted, as Troilus reports in his complaint, "O paleys desolate, / O hous of houses whilom best ihight, / O paleys empty and disconsolat" (V, 843, 540-42). While Criseyde's grief makes her reluctant to answer Diomedes's welcoming words and praises, as "hire thoughte hire sorwful herte brast a-two," she resolves to thank the Greek knight and accept his friendship before entering a reunion with her father (V, 180). As I have already discussed, the narrator continues to invite the readers' sympathy for Criseyde as Book V progresses, explaining that he is not quick to judge Criseyde, particularly because "she so sory was for hire untrouthe" (V, 1098). The poem ends with his ambivalent perspective on Criseyde; just as she resists the journey away from Troy

and into the arms of Diomedes, the narrator struggles against the narrative tradition in which he tells his story by leaving the question of Criseyde's betrayal open to interpretation.

The narrator similarly challenges readers to re-interpret Troilus's perfect moral heroism and Christian philosophical detachment through his representation of Troilus's ascent at the end of *Troilus and Criseyde*. The ending complicates the idea explored within the visionary tradition that physical distance necessarily equips the seer with a more figurative distance, an aloofness from the affairs of mortal experience. The lines describing Troilus's ascent to the eighth sphere evoke a Dantean ascent, particularly through references to the stars and the heavenly melodies, as well as the more metaphorical gaze toward the heavens that Lady Philosophy advocates in the

*Boece*:

And whan that he was slayn in this manere,  
His lighte goost ful blisfully is went  
Up to the holughnesse of the eighthe spere,  
In convers letyng everich element;  
And ther he saugh with ful avysement  
The erratik sterres, herkenyng armonye  
With sownes ful of hevenyssh melodie.

And down from thennes faste he gan avyse  
This litel spot of erthe that with the se  
Embraced is, and fully gan despise  
This wrecched world, and held al vanite  
To respect of the pleyn felicite  
That is in hevne above; and at the laste,  
Ther he was slayn his lokyng down he caste

And in himself he lough right at the wo  
Of hem that wepten for his deth so faste,  
And dampned aloure werk that foloweth so  
The blynde lust, the which that may nat laste,  
And sholden aloure herte on heven caste;  
And forth he wente, shortly for to telle,  
Ther as Mercurye sorted hym to dwelle.  
(V, 1807-1827)

As in the early lines of movement II of the *House of Fame*, in which Geoffrey rises up into a cloud above earthly ground, this scene questions the actuality of transcendence with physical ascent. The narrator emphasizes the visionary experience by describing Troilus as a “lighte goost,” whose sight of “the erratik sterres, herkenyng armonye / With sownes ful of hevenyssh melodie” evokes Lady Philosophy’s illustrations of the ethereal realm in the *Boece*. After all, Lady Philosophy sings in Book 4, “I have, forthi, swifte fetheris that surmounten the heighte of the hevene.”<sup>82</sup> However, in the *Boece*, as I have written before, the subject’s ascent is more explicitly metaphorical than physical, just as his upward gaze symbolizes his increasing focus on the supreme good and his renunciation of worldly goods; Lady Philosophy changes the subject of “swifte fetheris” to “swift thoght,” which “hath clothid itself in tho fetheris.”<sup>83</sup> Indeed, as Cherniss writes, “at the end of the book he [Boethius] has reached the limits of Philosophy’s powers; there is no leap into the realms of theology and eschatology...the ending is affirmative but provisional.”<sup>84</sup>

In Book V of *Troilus and Criseyde*, though, Chaucer literalizes Troilus’s ascent after his episodes of experience as a victim of Fortune’s Wheel. Furthermore, he suggests that Troilus uses his new position of distance to less spiritually-gratifying ends than the visionary scene initially suggests. Like Geoffrey, Troilus acquires a vision comprehensive enough to delineate the little spot of earth, but whereas Geoffrey desperately wants to lose himself to transcendent experience, Troilus looks downward (“lokyng down”) in a repetition of the scorn he casts upon lovers in Book I. Evoking and yet also missing the Christian point of the *contemptus mundi* philosophy, Troilus laughs mockingly at the former friends he leaves behind. Troilus’s pride in

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<sup>82</sup> Chaucer, *Boece*, 4, Metr. 1, 1-2.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>84</sup> Cherniss, *Boethian Apocalypse*, 27.

Book I causes the narrator to interject with a Boethian reading of the effects of Troilus's narrow perspective,<sup>85</sup> and here, while the narrator is less explicit about the Boethian message, the image of Troilus post-mortem implicitly suggests that Troilus remains stuck in a pre-transformation, pre-transcendent Boethian subjectivity. The repetition of Troilus's ridicule of lovers connects him to the tragic and temporally-bound circularity of Thebanness raised earlier, distinguished from the Boethian Neoplatonic cycle, in which the soul returns from its mortal body to its true home.

This reading undermines the common idea that Chaucer rewards Troilus with Christian transcendence,<sup>86</sup> that Troilus's mortal woe is so painful and innocent that it warrants him the status of a virtuous pagan or even a Christian, anachronistically. At the end of the poem, Troilus still lacks the philosophical acuity to distance himself more figuratively from a temporality that elides into the past. Unlike Dante's pilgrim, whose height upon Mount Purgatory signifies the purgation of earthly memory, Troilus uses his totalizing view as an opportunity to continue focusing on earth. Particularly in the light of other instances across Chaucer's poems in which elevation tempts viewers to "see" time and space wholly, from Geoffrey's ascent in the *House of Fame* to Scipio's visionary experience in the *Dream of Scipio* subtext of the *Parliament of Fowls*, Troilus's narrowness stands out. His scornful laugh disconnects him from Boethius on the subject of history; whereas the Boethian perspective recognizes the contingency of the individual's personal life upon the sweeping forces of public, historical events, Troilus's vision reveals his sense of immersion and indicates that he still possesses the eyes of the fragmented,

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<sup>85</sup> I refer here to the passage already cited, Book I, 211-17.

<sup>86</sup> V.A. Kolve makes the case that Troilus's love "is also a quest for transcendence" and that this quest "earns him at the end a certain reward," in *Telling Images: Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative II* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 254. José María Gutiérrez Arranz also writes that Troilus "seems to be rewarded in the story," in *The Cycle of Troy in Geoffrey Chaucer: Tradition and "Moralitee,"* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 39.

mortal viewer. Chaucer's Troilus may be elevated spatially, but his spiteful backward glance signifies that he falls short of divine realization. More broadly, his condemnatory view of the transitory nature of human experience appears to be sharply at odds with the more flawed and dialectical perspectives that Chaucer celebrates in his prior works.

#### CONCLUSION AND CODA

Michel de Certeau's *Practice of Everyday Life* brings to light the strategic and tactical aspects of Pandarus's approach to the lovers' experience in *Troilus and Criseyde*, as I have shown, but his philosophy of urban space more widely elicits experiences and ideas of perspective that Chaucer develops across his narrative. Like De Certeau's "ordinary practitioners of the city," the lovers in *Troilus and Criseyde* exist "below the thresholds at which visibility begins," unable to discern the macrocosmic patterns of time that encompass more than their own lifespans.<sup>87</sup> Prevented from acquiring a "visibility," or vision, that facilitates a sophisticated temporal consciousness, they become "walkers, *Wandersmänner*, whose bodies follow the thick and thin of an urban 'text' they write without being able to read it."<sup>88</sup> De Certeau's contrast of perspectives through people's positions in urban space compares to the differences Chaucer establishes between his Trojan characters and his readers. As I have shown, anachronisms, which have the effect of distancing readers so that they can think of medieval London at the same time as they read of Troy, shape the ethics of how the readers "see time," and whereas the characters embedded in Troy proliferate the Boethian subjectivities, the readers, when it comes to the narrative of Troy, possess an idealized perspective and thus grasp the patterns of time. The Boethian intertext pressures Chaucer's readers to reflect upon the historical cycle and their own

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<sup>87</sup> De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 93.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

vulnerable position in the present. Its constant reminder of the divine sense of continuous time highlights the contrasting boundaries of human knowledge, and encourages readers to keep a philosophical distance from the temporal affairs of the Trojans, even as they are tempted into familiarization and sympathy.

Nonetheless, Boethian distance does not inspire aloofness from the emotional charges of the romance (though it also does not inspire the backward scorn that Troilus shows in the scene of ascent). In the *Boece*, even if Boethius's own guide shuns the strumpet muses, poetry helps Boethius to compose elegiac verses and find comfort despite the misery of his entrapment. Lady Philosophy is concerned with the figurative direction of the prisoner's gaze over the course of his educational journey; because Boethius looks downward and backward, he allows for mortal preoccupations to cloud his ability to see. In De Certeau's theoretical framework, Lady Philosophy encourages the gaze of the voyeur, rather than the walker. But again, Chaucer never goes so far as to advocate a Christian turn away from the world or total voyeurism. Instead, he adopts Lady Philosophy's emphasis on self-possession and a perspectively rich detachment in the face of adversity, while maintaining sympathy for human experience and an acceptance of the temporal domain. Boethianisms accentuate and scrutinize the vision and perception of the readers and the characters of the poem. They inculcate readers with differentiated levels of knowledge; in calling attention to the experiences of the Trojan characters, in particular, Chaucer highlights the variably limited perspectives human beings possess within earthly time without condemning mortal experience.

Thus, as in the dream visions, the Boethian fabric goes beyond the parodic representations of individual characters—with Troilus as immature Boethius; Pandarus as a fraudulent Lady Philosophy, constructing, rather than repudiating, false representations of the

world; and Criseyde, as a counterpoint to both characters, a reminder of the cataclysmic cycles of history but also a figure whose obsession with exemplarity falls short of helping her. None of these characters show an entirely balanced perspective of time, but then again, neither do Chaucer's Londoners, as suggested by the context of London in the 1380s; as Patterson writes, *Troilus and Criseyde* "admits that there is no immunity from historicity."<sup>89</sup> In a prudential "viewing" position, readers possess the foreknowledge of a divine spectator, seeing the sequential order of events simultaneously, but the forces of Troy that deceive the characters also often beguile the readers: Pandarus's mediations, Troilus's complaints, and even the narrator's varied preoccupations with romance thwart the focus on history. At times, this beguiling effect is productive, hinting at the pleasures of forgetting history and living in the present, and thus evoking the message about history discussed in Chapter One on the *Book of the Duchess*. There is something to be said for Troilus's change of heart (literal and metaphorical) and Pandarus's attempts to keep the serious world of history from caving in on his fictional creations for just a little longer. Chaucer puts pressure on his readers to resist moralizing these characters through the character of Calchas, too. While Chaucer may want them to practice prudence as best they can, in no sense does he present Calchas as an admirable hero, even if, as Barbara Nolan writes, "Chaucer implicates through Calchas's departure" a "panoptic Troy."<sup>90</sup> At the parliament in Book IV, speaking of having left Criseyde sleeping in her bed as he fled the city, the guilty father reprimands himself, "O cruel fader that I was!" (IV, 94). Calchas's panoptic perspective and powers of foresight do not particularly cast him into an ethical role in Chaucer's narrative.

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<sup>89</sup> Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History*, 86.

<sup>90</sup> Barbara Nolan, "Chaucer's Poetics of Dwelling in *Troilus and Criseyde*," in *Chaucer and the City*, ed. Ardis Butterfield (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2006), 63

While the all-seeing view of Trojan time leads Calchas to destructive ends, the panopticism of Chaucer's readers is ethically productive for their sense of their own present time, and Chaucer thinks through Boethius's strategies of lengthening vision, and thereby ethically transforming historical perspective. Boethian "lokynge" may correct self-involvement and self-entrapment within history, encouraging consideration of the interaction of the past and present. Chaucer's Londoners learn through reading that they have only a partial view of their own time and are, through their shortsightedness, subject to the possibility of becoming "Trojan" or, just as well, "Theban." For Boethius, says Akbari, "the act of vision is a collaborative process which requires both the visible object and the power of sight located in the viewer."<sup>91</sup> The visible object of Chaucer's readers, then, is not only the text but also the world that the text mediates—the world of Chaucer's London. In the light of Boethius's theory of optics, *Troilus and Criseyde* shows that readers cannot fully possess the Boethian distance of their own affairs. Articulating the ambivalent position in which Chaucer's effects of familiarization and defamiliarization place readers, Frank Grady asks, "Are we made in the image of Troilus, who has acted in the way we are advised to and has suffered for it, or in the image of God, 'that after his ymage / Yow made'?"<sup>92</sup> For the most part, Troilus and the other characters see history as Jean-Claude Schmitt describes it, as "not a forward march along a single, straight track, a continuous and necessary thread that we have simply to unwind from the past to our present and then into a future that is certain and knowable," but rather as "a success of possible choices, of futures that are all available at any given moment, of which only a few are realised and which we cannot know in

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<sup>91</sup> Akbari, *Seeing through the Veil*, 30.

<sup>92</sup> Frank Grady, "The Boethian Reader of *Troilus and Criseyde*," *The Chaucer Review* 33 (1999), 248.

advance.”<sup>93</sup> Even if the readers know the outcome of the Troy story, capable of seeing Trojan history as this “single, straight track,” Chaucer also values the imagination of alternative possible outcomes and the process by which characters make connections between temporalities. Validating the positions of the characters embedded in his narrative along with those of the readers, figuratively elevated above the text, Chaucer attributes usefulness to a dialectic, if not a conflict, of perspectives. In this sense, *Troilus and Criseyde* returns to the celebration of the processes rather than absoluteness of temporal knowing in the *Book of the Duchess*, the *House of Fame*, and the *Parliament of Fowls*.

The multiple perspectives of time in all of these works may help to uncover Chaucer’s own sense of temporality, as well as his attempts to distance himself from the ever-changing affairs of his historical period while preserving his relationships within the city of London. According to Strohm, Chaucer sought “to scale down his visibility as a member of the royal faction” and find refuge and quiet from the air of political divisiveness in the Ricardian world.<sup>94</sup> The spaces Chaucer occupied reflect his conscious physical distance, a literal cue for understanding the philosophical distance he espouses in *Troilus and Criseyde*.<sup>95</sup> At Aldgate, the location of Chaucer’s home just before the height of conflict in the 1380s, Chaucer could oversee the city as a voyeur. Derek Pearsall describes how the poet’s living quarters sat right above the city gate, accompanied by “some former guard-house accommodation in the two large flanking

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<sup>93</sup> Jean-Claude Schmitt, “Appropriating the Future,” in *Medieval Futures: Attitudes to the Future in the Middle Ages*, eds. J.A. Burrow and Ian P. Wei (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2000), 3-4.

<sup>94</sup> Strohm, “Politics and Poetics,” 93.

<sup>95</sup> See, for instance, David Wallace, “Chaucer and the Absent City,” in *Chaucer’s England: Literature in Historical Context*, ed. Barbara Hanawalt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), and Sylvia L. Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989).

towers,” an architectural image that makes Chaucer’s field of vision seem expansive to such a degree that he would have been to see London as an urban whole.<sup>96</sup>

Chaucer’s method of escaping the pressures of his political world through physical relocation is a reminder that he sought even more distance than Aldgate allowed, as if he were attempting to elongate his perspective. His withdrawal from London politics likens him to Dante and Petrarch, near-contemporary Italian poets who suggest that their distance from their cities and political identities metaphorically reorient their experience of seeing history and the present. His tactical moves also evoke his invention of Theseus in the *Knight’s Tale* in the *Canterbury Tales*. Theseus, Duke of Athens, constructs a sense of order out of the violent chaos inflicted by the knights Palamon and Arcite through the arrangement and imposition of architectural spaces. Not only do spaces in the poem, from the prison tower to the grove to the amphitheater, express patterns of harmony and disharmony; in addition, they shape the experience of seeing, as when Theseus, possessing an elongated and omniscient perspective, “seeks to channel [the knights’] violence into the culturally sanctioned form of a tournament,” where viewers can watch their duel in a civilized fashion, thus deeming it acceptable, as entertainment rather than confusion and disorder.<sup>97</sup> Theseus’s divine-like gaze—as a Boethian *spectator cunctorum*, or seer of all—requires his distance from the arena of the tournament: “Al is this reuled by the sighte above. / This mene I now by mighty Theseus.”<sup>98</sup> In addition to semioticizing the bloody battle of the grove into a noble knightly duel, Theseus uses his distance from the chaos of the “city” to see beyond the *aventures* that victimize Palamon and Arcite and to control his circumstances. This

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<sup>96</sup> Pearsall, *The Life of Geoffrey Chaucer*, 96-7.

<sup>97</sup> Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History*, 200.

<sup>98</sup> Chaucer, *The Knight’s Tale* in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974), 1672-73.

resultant vision of unity, symbolized by the colossal theater, is linked to the creation of harmony in Theseus's Athens. It is no coincidence that Theseus makes a Boethian speech, the "Firste Moevere" speech, on the powers that lie beyond Fortune's control, echoing Lady Philosophy on providence and the fair chain of divine love in *Boece*. Theseus teaches, "Thanne is it wysdom, as it thynketh me, / To maken vertu of necessitee."<sup>99</sup>

Chaucer's perspective evidently led him "to maken vertu of necessitee" in the same way that Theseus advises, to accept the impossibility of escaping the circumstances of Fortune and to avoid complaint.<sup>100</sup> Theseus shows a limited control over *aventure* and futurity, hardly bearing the prophetic powers of Cassandra and Calchas in *Troilus and Criseyde*, and yet making "vertu" suggests the prospect of finding order in the chaotic. Like Theseus, whose experience of sight helps him to maintain a balance between the unpredictable movements of Fortune and the stability he seeks to secure, Chaucer makes political changes and geographical movements over the course of the Ricardian period that suggest his partial sense of control over the tumult of his historical moment.

Returning to the function of *Troilus and Criseyde*, the poem is a cautionary tale in that it shows the entanglement of civic and personal identities, which are connected to the point that the destiny of the city affects personal futures. But the nuance of this cautionary genre and the sense of appreciation for the different processes of understanding time suggest that Chaucer also sought to ambiguate allegories and avoid moralizations of those who were entangled in the political morass that was relevant to him. It is easy to imagine Chaucer containing his own history just enough that the slippage between Troilus and Troy could not be reenacted in his own relationship with London; the Boethian perspective implicit in *Troilus and Criseyde* suggests

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<sup>99</sup> Chaucer, *The Knight's Tale*, 2897.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 3041-42.

that, while he lacked the third eye of Prudence, he tried to use memory and intelligence as his two “eyes,” attempting to perceive the patterns of historical repetition in anticipation of the future. Chaucer’s poems and the narrators’ alternating positions of familiarity and estrangement also make it possible to imagine that Chaucer related to the characters of his poems, with all their perspectival flaws. As author, he speaks to the go-between Pandarus, creating his narrative as Pandarus facilitates the epistolary exchange between Troilus and Criseyde, and to the foreknowing Calchas, writing the story of Troy retrospectively. Like Criseyde, he flees from historical crisis for self-protection; Chaucer’s elevation at his residence at Aldgate and his later move from Aldgate to Kent (by 1385 or 1386) spatialize the political reserve he may have wanted to convey during a tumultuous political time.<sup>101</sup>

Furthermore, as Glending Olson points out, the *House of Fame* suggests that Chaucer differentiates his official labor time from his reading and writing activities at home, indicating that Chaucer may have found distance from the court and customs life in “mental retreat.”<sup>102</sup> Finally, like Troilus, the absence of records and relative security Chaucer maintained during a precarious period suggest his reluctance to voice his disagreement, at the risk of compromising principles of honor and stability, at parliaments including the 1386 parliament and the Wonderful Parliament, where the Lords Appellant officially succeeded in impeaching and condemning particular loyalist members of the court and in creating reforms of government.<sup>103</sup> The records

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<sup>101</sup> Chaucer was first associated with the commission for the peace in Kent in 1385 and made requests for substitutes so that he could profit from his controllerships while out of London, but even still, he was vulnerable given his royal appointment at a time when Richard was under the threat of the “Wonderful Parliament,” according to S. Sanderlin, “Chaucer and Ricardian Politics,” *The Chaucer Review* 22 (1988): 172.

<sup>102</sup> Glending Olson, “Geoffrey Chaucer,” in *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, ed. David Wallace (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 569.

<sup>103</sup> Anthony Goodman, *The Loyal Conspiracy: The Lords Appellant under Richard II* (Coral Gables: The University of Miami Press, 1971), 40-2.

that do survive show Chaucer resigning from his controllerships in what S. Sanderlin calls “the first stage in his withdrawal from the political scene.”<sup>104</sup> Envisioning Chaucer in relation to his Trojan characters reinforces the many perspectives that shape the poem, as well as the poem’s preoccupation with the ties between an individual’s social and political circumstances, his construction of time, and his choices.

The figurative levels of distance imagined in *Troilus and Criseyde* thus acutely reveal Chaucer as a political poet. The plurality of Boethian subjectivities, not only in *Troilus and Criseyde*, but also in the dream visions, transforms the absolute Neoplatonism of the *Boece*, undermining its transcendent idealism and appreciating its underlying emphasis on process. Chaucer repeatedly shows the difficulty of instrumentalizing vision in the way that Boethius theorizes. Dismissing the position of the *contemptus mundi* tradition, Chaucer’s poems indirectly undermine the moralizing censure of Orpheus in the *Boece*, displaying sensitivity toward the nostalgic gaze ever-entrenched in the romantic past while recognizing its tragic dimension. In the *House of Fame*, the Eagle reprimands Geoffrey for attempting to elevate himself to an otherworldly position, and in the *Parliament of Fowls*, Chaucer insists on the productive randomness of his narrator’s sublunar experience. At the end of *Troilus and Criseyde*, Chaucer represents Troilus’s mockery from the eighth sphere to suggest the likelihood that the hero has not, in fact, reached a state of enlightenment or been transfigured by his position of distance. Chaucer values the embeddedness of his characters within their imaginative dream worlds and urban landscapes, which suggests also that the poet enjoyed his own exchange with the ground floor he occupied. What Chaucer’s Boethius does recommend, then, is a loving distance, a position at which the individual neither seeks full reclusiveness and protection from human experience—and the chaos of London, more specifically—nor wholly immerses in the fraught

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<sup>104</sup> Sanderlin, “Chaucer and Ricardian Politics,” 173.

and often dangerous politics of the city, as many of Chaucer's contemporaries did. Lawton notes that, for Chaucer, "as on the road from London to Canterbury, the city is a space to walk in, away from, and towards."<sup>105</sup>

Anachronisms and the Boethian intertext help to characterize the obliqueness and political evasiveness of Chaucer's poems, but these qualities are, as Olson writes, "themselves historical," and they help situate Chaucer's writings among late medieval English civic writings.<sup>106</sup> During a period of sharp political division, there were also differences in how writers responded to public affairs. While the genre of *fürstenspiegel* became a popular way of holding a flattering mirror up to princes toward the tail end of the fourteenth century and over the course of the fifteenth century, the literary mirror of political life could also be scathing; "moral Gower" avoided repercussions, but his work might have been perceived to be as violent and active of a response to the events of the 1380s and 1390s as the events themselves. Gower's *Vox Clamantis* is a merciless satire on contemporary society, and in the author's *Confessio Amantis*, his political loyalties shift, almost as if to evoke Criseyde's "slydyng," cutting ties with Richard and dedicating works to Henry IV by the late 1390s. Chaucer's poems retain the moral ambiguity and sympathy that is largely absent from Gower's work, perhaps instead anticipating the writing of Sir John Clanvowe. Of the Lollard Knights, a particularly endangered group as a result of their royalism, Sir John Clanvowe wrote the *Book of Cupid*, a work of court poetry and "the only poem in English from Richard II's court that is comparable to Chaucer's continentally derived dream-vision poetry."<sup>107</sup> The *Book of Cupid* embraces the role of debate and play of voices found

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<sup>105</sup> David Lawton, "English literary voices, 1350-1500," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Culture*, ed. Andrew Galloway (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 245.

<sup>106</sup> Olson, "Geoffrey Chaucer," 566.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 572.

in the *Parliament of Fowls*, and gives further credence to the idea that Chaucer sought to avoid taking the stand that many of his contemporaries took. Like Chaucer's Boethian lyrics, the *Book of Cupid* helps to elicit a doubling or evasive effect.

In this context, Chaucer occupies the personae of the narrators across his works. Each of these narrators reflects aspects of himself: the narrator in the *Book of the Duchess* mimics Chaucer's position in relation to the courtly figure of John of Gaunt, Geoffrey in the *House of Fame* makes readers well-aware of Chaucer's scholarly breadth, the narrator in the *Parliament of Fowls* highlights Chaucer on his lonesome quest, at a distance from the clamorous scene of politics and courtship, and the *Troilus and Criseyde* storyteller reveals Chaucer's distant yet sympathetic attitude toward his present moment. At the same time, these narrators are also highly disconnected, evoking the elusive historical persona of Chaucer the author in only fragmentary ways, always emphasizing his reserve from the world he occupied and the characters that surrounded him.

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