Unexpected Plato
Philosophical Approaches to Chaucer's Writing

Timothy John Macy

A Thesis Submitted in Candidature for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Cardiff University 2007

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Abstract

This thesis examines the way in which Plato and Platonic theories appear overtly and opportunistically in Chaucer's writings. It looks at some of the more evident ways in which the poet invokes the philosopher, but also argues that Chaucer 'cherry-picks' what he wants from Plato, and (in some cases), changes the fundamental premise of the philosophical tenet upon which the original is based in order to make a creative statement. A theme of the Platonic notion of contrarieties will run throughout the thesis; at times it will necessarily discuss at some length the philosophical heritage inherited by the late fourteenth century. I will look firstly at ways in which Plato appears in Chaucer's more famously philosophical works before focusing on some of the less 'popular' *Canterbury Tales*, and will, in turn also draw attention to issues in Chaucer that can be seen to have been initiated by ancient philosophy, insofar as Chaucer is likely to have received them, or to have been aware of their arguments. At no time does this thesis argue for a direct transmission or connection between the writings of Plato and those of Chaucer. Rather, I argue that in Chaucer we see peculiar elements of Platonic theory (either an appropriation or a challenge thereof), and that such a philosophical approach from a reader both adds to a critical debate regarding the relationship between Chaucer and philosophy, and deepens an appreciation of the way in which some of Chaucer's more maligned texts are, in fact, some of his most rewarding.

Acknowledgements

I feel immensely privileged and happily obligated to thank several people without whom this project, whatever its outcome, would not have been possible. I need to thank Dr. Ruth Evans, my first supervisor, who not only inspired me to pursue the PhD in the first place, but was patient and trusting enough to let me go with my gut and, in her words, 'have the courage of my convictions'. She, more than anyone else, helped me to take a vague instinct and develop it into an argument – and I think it was considerably more work than she anticipated. She not only stood by me, but encouraged me to develop a style of my own, and helped me to realise that that individual creative voice didn't necessarily have to acquiesce to the critical convention. As grateful as I am for her support in bringing out the thesis in me, I am equally as grateful for bringing out the "me" in my thesis. I would also like to acknowledge the guidance and candour of Professor Stephen Knight, who had the unenviable task of leading me through the middle stages of this work. I could not have chosen a better person to take the reins of my supervision so late in the game; his insights and fresh points of view have added a dimension and thoroughness to the project that it certainly would have lacked otherwise. Helen Phillips, my third and final supervisor, had the tenacity to take what was still a very rough idea and shape it into my current best academic endeavour; that was not an easy task. Finally, in the academic portion of my acknowledgements, I would be careless if I did not acknowledge Dr. Martin Coyle and Dr. John Peck who took a significant risk by accepting my application to pursue a Master's Degree at Cardiff University. They saw something in me that even I had probably lost sight of, and were willing to gamble their time and my money to awaken whatever latent talent or desire might exist. Some years and many thousands of words later, I hope that I have begun to repay that investment.

Of course, the ability to complete any work of this sort cannot occur with academic support alone; there are a number of people outside my scholastic life who have made the writing possible. I would like to acknowledge my dad Marshall and his wife Debbie, and my late mother Peni, who, though living geographically separate and distant lives, have been united and intimate with their support of my pursuits. I also would like to recognise my younger brother and sister, Mathew and Marissa, who have reminded me what it is like to be excited about my education. My older brother Drew has, perhaps more than he is aware, always been a source of strength and an inspiration to me. Lastly, I would be unforgivably negligent if I did not acknowledge the persistent and sometimes pushy support of my wife Carol. For someone who feels about Chaucer and academic philosophy much the same way that I feel about watching test cricket, she has been the absolute paradigm of patience and encouragement. Whatever good comes of this, I owe in part to her.

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Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to address the Platonic, Aristotelian and neo-Platonic themes that operate in the background of several of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. It is not an attempt to discover new 'sources and analogues' of Chaucer's writings. This project is not an attempt to incorporate the entire Chaucer corpus into its frame of reference. Furthermore, this thesis offers neither any kind of sophisticated critical reading of Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus (or any other philosopher), nor an examination of the line of transmission of their work to Chaucer's library.

Instead, this thesis deals with the way that Chaucer adopts a very flexible, almost opportunistic relationship with Platonic references, such that Plato appears in Chaucer in some very unexpected places, and serves as means to some very unexpected ends. As the title of the thesis might suggest, Chaucer teases out Plato insomuch as he can, and offers a uniquely Chaucerian understanding, assimilation and integration of philosophic principles to the audience, many of whom would be unfamiliar even with their society's own debt to Platonic or neo-Platonic theory. Plato becomes a kind of literary "Play-Dough": a pliable and endlessly re-workable base from which Chaucer works to build his own creative art. This thesis operates on the premise that the unknowable intention of such an act by Chaucer is irrelevant to its presence in his work; 'unexpected Plato' forms the basis of much of what can be read in Chaucer. Being able to recognise it as such can change the experience of reading Chaucer's work.

Most criticism of Chaucer's philosophical heritage tends to concentrate on 'Boethian' qualities observed either secondarily in some of the *Tales*, or primarily in other examples of Chaucer's work, such as *A Treatise on the Astrolabe* or *Troilus and Criseyde*. I argue below that the texts offered as evidence deal directly and indirectly with the philosophical issues raised either by the ancient schools or by the more contemporary schools upon which the ancients exercised their greatest theoretical

influence. Furthermore, I argue that these philosophical themes change the way in which some of the tales can be read, thereby identifying important implications of otherwise troublesome elements of the *Tales* in general.

Chapter One deals with the notion of a 'philosophical' Chaucer, and the ways in which Plato may appear in places that haven't been addressed in depth by critical attention. It looks at some more obvious places where readers find philosophical references (*The Book of the Duchess*, *The Parliament of Fowls*, for example), but also in some places where Plato is more creatively (and curiously) appropriated by Chaucer.

Chapter Two deals specifically with the argument of contrariety in regard to the binary models of sex and gender. It explores the possibility that *The Pardoner's Tale* may identify inherent problems with the two-sex model and could be read to illustrate mythical, historical and classical examples of texts that challenge the notion of human existence in this limiting and oppositional structure.

Chapter Three discusses how the problem of a "two-extreme" model is further developed by *The Physician's Tale* and its notion of the body. This chapter outlines the medieval connection made between the body and the State, and investigates the ways in which the text's treatment of that relationship challenges medieval theories of physical and political contrariety.

Chapter Four continues the discussion of the physicality of human existence by examining the nature of the body's relationship to the soul, as well as the nature of the soul itself. This chapter, focusing primarily on *The Second Nun's Tale*, seeks to investigate how the text addresses medieval notions of the soul and how those notions lead to a rigidly hierarchical structure of being among all things.

Having examined in Chapter Four the contemporary arguments regarding the status of the human soul, Chapter Five discusses the fallibility of the human senses. In particular, this chapter looks at the pre-eminence of sight and optical theory in medieval

culture, and examines how *The Franklin's Tale* addresses certain philosophical and optical themes in relation to contrariety and epistemology.

Finally, Chapter Six discusses how *The Squire's Tale* addresses the medieval anxiety about poetry and fiction as worthwhile pursuits, or ways of communicating epistemological truths. The chapter attempts to demonstrate how poetry is presented as a medium through which all of the fundamental principles of contrariety previously discussed can be mediated.

Philosophical Chaucer
Unexpected Plato in Chaucer's Writings

When Chaucer mentions 'Philosophical Strode', he is doing more than name-dropping (*Troilus* V.1857). He is, in effect, at once acknowledging the possibility that one can be both poetic and philosophical as well as showing himself to be explicitly interested in offering his poetry to a distinctly philosophical consideration.[1] Critics who consider both Chaucer and philosophy seem mostly to be drawn primarily by existing critical approaches and modern criticism to two familiar and comfortable conclusions: that Chaucer operates through a medium of Aristotelian or Boethian frames of reference, and that the majority of his seriously philosophical discussions are treated in works other than *The Canterbury Tales*. When modern critics speak of 'philosophical Chaucer', they tend to aim at the obvious targets: *The Book of the Duchess*, *The Parliament of Fowls*, and the almost obligatory discussions regarding the philosophical aspects of *The Knight's Tale, Troilus and Criseyde* and the equally philosophical elements of *The Nun's Priest's Tale* and *The Clerk's Tale*. That is not to say, of course, that important (albeit until recently sporadic) critical attention has not been paid to the philosophical content of some of the other texts and tales; nonetheless the breadth and scope of the consideration has generally fallen into the categories just mentioned.[2] Tales that do get discussed in purely philosophical terms are usually considered in light of their inherent or latent reference to 'The Philosopher' and his ultimate authority and the seemingly ubiquitous nature of Aristotelian concepts in late medieval culture. For instance, The *General Prologue* presents the Clerk as having twenty books of Aristotle (I.294-5). *The Clerk's Prologue* introduces the narrator correspondingly as a professional philosopher: the Host says that he must be studying 'som sophyme' (IV.5). Jerome Taylor has even argued that Aristotelian logic is a specific background for *The*

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[1] *Riverside Chaucer*, p. 1058.

[2] See also V.J. Scattergood, in *Oxford Guide to Chaucer: The Shorter Poems*, ed. by A. J. Minnis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 485-494, 503, for a discussion on Chaucer's debt to Seneca; and J.D. Burnley, *Chaucer's Language and the Philosopher's Tradition* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1979) for philosophers with whom Chaucer seems to have a direct link, of which Seneca is a prime example. In the case of Platonic Ideas, of course, these are typically filtered through a very wide range of other authors.

Clerk's Tale.[3] Glending Olson argues that Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics* may lie behind some ideas about 'pley' in *The Clerk's Prologue* (IV.10).[4]

Boethius is often seen to bridge the gap between the purely philosophical and the philosophically practical, as critical approaches to Chaucer's presumed world-view are often expressed in term of their greater or lesser degrees of Boethianity, and much criticism has focused on how and to what degree Chaucer can best be read either as a proponent of, a challenger to, or an ambivalent social commentator on Boethian concepts of Free Will, Fortune, Providence, Plenty and, of course, Love. Theseus' speech in *The Knight's Tale* (I.2987-3089) presents the essentially neo-Platonic idea of the Chain of Love. This speech – significantly – is Chaucer's addition and not found in Boccaccio's original. Rather, Chaucer probably got the idea about the Chain from Boethius (*Consolation of Philosophy*, II.8) and from *Roman de la Rose* (16707-81).[5] Finally, there is the concept of Love itself and the considerable body of criticism dedicated to an ongoing (and arguably irresolvable) debate regarding Chaucer as a Christian poet of courtly love.

This approach seems to favour the obvious and more contemporary resurgence of Aristotelian thought, without fully acknowledging the 'Twelfth Century Renaissance' of Platonist study centred primarily on the School of Chartres. Using the *Timaeus*, this flowering of scholastic activity produced concepts of Nature as a harmonious order in a

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[3] 'Fraunceys Petrak and the Logyk of Chaucer's Clerk', in *Francis Petrarch, Six Centuries Later*, ed. by Aldo Scaglione (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), pp. 364-83.

[4] See Olson's 'Plays as Play: A Medieval Ethical Theory of Performance and the Intellectual Context of the Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge', *Viator: Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 26, (1995) pp. 195-221; or 'Toward a Poetics of the Late Medieval Court Lyric' in *Vernacular Poetics in the Middle Ages: Studies in Medieval Culture*, ed. by Lois Ebin (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publishers, Western Michigan University, 1984), pp. 227-248.

[5] Riverside Chaucer, p. 841. That notes also cites critics who, before Knapp, thought that the pessimism in the speech indicates the influence of nominalism 'failure to reconcile God's justice and the arbitrariness of human destiny'. In contrast Knapp sees *The Knight's Tale* overall as realist and ultimately Platonic: *Chaucer and Social Contest*, (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 19. Interestingly, Minnis (*Chaucer and Pagan Antiquity*, pp. 125-31) points to the fact that *The Knight's Tale* depicts a pagan and not a Christian world view. The interest Chaucer shows in relating some of his writing to classical philosophy raises the question of how far, in works like *The Knight's Tale*, he is exploring attitudes that do not rely on a Christian set of ideas. Perhaps, like his Physician, Chaucer is willing to entertain the idea that a very learned worldview can be acquired without dependence on the Bible.

divinely-created Universe, through a creative fusion of classical and Christian thought, and remained an important inspiration for works such as *The Parliament of Fowls*.[6] Alain de Lille's Nature, Chaucer's source for the goddess in *The Parliament of Fowls*, is essentially Platonic; filtered through, particularly, the twelfth-century Renaissance, the School of Chartres, and specifically Alain de Lille.

There is, of course, a great deal of evidence that leads critics to pursue the questions that dominate the study of Chaucer's relation to philosophy. By way of introduction, it seems appropriate to acknowledge (but also to challenge) some of this criticism as well as the approaches taken to its evidence. Even Mark Miller's recent book, *Philosophical Chaucer*, while striking new ground and providing one of the most comprehensive discussions of an overriding and consistent philosophical current in the *Tales*, adopts the criteria of traditional critical Boethian and Aristotelian frames of reference – critical avenues that are by now commonplace. Granted, the route that Miller takes is slightly different, but much of the scenery seems familiar and the destination of the conclusion remains the same: '[love emerges] as itself structured around a Boethian antinomy of the will'.[7]

J.A.W. Bennett's book on *The Parliament of Fowls* traces Chaucer's use of *Somnium Scipionis* in the first sections of *The Parliament* but also observes that Chaucer 'shapes it to his own purposes', in particular by pursuing his line of enquiry about the nature of passion; whereas as Bennett says, 'Certainly for Cicero, Platonist as he was—or as he was whilst writing the *Somnium* —any judgement that placed a premium on passion would have been incomprehensible'.[8] Bennett seems to feel, as this thesis will argue, that Chaucer uses the philosophy knowledgably but cavalierly—or creatively, depending on one's perspective. Despite Bennett's attention, the more usual

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[6] See the outline of the history of the idea and its appearance in literature in J.A.W. Bennett, *The Parlement of Fowls: An Interpretation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), pp. 194-212.
[7] Mark Miller, *Philosophical Chaucer* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 35.
[8] Bennett, p. 35.

modern critical approach tends to concentrate on the tide of Aristotelian thinking, rather than the undercurrent of Platonic theory that remains a constant, albeit quieter influence.

This is not to suggest that previous discussions regarding Chaucer's philosophical disposition, including Miller's, are not important, thought-provoking or inherently valuable as discourses through which an engagement with Chaucer is challenged and constantly re-defined. This thesis will suggest, rather, that there are ways to think about a 'philosophical Chaucer' that do not necessarily rely on his seeming inseparability from Boethian constructs, or his function as a love-poet, or, indeed, as a poet who is concerned primarily with the medieval question of Free Will. Readers can, and I would suggest that readers should, begin to broaden the parameters by which they are willing to consider Chaucer's philosophical explorations.

Critical Approaches to a Philosophical Chaucer

Miller's work is not the first attempt to address the general question of the nature of Chaucer's philosophies beyond *The Knight's Tale* and *Troilus*. For example, in his '"Commune Profit" and Libidinal Dissemination in Chaucer', Yasunari Takada investigates at length the learned medieval debate between the respective worth of the political and philosophical lives (originally the religious concepts of the *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa*) in relation to Chaucer's work. Among other points, he contends that Petrarch (drawing on Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis*) relies on the idea 'that even by virtue of the political life (*vita activa*) the soul can attain the heavenly beatitude which is commonly taken to be reserved for contemplative life'.[9]

Takada's discussion stems from the problematic fact that:

[9] Yasunari Takada, '"Commune Profit" and Libidinal Dissemination in Chaucer' in *The Body and Soul in Medieval Literature*, ed. by Piero Boitani and Anna Torti (Cambridge: Brewer, 1999), pp. 107-21 (p. 108).

> for the man of action like "the rulers of the commonwealth" leading the life of action (*vita activa*) philosophizing or doing philosophy is a pure luxury, which can be enjoyed only in scholarly leisure (*otium*), not in activities of any negotiation (*negotium*). But there have been men of action virtuous enough to attain blessedness. How should modern readers deal with and define these non-philosopher's virtues?[10]

In other words, Takada begins with the recognition that a moral dilemma exists when considering the spiritual health of people who are too busy doing things to have time to sit about and think about the higher virtues. On one hand, Takada is articulating the medieval debate regarding the salvation of the souls of non-philosophers. Takada's approach to the discussion, on the other hand, is unique in that it recognises and explores neo-Platonic elements of the debate that had to this point been overshadowed in Chaucer criticism by what has been seen as Aristotle's superior importance.

Takada suggests that the dilemma becomes even more problematic because of the categorical nature of the four virtuous subspecies (political virtues, cleansing virtues, virtues of the purified mind and exemplary virtues) of each of the fundamental four cardinal virtues (prudence, temperance, fortitude and justice), each of which has been prescribed to be attainable through a different, hierarchical mode of life. As one moves further up the scale of hierarchical virtue, one begins to identify and then to separate body from soul until, ultimately, 'the human mind is in perfect accord and unity with the divine Mind'.[11] However, it is Takada's understanding that 'in accordance with his strategy in the *Commentary*, Macrobius sets store not so much by the differentiation of the virtues as by the equal efficiency of the virtues in attaining heavenly beatitude. Heavenly beatitude, which the Neo-Platonic tradition held as the monopoly of philosophers, is now made equally open to the man of action, and this revolutionary turn was made possible by the virtues of the 'political virtues'.[12] Takada's approach, though arguably over-schematised, is certainly critically stimulating.

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[10] Takada, pp. 109-110.
[11] Takada, p. 110.
[12] Takada, p. 111.

Ultimately, however, Takada adopts, like many other critics approaching the concept of 'philosophical Chaucer', the premise that Chaucer, as a man of action, will be found to be philosophical (and therefore capable of beatitude) in as far as his action – his poetry – can be interpreted as demonstrating philosophical ideals.

Other critics choose to confront the expected categories of Chaucer's philosophies. Raymond P. Tripp, Jr., for instance, deals with the philosophical concepts of 'contraries' and 'plenitude' in his 'The Darker Side to Absolon's Dawn Visit' in a work that directly challenges claims that Chaucer was 'Boethian'. 'Suicide, assassination, murder, nails driven through the skull, pigs eating babies, conflagrations, etc. seem also to be part of God's much touted "plenty". Murder and death are plainly as much of this world as love and life.'[13] Tripp wants to move to an argument that discusses in philosophical terms the uncontrollable nature of Love and the unfortunate fate of anyone (such as the Franklin's Arveragus and Dorigen) who attempts to 'gain "soveraynetee" over love through a marriage which is really no marriage, but a contractual compromise of mutual tolerance'.[14] Tripp makes clear and well-supported arguments, but cannot seem to present alternatives to the Boethian approach to philosophical Chaucer. Instead, he interprets the material in a new way, still conforming to the expected results: Chaucer is Boethian, but perhaps not in the way that critics have come to expect.

Chaucer would, of course, have come across several distinctly Platonic ideas in Boethius while translating it. For example, his translation includes the passage, *V prosa 6*, where Boethius alludes to Plato's ideas about whether the universe is eternal.[15] In Boethius, there is a reference to Plato's discussion of whether the universe is eternal,

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[13] Raymond P. Tripp, Jr., 'The Darker Side to Absolon's Dawn Visit', *The Chaucer Review*, 20 (1986), 207-229, (p. 208).
[14] Tripp, p. 210.
[15] *Boece* (51-99), p. 466-7. All further references to Chaucer's work are from *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry D. Benson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987). Whenever possible, these citations will appear parenthetically by line and page numbers.

without beginning or end. Boethius concludes that, properly speaking, God is eternal but the world is perpetual. The world has the 'property of time' and God does not.

This sort of passage, familiar to Chaucer, which he had actually translated, would have brought Platonic philosophical conundrums (here about the nature of time and eternity) into his thinking.[16] His familiarity with Boethius, in particular, means that, though he knows of Plato, he is receiving ideas from Platonic tradition which prove inspirational for him, such as the idea of the flight of the soul out of the body and away from error and sorrow (*Troilus*) but not necessarily associating them directly or exclusively with Plato. Just as it is possible to argue that Chaucer may not be associating Platonic theories directly with Plato, it may also be possible to argue that, at times, Chaucer is not only aware of the Boethian debt to Plato, but is also willing to appropriate Plato more directly and without some of the philosophical rigidity associated with Boethius.

Beyond Boethius

With an altogether different approach, Holly Wallace Boucher tackles the difficult question of the stature of the poet in the fourteenth century and in relation to medieval philosophical and theological worldviews, and the decline of that stature between what she characterises as Dante's 'colossal confidence' and the uncertain and ill-defined role that she claims Boccaccio and Chaucer to have shared. According to Boucher, Dante 'implies that divine secrets are invariably revealed to those who blamelessly seek them out: words, by their relation to Logos, possess the inalienable power of signs to signify the real ... Dante and the *Queste* poet held a common attitude toward fiction; they believed their poetry bore a simple and intelligible relationship to

[16] I prosa 4, 22-42 (p. 401) also includes Plato's general ideas from the *Republic* that cities should be ruled by wise men. III metrum 11 (pp. 436-7) is about inward sight, freed from the errors introduced by the body, which is called 'the doctrine of Plato' (Chaucer's translation, III metrum 11, 43). In III prosa 12 (pp. 437-9), Boethius begins with the words (Chaucer's translation) 'I accorde me gretly to Plato' and agrees on the need to seek truth without the 'contagious conjunccioun of the body'.

the truth and was an image of the divine order'.[17] However epistemologically empowered Dante and the *Queste* poet appear to be to Boucher, Bocaccio and Chaucer, later poets, suffer from the 'profound' influence of Ockham's Nominalism. In short, she claims that the necessary link between sign and signified becomes 'unravelled' by the proposition that the 'individual is always prior to the universal in the order of knowing'. Whereas Dante had a direct connection between the words he used and the truths they were meant to reveal, writers by Chaucer's time had only the 'ambiguity of symbol patterns' and a Logos that was now 'only partially available through language'.[18]

James Dean's critical perspective is opposed to the strongly Boethian reading offered by D.W. Robertson's interpretation of *Troilus and Criseyde*. He clearly wishes to suggest that *The Book of the Duchess* promotes the 'special powers of the craft of poetry' that 'allow both poet and listener to re-create the past and in some measure bring it to life'.[19] With Boucher, however, the discussion is moving towards a renewed acknowledgement that it is acceptable to discuss Chaucer's philosophical traits in non-Boethian, non-Aristotelian, non-amorcentric terms. Boucher represents a very small proportion of the critical community who are willing to approach philosophical Chaucer with this latitude and who are willing to attempt to consider his work outside of (and not just in reaction to) the accepted standards of early twentieth century Chaucerianism.

It is illuminating to stand aside from the questions of Aristotelian and Boethian influence in Chaucer. Of course, Chaucer relies heavily on the availability of Aristotelian manuscripts and mentions 'The Philosopher' more often than any other thinker. That is not to say, however, that Aristotle is his only philosophical frame of reference or, indeed, that one should necessarily ascribe to him any degree of unique intellectual eminence above some of the other philosophers (mentioned and implicit)

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[17] Holly Wallace Boucher, 'Nominalism: The Difference for Chaucer and Boccaccio', *The Chaucer Review*, 20 (1986), 213-220 (p. 214).
[18] Boucher, pp. 214-15.
[19] James Dean, 'Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess* a Non-Boethian Interpretation', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 46 (1985), 235-249 (p. 236).

whose theories, names or influence appear in Chaucer's works. Avicenna, Averroes, Augustine, Ambrose, Anselm, Bradwardine, Dante, Galen, Socrates and Plato all make explicit appearances in Chaucer's texts. Shepherd Godfrey is among several critics who have demonstrated how the contemporary theories of Ockham, Bradwardine and Wyclif are also confronted in Chaucer's texts.[20] Clearly, Chaucer is neither limited to nor solely influenced by the dominance of Aristotelian thought in the late fourteenth century. Despite their considerable respective influence on Chaucer's environment, knowledge, subject matter and style, to describe Chaucer as Aristotelian or even Boethian is nonetheless to ignore important, and more subtle, philosophical concerns that Chaucer may have addressed.

Specifically, this chapter will suggest that there are several other valid ways to consider 'philosophical Chaucer', and that each perspective brings a new dimension to our appreciation of the complexity of his work; these will form the subjects of later chapters of this thesis. And although it would not be reasonable to discuss at length the influence of all of the philosophers mentioned above, this chapter intends to outline and to investigate briefly the curious ways in which Plato and his theories pop up somewhat unexpectedly throughout Chaucer's writing. This thesis does not intend to 'unravel the knot' or to reveal any secret decoder to the hidden meanings of Chaucer's philosophical works, or even to suggest that such hidden meanings exist to be decoded in the first place. Rather, it intends only to acknowledge and to explore the appearance of Plato in some of Chaucer's work in the broadest sense before moving on to explore them at length with regard to some of *The Canterbury Tales*. In doing so, this thesis hopes to recognise a significant – and, for the most part, ignored – Platonic undercurrent to Chaucer's work and to demonstrate that there is much more Plato in Chaucer than modern audiences may have initially appreciated. This chapter will later consider

[20] Shepherd Godfrey, 'Religion and Philosophy in Chaucer', in *Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. by Derek Brewer (London: Bell & Sons, 1974), pp. 262- 89.

passages from *The Parliament of Fowls, Troilus and Criseyde,* the *Legend of Good Women* and the *Canon Yeoman's Tale*, to explore how far, even if we cannot reasonably suppose that Chaucer was a Platonist in the narrowest sense, we can at the very least acknowledge Chaucer's intriguing interaction with Platonic ideas and sources, and pay some critical attention to the interpretive questions these raise.

The Case of Troilus

To consider the implications of a 'philosophical Chaucer' is not a new conceit. The proposition that Chaucer wrote about, and possibly in reaction to, the influence of late fourteenth-century philosophical discourses has been a vibrant topic of academic debate since Kittredge. However it is Lewis' 1932 article 'What Chaucer really did to *Il Filostrato*' and the seminal *Allegory of Love* that develops from it that provide a common point of reference for most of the subsequent discussions, either as augmentations to the arguments made by Lewis or as challenges to the theories presented therein. An important example is Elizabeth Salter's 1966 article entitled '"Troilus and Criseyde": a reconsideration'. In it, Salter acknowledges C.S. Lewis as a magisterial authority: 'If there is still a need to 'reconsider' *Troilus and Criseyde*', she says, 'it is not because his directions were substantially wrong, but because many of these directions have not been fully explored'.[21] In setting Lewis' *The Allegory of Love* as the quintessential and almost final critical exercise on *Troilus*, Salter then divides the attention to the poem between those who wish to demonstrate further the poem's significance, and those who 'are set to disturb traditional attitudes by exercising ingenuity at the expense of common sense and sensibility'.[22] Salter clearly considers herself to be of the former distinction; she seems to present herself as someone who can

[21] Elizabeth Salter, 'Troilus and Criseyde: A Reconsideration', in *Critical Essays on Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde and his Major Early Poems*, ed. by C. David Benson (Open University Press, 1991), pp. 92-109 (p. 92).
[22] Salter, p. 93.

expand on the insights provided by Lewis, the essay itself printed as part of a collection of essays memorialising Lewis' death in 1963.

Salter presents Lewis' 'What Chaucer really did to *Il Filostrato*' as the point of critical origin for the ideas that later developed into the motivational force behind *The Allegory of Love*. Lewis' *The Allegory of Love* seeks to concretize a concept of consistent medieval courtly love, to explore its allegorical appearance in germinal works such as *Le Roman de la Rose*, and to delineate the special role that authors, including Chaucer, play in English poetry in contributing to the 'family' of literature begotten by the romance and its ideals. In the *Allegory*, Lewis establishes implicitly one of the two premises for what is usually meant by the term 'philosophical Chaucer': 'Chaucer is a poet of courtly love'[23] who, by the time of writing *Troilus*, 'has few rivals, and no masters'.[24] Chaucer's role in *The Allegory of Love* is as a poet who demonstrates the pinnacle of fourteenth-century love poetry and who, by doing so, personifies the 'truly medieval and universal'.[25]

In 'What Chaucer really did to *Il Filostrato*', Lewis sets the stage for *Allegory* by explaining how a universal concept of what it is to be 'medieval' validates and adjusts much of Chaucer's work. In it, Lewis attempts to demonstrate the nature of Chaucer's treatment of his source texts as a concerted effort by Chaucer to apply a system of medievalization to them. Although persuasive and exhaustively researched, the 1936 theory itself seems somewhat weakened from the perspective of modern criticism by the fact that it assumes that there is a homogenous concept of 'medieviality' (or, more accurately, a constant and medievally-universal concept of Love) with which the source texts can be brought into line. 'As a poet of courtly love', Lewis suggests, Chaucer had no choice but make modifications to texts that ran counter to the 'code of

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[23] C.S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition* (Oxford: Open University Press, 1936), p. 161.
[24] Lewis, p. 197.
[25] Lewis, p. 179.

courtly love' to which Chaucer must have subscribed. When Lewis speaks of Chaucer writing 'for an audience who still looked at poetry in the medieval fashion', he makes two assumptions. Firstly, he assumes that Chaucer's intentions when writing or his consideration of an audience were knowable and consistent. Secondly, he assumes that any audience's expectations of his work were likewise categorical. Each of these two assumptions seems a step too far. This is criticism premised on the concept of a coherent and shared philosophical 'world view' in any particular period. In regard to the former claim of Chaucer's intention can we not also reasonably consider Chaucer to have taken an inconsistent approach to the purpose of his own writing? Can the Chaucer of 'Troilus' be defined wholly as a poet of courtly love, or can we not attribute a greater scope of flexibility to his motivation? In regard to the claim that there existed a definable and universal medieval audience, surely the same questions can be raised. Underlying both theses is the concept of a homogenous 'medievality' that must have permeated both author and audience of the late fourteenth century. In order for the theory that Chaucer 'medievalized' his sources this concept implies the consistent systemisation of beliefs, intentions and expectations to which all aspects of his writing can be seen to adhere. This seems unlikely if not wholly unreasonable. And although it is hard to argue with the evidence that Lewis presents, or the persuasive manner in which he presents it, the underlying principle that there is a constant concept of 'medievality' to which Chaucer directs all of his treatments of *Il Filostrato* seems fundamentally problematical, and it is against this consistency that these opening pages will argue.

In fact, this thesis intends to argue that Chaucer's work is almost wholly inconsistent, and that his treatment of certain sources such as Plato is definable more by his varied use and sometimes self-contradictory nature than by any overriding and universal sense of authorial or audiencial expectation. Chaucer could not apply a system

of 'medievality' to his sources because the invariable model for comparison existed neither in the expectations or intentions of author, nor in those of the audience. Instead, it seems far more likely that Chaucer employs what Joseph Mogan calls a 'theme of mutability' in his works, but to a greater extent, perhaps, than Mogan is willing to attribute to Chaucer.[26] Whereas Mogan identifies a theme of the world 'in all its transitoriness' throughout Chaucer's creative and translational works, it seems reasonable to apply that same recognition of inconsistency in his approach to the works themselves. If, as Mogan suggests, a fundamental lack of stability permeates Chaucer's work, perhaps it might be useful to tolerate such mutability from the author as a whole. To return to a more recent Salter, the most prudent approach to the project of exploring a philosophical Chaucer seems to be one that expects from him 'a work of variable and fluctuating allegiances'.[27] Such an approach allows us the critical freedom to acknowledge allegiances to certain philosophical trends one moment without compromising a recognition of antithetical proposition in the next. As a result, the previous conclusions that seemed inevitable – 'philosophical Chaucer' is a poet who deals mostly with the philosophical concerns of love or agency, both of which are normally discussed within the framework of either a concordance or a disharmony with Boethian or Aristotelian constructs – are no longer the only conclusions that the critic is allowed to accept, however well-founded they may be. In other words, to admit the appearance or even the spectre of Plato is not necessarily to deny the embodiment of Aristotle or vice versa. Moreover, this thesis will argue that Chaucer enhances the 'Platonic' implications of *Troilus* by adding to the Boethian passages images of light and transcendence that he took over from Boccaccio's *Teseida*.

The ending of *Troilus*, something Chaucer deliberately added to the plot of *Il Filostrato*, comes immediately from Boccaccio's *Teseida* but, of course, the idea of the

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[26] Joseph Mogan, Jr., *Chaucer and the Theme of Mutability* (The Hague: Mouton, 1969).
[27] Elizabeth Salter, *Fourteenth Century English Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), p. 140.

soul ascending to the spheres, once it escapes at death from the body, has Platonic origins. John Steadman's *Disembodied Laughter*, considers the background and use of this motif.[28] It is, however, also already a central motif in Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*, especially in IV metrum 1 and, associated there with Boethius' version of the myth of Orpheus, in III metrum 12.[29] The end of *Troilus* seems to show Chaucer trying to bring together a pagan philosophical model of body and spirit with a Christian world view. Thus his hero has an essentially Platonic escape from the body and the world of matter, and mocks at suffering, but Chaucer ends the poem with a prayer to the Trinity, and a reference to a loving God, who became incarnate.

Unexpected Plato: The Canon Yeoman's Tale

Without the shackles of Lewis' insistence on consistency, the modern reader is free to embrace the contrariety in Chaucer's methodology as well as in the works themselves. It is with this approach – neither dismissive of nor determined by Aristotelian, Boethian or amorcentric opinions of Chaucer or his work – which I intend to proceed.

Given such an approach, it seems fitting to begin with an unconventional reading of one of Chaucer's most neglected tales: the *Canon Yeoman's Tale*. The tale itself is not overly philosophical in tone, construct or message; it is, for the most part, a fairly innocuous tale that spends its entire first half discussing the moral ramifications of a life spent seeking the Philosopher's Stone, and the dangers involved in the practice of alchemy. The tale, again, for all of its obvious morality, speaks little to philosophical concerns outside the issues of alchemy, which, according to Islamic and Western traditions, sees some of its earliest origins in Plato's *Timaeus*. The linking of alchemy in

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[28] John Steadman, *Disembodied Laughter: Troilus and the Apotheosis Tradition: A Re-examination of Narrative and Thematic Contexts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972).
[29] John B. Friedman, *Orpheus in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), pp. 90-117.

the tale to its Platonic roots cannot reasonably be seen as anything other than coincidental, as the popularity of medieval alchemy is well documented if by nothing else than by the sense of gravity in the Yeoman's tale. To find Platonic roots to medieval alchemy is neither original nor challenging to the text. The real challenge, especially in respect to the critical project at hand, is to explore the personal appearance Plato makes towards the end of this tale, in a dialogue between him and one of his students who wishes to be told the secrets of the Philosopher's Stone:

> Also ther was a disciple of Plato,
> That on a tyme seyde his maister to,
> As his book Senior wol bere witnesse,
> And this was his demande in soothfastnesse:
> "Telle me the name of the privee stoon." (VIII [G].1448)

Plato attempts first to bewilder the student, using terms that were beyond the disciple's knowledge, never quite getting to the principle elements of the alchemist's tool (1453-1459). When pressed for 'the roote', Plato answers:

> "Nay, nay," quod Plato, "certain, that I nyl.
> The philosophres sworn were everychoon
> That they sholden discovere it unto noon,
> Ne in no book it write in no manere.
> For unto Crist it is so lief and deere
> That he wol nat that it discovered bee,
> But where it liketh to his deitee
> Men for t'enspire, and eek for to deffende
> Whom that hym liketh; lo, this is the ende." (VIII [G].1466)

In other words, Plato refuses to reveal the principle elements of Magnesia until such time that God determines that it will inspire men; until such time as this, the philosophers' secret stays firmly with the philosophers themselves. It is interesting that Plato makes an appearance at this point in the Yeoman's tale. As the penultimate voice of the tale, and, indeed, the final authority on the moral justification for avoiding the snares of alchemy (to pursue the secret is to make God your enemy) (VIII [G].1476), the text places Plato as the keynote speaker in a series of ethical denunciations. It may not be entirely surprising that Plato should appear as an authority on the matter. Plato, or at least the theories he presents in the *Timeaus* as they appear through Islamic and Latin

texts, are well-established authorities for alchemy. According to Professor Hamed Abdel-reheem Ead, Professor of Chemistry at the Faculty of Science-University of Cairo, Plato was among the listed alchemists by Ibn al-Nadlm and appears in various forms throughout Arabic alchemical texts.[30] Of course, the theories of Plato available to the late fourteenth century alchemists are not as accessible or as influential as those of Aristotle. Compared to works written or inspired by Plato, Aristotelian alchemical texts are abundant. He is consequently seen by most critics as one of only two quintessential Greek contributors to the subject; his availability and popularity allowed great access to the Aristotelian advancements on the quadrilateral theory of the earth's elements, the cornerstone by which medieval alchemy and all of its less honourable pursuits flourished.

Given the prevalence of Aristotle as the alchemical authority and the relative rarity of popular recognition of Plato's contributions to the subject, Plato's appearance here becomes remarkable. As the author of the explanatory notes to the Canon Yeoman's *Prologue* and *Tale*, Reidy points out that 'this dialogue between Plato and a disciple is based on a passage in a Latin translation of an Arabic commentary on an allegorical alchemical poem, *Epistle of the Sun to the Crescent Moon*' (Muhammad Ibn Umail, ca. 900-960). However, Chaucer probably invented most of the dialogue found in the *Canon Yeoman's Tale*. He may have come across Plato's influence through the marginalia of a contemporary medieval text.[31] With only this loose reference behind it and, for the most part, a dialogue composed by Chaucer himself, the text at this point begs several questions. Why is Plato used as the terminal testimony in the tale against the temptations of alchemy? Why does Chaucer seem to invent substantial lines of dialogue and give Plato such a dominant voice? Finally, one cannot help but wonder how Chaucer discovers Plato in the first place. Deeply eclipsed by the shadow of

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[30] 'Alchemy in Islamic Times', <http://www.levity.com/alchemy/islam01.html> [accessed 13 February 2006].
[31] *Riverside Chaucer*, p. 951.

Aristotle's spectre over the Middle Ages, how does this tiny shimmer of Platonic enlightenment find its way to the author and, ultimately, to the audience? Surprisingly – or perhaps expectedly if we are to expect the unexpected from Chaucer's texts – this enticing flicker of Platonic influence is not unique either in its existence or in the inexplicable nature of its appearance. Plato, so it would seem, pops up more often in Chaucer's writing than critics might otherwise anticipate.

Unexpected Plato: The Legend of Good Women

As another example of 'unexpected Plato', one needs only but turn to perhaps one of Chaucer's least overtly philosophical texts: *The Legend of Good Women.* The tales are, of course inherently moral tales that could be used to demonstrate worthy characteristics of legendary women as validly as they are certainly used to demonstrate Chaucer's skill as a maturing writer and storyteller. As critics make their way through the well-established lives of the 'good women', the reader might find it hard to resist the temptation to be swept away by the style and magnitude of the text. The endeavour of the work itself, to re-tell already well-known legends, almost necessitates a piece of poetry that runs thick with already familiar images and storylines.

Line 525 of the F Text prologue (G514) introduces the ambiguous character of Agaton. In the footnotes and explanatory notes to the text, Benson suggests that this reference is to the Agathon mentioned in Plato's *Symposium*, during which a group of friends enter into a story-telling competition, one of which stories is that of Alceste. [32] Again, the mention of Plato's Agathon is remarkable for several reasons, each of which should be enough to prick up the critical ear. Initially, readers can be intrigued by the changes that Chaucer's text makes to the source material, especially the invention of Alcestis becoming a star (F525). Plato's version simply states that Alcestis 'is one of the very few to whom, in admiration of her noble action, [the gods] have granted the

[32] *Riverside Chaucer*, p. 1605.

privilege of returning alive to earth; such exceeding honour is paid by the gods to the devotion and virtue of love'.[33] Although there is no doubt about Alcestis' virtue, Chaucer's text seems to augment the reward that she received for her actions. Whereas Plato only commits Alcestis to a flower, Chaucer chooses to place her in the stars. He could, of course, be exploring the name itself, placing Alcestis where he thinks she belongs. He could, on the other hand, be choosing to honour the commitment to love that Alcestis makes by rewarding her with what he deems to be a more appropriate accolade.

The text does not cease to intrigue the critical imagination with the 'stellfyed' Alcestis; one is tempted to ask of the Platonic reference in the prologue similar questions to those addressed to the Canon's Yeoman: why Plato, and how? Is it simple coincidence that the participants of the *Symposium* are called, like the poet in the *Legend of Good Women*, to honour Love? Is it oversimplifying things to notice that the premise of the *Symposium* is a group of hungover gentlemen deciding that instead of carrying on where the previous night's party left off, they would instead have a story-telling competition? And what of other themes, such as trisexuality – a theme to which this thesis will return – are their presence in the *Symposium* and (arguably) in Chaucer simply accidental? Like so many other facets of Chaucer's texts, the answers to these questions are elusive at best. At the very least, the reader can see once again how Plato permeates Chaucer's text, even if it is something of a challenge to attribute any kind of reasonable explanation. That Plato does appear can be without question; in texts such as the *Legend of Good Women*, the possible reason behind that appearance or the significance of it are still to be resolved.

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[33] *Symposium*, in *The Dialogues of Plato*, trans. by B. Jowett, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), I, 479-556. All further references to the *Symposium* will be to this edition.

Platonic Chaucer

It is a little easier to explore Platonic theories in Chaucer's openly philosophical works such as *Troilus and Criseyde*. *Troilus* is clearly a work concerned with philosophical matters such as fate, destiny, agency and love; and these matters have been extensively covered by important critics. It may seem fruitless to attempt a new approach.

In his comparison of some lines of *Troilus* with their probable source, Winthrop Wetherbee concludes that Chaucer's changes to the original text imply a Platonic influence in the alterations made. 'Throughout the poem', Wetherbee states, 'we will see Troilus's idealism providing the occasion, and at times the material, for the art of Pandarus, which translates it into a form that, while paying lip service to the ideal, is finally literal to the extreme. Geoffrey's architect is an artist in a lofty traditional sense, a version of the *poeta platonicus*; but Pandarus is a mere craftsman, whose wholly practical design will be realized within the four walls of an actual (and already existing) house'.[34] The observation itself is keen, but the real interest here is the claim that Chaucer made the alteration to Boccaccio intentionally. In order to do so, of course, he would have had to have been aware of the distinction in the roles and stature of poets, and, to some extent, subscribe to (or at least be willing to experiment with) the idea that such a distinction is valid and worthy of the alterations themselves. According to Wetherbee, 'the effect of Chaucer's allusion to Geoffrey is thus to foreordain at the level of artistic principle the subversion of Troilus's love and the poem's moral and spiritual vision, which will be the efforts of Pandarus's artistry'.[35] Wetherbee notes that the comparison between Pandarus' activity and that of an architect refers directly to the 'tradition of the *Timaeus* and late classical neo-Platonism' and that the correlation that

[34] Winthrop Wetherbee, *Chaucer and the Poets* (London and Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984), p. 79.
[35] Wetherbee, p. 79.

the role of the poet is devalued in accordance to the role assigned to poets in Plato's structure.[36]

In other passages, *Troilus* explores this well-known Platonic relationship between poetry and artist. For instance, In Book II, Pandarus instructs Troilus on the writing of his letter to Criseyde. His opening lines of advice are straight-forward enough:

> Towchyng thi lettre, thou art wys ynough.
> I woot thow nylt it dygneliche endite,
> As make it with thise argumentes tough;
> Ne scryvenyssh or craftyly thow it write;
> Biblotte it with thi teris ek a lite;
> And if thow write a goodly word al softe,
> Though it be good, reherce it nought to ofte. (1023)

Pandarus tells Troilus to keep it simple: to not be too haughty, nor too business-like, nor too flamboyant or colourful. He is instructing the lover to construct the letter as any other craftsman would construct their ware: with precision and balance. In fact, with regard to the advice to use the same well-found words sparingly, he carries on to instruct Troilus as if he were a harpist who was capable of playing the best music ever heard:

> "For though the beste harpour upon lyve
> Wolde on the best sowned joly harpe
> That evere was, with alle his fyngres five
> Touche ay o stryng, or ay o werbul harpe,
> Were his nayles poynted nevere so sharpe,
> It sholde maken every wight to dulle,
> To here his glee, and of his strokes fulle.(1030)

In these lines, Pandarus continues the same neo-Platonic comparison that Wetherbee has identified: a writer, a poet, is someone whose art can be codified, can be instructed and can be perfected by adherence to the strict rules laid out either by Plato or by contemporary conceit. To be an effective love poet is to be nothing more than a trained musician who can hit a variety of notes in order to strike the right accord with

[36] Wetherbee, p. 79.

his audience, whoever that may be. To Pandarus, the secret of success in writing the love letter is to use the right tone, the right words in the right combination to win the heart of the desired. As Wetherbee has argued, at this point in Pandarus' instruction, there is no 'inner life [...] no archetypal preconception of what he seeks to realize. His imagination is wholly oriented toward the material world and operates pragmatically'.[37] If the reader is to follow Wetherbee's lead implicitly, the instruction would end here. However, the text continues, and the tuition takes a brief but unexpected turn:

> "Ne jompre ek no discordant thyng yfeere,
> As thus, to usen terms of physic
> In loves termes; hold of thi matere
> The forme alwey, and do that it be lik. (1037)

At this point, the text seems to be suggesting that the external archetypal model of good poetry does exist, and that it differs significantly from other types of communication. Pandarus warns Troilus not to mix the terminology of love with that of medicine, Finally, he insists that the matter of the letter must match its form; what is produced by Troilus' hand must match the form of a 'love letter' that exists and to which all love letters must be compared in order to establish their worth. If there is any doubt over this implied correlation, one only needs to read the next few lines.

> For if a peyntour wolde peynte a pyk
> With asses feet, and hedde it as an ape,
> It cordeth naught, so were it but a jape. (1041)

In terms of Platonic reference, the reader can approach these final few lines of advice from at least two perspectives. Firstly, the text suggests that the material realisation of a love letter must match its form, much like the painting of a fish must match what a fish actually looks like. If, like a painter who paints the feet of an ass and the head of an ape onto the body of fish, a poet utilises inappropriate parts and assembles his love letter incorrectly, the letter will not match its form. Consequently, the painting and the letter will be nothing more than a joke to its respective audience.

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[37] Wetherbee, p. 79.

Seen from this perspective, there is some leniency to allow the text to attribute to poetry some kind of transcendent reference. The existence of a form of love poetry implies that it is possible and worthwhile to attempt to grasp and to realise an approximation of that form. Poetry can, according to the language of those few lines, direct the poet's activities toward understanding an unknowable form.

In a much larger sense, the passage reinforces what Wetherbee suggests: the text agrees with a devaluing of the poetic effort as a meaningful exercise, with Platonic connotations. Firstly, the reader must acknowledge the comical nature of the lines. The image of a fish with an ass' feet and an ape's head is comical – and the poet tells us that such a representation would, in fact, be nothing more than a joke. That joke not only belittles the erroneous representation, but also belittles the potential of that craft as a whole. Neo-Platonically speaking, what enlightenment could possibly come from an activity that has the potential and perhaps the propensity for such absurdity? That is, of course, not to say that philosophy does not suffer from the same threat; philosophical thinking that is likewise incongruous with reality is just as dangerous. It is not, however, funny or absurd and the implications of the unnatural absurdity somehow seem to render misrepresentation in painting (and therefore in writing) a more heinous crime. At the very least, the comical nature of the ape-ass-fish destroys any gravity or reverence for the work; a fate that seems uniquely applied to the arts.

More directly, the passage devalues the poet by the fact that the poet is being compared to a painter, someone who, in the Platonic sense, is someone who makes copies of copies of things (a topic that will be discussed later in this thesis). The analogy, of course, is flawed – there is no material example that *Troilus* is meant to recreate as the painter would recreate a fish he saw in the stream. However, the comparison still serves to relegate Troilus the love poet to an artisan whose best can still only be thrice removed from the reality of a perfect form. In this regard, the poet has no

chance of ever attempting to represent the form itself, and therefore cannot produce a piece of poetry that could assist himself or anyone else to glimpse the unknowable. According to several passages associated with Pandarus, the poet, like the painter, is forever confined to reproducing art that has this world as its subject and is not capable of moving his soul towards the neo-Platonic heavens. Interestingly, this is not always the way that poetry, or its inherent capacity for philosophical worth, are represented by Chaucer's texts.

In fact, Monica McAlpine argues that *Troilus* has aspects that point to arguments counter to those proposed so far by Lewis and Wetherbee. Initially, McAlpine states that 'when I speak of Chaucer's use of the conventional medieval concept of tragedy, then, I mean the bivalent, type and I use the term "de casibus tragedy"'.[38] The two motivations of tragedy are that it can be a reactionary force of balance for unethical action, or that it can be the external product of the power of Fortune, thus eliminating any responsibility or sense of guilt or empowerment. According to McAlpine, Chaucer's texts (as well as most late-medieval writers) 'vacillate' between the two concepts of tragedy (once again suggesting that the only consistent concept of 'medievalization' was inconsistency itself). By making such a claim, McAlpine addresses Lewis' claim that there ever was a consistent and knowable sense of *medieviality* to which Chaucer's texts could be seen to adhere.

She seems to be arguing for a legitimacy of genre for the comical writing, and is adamant that such writing is not necessarily to be seen to be of any less philosophical worth. McAlpine states that '[Chaucer] answers, point by point, the world view *de casibus* tragedy implies in order to construct an alternative world compatible with Boethian philosophy in which both genuine tragedy and genuine comedy can occur'.[39] In other words, McAlpine is questioning any theory (such as Lewis' or, indeed, Plato's)

[38] Monica McAlpine, *The Genre of Troilus and Criseyde* (London and Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978), p. 20.
[39] McAlpine, p. 45.

that would only permit one significant mode of expression or, in Lewis' case, only subscribe to one unified theory of medieval ideology and culture. By constructing such a world where both aspects of a binary comparison have equal worth, Chaucer's texts prepare the way for a more tolerant view towards poetry in relation to neo-Platonic terms of value. McAlpine restates what we know to be the case in regard to the neo-Platonic hierarchy of thought and activity. However, she adds a dimension not previously attributed to Chaucer's texts, but clearly evident in those of some of his sources. Specifically, she addresses one of the philosophic tenets of Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*, which, simply put, defines (and therefore allows for) the existence of a 'philosophic poet'.

The highest aspiration of Boethius' art is to construct an image of that divine nature which Philosophy proposes as the ultimate object of both man's knowledge and his existence. It is through philosophic arguments and songs, with their interdependent definitions, inferences and proofs, that Philosophy attempts to weave a literary whole which is an image of the Platonic sphere or circle which is, in its turn, a traditional image of the divine nature'.[40] Boethius acknowledges that all of man's mental and physical activities should have the same purpose, but also realises that nothing that is created physically on earth can, in fact, be a perfect representation of an other-worldly form. What is important to Boethius, as McAlpine states, is the endeavour: 'every product of man's imagination should embody both the aspiration to represent this ultimate reality and a confession of its own inevitable failure fully to realize that aspiration'.[41]

To some extent, this human endeavour is what seems to be important to Chaucer's texts as well. At the very least, it would appear that some of Chaucer's writings are trying to address the issue. They are, to use McAlpine's words in a slightly

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[40] McAlpine, p. 76.
[41] McAlpine, p. 77.

changed context, trying to 'contain within its very structure what Plato called the antidote to the dangers of poetry: the knowledge of what such things really are'.[42] It can be argued that Chaucer's writing contains Platonic ideas on more than a coincidental level. Several of the chapters to follow, specifically the discussion of *The Squire's Tale*, will address the issue of whether the text can be read as an attempt to promote the inherent philosophical value of poetry and raise the epistemological estimation of the poet and his craft, as prescribed by Platonic political theory.

Plato in The Parliament of Fowls

Close readings of Chaucer's text will later constitute the body of this thesis. This introductory chapter, on the other hand, concerns itself primarily with the way in which Plato or his ghost pop up in Chaucer's text when we least expect them to. It is to this purpose that we must return. As a final exercise in developing the reader's critical willingness to recognise Plato in Chaucer, this chapter turns its attention to *The Parliament of Fowls*. As with so many other Chaucerian texts, the 'philosophy' of the tale appears somewhat predictable. If the reader assumes that 'philosophical Chaucer' will only be found in the debate over Love or in Aristotelian or Boethian echoes, then *The Parliament of Fowls* is a work that challenges such presuppositions.

Critics can even return to Takada's points on Chaucer's texts, in order to adopt the same approach already applied to the *Canon Yeoman's Tale,* the *Legend of Good Women* and *Troilus and Criseyde*. For instance, it may be worth considering whether one of the effects of *The Parliament of Fowls*, as indeed, all of *The Canterbury Tales* discussed in the following chapters, is to question the distinctions of opposition once taken for granted (male/female, body/soul, action/contemplation, etc.). There are venerable philosophical traditions that might encourage Chaucer and his audience to find a balance of opposites, rather than the doctrine of a single truth, an acceptable

[42] McAlpine, p. 85.

approach to such binary opposition. Russell A. Peck asserts that 'the concept of Love as a binder of elemental contraries within nature into a concordant harmony' is something Chaucer would have known through his familiarity with Boethian principles. Kathryn Lynch argues that 'Chaucer carefully leaves his an art of balance and juxtaposition, in which no side ever dominates too fully'. We can expand Takada's ambitious attempts to recognise in Chaucer's work a poetic effort to reconcile (at least in terms of metaphysical significance) 'the two distinct entities of body and soul, with their opposing orientations, embodiment and disembodiment respectively'.[43] There is no logical reason why a similar exercise in exploration cannot be applied to the other fundamental institutionalised dichotomies of medieval (and perhaps even of contemporary) culture. To do so is not only to attempt to legitimise both sides of a conceptually binary construct – it is not, as Takada suggests, simply a matter of releasing the lesser of two opposites from a definition based solely on 'its negative relationship' with the greater contrary.

By attempting to legitimise equally both pairs of any contrariety, we also begin to play with the concepts inherent in the Platonic principle of plenitude, in which all manifestations of nature are seen as significantly positive (if not wholly equal) parts of a continuum, rather than as essentially negative comparisons to a positive ideal or form. J.A.W. Bennett suggests that 'by accepting the doctrine of plenitude, [Chaucer] took the only possible way of putting in its proper place the view of the body as the prison of the soul, to which Cicero's *Somnium* gives classic expression; and thus provided us with an epitome of the philosophic development of the entire Middle Ages'.[44] It might be slightly ambitious to claim that this one concept grants such an encompassing and complete insight to the entire scope of medieval philosophical development. Nevertheless, Bennett's statement illustrates a recognition of the centrality of the debate

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[43] Takada, p. 111.
[44] J.A.W. Bennett, *The Parlement of Foules* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), p. 13.

between Plato's other-worldly forms, which had enjoyed so much favour across many discourses prior to the twelfth century, and the newly awakened (and neo-Platonically-flavoured) Aristotelianism of the thirteenth. Bennett goes on to say that to accept the portrait of Nature supplied in the *Parliament* 'is to reject dualism', and that the developing knowledge and understanding of Aristotelian principles allowed poets to ascribe 'new attributes' to Nature and 'set forth the new vision of Nature in bright new images'.[45]

However philosophically important Dame Nature is in the work, Peck suggests that 'the section between Geoffrey's reading and his encounter with Dame Nature is the most ignored portion of the poem. Yet, in some ways, it is the most important'.[46] Even to the laziest critical eye, it is clear that there must be something important about the pre-dream information provided by *The Parliament of Fowls* narrator. Nearly one hundred lines of 'pre-dream' plot – compared to the almost unbelievably short 5 lines of 'post-dream' narration – must have some degree of significance. And yet, very little critical time is spent on these lines: what has been written recently tends to concentrate on the structure and its indebtedness to ancient themes. If we go as far back as Bennett's 1957 chapter on the proem in his discussion of the *Parliament* as a whole, we find a somewhat more substantial critical treatment of these curious lines. Bennett appears to focus on a conventional conception of Chaucer as being predominantly a 'love poet': certainly one not unaware of (but equally unconcerned with commenting upon) matters of philosophy. Bennett presents Chaucer's attitude towards the philosophical premises assumed in the proem as marked by a nonchalance that borders on the blasé: 'Chaucer summarizes his doctrine, neither shunning it nor glossing it over. It was, after all, as familiar to him as it was to the Donne of the *Anniversaries*; and he was to put it into the

[45] Bennett, p. 109-110.
[46] Peck, p. 298.

mouth of his Theseus, as cheerful and extrovert a character as could be desired'.[47] In fact, throughout Bennett's exploration of the proem to the *Parliament*, this picture of Chaucer's indifferent approach to the narrator's possible philosophical concerns continues. His overall judgement is to see that Chaucer's interest in philosophy was secondary, almost as if the overwhelming impact of philosophy on his thirteenth-century literary influences was to impress him intellectually rather than to stimulate him philosophically:

> all we need to remember is that he must have read the poets of the new movements with something of the same intellectual thrill that they themselves had felt when the new speculations first spread through the ruelles and lecture-rooms of Italy and France. No phrase but Miranda's 'brave new world' [...] will convey the wonder with which poets and schoolmen alike had gazed through Aristotle's glass, when St. Thomas had polished and refocused it.[48]

Whereas Bennett points out Chaucer's awareness of philosophical matters, he does not seem to want to explore the possibility that these issues, issues of neo-Platonic dualism, Aristotelian realism and the problems that the developments and synthesis of these systems propagated, in contemporary discourses, were treated as much as matters of intellectual concern for the narrator of Chaucer's work as they were for those of Macrobius and Cicero.

It seems somewhat dismissive to regard the proem to the *Parliament* simply – or even mainly – as either a necessary exercise in medieval dream-poetry structure, an obligatory acknowledgement of *auctoritas*, or as the proposition of a neo-Platonic straw-man thesis on man's concern with 'the common weal' to be addressed and dismissed in the *narratio*. There is an alternative approach, one which finds Plato a presence in more than just a superficial manner. Neo-Platonic Plato – and the question of whether Chaucer writes in conjunction with or opposition to him – can be seen to appear in some important and often ignored parts of the poem.

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[47] Bennett, pp. 35-6.
[48] Bennett, pp. 46-7.

For instance, if we consider the *Dream of Scipio* as Chaucer's text presents it, we see several alterations by Chaucer that significantly alter the way the story is received. Interestingly, many neo-Platonic references from the *Dream* remain: we are told of the nine spheres of the heavens and of the celestial 'musik and melodye' (62) commonly referred to in neo-Platonic astrological writings. We read that Chaucer's African agrees with Cicero's where each admonishes Scipio to busy his soul with '... matters concerning the commonwealth' (what Chaucer would refer to as the 'commune profit').[49] However, whereas the narrator of Chaucer's dream tale is given only this political direction, Cicero's Africanus continues by expanding on why such a focus is important to the journey of the soul. For Cicero, focusing on one's civic duty keeps one's soul 'in constant action and exercise' causing it to 'rise above [the body], and in contemplation of what is beyond, detach itself as much as possible from the body' (p.77). According to Cicero, the more active we are on earth exercising our souls in civic duty, the easier our souls will be able to make the journey to the neo-Platonic 'home' of transcendent existence.

Chaucer's text has no such requirement for the soul's health that it should return to the World Soul after bodily death. By eliminating his source's extended reasoning behind why humans should focus their energies on attending to the 'commune profit', Chaucer's text is creatively re-focusing the argument away from the neo-Platonic and other-worldly distinctions between body and soul and, instead aims the path of human salvation in the direction of our this-worldly ability and obligation to contribute to a peaceful, harmonised civilisation. Cicero asserts that:

> the souls of those who have surrendered themselves to the to bodily pleasures, becoming their slaves, and who in response to sensual passions have flouted the laws of gods and of men, slip out of their bodies at death and hover close to the earth, and return to this region only after long ages of torment. (p. 77)

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[49] Macrobius, *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, trans. and ed. by William Harris Stahl (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), p. 72. All other citations from the *Commentary* will be from this edition.

Chaucer's version seems to agree with and repeats the sentiment of Cicero's passage, adding only the conditions of purgatory and Christian divine Grace that would have been unavailable to the ancients:

> But brekers of the lawe, soth to seyne,
> And likerous folk, after that they ben dede,
> Shal whirle abouth th'erthe alwey in peyne,
> Tyl many a world be passed, our of drede,
> And than, foryeven al hir wikked dede,
> Than shul they come into that blysful place,
> To which to comen God the sende his grace. (78)

As the final words spoken by African, this passage rings with a certain degree of foreboding: one is left with a severe warning of what is to happen if the correct focus is not placed in our earthly duty to contribute to a civilised community. By the time the audience reaches this dramatic end to the narrator's reading session, Chaucer's text has engaged with neo-Platonism on a number of levels: seemingly picking and choosing, in typically Chaucerian ambivalence, which bits are useful, which bits are interesting and which bits are altogether worthless to his own construction.

Finally, as night falls, Chaucer's narrator loses the ability to read Cicero any longer, a final reference to the neo-Platonic enlightenment to which the reader has just been instructed that he must seek through attention to the 'commune profit'. This 'lak of lyght' forces the narrator to retire to bed, and to a quick and dream-filled sleep (87). The allegory of light as a symbol of the Good has been associated with Plato since the Cave, and with Plotinus since his theory of enlightenment. As Chaucer's tale shifts from 'reality' of one dream to the abnormality of another, one wonders whether, once again, this use of Plato is coincidence or conscious.

What is far more important than any concrete solutions is the question of the tolerance of the possibility of Plato in Chaucer's texts, and the recognition that he comes and goes freely and without any direct allegiance to the undeniable themes or constructs of Chaucer's texts. His unexpected appearance in much of Chaucer's work

does not necessarily indicate a zealous and consistent rebuttal of the dominant Aristotelian theories that overshadowed the late fourteenth century. Rather, modern readers must be willing to accept that Plato works his way through Chaucer's texts in some unusual and unexpected ways, sometimes almost intangible yet palpable and intrinsic to the overall perspective of these complex works.

When Neither Man nor Woman is Enough
Contemporary and Medieval Problems with Reading *The Pardoner's Tale*

But two things cannot be rightly put together without a third; there must be some bond of union between them. And the fairest bond is that which makes the most complete fusion of itself and the things which it combines; and proportion is best adapted to affect such a union.

Timaeus 31b9

The critical attention enjoyed by *The Pardoner's Tale* was relatively moderate until the recent work of Robert Sturges delved into the mysterious nature of the Pardoner's most obvious ambiguity.[1] Sturges explores each and every possibility of the Pardoner's sexual and medical situation, discussing at great length the critical options that had been presented, as well as those that had been, for the most part, ignored by Chaucerian scholarship. When this critical history is taken into account, along with many other recent investigations of Chaucer's works in relation to their presentation of issues of gender or sexuality, evidence begins to accumulate that might suggest the flexibility of such texts' general approach towards the subject matter. Today the corpus of Chaucerian 'gender' studies grows and grows. Recent additions to this body of work, such as Stephanie Trigg's *Congenial Souls*, Glenn Burger's *Chaucer's Queer Nation* and Sharon Farmer and Carol Braun Pasternack's *Gender and Difference in the Middle Ages*, add to the considerable scholarship already available from the studies of Cadden, Hansen, Rigby and Crane. And however comprehensive and seemingly inexhaustible these resources are, Catherine S. Cox is among the latest to explore the issues of gender in Chaucer's work, and one of the few to make implicit connections between those issues of gender specifically in Chaucer and the specific philosophical foundations upon which they are based. Cox draws our attention directly to the Aristotelian (and ultimately Platonic) theories that formed the basis of an entrenched opposition between male and female. Gender, then, becomes the far more elaborated, more fully and rigidly dichotomised social production and reproduction of male and female identities and behaviours – of male and female persons – in a cultural system for which 'male/female' functions as a primary and binary model affecting the structure and meaning of many other binaries whose apparent connection to chromosomal sex will often be exiguous or

[1] Robert Sturges, *Chaucer's Pardoner and Gender Theory: Bodies of Discourse* (New York: St. Martin's, 1999).

nonexistent.[2] She also reminds us that the 'The negativeness accorded the feminine is manifest in the hierarchical value structure attached to conventional (Aristotelian and Platonic) ideologies of gender difference'.[3] Cox's critical approach to the Pardoner is limited mostly to discussions of his relation to portrayals of femininity; in the few pages allotted to discuss the Pardoner outright, the ambiguity of his sexuality is taken for granted and used to introduce a similar argument for the Summoner. There seems to be a general acceptance by Cox's piece that the Pardoner is problematic sexually, but little discussion as to whether the causes for those problems might stem from philosophical sources, beyond discussions of the accessibility of Galen's seven-celled womb. The following chapter hopes to address that lack of philosophical scrutiny, and to explore the central utility of recognising the medieval prejudices based in ancient philosophy which lead to the problems of understanding and articulating the Pardoner's gender.

Problems with the Two-Sex Gender Model

One might be inclined to think that, in modern approaches to the discourses of gender and sex, critics are becoming less inclined to look at a world of infinite complexities through the bipolar lenses of Aristotelian and Freudian predecessors. Many aspects of modern society are no longer being seen as representative of an innate polarity, but as varying degrees of representation along a spectrum of possibilities. One such area of polarised outlook that has received much recent scholarly attention is the issue of the construction of the binary norms of 'masculinity' and 'femininity' that have dominated the way in which we think about gender.[4] It is no longer appropriate to see the world of gender as consisting of only two possibilities; it has become impossible to ignore the

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[2] Catherine S. Cox, *Gender and Language in Chaucer* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1999), p. 4.
[3] Cox, p. 9.
[4] See especially Greg Walker and Elaine Treharne's *Writing Gender and Genre in Medieval Literature: Approaches to Old and Middle English Texts* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2002); Glen Burger's *Chaucer's Queer Nation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003); and of course Joyce Salisbury's *Sex in the Middle Ages: A Book of Essays* (New York: Garland, 1991).

evidence that suggests that human gender exists along a continuum of degrees between masculine and feminine. One might be inclined to think that since current gender studies have rendered either extreme untenable, that the same would apply to sex. One would, for the most part, be wrong.

When looking at what is being written today regarding sex and the role of gender studies in criticism, it is encouraging to see the theoretical dissolution of normative sexual and gender classifications.[5] Most contemporary critics are unreserved about the utility not only of examining current social constructions about gender and how they affect what we read (and do not read) in medieval literature, but also remind the audience of the necessity of 'unhinging gender identity from sexual identity' when considering the relationship of the reader to the texts.[6] However helpful these relatively new developments are in shedding light on the material available, the structure adopted by many of the proponents of this new direction in sex and gender studies seems itself somewhat inadequate to describe the fullness of human experience, at least in terms of human sexuality.

If, as Frantzen states, women are not enough and men are not enough, there remain some interesting and as-of-yet unanswered questions regarding contemporary

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[5] It is, of course, imperative to separate the two things, gender and sex. Whereas Partner reminds us of the overall utility of separating the two terms, Frantzen articulates what those differences imply: 'What "gender" makes plain, and what is concealed by "sex," is the relation of sexual identity to power; gender is a more powerful analytical concept than sex [...]. Gender also challenges the assumption that heterosexual relations, since socially normative, are also natural: gender defines the spaces between heterosexual roles and reconfigures the old opposition between male and female. Just as woman was "naturally" secondary, the homosexual was "unnatural" and so secondary to the "natural" phenomenon of heterosexuality. Gender exposes the dependence of such first principles on other assumptions', Allen J. Frantzen, 'When Women Are not Enough', *Speculum*, 68 (1993), 445-471 (p. 446).

[6] Nancy F. Partner, 'No Sex, No Gender', *Speculum*, 68 (1993), 419-443 (p. 423). For discussions about the unseen or unrepresented in medieval texts and as a thread in modern literature criticism, see Joan Cadden, 'Sciences/Silences: The Natures and Languages of "Sodomy" in Peter of Abano's *Problemata* Commentary', in *Constructing Medieval Sexuality*, ed. by Karma Lochrie, Peggy McCraken and James A. Schultz (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), pp. 40-57; Tison Pugh, 'Queer Pandarus? Silence and Sexual Ambiguity in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*', *Philological Quarterly*, 80 (2001), 17-35; and especially Danielle Jacquart and Claude Thomas, *Sexuality and Medicine in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1985). For an excellent discussion of Chaucer's Absolon as a problematic figure for gender and sex, see Greg Walker, 'Rough Girls and Squeamish Boys: The Trouble with Absolon in *The Miller's Tale*', in *Writing Gender and Genre in Medieval Literature* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2002), ed. by Elaine Treharne, pp. 31-61, though the issue of intersexuality is never raised (nor, would it seem appropriate in the context of his discussion).

approaches to sex. For instance, why do modern critical approaches accommodate a blurred distinction between the presumed polarities of gender and yet continue to insist on discussing sex within the restrictions of a binary system, even if that system has, for the most part, been stripped of its interrelated metaphysical values? With so much discussion about the unfairness to women of the 'one-sex' model imposed by authors and critics in the past, why does contemporary academic culture now limit itself to the 'two-sex' model appropriated by most contemporary sex and gender studies? Most critics seem willing to allow a certain degree of leeway in their discussion of medieval gender roles; there are countless essays investigating medieval issues of ambiguous gender. However, in all of modernity's Foucaultian talk of the social aspects of sexual identity and the elusive nature of definite gender roles, modern criticism seems to have become unwilling to let physical sexual ambiguity *be* an answer unto itself.

Problems arise with the concept of a rigidly binary sexual model when we consider the anatomic hermaphrodite.[7] By their very nature, the hermaphrodite embodies the possibility of a triangular relationship rather than a polarised set of possibilities.[8] To complicate matters further, the literal and literary concept of the hermaphrodite cannot be seen simply to have existed as a consistently sexed perception throughout history. In fact, the hermaphrodite has always been problematic both to science and to literature, due either to their complicating nature within a binary sexual construction, or to their fundamental and necessary resistance to such a two-sexed model. Furthermore, it is possible that this intellectual stubbornness to be defined by or

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[7] For the purposes of this essay, it is helpful to describe the hermaphrodite in purely sexual (and apologetically clinical) terms: someone who, as the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* states, has 'both male and female sexual organs.' And although the term 'androgynous' can be used to describe a physiological condition, this thesis will consider that particular term in a sociological context only. For discussions regarding Chaucer's works and theories of androgyny, see Pugh's 'Queer Pandarus? Silence and Sexual Ambiguity in Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde', above, or Jewell Parker Rhodes' 'Female Sterotypes in Medieval Literature: Androgyny and the Wife of Bath', *Journal of Women's Studies in Literature*, 1 (1979), pp. 348-52.

[8] For the sake of readability, the possessive pronoun used to refer to the hermaphrodite will be 'their', as the use of 'its' seems to dehumanise the subject and 's/he' or 'his/hers' are unsightly and stylistically distracting.

to be confined within sex categories that imply a necessarily exclusive sexual duality actually prevents occurrences of intersexuality from being accurately described and dealt with as medical and literary subjects. Why, for instance is a modern critical audience so inclined towards using terms exclusively descriptive of homosexuality or castration when describing Chaucer's Pardoner, when it might be just as plausible to employ terminology that embraces the fact that the Pardoner might be a medieval hermaphrodite?

When dealing specifically with the hermaphroditism of the Middle Ages, understanding the possible difficulty of its representation helps us to realise that the language used to describe their existence may be confused with other types of experience (namely, homosexual or bisexual behaviour) which are in fact exclusive terms in a binarily opposed sexual division. It then becomes interesting to re-examine cases within medieval culture that heretofore have been interpreted as homosexual, bisexual or completely incomprehensible behaviour, all of which describe polarised genders and sexualities, where it may well be that some of these cases can, in fact, be better understood as examples of hermaphroditism.[9] Therefore, I intend first to examine the medical and philosophical precedent for the medieval concept of the hermaphrodite, and then to discuss an historical case - the John/Eleanor Rykener cross-dressing case of 1395 - and a literary example: Chaucer's Pardoner in light of the problematic expression of their sexuality. Each case presents itself as a specific example in which an alternative reading of the evidence may, in terms of understanding their gender and their sex, either

[9] Current language tags seem unable to deal satisfactorily with a tri-sex model, because of the fact that all currently available terminology is confined to a binary system. Terminology such as 'heterosexual', 'homosexual' and 'bisexual', though representative of a wide-ranging triad, still only describe the sexual possibilities of two extremes (one who associated themselves sexually with the same, the other or both), and that the term 'asexual' removes itself from the equation as it denotes the absence of sexuality. To say that someone considers themselves to be a man or a woman, and that to express that that someone sexually prefers men (homosexual) or women (heterosexual) or both (bisexual), is not the same as to say that someone is or that someone sexually prefers another who is neither man nor woman, but another person of a third legitimate sex, a hermaphrodite. While 'intersexed' seems to be the best possible solution to describe the sex of a hermaphrodite, 'intersexed' and 'intersexual' still resonate with elements of duality and seem somehow insufficient to describe the sex and sexual activity of an intersexed person.

re-evaluate them in terms of their relationship to a binary sexual system, or take them altogether out of the realms of the diverse androcentric scale of sexuality and into a uniquely sexed world of their own: that of the medieval hermaphrodite. It is only after such an investigation into the problems of medieval representation of hermaphroditism that we will be able to speculate whether the medieval concept of intersexuality could have been one that allowed for multiple, not binary, understandings. Not only may a medieval observer have seen hermaphroditism as a function of male sexuality, but they also may have seen it as a reflection of the spectrum of sexuality that we so readily allow today in other gender-laden discourses.

Man and Woman as Opposites

When we endeavour to discuss at any significant length the medieval tendency to group things in pairs of opposites, no two manifestations of contrariety are as readily available, or as widely discussed in modern studies as those of Man and Woman. Within the discourses of sex and gender, we see that the medieval concept of contrariety is confused and ultimately indecisive. On one hand, an argument exists that the late medieval concept of sexuality allowed for an infinite degree of variation between male and female. On the other hand, a great deal of evidence exists that suggests that the medieval concept of sexuality is completely defined by ideas of opposition, that there are, in the mind of the medieval person, two opposing sides of the sex coin: male and female. One side – the male side – is defined as having the 'greatest, best, fairest, most perfect' that what it is to be human has to offer.[10] On the other hand, woman is seen as the degenerate man – a model of incomplete development and nothing more than the manifestation of a degree of privation of the inert human potential: 'But the female is

[10] *Timaeus*, 92c9-10, in *The Dialogues of Plato*, trans. by B. Jowett, 5 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), III, pp. 706-780 (p. 780). All other citations of the *Timaeus* will be from this edition. Although this passage actually refers to God, the superlative sentiment applied the Intellectual applies as well (in a lesser degree to that above it and to a great degree to that below it) to any Thing that is seen as the exemplar of its species. As men are identified as the best a human can be, these attributes can be said in relative terms to apply to men as opposed to women.

opposite to the male, and is female because of its inability to concoct and of the coldness of the sanguineous nutriment'.[11] Perhaps this discussion of the medieval concept of sex would be best initiated if it starts with a system of opposition that is, to some medieval mindsets at least, easy enough to comprehend: that of distinguishing, categorising and evaluating anatomic sex in reference to a systematic devaluation of the female human as a oppositional privation of the human male. By first establishing what it means to be female – in the medieval frame of reference, of course, to what it means to be male – we can then move on to discuss how the medieval concept of the hermaphrodite can be seen either as a variation of the deficient male (thus placing it in line with the two-sex model of gender), or as the legitimate and necessary third element of mediating sexuality between two opposing contraries.

In order to understand how women were perceived primarily as degenerate men, it may be helpful first to appreciate what the contemporary understanding of the physiological origin of women was, and how this affects the way in which their metaphysical nature is perceived. As with so many of the medieval evaluative concepts, the fourteenth century concept of what it meant to be 'woman' has its basis in much older thought. Women suffered a detrimental philosophical evaluation based on a presumed physiological deficiency from the very beginning.

Plato deals with the creation of human beings most famously in three dialogues: *Symposium*, the *Republic* and *Timeaus*. In the *Symposium*, the earliest of the three works, Plato tells us that the original human being was a circular, four-armed and four-legged creature, who was all sexes in one:

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[11] *Generation of Animals*, 766b17-8 (p. 1186), in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, trans. by A. Platt, ed. by Jonathan Barnes, 2 vols (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), I, pp. 1111-1218. Aristotle goes on to declare that 'those of a moister and more feminine state of body are more wont to beget females, and a liquid semen causes this more than a thicker; now all the characteristics come of deficiency of natural heat' (776b30-3).

> The sexes were not two as they are now, but originally three in number; there was man, woman, and the union of the two, having a name corresponding to this double nature, which had once a real existence, but is now lost, and the word 'Androgynous' is only preserved as a term of reproach [...]Now the sexes were three, and such as I have described them; because the sun, moon, and earth are three; and the man was originally the child of the sun, the woman of the earth, and the man-woman of the moon, which is made up of sun and earth.[12]

The gods, fearing of the power of this creature and its potential to usurp their own position, sliced the creature in two and, eventually, manipulated the remnants such that the two halves would desire each other and be naturally inclined to perpetuate the species. Where once there were three sexes, there now remained only two, as

> Men who are a section of that double nature which was once called Androgynous are lovers of women; adulterers are generally of this breed, and also adulterous women who lust after men: the women who are a section of the woman do not care for men, but have female attachments; the female companions are of this sort.[13]

For some reason, the physiological associations of a tri-sex model have been incorporated into a sociologically binary model. This version of the creation myth does not address the physical degeneration of men into women; nor does it account for the development of hermaphrodites. Women, according to this model, are physiologically equal to men, and intersexed individuals are not recognised.

Moving from a mythological argument of sexual degeneration to a social argument of gender opposition, it only gets slightly better for women in the *Republic.* When considering the woman's place as possible warriors in his *Republic*, Plato asks 'Is she capable of sharing either wholly or partially in the actions of men, or not at all?'[14] His response is, again, a relative judgement that is subtly misogynistic: 'all the pursuits of a man can naturally be assigned to women also; but in all of them a woman is weaker than a man'.[15]

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[12] *Symposium*, 189d6-e190b3 (p. 521).
[13] *Symposium*, 191d5-e3 (p. 523).
[14] Plato, the *Republic*, 453a3-5, in *The Complete Works of Plato*, trans. by B. Jowett, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), II, pp. 1-500 (p. 306). All further references to the *Republic* will be from this edition.
[15] *Republic,* 454d9-e1 (p. 310).

Plato's third account of the creation of Woman in the *Timeaus* is hardly encouraging:

> On the subject of animals, then, the following remarks may be offered. Of the men who came into the world, those who were cowards or led unrighteous lives may with reason be supposed to have changed into the nature of women in the second generation.[16]

The original women, according to Plato, were degenerate men, men who were found lacking in morality in a previous life. As a sign of their cowardliness or lack of masculinity, they were not returned to their star of origin but, rather, sent back to an earthly existence as something that was less than the potentiality expressed by being a male. To be female was to be second-best, runner-up.

Aristotle does not offer much more hope for women. His account of the physiological factors involved in the procreation of a female of any species set out his stall, so to speak. Females are formed, in short, when there is not enough heat created in the 'sanguinea' to form a strong enough heart to nourish the developing embryo:

> But the female is opposite to the male, and is female because of its inability to concoct and of the coldness of the sanguineous nutriment [...] And those of a moister and more feminine state of body are more wont to beget females, and a liquid semen causes this more than a thicker; now all of these characteristics come of deficiency in natural heat.[17]

Aristotle has established three important distinctions that will reside in most aspects of the medieval evaluation of gender. First, he establishes that men and women are opposite: they have different states of body that pose them against one another on a binary system of categorisation (active/passive, form/matter, dry/wet, hot/cold, etc.). Secondly, he claims that the conception of a female offspring is because of an inability of the female during her role in procreation. It is her inability to generate enough heat in the heart of the developing child that results in yet another female being born. Finally, he establishes that the root of all of these problems is an inherent deficiency in the female body: it lacks the heat and the relative dryness of males (specifically, the female

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[16] *Timaeus*, 90e5-91a1 (p. 778).
[17] *Generation of Animals*, 766a30-b34 (p. 1186).

sperm is too wet and cold) and therefore are incapable of proper reproduction. In the *Generation of Animals*, he concludes:

> The reason [that male babies are more often deformed in humans than females] is that the male is much superior to the female in natural heat, and so the male foetus moves about more than the females, and on account of moving is more liable to injury [...]. For females are weaker and cooler in nature, and we must look upon the female character as being sort of natural deficiency.[18]

Aristotle's condemnation of women does not end with their role in procreation; he addresses their role in society as well, with equally damaging medieval ramifications. In fact, he goes as far in his *Politics* as to assign to women a similar (but not quite identical) role to slaves in the State:

> In the first place there must be a union of those who cannot exist without each other; namely, of male and female, that the race may continue (and this is a union which is formed, not of choice, but because, in common with other animals and with plants, mankind have a natural desire to leave behind them an image of themselves), and of natural ruler and subject, that both may be preserved. For that which can foresee by the exercise of mind is by nature lord and master, and that which can with its body give effect to such foresight is a subject, and by nature a slave, hence master and slave have the same interest.[19]

Women are placed by this passage into the role of a suitable means to a just end: the physical vessel capable of carrying out Man's unique intellectual insight into the importance of regeneration. In such a comparison, Woman is akin to the slave, as she exists only to actualise the just will of the master. Aristotle makes some half-hearted distinction between women and slaves when he allows that, unlike slaves and the women of the Barbarians, women of the State make things for a purpose.[20]

Chaucer recognises Aristotle's influence over a contemporary evaluation of woman in society. For instance, in the *Tale of Melibee*, Melibee paraphrases Aristotelian advice that 'in evil counsel women far outstrip men' (VII.1089) during his discrediting of the worthiness of women's counsel. His misunderstanding of the Philosopher's guidance is soon corrected by Prudence, as are the other four reasons

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[18] *Generation of Animals*, 775a5-15 (p. 1199).
[19] *Politics*, 125a25-34 (pp. 1986-1987).
[20] *Politics*, 1252b2 (p. 1987).

Melibee gives for not listening to his wife. Blamires argues that the discussion of the 'dos and don'ts' are influenced heavily by established medieval 'protocols of counsel', and that Melibee's inability to follow those protocols is accentuated by Prudence's strict adherence to them.[21] The debate over whether Chaucer was expressly antifeminist is not the subject of this passage or this thesis; it cannot be addressed at any length here. What needs only to be recognised is the awareness of the text in regard to the Aristotelian authority over medieval sociological constructs.

In fact, by the time the issue of gender reaches the early Middle Ages, women have made some inroads into philosophical estimation, but not much. Augustine seems to put a Christian slant on the arguments presented by Plato and Aristotle. From a Christian point of view that necessarily prohibits reincarnation, Augustine cannot accept the Platonic premise that women are men who have been somehow punished for the misdeeds of a past life.[22] Instead, Augustine's references to women's place below men all refer to biblical precedent for the rule of man. In one of many examples (notably from *City of God* and *On the Literal Translation of Genesis*) where Augustine takes the righteous place of man above woman as a matter of fact, he states:

> We cannot, however, interpret 'male' and 'female' as symbolising something else in each individual man: for example, the distinction between the ruling element and the ruled.[23]

However much we would like to excuse Augustine for being nothing more than a passive product of his environment, the fact remains that he subscribed to and proliferated the theory that women were by nature inferior and subservient to men. On a

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[21] Alcuin Blamires, *Chaucer, Ethics and Gender* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 66-7. See also Blamires' discussion on the legacy of perceived physiological difference between men and women in *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended: An Anthology of Medieval Texts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), pp. 38-45.

[22] *Timaeus*, 90e6-91a1 (p.778).

[23] Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans*, trans. by R.W. Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), XIV.22 (p. 622). Another lengthy discussion can be found in *On the Trinity*, XII.9, wherein Augustine regards women as the image of God only when joined with a husband. Otherwise, she is 'referred separately to her quality as help-meet, which regards woman herself alone, then she is not the image of God; but as regards the man alone, he is the image of God as fully and completely as when the woman too is joined with him in one' (Augustine, *On The Trinity*, trans. by Rev. Marcus Dodds (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1873), p. 292.

more sophisticated and metaphysical level, woman's souls were considered to be associated with a lower level of the mind than those of men's, thus making it impossible for women ever truly to visualise God.[24] It is hard to grant Augustine any feminist amnesty, however, when we read in Augustine passages such as:

> As the master, the man gave a name to his woman, his inferior, and said, "Now this is bone from my bones, and flesh from my flesh." "Bone from my bones" perhaps on account of fortitude. "Flesh from my flesh" on account of temperance. For these two virtues, we are taught, pertain to the lower part of the mind that the prudence of reason rules.[25]

When Augustine refers to the Biblical statement that 'she was made as man's helper', 'He is ruled by wisdom, she is ruled by the man' and 'the order of things makes her subject to man' we can hardly ignore the fact that he, too, presents us with a natural, righteous and inescapable hierarchy between men and women.[26] Again, one can see how, in the *Tale of Melibee*, this sentiment is addressed, as Prudence defends herself by stating that 'if wommen were nat goode, and hir conseils goode and profitable, oure Lord God of hevene wolde nevere han wrought hem, ne called hem help of man, but rather confusioun of man' (VII.1103). Prudence is at once reinforcing the subjugation of woman to man and, simultaneously, empowering that position as one of divine providence. In other words, Prudence's use of the biblical passage reiterates the fact that God made Woman to be Man's helper for a reason: their counsel and help is not only worthwhile, it is part of God's plan.

Knowing as we do how influential Plato and Aristotle are throughout the thought of Aquinas, it should come as no surprise that Aquinas does not greatly advance the position of women. His views, summarised in the four articles on 'The Production of the Woman' in the *Summa Theologica*, both rely on and dispute Aristotelian claims about women. In Question One (Whether the woman should have been made in that

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[24] *On The Trinity,* XII.13.20, pp. 300-1.
[25] Augustine, *Anti-Manichean Writings*, II.13.18, in *St. Augustine on Marriage and Sexuality* (Washington, DC: Catholic University Press of America, 1996), p. 38.
[26] *Anti-Manichean Writings*, II.11.15, pp. 39-40.

first production of things?), Aquinas concludes that woman is misbegotten only when viewed in reference to man, because

> [...] the active force in the male seed tends to the production of a perfect likeness in the masculine sex; while the production of woman comes from defect in the active force or from some material indisposition.[27]

In the other four points of the question, their objections and his answers, Aquinas concludes that it is logical and proper for woman to have been made from man (for many reasons, not the least of which is that man might love her more if he knows that he had a hand – or a rib – in her creation), that it is logical and plausible that the rib was taken from Adam without pain and was then augmented by God into Eve, [28] and that it is perfectly all right that God made Woman as the by-product of Man; it is His right as the supreme being to forego normal laws of nature and, should He so choose, 'produce either a man from the slime of the earth, or a woman from the rib of man'.[29] Paul E. Sigmund argues that, while the Aristotelian and Augustinian notion insisting that women are meant only to assist men in procreation is present in his work, Aquinas denies that a woman is a malformed or 'misbegotten' man. Instead of being the product of any conceptual mistake, women are, he says, according to Aquinas, the result of a force of nature that is 'directed to the work of procreation'.[30] Clearly, nevertheless, we see that the fundamental physiological conception of 'woman' is predicated on the belief that to be a woman or to produce one in reproduction is the direct result of some kind of privation.

For some reason, there existed in the medieval concept of anatomic sex a reluctance to allow the Platonic, Aristotelian and neo-Platonic theory of graduation that

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[27] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, ed. and trans. by Timothy Suttor, 61 vols (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1970), Q92.A1. All other references to *Summa Theologica* will be from this series, with section relative editors and translators duly identified.
[28] Interestingly, Aquinas takes the time to rationalise why the rib was selected. Had Eve been made from a part of Adams' head, she would have some claim to 'authority over man'; had she been grown from his feet, she would have been subject to Adam's 'contempt as his slave' (*Summa Theologica*, Q92.A 3).
[29] *Summa Theologica*, Q92.A 4.
[30] *Anti-Manichean Writings*, II.11.15, p. 40.

would normally apply to the extremes of any set of opposites. Arthur O Lovejoy states that Aristotle was a firm believer that

> Nature refuses to conform to our craving for clear lines of demarcation; she loves twilight zones, where forms abide which, if they are to be classified at all, must be assigned to two classes at once. And this insensibly minute gradation of the differentness is especially evident at precisely those points at which common speech implies the presence of profound and well-defined contrasts.[31]

He is, of course, referring to passages in Aristotle that refer to the natural occurrences that seem to blur the lines between plant and animal.[32] Lovejoy also cites a passage from *Generation of Animals*, in which Aristotle describes 'testacea', which are 'partly like and partly unlike those in the other classes'.[33] Whereas Lovejoy implies that these two passages demonstrate a theoretical tolerance for species inhabiting a sort of 'middle ground', he fails to notice that the application of the categorical leniency seems only relevant to species that appear to cross the demarcated lines between other species; there is no indication that the same tolerance is to be shown for problematic examples *within* any given species. In fact, when Aristotle specifically discusses the production of a hermaphrodite at a later point in the *Generation of Animals*, his assessment of the causation of the 'monstrosity' is not tolerant at all.[34] According to Aristotle, hermaphrodites occur when an excess of the male generative material is gathered more 'than is required by the nature of the part'.[35] However scientific and disinterested his account for the creation of an intersexed individual is, his evaluation of their nature is far more subjective. In short, a hermaphrodite is 'contrary to nature'; one set of its sex organs 'is attached like a tumour' as a result of insufficient nourishment.[36] Whatever

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[31] Lovejoy, Arthur O., *The Great Chain of Being: A Study in the History of an Idea* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964), p. 56.
[32] Aristotle, *History of Animals*, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. by Jonathan Barnes, 2 vols. (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 774-993, 588b4-18 (p. 922).
[33] *Generation of Animals*, 761a12-13 (p. 1178).
[34] Most of Book IV of *Generation of Animals* deals with congenital irregularities, all of which Aristotle classifies as 'monstrosities'. For the specific discussions of the human hermaphrodite, see 772b26-37 (pp. 1195-6). See also Augustine's *On The Trinity*, XII.8 (p. 290), as he uses the same word to describe the same condition.
[35] *Generation of Animals*, 772b13-15 (p. 1195).
[36] *Generation of Animals*, 772b26-31 (p. 1195).

claims of continuity and inter-species flexibility Lovejoy wishes to make in defence of Aristotle, they cannot apply to the seemingly special case of the hermaphrodite. As Lorraine Datson and Katherine Park remark, 'This model expressed the characteristic Aristotelian interpretation of sexual difference, which presented male and female less as points on a spectrum, in the Hippocratic manner, than as polar opposites admitting no meaningful mediation'.[37]

With Platonic thought, however, we have seen a complete reliance on the necessity of mediating principles. It is, after all, Plato who declares that 'two things cannot be rightly put together without a third [...]. And the fairest bond is that which makes the most complete fusion of itself and the things which it combines'.[38] How then, do the diverse medieval communities make the transition from this insistence on a common ground between opposites that would necessitate the existence of the hermaphrodite to the Aristotelian denouncement of this mediation as a cancerous abnormality against nature?

[37] Lorraine Datson and Katherine Park, 'The Hermaphrodite and the Orders of Nature', in *Premodern Sexualities*, ed. by Louise Fradenburg and Carla Freccero (London: Routledge, 1996), 117-137 (p. 119).
[38] *Timaeus*, 31b9-11 (p. 718).

The History of the Concept of the Hermaphrodite

Chaucer's Pardoner raises questions about how his period regarded intersex states. The ensuing pages will necessarily consider philosophical theories available to Chaucer's world, literary treatment of intersexuality (especially in Ovid), and possible implications of contemporary awareness in Chaucer's society of intersex individuals. Exploring for a short while the attitudes towards the intersex state which would have informed the medieval awareness of and disposition towards intersexuality may help to explain the surprisingly nonchalant manner in which the subject is introduced by the character of the Pardoner. Chaucer's casual, almost indifferent introduction of the Pardoner as a sexually ambiguous character suggests that modern readers may have more questions regarding the acceptance of him than Chaucer or his audience might have had. If nothing else, the Pardoner raises some questions about the social normality of sexual ambiguity, and it is to those questions that this thesis will return shortly.

Although the scientific recognition of living organisms with two sets of genitals dates back to antiquity, the medieval mythological concept of hermaphroditism springs primarily from Ovid's tale of intersexuality in *Metamorphoses* (8 AD).[39] In general, we know that Chaucer was deeply knowledgeable about Ovid's work, as it is mentioned in the prologue to the *Man at Law's Tale* (II.93). Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is mentioned throughout the *Tales*, and is a source for the *Manciple's Tale* and parts of *The Book of the Duchess*, and *The Legend of Good Women*. The Ovidian tale refers to Hermaphroditus,[40] who, although decisively male-sexed, had 'a resemblance to his father and to his mother'.[41] While swimming in a stream, he is attacked by the naiad Salmacis:

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[39] See above and, for more information, Beryl Rowland's 'Animal Imagery and the Pardoner's Abnormality', in *Neophilologus*, 48 (1964), 56-60 (p. 57).
[40] Originally, the gods in question were Hermes and Aphrodite - thus giving us the term 'hermaphrodite'.
[41] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. by Frank Justus Miller (London: William Heinemann, 1928).

> For their two bodies, joined together as they were, were merged in one, with one face and one form for both. As when one grafts a twig on some tree, he sees the branches grow one, and with common life come to maturity, so were these two bodies knit in close embrace: they were no longer two, nor such as to be called one, woman and one, man. They seemed neither, and yet both.[42]

We see that, at the very least, the original union is not welcomed by the victim, Hermaphroditus. Salmacis is represented as a violent and destructive parasite; she is a snake hindering the flight of an eagle, an ivy suffocating a tree, and a multi-limbed squid who kills its prey by 'wrapping its tentacles around it on every side'.[43] Hermaphroditus, the descendant of Atlas, resists stubbornly, denies the nymph all pleasure, but finally gives in and submits himself to her embrace.[44] The combination of Hermaphroditus' and Salmacis' bodies yields a new being, somewhere between man and woman, and not only causes the boy to lament his own transformation, but also inspires him to cry out a curse upon all other men who bathe in the stream.[45]

Ovid's concept of hermaphroditism is negative in this tale: all of the terms used to describe the act of becoming intersexed are decisively unfavourable. However, the terms are in relation to the loss of Hermaphroditus' masculinity, rather than a reflection of a general objection to intersexuality. Whereas Ovid quite casually refers to Sithon, who 'hovered between both sexes, now male, now female',[46] without any mention of remorse or deformity, the curse of Hermaphroditus is consistently described in terms of a horrendous loss of manliness. Hermaphroditus specifically becomes less than a man, and his voice is no longer masculine: '*Ergo ubi se liquidas, quo vir descenderat, undas semimarem fecisse videt mottitaque in illis membra, manus tendens, sed iam non voce virili*'.[47] The stream 'enervates with its enfeebling waters and renders soft and weak all men who bathe therein'.[48] The term 'hermaphrodite', therefore, cannot be seen to carry

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[42] Ovid, p. 205.
[43] Ovid, p. 205.
[44] Ovid, p. 204.
[45] Ovid, p. 205.
[46] *Nec loqour, ut quondam naturae iure Novato ambiguous fuerit modo vir, modo femina Sithon* (p. 198).
[47] Ovid, p. 205.
[48] Ovid, p. 199.

with it from its literary genesis any preconceptions of objective negativity, but, rather, negative connotations in relation to masculine imperfection, change, lack, deformity, weakness or privation.[49]

In Aristotle, we see the first systematic discussions of privation as a necessary component of becoming. In fact, Aristotle's definition of privation is intimately connected with his definition of the principle of contrariety.[50] Aristotle's discussion of privation in the *Physics* leads him to conclude that it is itself a kind of form (193b19-21, p. 330) and can be subsequently seen as one of the three fundamental aspects of the category of substance (201a4-9, pp. 342-343).

For Augustine, on the other hand, privation takes a far more substantial role. Although he never addresses the specific subject of gender, Augustine combines the Aristotelian principle of privation with the neo-Platonic principle of emanation to deduce that privation is a defection of a quality of a thing that has inherently more potential than it exhibits in existence. Because all created things are necessarily good, privation becomes the principle by which Evil is formed, as Evil is defined by the deliberate turning away from God to favour a lesser good (as in one's self or material things).[51] Considering Augustine's ubiquitous influence on medieval Western philosophy, it comes as no surprise that most philosophers who follow him take up the general topic of privation at one point or another.

Boethius' acceptance of the Augustinian definition of good is the entire premise of the *Consolation of Philosophy*; Anselm extends the concept to include the privation

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[49] Paul Vincent Spade, 'Medieval Philosophy', in *The Oxford Illustrated History of Western Philosophy*, ed. by Anthony Kenny (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 55-106 (p. 60). Spade reminds us that *privation* is a fundamental principle by which the moral value of any thing may be assessed. Spade states that privation is the concept by which something is determined to be something less than it either metaphysically or physiologically ought to be. It cannot be underestimated how important the concept of privation was to the ancient and medieval thinkers. In an ancient system where all things are ultimately the Effects of a necessarily good Cause, and a medieval system in which that Cause is a necessarily good God, the concept of privation plays a decisive role in the ability of medieval Christian thinkers to deal with manifestations of the Good that are not so good: Evil, for instance.

[50] *Physics*, 225b3-4 (p. 381).

[51] See *On Free Will*, III.1.1 for Augustine's discussion of evil as a choice to turn away from the Good.

of good as the loss of the intrinsic human justice and beauty.[52] Peter Abelard's (1079-1142) relationship with privation was a very personal matter, as he was castrated by the uncle of his lover Heloise.[53] Martin Irvine recognises that the removal of Abelard's testicles gave his enemies the excuse to dismiss him on the most basic level; denying him even the very fundamental elements of identity.[54]

Irvine goes on to suggest that Abelard's emasculation 'is a sign of a deeper lack, a deficiency or erasure of *virtus*, which alone allows the true performance of masculinity'. Abelard is lamenting and being ridiculed not for what he is per se, but what he is in light of what he *should be*. Necessarily operating within a philosophical and social world in which the privation of male sex organs is inseparably linked to a scale of human perfection, he is forced to use his mind and his writing to, as Irvine says, 'perform through his books, a claim to this inner *virtus*, a fantasised phallus-substitute, a re-identification with symbolic power': he uses his intellect and his writing to reclaim that of which he has been deprived. In this sense, Chaucer's Pardoner might be seen by a contemporary audience to be suffering from a lack of positive masculinity when he is described as possibly being a 'geldyng'. As such, any number of assumptions regarding his character could be made, ranging from the most pious (voluntary or 'immaculate' castration to serve God) to the most perverse (forced castration as punishment for any

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[52] Sin - evil as privation, *privatio boni* - strips the world of its beauty and order; when man commits a sin he 'disrupts that part of the world's order, that is, its beauty, revealed in him' (*Cur Deus Homo* (Chicago: Open Court Publishing, 1939), pp. 208-10). See also Robert D. Crouse, 'The Augustinian Background of St. Anselm's Concept of *Justitia*', *Canadian Journal of Theology*, 4 (1958), 112-13.

[53] *Oxford Illustrated History*, p. 83.

[54] Martin Irvine, 'The Pen(is), Castration, and Identity: Abelard's Negotiations of Gender', [Accessed 15 August 2003], < http://www.georgetown.edu/labyrinth/conf/cs95/papers/irvine.html>. According to Irvine, Abelard has no identity in Roscelin's view: he is neither monk nor cleric or layman, and he has no name, not even Petrus, since a masculine proper name loses its signification once its subject changes gender: 'But, to be sure, you are lying that you can be called "Petrus" from conventional usage. I'm certain that a noun (*nomen*) of masculine gender, if it falls away from its own gender, will refuse to signify its usual thing (*rem*). For proper nouns usually lose their signification when the things signified fall back from their own completion. A house is not called a house but an imperfect house when its walls and roof are removed. Therefore since the part that makes a man has been removed, you are to be called not "Petrus" but "imperfect Petrus". It is relevant to this heap of human disgrace because in the seal by which you seal your stinking letters you form an image having two heads, one a man and the other a woman.. I have decided to say many true and obvious things against your attack, but since I am writing against an imperfect man, I will leave the work that I began incomplete'.

one of a variety of sexual crimes).[55] Either way, the nature of the Pardoner is ambiguous; the principle of privation as a precaution is, however, the overriding impetus in both explanations. When the text refers to the Pardoner either as a gelding or a mare, it is possible to read 'gelding' as the more abhorrent option, as it would imply an unnatural and unholy state of being due to its state of deviant privation.

Aquinas deals specifically with the privation of good in *De Malo*; it is safe to say that every medieval thinker dealt with privation in some way or another. Although we do not have the time at present to give full attention to a discussion of Evil as a privation of good, we should at least understand that by the late medieval period, the principle of privation continues to play an important role in the evaluation of most aspects of philosophy and physiology. In the physiological examples of the medieval woman, eunuch and hermaphrodite, the case for a lower status rested entirely on a presumption of privation. The standard for that measurement was, of course, the supposed philosophical pre-eminence of the male body as a biologically complete human being.

The gender-based negativity associated with hermaphrodites seems to have been consistent with other discourses as well, specifically with medicine and philosophy. Much earlier than Ovid, Aristotle presents a fundamentally dualistic approach to the reproduction of the human species, and, by extension, the relative error that occurs in order to produce a hermaphrodite. Aristotle's works (especially *History of Animals*, c. 350 BC) 'invoke pairs of opposing qualities': male and female, form and being, effect and cause.[56] In his description of the reproductive process, Aristotle describes the

[55] Irvine lists at least one example of the former and several examples of the latter.
[56] Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 23.

formation of a hermaphrodite in terms of this polarised view of reality and of the sexes; his work sets precedents for the hierarchical distinctions between male and female.[57]

Sometime later, Galen (AD 130-200) considered and developed Aristotelian notions of reproduction by introducing the concept of the active female sperm. Departing from Aristotle's view of the womb as a passive receptacle, Galen's view provided women with a determining role in the sex of a child. Unfortunately, it also provided them with much of the blame for abnormalities, especially hermaphrodites.[58] Galen discusses the concepts of warm and cool as factors of gender determination; while certain imbalances between the heat of the sperm and the coolness of the womb could result in effeminate men or masculine women, the most catastrophic combination produces the hermaphrodite. Galen seems to anticipate medieval attitudes towards intersexuality; hermaphrodites are produced because of the lack of masculinity or the deterioration in the natural state of a man.

Cadden, Datson and Park all claim that Hippocratic and, to some extent, Galenic principles promote a non-judgemental view of hermaphrodites as an 'event of perfectly

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[57] In relation to human reproduction, if the active, thick, 'granular' spermatic fluid meets with a woman's sickly and passive womb that is appropriately 'somewhat rough and adherent,' conception is likely. After conception, observing the placement of the foetus could be useful in determining its sex: 'in the case of male children, the first movement usually occurs on the right-hand side of the womb [...] but if the child be a female then on the left-hand side'. By describing the process by which to distinguish male from female embryo, Aristotle comments less on hermaphroditism than on the fundamental establishment of a gender hierarchy. Anatomic sex is important to Aristotle: male babies exhibit more movement in the womb and take less time than females to 'to come to perfection,' as the female foetus 'accomplishes the whole development of its parts more slowly than the male.' Furthermore, male embryos give the pregnant woman an easier time during gestation and allow the expectant mother to 'retain a comparatively healthy look,' whereas female babies cause the mother to 'look as a rule paler and suffer more pain.' (*History of Animals*, 582a30-584a13-15 (pp. 912-5)). Aristotle constantly allows for exceptions to his rules, but refers often to at least a distinct difference, if not a remarkable inadequacy, of the role of the woman in reproduction and of the generation of female babies in general. For further discussion, see Blamires' *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended*, pp 38-45.

[58] Cadden, p. 33.

balanced male and female factors'.[59] Even if the case is that a Hippocratically-based understanding of non-judgmental intersexuality existed to any extent in Galen, the authors admit that by 'the later thirteenth century the simple dichotomies between Aristotelian and Hippocratic models had become blurred and complicated by a welter of distinctions and mutual accommodations'.[60] The evidence seems to suggest that as with Ovid, eventually it came to be understood that it is only because of an insufficiency of masculinity that a hermaphrodite comes into being and it is seen as a regression from normalcy in relationship to the anatomic dichotomy established by Aristotelian and neo-Platonic hierarchical structures relating to 'natural' reproduction.

Although a convert away from the pitfalls of Manichean dualism, Augustine still produced writings that served to reinforce the view of the hermaphrodite as an abnormality. Chapter Eight of *City of God*, entitled 'Whether certain monstrous races of men were produced as descendants of Adam or the sons of Noah', clearly states:

> The histories of the nations tell of certain monstrous races of men. [...] Others combine in themselves the nature of both sexes, having the right breast of a man and the left of a woman, and, when they mate, they take it in turns to beget and conceive.[61]

One might be willing to overlook this condemnation of an intersexed race, as in context (mentioned with examples of Cyclops and backwardly-footed peoples, dog-headed men and neckless men whose eyes are in their shoulders) they can be dismissed by the modern critic as mythological references. However, Augustine does not limit his categorisation of monstrosities to purely fantastic creatures. He continues:

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[59] 'The Hermaphrodite and the Order of Nature', p. 119. To whatever extent Galen though of women as less perfect than men, he still did not attach the same rigid system of polarity of classification that had been institutionalised by Aristotle. See *Meanings of Sex Difference*, especially page 17. Cadden also expresses the sentiment that although binarily based on contraries, the Hippocratic system did not entail any hierarchical structure. Opposites were thought to be balancing and of equal value, which promoted the 'the medical concept of balance, like the general notion of moderation, presupposed the existence of polarities and sets of extremes between which a mean must be sought'. Galen would take this stance to indicate that many of Plato's tenets were based on Hippocratic principles of moderation and mediation, Wesley Smith, *The Hippocratic Tradition* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1979), p. 86.
[60] 'The Hermaphrodite and the Order of Nature', p. 121.
[61] *City of God*, XVI.8, p. 708.

> Again, though they are rare, it is difficult to find times when there have been no *androgyny*, also called hermaphrodites: persons who embody the characteristics of both sexes so completely that it is uncertain whether they should be called male or female. However, the prevailing habit of speech has named them according to the superior sex, that is, the male; for no one has ever used the term 'androgyness' or 'hermaphroditess'.[62]

Augustine's comments are interesting on two levels. First, we must realise that the purpose of the passage is to attempt to defend these 'monsters' as descendants from Adam and, by extension, as intentional creations of God. In this attempt, Augustine is forced to admit defeat as he concludes the passage by declaring three possible answers (none of which being, of course, that God has made a mistake). Either the stories about the existence of these monsters are 'completely worthless'; if such creatures exist they are not truly men; 'or, if they are men, they are descended from Adam'.[63] The second interesting point is that Augustine seems to rely on a convention of language, rather than a steadfast biological classification, in order to label the hermaphrodite as male. The admission that no one uses a third term to describe the sex of the hermaphrodite suggests that the refusal to allow the possibility of a unique sex for the androgynous person is a linguistic limitation rather than a scientific necessity or cultural aversion. However, we cannot ignore the brutality of the term 'monstrous' and the connotations of unnaturalness with which it must be associated. The term is used again by Augustine in *On the Trinity*, during which he clarifies the scriptural reference to the creation of man and woman:

> "male and female created He them;" for some have feared to say, He made him male and female, lest something monstrous, as it were, should be understood, as those whom they call hermaphrodites, although even so both might be understood not falsely in the singular number, on account of that which is said, "Two is one flesh".[64]

For medieval philosophers and their ancestors, then, the hermaphrodite existed to remind the 'normal' person what 'normal' was supposed to be. Furthermore,

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[62] *City of God*, XVI.8, p. 709.
[63] *City of God*, XVI.8, p. 710.
[64] Augustine, *On The Trinity*, XII.8, p. 290.

intersexed people existed as a direct result of the inability of their parents to reproduce correctly in accordance with the laws of nature, all of which indicated that being 'male' was better than being 'female,' and that being 'in-between' was worse than being either. In the cultural fragments of the Middle Ages, therefore, hermaphrodites are represented as deficiently masculine beings, only useful as rhetorical devices to explain the 'naturally' binary oppositions of male and female, and the role each plays in the process of procreation.

Medical Concepts of the Hermaphrodite

The medieval medical documentation of the intersexed echoes the philosophical concern with the troublesome nature of the hermaphrodite. In much of the contemporary medical evidence available, the production of a hermaphroditic child is seen as a medical abnormality in much the same way as Galen presents it as an inadequacy. As a surgical resolution to the abnormality, Guy de Chauliac instructs physicians to cut off what the person does not want, as long as one does not cut off the part that 'maketh water.'[65] Surgical solutions to a perceived medical problem, to some extent still practiced today, requires that the subject conform to a binary model of sexuality to which they may not subscribe.[66] Aristotle's and Galen's respective arguments eventually develop into the contemporarily common theory of the seven-celled uterus, which describes the female organ as divided into seven compartments, each of which serve a specific function in determining the sex of the foetus:

> conceptus housed in one of the cubicles on the left, the cooler side, would, of course, be a girl, on the right, a boy. A foetus that developed in the middle cell would be a hermaphrodite.[67]

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[65] *The Cyrurgie of Guy de Chauliac*, ed. by Margaret S. Ogden (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 529.
[66] For information regarding the current state of 'unwanted surgery' on intersexed individuals, see the 'Intersex Society of North America', <http://www.isna.org/about/index.html>.
[67] Cadden, p. 198.

Although the seven-celled theory may seem to begin to provide the hermaphrodite with a uniquely sexed identity, its identity is, in fact, only secondary to the importance of masculinity implicit in the fundamental points of the argument. In other words, because of the well-established hierarchy implicit in the superiority of the male's attributes and the deficiency of the female contributions, the hermaphrodite still exists as a deficient form of maleness. Based on this evidence, the classification of sex in medieval thought may have consisted mainly of two sexual normative categories, male and female. Any problematic issue relating to sex or gender, such as sodomy, bisexuality, homosexuality or hermaphroditism, most likely would have been dealt with in terms of being an abnormality of masculinity, which had long been understood to be the dominant and more perfect gender.

However convincing and well-established the model of the 'hermaphrodite as deficient male' is, there is evidence to suggest that, during the Middle Ages, there was another conception of gender that did not attempt to place hermaphrodites within the confines of masculinity and femininity. Cary Nederman and Jacqui True raise the argument 'that hermaphrodites may at some time have been understood as a third sex, a biologically distinct sort of human being'.[68] Caroline Walker Bynum adds support to the argument by stating that medieval discussions regarding conception 'seem to put male and female along a continuum and leave it totally unclear why there are not at least as many hermaphrodites (midpoints on the spectrum) as there are males and females (endpoints on the spectrum).[69]

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[68] Cary J. Nederman and Jacqui True, 'The Third Sex: The Idea of the Hermaphrodite in Twelfth-Century Europe', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 6 (1996), 497-517 (p. 499).
[69] Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Renaissance* (New York: Zone, 1992), pp. 220-1.

The Three-Sex Model

Looking again to some of the antecedents of medieval medical and literary thought, we find evidence to support such a claim that such a three-sex gender model may have existed. For instance, Ovid refers to the intersexed Hermaphroditus as 'no longer two, but a single form, possessed of a dual nature, which could not be called male or female, but seemed to be at once both and neither'.[70] By reading from a tri-sex perspective, we see that Hermaphroditus is being portrayed not as male or female, but as a different sex altogether. The use of the term *form* becomes important, in that it implies a new *unique* existence in the Platonic evaluation of being. All material things exist in relation to a perfect, unknowable Form. To exist corporally is to be a physical (albeit necessarily imperfect) representation of a perfect Form.

Using this knowledge and Ovid's terminology, Hermaphroditus and Salmacis cease to exist respectively as representations of male and female forms, but as a separate and unique form: that of the intersexed individual. This perspective significantly changes the source of Hermaphroditus' lamentations from being that of the loss of masculinity to the loss of identity with a particularly sexed individual within a binary system of anatomic classification. Because the sexual system employed by the text does not allow for a third option, we are brought back to the issue of privation as the source of its characters' anguish. The implication of weakness is still enshrined in a hierarchical concept of male superiority, but the general emphasis has shifted from the degeneration of Hermaphroditus' manliness to the loss of his ability to recognise the third Form, a failure to comprehend his material relationship to his own inherent intersexed potentiality, or a dramatic and unwanted change in fundamental being. The previously separate forms are represented as a new and unique being; Hermaphroditus is seen as lamenting the loss of his former uniquely sexed identity and not being

[70] Ovid, p. 104.

comfortable with his new uniquely sexed identity, rather than being upset solely because he has ceased to be completely male. Hermaphroditus is not only lamenting the privation of his potential male sexuality, but he is also worried about the change in his gender, which is socially and philosophically invested in male-centred hierarchical value systems. By extension, we can propose that since Hermaphroditus laments his new and different sex, one that is neither male nor female, a third and unique sex must therefore exist (at least according to Ovid); that sex must be that of the hermaphrodite.

Evidence of the possibility of the third sex can also be found in Aristotle. Again, in *History of Animals*, he refers to the intersexed as natural and unique forms of life:

> With regard to sex, some animals are divided into male and female, but others are not so divided [...] In animals that live confined to one spot there is no duality of sex [...] among some insects and fishes, some cases are found wholly devoid of this duality of sex. For instance, the eel is neither male nor female, and can engender nothing.[71]

Aristotle, in his treatment of the sex of animals, clearly allows for the possibility of beings to exist outside of the binary constructions of male and female. It is a matter of fact to him that some animals are either completely sexless or at the very least neither male nor female. Although we cannot necessarily impose upon Aristotle an unqualified application of this non-duality to humans, he does allow for 'certain exceptions' to his otherwise unyielding rule of either absolute duality or absolute plurality. [72]

The Rykener Case

One such exception may be the case of John/Eleanor Rykener of 1395. In addition to the exhaustive interpretation of the document presented by Karras and Boyd, which presents Rykener 'in modern terms [...] as a bisexual prostitute',[73] we also find evidence of the possibility of John/Eleanor being discussed as an historical

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[71] *History of Animals*, 537b23-34 (p. 850); 538a1-3 (p. 850).
[72] *History of Animals*, 537b, 28 (p. 850).
[73] Ruth Mazo Karras and David Lorenzo Boyd, 'Ut cum muliere', in *Premodern Sexualities*, ed. by Louise Fradenburg and Carla Freccero (London: Routledge, 1996), 99-116 (p. 101).

hermaphrodite. If we are able to escape the social and grammatical limitations of a binary system of sexuality, we begin to see John/Eleanor very differently indeed. Much of Karras and Boyd's own language recognises the problematic nature of classifying Rykener's sex and gender; they admit 'Rykener does not seem to have been treated under either of these two categories [of prostitute or sodomite]'.[74] By this we may infer that, because there is no evidence of Rykener being prosecuted for either the offence of sodomy or prostitution, there may have been other issues that complicated his case. According to Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass, the medieval woman could not be prosecuted for sodomy.[75] As it was clear that the more controversial of the two vices in question was understood to be sodomy,[76] the apparent inability of the courts to prosecute Rykener for that specific crime suggests that something else – perhaps his sex – was in question.[77]

Evidence suggests that the issue in question, while perhaps having been understood in terms of homosexual activity, was, in fact, that of a hermaphrodite choosing to have sex with people, sometimes as a woman and sometimes as a man. 'Phillip, rector of Theydon Garnon, had sex with [Rykener] as a woman'[78] while 'as a man, [Rykener] had sex with a certain Joan [...] and also [in Beaconsfield] two foreign Franciscans had sex with him as with a woman.'[79] Rykener admits that he cannot

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[74] 'Ut cum muliere', p. 101.
[75] That is not to say that the medieval woman could not commit sodomy. Sodomy, a problematic term in itself, expanded its meaning to encompass all kinds of 'abnormal' sexual activity, including same-sex relations between women, usury as well as anal intercourse. See Joan Cadden, 'Sciences/Silences: The Natures and Languages of "Sodomy" in Peter of Abano's *Problemata* Commentary', in *Constructing Medieval Sexuality*, ed. by Karma Lochrie, Peggy McCraken and James A. Schultz (Minneapolis and Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), pp. 40-57, and Karras and Boyd, above.
[76] Karras and Boyd, p. 113. The footnote to this reference of vice reads: 'Since the language is stronger than that used to refer to prostitution in the legal records, it probably refers to sodomy here'.
[77] Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass. 'Fetishising Gender: Constructing the Hermaphrodite in Renaissance Europe', in *Bodyguards: The Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity*, ed. by Epstein and Straub (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 80-112.
[78] Jones and Stallybrass, p. 111.
[79] Jones and Stallybrass, p. 112.

remember how many times he has had sex as a man as opposed to how many times he has had sex as a woman: only that he got paid more by priests.[80]

Clearly, there is evidence that Rykener can operate as man or woman in either sexual capacity. Although it may be postulated that the male-sexed body can operate in either sexual capacity, this does not explain the inability of the officials to prosecute for sodomy (the 'illegal and immoral' male enactment of the female sexual capacity), or the ambiguity of the engendering of Rykener by the language used in the document. This linguistic intersexuality is commented on by Karras and Boyd:

> [...] the document repeatedly treats Rykener as a woman. He commits the sex act 'modo muliebri' (in a womanish manner) and men have sex with him 'ut cum muliere' (as with woman) or 'ut cum femina' (as with a female), while when he has sex with women, he does it 'ut vir' (as a man) or 'modo virili' (in a manly fashion) [...]. When he acts as a man, he is the subject [...], but when he acts like a woman, he is its object.[81]

Rykener, then, becomes either man or woman - agent or passive recipient - of sexual intercourse, which in the medieval mind, according to Pierre J. Payer, is not only a horrible sin akin to masturbation, but definitive evidence of hermaphroditism in the works of Peter of Poitier and William of Auvergne.[82] Furthermore, 'the language in the confession itself suggests that Rykener might have been seen as woman'.[83] Although Rykener is biologically observed as a man, 'he is linguistically gendered female in the Latin document'.[84] Boyd's and Karras' own observations about the interchangeability of Rykener's gender support a claim of hermaphroditism in that they are willing to claim that the original language regarding his sexuality is not ambiguous - it is specifically, alternatively, male and female. Rykener's dilemma may not have been, then, that he was performing any illegal act of sodomy, only that he was beyond evaluation by the legal authorities.

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[80] Jones and Stallybrass, p. 112.
[81] Jones and Stallybrass, p. 109.
[82] Pierre J. Payer, 'Sex and Confession in the Thirteenth Century', in *Sex in the Middle Ages: A Book of Essays,* ed. by Joyce E. Salisbury (London: Garland Publishing, 1991), pp. 126-144 (p. 132).
[83] Karras and Boyd, p. 101.
[84] Karras and Boyd, p. 110.

There is evidence to suggest that Rykener's case was not an isolated one and, in fact, there may be other cases of hermaphroditism that have not been recognised in medieval culture. Whereas Rykener may represent an actual empirical medical case, Chaucer's Pardoner, who has been described 'as a eunuch, a hermaphrodite, or a homosexual', may illustrate the problematic nature of representing hermaphrodites in fourteenth century literature. [85] Until recently, the concept of hermaphroditism is only given a brief mention of possibility in relationship to the amount of the academic attention that has centred on the pardoner's role as a eunuch or a homosexual, due mostly, I imagine, to a modern preoccupation with a binary model of sexual classification.[86]

The Pardoner

Of the evidence presented, among the most accessible is that of the animal imagery used to portray the 'Pardoner's abnormality'.[87] The most obvious mention of the sex-dilemma is in the *General Prologue*, wherein the Host declares of the Pardoner: 'I trowe he were a geldyng or mare' (I.691). This statement immediately throws the gender and the sex of the Pardoner into question; it is not certain whether the subject is a surgically altered, 'sexless and impotent' male horse or a biologically functional female horse. [88] Rowland argues that this reference to the Pardoner's sex is one of several other animal allusions, specifically those that refer to the hare and the goat. Both references would place the

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[85] Mathew Kuefler, 'Castration and Eunuchism in the Middle Ages', in *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, ed. by Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage (London: Garland Publishing, 1996), pp. 279-306 (p. 290).

[86] The most obvious recent exception to this is Robert Sturges' *Chaucer's Pardoner and Gender Theory: Bodies of Discourse* (New York: St. Martin's, 1999). Prior to Sturges' book and Rowland's discussions (below), most arguments regarding the possibility of an intersexed Pardoner were dismissed (see Jeffrey Myers' 'Chaucer's Pardoner as a Female Eunuch, *Studia Neophilologica*, 72 (2000), 54-62; Steven Kruger's 'Claiming the Pardoner: Toward a Gay Reading of Chaucer's *Pardoner's Tale*', in *Critical Essays on Geoffrey Chaucer* (New York: G.K. Hall, 1988), pp. 150-72; and Carolyn Dinshaw's 'Eunuch Hermeneutics' in *Chaucer to Spenser: A Critical Reader*, ed. by Derek Pearsall (Oxford; Blackwell, 1999), pp. 65-106.

[87] Rowland, 'Animal Imagery', p. 58.

[88] Beryl Rowland, *Blind Beasts: Chaucer's Animal World* (Chatham: W. & J. Mackay & Co., 1971), p. 99.

Pardoner as a hermaphrodite rather than a eunuch or a homosexual, as hares and goats have long-standing and well-established associations with lechery and hermaphroditism in the Middle Ages.[89] The Pardoner is also described as dove, (VI.397) which is commonly associated with the image of the hermaphroditic goat.[90] The specific use of the dove could be seen to invoke a reference to the Holy Spirit, something suggested analogically not by the Pardoner's relationship to the Summoner and the Physician in a triad, but perhaps a reminder of the Platonic necessity of mediation between extremes.[91] Representing the Pardoner as a part of a necessarily triangular relationship is consistent with an interpretation of hermaphroditism as a unique and separate possibility of a third gender. It could be argued that, as with the Holy Trinity and the three pilgrims, each member of the triad exists in relation to the other while maintaining an individual identity. Because the concept of hermaphroditism is impossible to understand without the relative concepts of male and female, we need all three concepts in order to gain a complete understanding of the possibilities of gender.

The physical description and the allusions to the sexual activities of the Pardoner support the idea that he may be envisioned not only as a hermaphrodite, but also as existing outside of the normal constraints of a two-sexed model of gender. At the same time the description suffers from a language and culture which can only interpret him as far as he relates to the conventional functions of 'male' or 'female'. For instance, while

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[89] Rowland, 'Animal Imagery' (p. 57-8): 'Chaucer describes the Pardoner as having "glarynge eyen [...] as a hare' (I.684), and 'voys [...] as smal as a goot" (I.688). These brief comparisons are striking and specific. The eyes of the hare are large, prominent, placed on the sides of the head, and they have slightly elliptical pupils. They project beyond the surrounding surface and their protrusion appears to vary with the will of the animal. One of the most persistent beliefs about the hare is that it is a hermaphrodite or bisexual. This error appears in works of various periods and is said to have survived until the end of the eighteenth century. Aristotle does not record it, but the superstition appears in both Pliny and Aelian, and in the Gwentian code of north-east Wales, supposed to be of the eleventh century, the hare is said to be incapable of legal evaluation because it is male one month and female another. Twiti states that "at one tyme he is male, at other female," and in common with the writer of *The Master of Game*, he applies masculine and feminine pronouns indiscriminately [...]. in the fourteenth-century Welsh poem "Ysgyfamog", the hare is termed "gwr-wreic": a hermaphrodite. The goat is also regarded as a hermaphrodite and both animals have a reputation for extreme lasciviousness'.

[90] Rowland, *Blind Beasts*, p. 19.

[91] Jane Chance, ''Disfigured is thy Face': Chaucer's Pardoner and the Protean Shape-Shifter Fals-Semblant (A Response to Britton Harwood)', *Philological Quarterly*, 67 (1988), 423-437 (p. 423).

he has long, uncut 'heer as yelow as wex', (I.675) and 'no berd had he, ne nevere sholde have / As smothe it was as it were late shave' (I.689). He is also described as having, perhaps figuratively, a bulging 'male' (a purse, pouch or wallet), (I.694) and carries with him, as Vance comments, 'his 'holy bulles', like parchment entrails, tubular scrolls from which dangle leaden pendants, the *bullae* themselves as much a coarse double-entendre in medieval Latin as in Modern English'.[92] It is important to note that the Pardoner shows 'alle and some' of his bulles, (VI.334) perhaps a reference to a system of self-imposed partial disclosure of the Pardoner's sexuality. By showing the pilgrims what would be sufficient proof of his masculinity and by implying that there may be other interesting things to see regarding his gender, the Pardoner appears to hide from them what may be further proof of concealed femininity. In a rare moment of self-empowerment, Chaucer's Pardoner even refers directly to works of Avicenna by whom a hermaphrodite is condemned to choose between one or the other of the sexes he does not truly represent, (VI.889), and makes several references to fertility and water-making which are, again, issues of hermaphroditism raised by contemporary medical and philosophical discourses (VI.355-9, 368-70, 374-6).

His non-productive sexual exploits are gender-balanced by Chaucer's reference to 'a joly wenche in every toun' (VI.453), and by the male flirtation he seems to engage in with the Host when he asks him to 'kiss the relikes' (VI.944) he keeps in his 'male' (VI.920). Much like Rykener, Chaucer's Pardoner seems to be able and willing to alternate between sexual intercourse as a man and as a woman. If we look at Fals-Semblant, Chaucer's probable inspiration for the Pardoner,[93] we see more evidence of the character's ability to choose one sex or the other, and, therefore, to exist outside of them both. At one stage during Fals-Semblant's confession to Love, he claims:

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[92] Eugene Vance, 'Chaucer's Pardoner: Relics, Discourse, and Frames of Propriety', *New Literary History*, 20 (1989), 723-745 (p. 737).
[93] Carolyn Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics* (Madison, MI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), p. 173.

> Now I am Robert, now Robin, now Cordelier, now Jacobin. And in order to follow my companion, Land Constrained Abstinence, who comforts me and goes along with me, I take on many another disguise, just as it strikes her pleasure, to fulfil her desire. At one time I wear a woman's robe; now I am a girl, now a lady. At another time I become a religious: now I am a devotee, now a prioress, nun, or abbess; now a novice, now a professed nun.[94]

Here, the text's images for the ubiquity of deceit in society employ a trope of gender ambiguity that may have some sexual resonances. At the very least, de Meun's Faux Semblant blurs the rigidity of the masculine/feminine divide. It could be argued that Faux Semblant, '[...] like the Pardoner [...] has an essentially uncertain gender - sometimes he's a man, sometimes a woman'.[95]

Everything about the Pardoner seems to lie somewhere in between expected realms of duality and normalcy: even the Pardoner's sponsor, the Hospital of St. Mary Rouncivale at Charing Cross, is considered by some to have been outside of an established relationship of two geographical and political extremes, as its ownership and the rites to its funds were disputed between France and England for decades.[96] Again, we see that many aspects of the Pardoner relate him as being in a state of neither here-nor-there, of simultaneously having and lacking. As the criteria would suggest that he should, he 'affects to be both [sexes]',[97] and produces the appropriate degree of confusion to those who attempt to define him within polarised categories of gender. It is perhaps this confusion and subsequent repulsion that makes it appropriate that the Host threaten the Pardoner with castration one minute and kiss him the next (VI.202).

Conclusion

Chaucer's Pardoner personifies the uncertain state of the medieval concept of hermaphroditism. He exists as nothing absolutely certain and definable: not as gelding

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[94] Charles Dahlberg, trans., *The Romance of the Rose by Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 197.
[95] Dinshaw, p. 175.
[96] David K. Maxfield, 'St. Mary Rouncivale, Charing Cross: The Hospital of Chaucer's Pardoner', *The Chaucer Review,* 28 (1993), 148-163 (p. 155).
[97] Nederman and True, p. 507.

or mare, eunuch or hermaphrodite, man or woman, true spiritual guide or true pilgrim.[98] He is, in fact, all and none of them at once. He represents an entity entirely separate from the above diametrically opposed modes of classification, but at the same time, one that can only be experienced and referred to in terms of genders that are exclusively binary. The fact that Rykener and the Pardoner can at least be considered to be hermaphrodites raises important issues concerning the possibility of other cases wherein the subject may not be representing itself, but the object's best attempt to place the implacable within a familiar discourse of understanding. The medieval hermaphrodite becomes a sexual enigma because of their reliance upon and resistance to a system of engendering which simultaneously denies and recognises the triangular nature of the spectrum of human sexuality. Hermaphrodites reiterate the need for modern observers to reconsider the assumption of duality in reference to medieval culture and literary productions.

[98] One of the other reasons for the Pardoner's association with Rouncivale is that it may have already had a wide reputation for being the hospital of choice for fake pardoners (see Maxfield, above). This claim not only explains why the Pardoner admits to having false relics despite a badge and a guarantee from the Pope (probably also fake), but also serves to expel him from the ranks of the truly religious. His hypocrisy, however, also denies him classification as a true pilgrim, as he is only really there to take the other pilgrims' money.

Virginius as a Poor Platonic Practitioner
Philosophical and Surgical Implications in *The Physician's Tale*

And this is what the physician has to do, and in this the art of medicine consists: for medicine may be regarded generally as the knowledge of the loves and desires of the body, and how to satisfy them or not; and the best physician is he who is able to separate fair love from foul, or to convert one into the other; and he who knows how to eradicate and how to implant love, whichever is required, and can reconcile the most hostile elements in the constitution and make them loving friends, is a skilful practitioner.

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It can appear that no one likes *The Physician's Tale*: the scope of its reluctant criticism ranges from indifferent to indignant, with relatively few scholars even attempting to make sense of Chaucer's problematic Doctor of Physic. There have been, more recently, developing indications of some critics' willingness to take the tale more seriously, but on the whole the tale has received a lukewarm critical reception at best.[1] As a member of the Physician's many critically unfriendly audiences, Sheila Delany has called it 'one of Chaucer's least interesting and least successful efforts', with 'flat characters, a rather incompetent narrative flawed by irrelevent digressions, a plot exceedingly implausable'.[2] R. Howard Bloch remarks that 'the characters of *The Physician's Tale* act so inexplicably and even illogically that not even the weight of psychologistic Chaucerian criticism can recuperate their intent'.[3] Lee Ramsey said in 1971, 'The moral tale which Chaucer assigned to his Physician has not elicited a great deal of critical comment, and what comment there has been is generally unfavorable...In fact, the only thing on which all commentators agree would seem to be that it is not a particularly good tale'.[4] Fifteen years later, Brian Lee comments that more than a few critics have stated that '*The Physician's Tale* is not one of [Chaucer's] most successful achievements'.[5] For some readers and for quite some time, it would seem, *The Physician's Tale* has provided more critical questions than answers. Almost every critical approach to the tale yields a similar introduction; this chapter is as yet no different. However, in light of Linda Lomperis' recent evaluation of the text that seems, at least in part, to reply to Sheila Delany's claims about the negative 'depoliticization'

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[1] See Helen Cooper, *Oxford Guides to Chaucer: The Canterbury Tales* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).
[2] Sheila Delany, 'Politics and the Paralysis of Poetic Imagination in the *Physician's Tale*', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 3 (1971), 47-75, (p. 47).
[3] R. Howard Bloch, 'Chaucer's Maiden Head: *The Physician's Tale* and the Poetics of Virginity', *Representations*, 28 (1989), 113-134, (p. 113).
[4] Lee C. Ramsey, '"The Sentence of it sooth is": Chaucer's *Physician's Tale*', *The Chaucer Review*, 6 (1971), 185-197, (p. 185).
[5] Brian S. Lee, 'The Position and Purpose of the *Physician's Tale*', *The Chaucer Review*, 22 (1987), 141-160, (p. 141).

of the tale, we might be able to come to a better understanding of the complexity and sophistication that the much-maligned tale has to offer. [6]

The approach of this thesis to such an understanding will be based on four methodological premises. First, this chapter intends to explore the premise that the concept of surgery – physical and metaphorical – dominates both the portrait and the tale, and to draw on both the theoretical and the practical sides of a medieval medical practitioner in its interpretation of the tale. Secondly, parts of the argument presented in this chapter hinge on the assumption that Chaucer's declaration of the Physician as a 'parfait practisour' is ironic. Thirdly, this chapter argues a deliberate metaphorical connection between the human body and contemporary socio-political structures. Lastly, this section will presume a subtle relationship between the teller and the tale, an exploration of which can enlighten heretofore unrecognised or underestimated value in the tale itself.[7]

The Physician's Portrait and Tale

The *General Prologue* portrait and *The Physician's Tale* together address the two fundamental aspects and discrepancies inherent in the medieval medical community. Firstly, the portrait tells us at some length of the physician's knowledge of theoretical medicine, while also crediting him with surgical skill. This reflects the fact that there were contemporary sociological and vocational differences between medieval physicians and surgeons. Secondly, *The Physician's Tale* itself can be seen as a

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[6] By her own admission, Lomperis disagrees with the 'fundamental assumption' of Delany's work. See 'Unruly Bodies and Ruling Practices: Chaucer's *Physician's Tale* as Socially Symbolic Act', in *Feminist Approaches to the Body in Medieval Literature*, ed. by Linda Lomperis and Sarah Stanbury (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), pp. 21-37 (p.37), n.27.

[7] For a discussion about possible sources for *The Physician's Tale*, see Kenneth Bleeth, '*The Physician's Tale* and Remembered Texts', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 28 (2006), pp. 221-4. For an argument that regards the tale as one with an intellectual message, see Andrew Welsh, 'Story and Wisdom in the *Physician's Tale* and the *Manciple's Tale*', in *Manuscript, Narrative, Lexicon: Essays on Literary and Cultural Transmission in Honour of Whitney F. Bolton*, ed. by Robert Boenig and Kathleen Davis, (London: Associated University Press, 2000).

demonstration of theoretical and practical skills as through the tale, Virginius is presented with, diagnoses and treats the affliction upon Virginia of Apius' lechery.

This chapter hopes to be able to draw out the inherent contrarieties elicited by the connections between the teller and the tale, as well as to examine *The Physician's Tale* itself in light of the Platonic definition of a good practitioner. By doing so, we can, to some degree, examine the neo-Platonic hierarchical categories of contrariety that may be at work in the text: categories which would not only inform the argument concerning what Delany calls the fictional character's seemingly illogical conceptualisation and the tale's inherent worth as a literary and social exercise, but also serve to further an ongoing argument regarding the gentle underlying current of neo-Platonism that meanders throughout the *Tales* as a whole.[8] Furthermore, by approaching the tale with a Platonic reading (as opposed to assuming that the tale, its teller or its author employ any necessarily neo-Platonic inspiration), it is possible to address questions raised by Emerson Brown Jr. when he asks, 'What is Chaucer Doing with the Physician and his Tale'?[9]

The portrait of the Physician in the *General Prologue* stresses the doctor's learning. This itself prepares the reader for an intellectual tale, and not just one of drama and pathos. However, some of the more relevant observations regarding his character are found not in what a medieval physician *is*, but what he certainly *is not*. Medieval physicians are not surgical practitioners. Until the eighteenth century, the medical approach to healing was largely philosophical and based on time-honoured (and classically-based) expectations rather than current empirical observations.[10] This is in large part because of the medieval concept of *auctoritas*, as identified and examined by

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[8] Delany, p. 47.
[9] Emerson Brown, Jr., 'What is Chaucer Doing with the Physician and his Tale?' *Philological Quarterly*, 60 (1981), pp. 129-149.
[10] Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), p. xiii.

Minnis.[11] The entire sociological construct of the physician was built upon a knowledge-base of 'authorites' and theoretical solutions; Michael McVaugh goes so far as to say that 'discoveries and innovations – *experimenta* – appear sometimes to have struck the medieval physician almost as awkwardness, inconvenient intrusions that had to be fitted into an already rationally finished, completed system'.[12] The doctor, as opposed to the surgeon, is someone who spends most of his professional training learning from books, rather than from any hands-on experience. Piers Mitchell states that the distinction between doctor and surgeon was clear:

> *Physicus/fisicien* designated a doctor with a high level of theoretical knowledge of natural science and medicine, together with the study of the liberal arts at university.
>
> [...]the *cyurgicus* was a surgeon, a term which only became common in the thirteenth century... Surgeons are widely thought to have been less well educated than physici and were looked down on by some physicians, who saw surgery as a manual trade.[13]

the *General Prologue* alerts the reader to such a authority-centric state of 'medical rationality' as it begins to declare the Doctor's credentials: he is well-grounded in astrology, nosology, philosophy, chemistry, politics and economics (I.413-445). The only knowledge ommitted from his repetoire is that of religion (I.438), an omission to which some critics attribute several kinds of significance and plausibility, ranging from artistic choice to a superstition that doctors tended towards atheism.[14] Although Michael Murphy's critical views regarding the physician's lack of religious learning are not necessarily widely supported, the fact remains that the Physician's credentials are entirely confined to theoretical training. The medieval physician's educational dependence upon theory and reason, as opposed to the necessarily practical demands of

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[11] A.J. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship* (London: Scholar Press, 1984).
[12] Michael McVaugh, 'Treatment of Hernia in the Later Middle Ages: Surgical Correction and Social Construction', in *Medicine from the Black Death to the French Disease*, ed. by French, Roger and others (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), pp. 131-155 (p. 131).
[13] Piers D. Mitchell, *Medicine in the Crusades: Warfare, Wounds and the Medieval Surgeon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 12.
[14] Michael Murphy, 'The Physician and his Tale', *Reader Friendly Version of the General Prologue and Sixteen Tales*, <http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/webcore/murphy/canterbury/13physi.pdf> [accessed 28 January 2003] (footnote 2).

his profession, gives rise to the first demonstration of the inherent contrariety present in Chaucer's physician: theory versus practice, knowledge versus action, intellect versus the body.

The Physician embodies this fundamental opposition. He is both a surgeon and a doctor; a theory-based academic whose profession demands that he demonstrates practical skills. The text may even be raising similar alarms as those expressed by Roger Bacon in his treatise entitled 'On the Errors of Physicians', in which he laments that 'The generality of Physicians give themselves up to disputes about numberless problems and useless arguments, and give no time to experience as they ought'.[15] Implicitly, its conclusion may also be acknowledging John of Arderne's concerns that:

> Auicen, forsoþ, seiþ, 'experience ouercomeþ reson'; and galien in pantegni seiþ, 'No man *ow for to trust in reson al-oon but ȝit it be proued of experience.' And he seith in anoþer place, 'Experience without reson is feble, and so is reson withoute experience fest vnto hym.[16]

Theoretical knowledge for a medieval physician would have necessarily included knowledge of medical and non-medical information. The *General Prologue* covers all the medical knowledge thoroughly:

> He knew the cause of everich maladye,
> Were it of hoot, or coold, or moyste, or drye,
> And where they engendred, and of what humour.
> He was a verray, parfit praktisour:
> The cause yknowe, and of his harm the roote,
> Anon he yaf the sike man his boote. (I.419)

This physician knows his stuff, medically speaking, and many medical theories were, if not contemporarily Platonic, certainly Platonic in origin.

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[15] A.G. Little and E Withington, eds, *Opera hactenus inedita Rogeri Baconi,* vol. 9 (Oxford, 1928), pp. 150-179.

[16] John of Arderne, *Treatises of Fistula in Ano: Hemorrhoids and Clysters* (London: Kegan, Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1910), p. 3.

Neo-Platonic Influences on Medieval Medicine

It may be unsurprising that the medieval world of medicine is one of the most fruitful places to look for neo-Platonic theoretical influences. The belief that the human body corresponded directly with the fundamentally hierarchical and binary structure of the universe was one of the truly ubiquitous theories of the Western Middle Ages.[17] When applied to the body of man and to medicine, this system of classification and opposition manifests itself as the theory of humoral medicine.[18] Rowe says:

> The most common conception of man's microcosmic identity with the four elements is found in the physiological psychology of the humors. Just as there are four elements comprised of pairs of contrary qualities, so in man there are four humors dependent upon the four bodily fluids, which were made of the same pairs of qualities, with each humor producing a disposition at least poetically like its corresponding element.[19]

Even in the broadest terms, a medieval practitioner's life is characterised by an intimate knowledge of contrarieties and the management of their balance within the human body. Theories which were Platonic in origin had become part of general cultural beliefs. These beliefs often maintain, however, patterns of thought that we can continue to call Platonic or neo-Platonic, such as the deep belief in the importance of contrariety in the construction of reality. There are some very obvious references throughout *The Canterbury Tales* that suggest that both the narrator and the audience of the *Tales* might be familiar with these theories. The Knight, for instance, when describing the unusual severity of Arcite's love-sickness, states:

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[17] D.W. Rowe elaborates on the development of the idea and the application of the theory in other aspects of medieval culture that eventually correspond to the human body. *O Love, O Charite! Contraries Harmonized in Chaucer's Troilus* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois Press, 1976), pp. 9-12.

[18] For further discussions on the ubiquity and longevity of the humoral theory through history, see Anne Digby, *Making a Medical Living* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Luis García-Ballester, *Galen and Galenism*, ed. by Jon Arrizabalaga and others (Aldershot: Ashgate Variorum, 2002); C.H. Talbot, *Medicine in Medieval England* (London: Oldbourne Book Company, 1967); Carole Rawcliffe, *Medicine and Society in Later Medieval England* (London: Sandpiper Books, 1999) and, of course, Walter Clyde Curry, *Chaucer and the Mediaeval Sciences* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1960).

[19] Rowe, p. 12.

Nat oonly lik the loveris maladye
Of Heroes, but rather lyk manye,
Engendred of humour malencolik
Biforen, in his celle fantastik. (I.1373)

Arcite's affliction is greater than any run-of-the-mill love sickness: it also manifests symptoms of the madness representative of an unnatural amount of the melancholic humor in the brain. In *The Nun's Priest's Tale*, this same knowledge and reliance on humoral diagnosis constitutes Pertelote's explanation not just for Chauntecleer's nightmares, but of many other types of disturbing dreams as well:

Certes this dreem, which ye han met to-nyght,
Cometh of the greet superfluytee
Of youre rede colera, pardee,
Which causeth folk to dreden in hir dremes
Of arwes, and of fyr with rede lemes,
Of rede beestes, that they wol hem byte,
Of contek, and of whelpes, grete and lyte;
Right as the humour of malencolie
Causeth ful many a man in sleep to crie
For feere of blake beres, or boles blake,
Or elles blake develes wole hem take.
Of othere humours koude I telle also
That werken many a man sleep full wo. (VII.2926)

Pertelote further instructs him to purge himself of the humors through herbal remedies in order to rid himself of his haunting dreams (VII.2946-2950). *The Knight's Tale* also invokes the Platonic concept of 'the faire cheyne of love' as the harmonising force that binds together the elements of fire, water, air and earth (I.2991-2992). There are several humoral descriptions of Pilgrims as well. The Reeve is described as 'a sclendre colerik man' (I.589) and, as Laurel Braswell-Means points out, elements of contemporary medical diagnosis in the description of the Summoner are a good indication of the text's debt to humoral theories that can reasonably be seen to be Platonic in origin. There is a strong suggestion that the text is aware (and expects its audience to be aware) of humoral theories and their relationship with physical health and outward appearances:

> In summary, this diagnosis would have depended upon three primary theories. The first concerns the Platonic and Aristotelian distinction of four primary elements.[20]

In several ways, then, the text demonstrates a wide-spread contemporary knowledge and expectation of knowledge that the balance and temperance between the contrary elemental forces in the human body is essential to personal health, just as it is to universal harmony. As an essential principle of metaphysical contrariety is inherent in this physiological theory, it is not surprising that a medieval physician's tale would deal at some level with the physical oppositions found in his profession. However, this particular physician's story pushes this basic theory of contraieties further, by moving from conservative and predictable depictions of accepted medical physiological principles found in the *Prologue* and some other tales, to a debate over the oppositional conflicts inherent in the medical profession itself.

A contemporary audience however was not likely to have been convinced by such a medicine-centred account of intellectual qualifications. Doctors, much like the text's example, are expected to be learned and full of information about medicine and also its philosophical and even political links. Rawcliffe states that the requirement that physicians 'should cultivate a wide range of scholarly pursuits went back to classical times. [...] The aim was to produce graduates who were both "philosophers and technicians", able to utilise their knowledge of the natural world as a means of conserving and restoring health'.[21] By way of gaining this range of knowledge,

> candidates for the Doctorate of Medicine [at Oxford] who had yet to obtain their first degree were expected, from 1312 onwards, to attend lectures for eight years, a requirement cut to six in the case of substantially accredited individuals. Statutes drawn up in the 1270s for the faculty of medicine at Cambridge had already imposed a far longer period of study for the degree of Bachelor of Medicine upon those without previous qualifications.[22]

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[20] Laurel Braswell-Means, 'A New Look at an Old Patient: Chaucer's Summoner and Medieval Physignomia', *The Chaucer Review,* 25 (1991), 266-276.
[21] Rawcliffe, p. 106.
[22] Rawcliffe, p. 107.

Whereas Rawcliffe's evidence demonstrates the requirements for the education and, later, delineates the implicit educational rationale for the physician to be educated in the arts, Talbot demonstrates how such training is ultimately made manifest in medical training:

> It is not surprising, therefore, that the methods employed to the study of arts, theology and law, should be applied to the study of medicine. These had always been verbal commentary; each word was defined, its place set in the sentence, its meaning amplified, and the whole sense tested by argument. [...] Instead, therefore, of medical students observing sick cases and finding out for themselves what diseases were, how they developed, how they reacted to forms of treatment and so on, they learned their medical texts like a catechism, always implicitly believing, hardly ever questioning, and rarely criticizing. Medical education was thus a matter of book-learning, a theoretical and speculative process, not necessarily associated with practise.[23]

The method of medical study is, again, fundamentally theoretical. Physicians are expected to be thinkers more than doers, as is reflected by later disdain by surgeons for their highly-revered counterparts. In fact, the narrator's Physician follows the prescribed guidelines in that:

> Whoever wishes to become proficient in the art of medicine ought to be capable of prolonged study, so that by constant reading of different books his perception and judgement reach that point where learning becomes easy[...]. Before studying medicine he should be well instructed in all subjects[...]. First of all he should be taught grammar, dialectic, astronomy, arithmetic, geometry and music [...] and be taught philosophy along with medicine.[24]

Further to establishing the exemplary qualifications of the Physician, the narrator demonstrates his doctor's comprehensive knowledge of 'astronomy'. Laurel Braswell adds to the understanding that a late-medieval physician should be

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[23] Talbot, pp. 65-66. The entirety of Talbot's chapter five, 'Medical Education' is an invaluable resource for understanding the length, breadth and shortcomings of the curriculum and method of late-medieval medical education. See also Danielle Jacquart, 'Medical Scholasticism', in *Western Medical Thought from Antiquity to the Middle Ages*, ed. by Mirko Grmek (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), pp. 197-240. Philosophy (or at least, at this point in the argument, the way in which it is learned) is a determining factor in regulating the relationship between doctor and patient and, ultimately, the relative ability of a physician to diagnose accurately the ailment and subsequent best course of treatment for his patient. Whereas it is enough at the moment to note the general consensus that medieval physicians were highly and broadly educated in all manners of contemporary education, we will return to the unique dynamic implications of their educational bias at a later point in this chapter. For a deeper discussion of the possible Islamic orgins of the medieval method and presentation of education, see George Makdisi, 'The Scholastic Method in Medieval Education: An Inquiry into its Origins in Law and Theology', *Speculum*, 49 (1974), 640-661.

[24] Talbot, p. 135.

knowledgeable in all areas of astrology by reminding us that many medieval writers presupposed the requisite that physicians should be competent in astrology.[25]

Astrology plays an important role in medical practice. Walter Clyde Curry emphasises this point by discussing in great detail the ways in which astrology affects the prognosis of a perceived malady as well as the cure prescribed for an ailment.[26]

A medieval doctor 'must understand that the four humours of the body fluctuate in volume and power according to the waxing and the waning of the moon[...]moreover, that humours have dominion variously in respective hours of the day'.[27] This becomes particularly relevant to the *Tales'* doctor as he is described as able to keep 'his patient a full great deal / In houres by his magic natural'.[28] The Doctor of Physic is thereby established as a representative authority on all dimensions of the educational expectations placed on doctors at this time.

At this point, we have been able to establish the Doctor's theoretical credentials. However, the *Prologue* also claims that he is a perfect practioner, and the distinction between theory and practice is significant. 'During the late Middle Ages, doctors were believed to be a repository of medical knowledge, thus their profession was seen as learned. The surgeon, on the other hand, was considered to be an artisan, thus his profession was seen as a craft'.[29]

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[25] Laurel Braswell, 'The Moon and Medicine in Chaucer's Time', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer,* 8 (1986), 146-156 (p. 146). Chaucer's doctor is, of course, 'grounded in astronomye' (I.414). As Benson notes, however, the fourteenth-century concept of astronomy is more closely aligned with the modern practice of astrology. For a thorough explanation of the different approaches to the medieval concept of 'astronomye', see *The Riverside Chaucer*, p. 816, n.414. See Talbot, Braswell or Rawcliffe for the particulars of such education.
[26] See also Talbot, pp. 129-133.
[27] Curry, *Chaucer and the Medieval Sciences*, p. 14. For a brief discussion of the Galenic principles of humoral opposition at work in the Middle Ages, see Benson's notes in *The Riverside Chaucer*, p. 816-817, n.420, 424. For further discussion of humoral sciences, see Rawcliffe, pp. 29-81, Talbot, p. 127 or Mirko Grmek, 'The Concept of Disease', in *Western Medical Thought,* ed. by Grmek, pp. 247-254.
[28] Curry, p. 11.
[29] Bryon Grigsby, 'The Social Position of the Surgeon in London, 1350-1450', *Essays in Medieval Studies,* 13 (1996), pp. 71-80 (p.71).

Medieval Surgeons and Doctors

Chaucer's doctor is unusual in being said to know of surgery as well as medicine. The medieval surgeon, seen as a lay craftsman who learns by apprenticeship, is the very opposite side of the medical coin to the physician.[30] The two professions provided two very different services to their relative clients, and therefore had different vocational training, social expectations and reputations. Even the most broad inspection into the world of medieval medicine reveals that, in the words of Marie-Christine Pouchelle:

> generally, physicians treated problems inside the body, and surgeons dealt with wounds, fractures, dislocations, urinary problems, amputations, skin diseases, and syphilis. They also bled patients when directed by physicians.[31]

There was a very practical difference between physicians and surgeons: physicians usually treated patients with topical or otherwise foreign remedies (herbs, elixirs, broths) by focusing on non-manipulative correction, whilst surgeons investigated and treated people physically by manipulating, restricting, removing or replacing parts of the body itself. Carole Rawcliffe states emphatically:

> This division of labour was not merely a matter of convenience or even snobbery: the Church itself had insisted that senior clergy should have nothing to do with surgery, thus implicitly widening the gulf between theory and practice...At the University of Paris all graduates in medicine were required to swear a formal oath, from 1350 onwards, that they would never attempt any kind of 'manual surgery' whatsoever.[32]

Both Grigsby and Rawcliffe seem to disagree with C.H. Talbot, who states that 'If there was a separation of surgery from medicine, it would appear to have taken its rise first among the Romans, for Galen admits that in his day there was a cleavage between physicians and surgeons. This tradition passed, through knowledge of Galen's

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[30] Although there is some evidence that parts of the professions had come to overlap by the end of the fourteenth or beginning of the fifteenth centuries, most sources indicate that the professions were considered distinct from one another. For more information, see: Charles Hugh Talbot, *Medicine and Medieval England* (London: Oldbourne, 1967), pp. 79-80, 100, 109, and 113.
[31] Marie-Christine Pouchelle, *The Body and Surgery in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Polity, 1990), p. 67.
[32] Rawcliffe, p. 112.

works, to the Arabs... The separation of surgery from medicine [...was due] to the influence of such texts as this which exhalted the "noble physician" to heights where any kind of manual operation was unthinkable'.[33] In fact, Talbot's very point is that the separation between the two fields was fundamentally a matter of 'convenience and snobbery', as it had begun because of a preoccupation of monasteries and abbeys with keeping their surgically-trained monks and abbots at home rather than out in the townships, and that the division of labour had little or no legal or ecclesiastical precedence. 'The famous phrase, *Ecclesia abhorret a sanguine,* which has been quoted by every writer on medicine for the past two hundred years as the reason for the separation of surgery from medicine [...] cannot be found in the Decretals of the Popes nor in any of the medieval commentaries on canon law. It is a literary ghost'.[34] Clearly, there is some disagreement as to the initial cause of the split between physician and surgeon; no one, however, can deny that the realistic difference between the two professions existed. Doctors and surgeons were, for the most part, two very different professions with two very different professional methods.

The fact that the the idea that the medieval Church associated surgey with prohibitions against spilling blood appears to be a myth does not detract from the use by Chaucer of both medical and surgical procedures as symbols for political and moral evils. The rest of this chapter will present the arguments that support this claim.

The Links Between Physical and Moral Well-Being

The Canterbury Tales as a whole shows much interest in the analogy between literal and moral healing. In the *Tale of Malibee*, Melibee is seeking advice from the community on how to heal his daughter. Among the first to offer their suggestions are the surgeons, who announce:

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[33] Talbot, p. 54.
[34] Talbot, pp. 50-55.

> But certes, as to the warisshynge of youre doghter, al be it so that she perilously be wounded, we shullen do so ententif bisynesse fro day to nyght that with the grace of God she shal be hool and sound as soone as is possible. (VII.1015)

This comment by itself is rather meaningless. However, the next section clearly delineates the perceived difference between contemporary surgeons and doctors:

> Almoost right in the same wise the phisiciens answerden, save that they seyden a fewe wordes moore: that right as maladies been cured by hir contraries, right so shuld men warisshe werre by vengeaunce. (VII.1015)

This analogy might seem, again, more familiar to Chaucer's audience than it does to modern readers. It uses the ideal of 'contrarieties' that, in essence, goes back to classical philosophy. Arguably, a link between the Physician's *Portrait* and *Tale* is the analogy between surgeon and executioner, both resolving an otherwise corrupt situation through the knife. According to Marie-Christine Pouchelle, surgeons and executioners shared the same degree of public detestation. Surgeons were generally thought of as being 'proud and pompous, but at the same time quite unreasonable and completely ignorant [...] they are ill-humoured, cruel men, and they demand and carry off fat payments'.[35] Furthermore, Pouchelle states that 'contemporaries judge the efficiency of the surgeon by the pain his operations cause, so that the cruelty is fathered on him, to such an extent that the surgeon who refuses to be considered as an executioner or public tormentor would become a laughing-stock among "ordinary educated people".[36] The medical surgeon, then, shares an unlikely cultural association with other professions such as butchers, barbers, dentists, and public exectioners. In fact, Pouchelle tells us that these professions were so closely related that in some cases, surgeons directed executions in French courts, and were given criminals to execute and, later, to dissect .[37]

The fact that surgeons could be closely associated in medieval cultural assumptions with executioners plays an important role in solidifying the idea of the double nature of Chaucer's Doctor's profession: as surgeon as well as physician. The

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[35] Pouchelle, p. 15.
[36] Pouchelle, p. 76.
[37] Pouchelle, p. 77.

knight Virginius acts as executioner to his daughter. At the same time, he performs the physical act of surgery by removing her head, thus relieving her of the threat to her moral health. In a final plea to her doctor, her father, young Virginia asks desperately, 'Goode fader shal I dye?/Is ther no grace, is ther no remedye?' (VI.235). These words clearly are meant to evoke a degree of sympathy for the young woman, and could also be intended to evoke from the audience a medieval Christian understanding of grace, despite the pre-Christian pagan setting of the tale itself. 'Remedye' can, of course, mean 'cure' as well as 'solution'. Virginia's words also serve to reinforce the established cultural connection between knight, surgeon, executioner and the narrator's doctor.

The Physician's Tale

Once such a connection has been made, it is easier to discuss the text's doctor (and medieval medicine in general) in an oppositional relation to neo-Platonism. For instance, the primary neo-Platonic and medical question of mover and moved, cause and effect, is brought into question by the knight's inability to diagnose and to locate correctly the cause of his daughter's moral ailments. This error is fatal and fundamental on at least two levels. For a surgeon, the ability to diagnose maladies correctly is essential to success and reputation. For a medieval philosopher, the fundamental life project is to ascertain the primary cause of being, and to formulate an idea of process by which that knowledge is gained and the extent to which we are able to know that primary cause. As we have already learned, the knight, acting as a metaphorical doctor, fails in his duty to assess the true nature of his daughter's moral dilemma. This ineptitude is accentuated when, after Virginia's execution, the villagers arrive on the scene to deliver the correct diagnosis:

> But right anon a thousand peple in threaste
> To save the knyght, for routhe and for pitee,
> For knowen was the false iniquitee.
> The peple anon has suspect in this thyng,
> By manere of the cherles chalangyng,
> That it was by the assent of Apius,
> They wisten wel that he was lecherus. (VI.260)

Readers may be intrigued by the fact that a thousand people saw through the judge's plan, knew of his treachery, and were better able than the knight to ascertain the correct diagnosis of the situation. In other words, the knight is unable to recognise a symptom of lecherousness that everyone else 'wisten well'.[38]

The metaphorical knightly surgeon completely misinterprets the data from the patient. Regardless of the fact that everyone else in the village 'had suspect in this thyng' (VI.263), Virginius could not realise as they did 'that he was lecherus' (VI.266). Virginia's final plea for an alternative solution recalls the previously established relationship between Christ and the Physician, as she pleads for a less intrusive cure to her infection: 'Is ther no grace, is ther no remedye?' (VI.236) The word grace suggests not only paternal mercy but the grace of Christ, a Physician, to administer an external remedy than invite Virginius to exhibit his surgical skills. Virginius' surgical solution, that his daughter is 'To dyen with a swerd or with a knyf' (VI.217), wording which establishes the father as acting both as knight and surgeon, as he declares a utensil of

[38] The idea of seeing sexual passion as a disease might not have been as novel to a fourteenth-century audience as to a modern one. The metaphor of love as an illness is common in courtly poetry, and notably treated, with humour, by the chacacter Reason in the *Romance of the Rose* (4377-84). Medieval medical writers also treated it as a serious topic. One contemporary example is Gerald of Sola's *Determinatio de Amore Hereos*. This treats the disease in not only medical but learned philosophical terms, as Mary Frances Wack's study of the work argues, showing that 'masters and students [of medicine] studied, expounded and debated the lover's malady'. It is also interesting to note that Chaucer's Physician would not be alone in his association of physical illness with sexual activity. The chronicler Walsingham associates the dangers of contagion, esp. the plague, with sexual misconduct. He reports that the citizens of London in 1382 took stricter measures against sexual sins, partly because they felt the clergy let too many people off lightly for cash (like the *General Prologue*'s Summoner and Friar) but also because, he says, they feared God would strike the city with disease 'on the day that God took his revenge'. Close to that entry in his chronicle, Walsingham also reports on a possibly anticlerical London Physician who warned people could only escape an onslaught of plague prophesied for Ascension Day by staying indoors, eating breakfast (against orthodox Christian precepts, before Mass), and reciting the Lord's Prayer five times, which led many people not to attend Ascension Day mass. See David Presst, trans., *The 'Chronica Maiora' of Thomas Walsingham, 1376-1422* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2005), pp. 182-3.

each profession to be the tool to be used for the impending operation. At the moment that his decision is made, Virginius fails to maintain the professional distance recommended by physicians such as Arderne, and, as did Arderne, 'cannot remain uncorrupted throughout this interaction, but is drawn into a fusion of the crossing over of what is touching and what is being touched'.[39] As he is about to perform his work, Virginius comments that her suffering causes him to suffer also (VI.215) and, even more strikingly, that her death will serve as the 'endere of my lyf' (VI.218). The text presents Virginius in a classically medical dilemma: where the lines between patient and doctor become blurred to the point that it is impossible at times to determine where one body of suffering ends and another begins. It can be argued, and will be argued here, that the miscalculations and misunderstandings by the knight are to be read as inadequacies by Chaucer's Physician-narrator.

As the narrator dramatically introduces the idea that Virginius' surgical solution will result in the death of his daughter, the reader begins to see the dissolution of the forms invested in the characters' creation. The learned Physician, the noble Knight and the virtuous Virgin are all subject to change and to death and, as such, are beginning to lose the immortal nature of their forms. The medieval concept of death, according to Jeremy Citrome, is heavily invested in a Platonic notion of forms and that idea that the primeval aversion to the fragmented body under threat of 'castration, mutilation, dismemberment, dislocation, evisceration, devouring, bursting open of the body' dominates and defines a concept of masculine invulnerability.[40]

Knights, it seems, would be required to be familiar with surgical matters related to their battles and to be able to render assistance if necessary.[41] This point is again demonstrated by the common appearance in contemporary medical publications of the

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[39] Jeremy J. Citrome, 'Bodies that Splatter: Surgery, Chivalry and the Body in John Arderne', *Exemplaria* 13 (2001), 137-172 (p. 145).
[40] Citrome, p. 141.
[41] Grigsby, p. 72.

'Wound Man': a medieval anatomical tool used by field surgeons (knights) to help with the identification and respective treatments of all possible battle injuries.[42] However tenuous this connection is, the concrete establishment of Virginius as a 'surgeon' is not necessary to further the argument. Whatever his primary profession and secondary experience, Virginius can be read to perform a kind of metaphorical surgery in the tale.

Virginius is enlisted as a surgeon by the text from the moment that he is presented with a moral dilemma. Unable to respond to Claudius' deceitful declaration of Virginia's ownership, Virginius submits to the judgement that his daughter is to be given to Apius, 'in lecherie to lyven' (VI.206). At this moment, Virginius is presented with a moral decision for which he believes a surgical solution to be the only cure. Afflicted by the consequences of Apius' lechery, Virginia's physical and spiritual integrity is at risk. Of course, Apius' unrighteous lust is not a disease that she has fostered or even invited, but has attacked her without provocation or apparent reason. It is important to make the clear distinction that Virginia herself is not *infected*, but that she is being affected by the lust in another. This assessment, or diagnosis of the nature and the locality of the affliction is crucial to its treatment. It is, of course, exactly where Virginius' skills as a surgeon let him and his daughter down.[43] Instead of addressing the actual disease, or indeed identifying its true location in Apius, Virginius decides to attempt an extreme cure of the secondary threat to his daughter's reputation. From a purely Galenic point of view, the failures of Virginius as a surgeon begin with his inability to recognise the person who is truly ill. Secondarily, he fails in that he is unable to comprehend the nature of the disease as lying outside the body of the patient, and

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[42] There are many online depictions of the Wound Man. Some of the better ones from different periods can be found at www.st-mike.org/medicine/woundman.html.

[43] Worthiness or wickedness plays little part in the medieval concept of the application of disease by God to mankind. If the recipient of an illness is not lacking spiritually, then suffering can be a physical test eventually to achieve a spiritual reward, as was the biblical precedent set by Job. In these cases of the righteous being tested by God, it is not important that the suffering person necessarily heals herself, but that she endures the afflictions set upon her without losing faith in the goodness of God. For further discussion on the role of Fortune in the affliction of the innocent, see Gerhard Joseph, 'The Gifts of Nature, Fortune, and Grace in the Physician's, Pardoner's and Parson's Tales', *The Chaucer Review*, 9, (1975), 237-245.

therefore beyond the expertise of any medical practitioner.[44] However, from a Christian medieval point of view, the afflictions of the body and those of the soul are very much interdependent.

Aristotle first made the connection between diseases of the body and those of the soul, when he hypothesised that humans possess 'an unobservable somatic substrate that was needed to explain the psychic functions found in the interface between body and soul'.[45] Rawcliffe writes that, in the devastating age of the plague, this connection evolves from a simple correlation of a physical illness with spiritual deficiency to a wide-spread metaphorical association of Christ as the physician of man's soul.[46] Any good physician or surgeon would be able to recognise the symptoms of a spiritual disease and apply the correct spritual remedy, 'ranging from the harsh extremes of penance and self-denial (which ranked as the spritual equivalent of major surgery) to prophylactic measures for avoiding the infection in the first place'.[47] It is hardly reasonable for us to expect our knight-surgeon to be any good at the diagnosis of causation, however. Given that the narrator is a physician and not a surgeon, the reader can expect exactly what is eventually delivered: Virginius, rather than saving a life, is instrumental in taking one instead.

Virginius, acting as surgeon, is given the unenviable task of trying to determine a physical cure for a serious spiritual condition. Both the affliction and the cure have moral and social ramifications; the text uses the oppositional characterisations of Virginia and Apius to argue against the neo-Platonic theories of moral and social diagnosis based on physical attributes of the body. One of the primary tools in the Augustinian neo-Platonist's arsenal for diagnosing issues of moral depravity and

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[44] For a discussion on the limitations of Galenic theories regarding the soul, see García-Ballester, especially section III.
[45] Mario Vegetti, 'Between Knowledge and Practice: Hellenistic Medicine', in *Western Medical Thought from Antiquity to the Middle Ages*', ed. by Mirko D. Grmek, pp. 72-104.
[46] Rawcliffe, pp. 19-21.
[47] Rawcliffe, p. 21.

political structure is the inspection of the physical condition. For instance, certain parts of the body are associated with different aspects of society. These qualifications are based on the hierarchical establishment prescribed by Christianised neo-Platonism, and set out famously in the pages of John of Salisbury's *Policraticus*.[48]

The Body Politic

Socially, every part of the body associates itself with different levels of divine insight, power and available knowledge. Apius, for instance, as a judge, is represented as the eyes, ears and tongue of a contemporary sociopolitical body. He is unable to use any of these parts effectively. The inability of each character to utilise the powers that are meant to be inherent in their social position challenges the basic structure of the political hierarchy itself. Likewise, a complete reversal of the power dynamic prescribed by this rigid structure implies that the hierarchy itself may not be as inflexible as the audience would tend to believe. As we delve deeper into the association of the surgeon with the physical body, the parts of the body can be seen to be used by the text to challenge the social structure that they are meant to represent. In such an interpretation, each relevant body part is, in turn, addressed by the text.

Apius, as a judge, allows his eyes to be satisfied by insisting that he physically sees (and be seen to see) Virginius so that the knight may make some public pretence at a defence: 'Of this, in his absence, / I may nat yeve diffynytyf sentence'(VI.171). Apius demands, as his corelative in the neo-Platontic social structure might suggest, that he employs his eyes in his judgement, leaving only to utilise his ears and tongue in order to fulfil his civic duty and metaphorical representation.[49] To this point, the text supports the social associations implied in the heirarchy established by Plato's *Republic*, furthered by Aristotle's insistence on categorical classification and confirmed in the

[48] John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, ed. and trans. by Cary J. Nederman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
[49] See V.11 of the *Policraticus* for this specific metaphor.

twelth century by the *Policraticus*. However, as Apius' other senses are ignored or misused, we see that the text also supports John of Salisbury's warnings, that there is 'nothing more miserable than judges ignorant of the science of law and devoid of a good will, which their love of presents and compensation proves beyond all doubt; the power by which they have exercised in the service of greediness, ostentation, or their own flesh and blood, and they are absolved from the necessity of a sacred oath to the laws'.[50] The previously sympathetic corroboration of the structure of the *Policraticus* quickly fades as the rest of Apius' social functions fail to deliver their promises of justice, insight or knowledge. Although the reader is told that Virginius' case will be heard fairly (VI.173), the judge's ears are, in fact, largely unused in the process of considering his decision. Apius refuses to hear Virginius, thus eliminating the use of one of the organs associated with his social responsibilities:

> But hastily, er he his tale tolde,
> And wolde have preeved it as sholde a knyght,
> And eek by witnessyng of many a wight,
> That al was fals that seyde his adversarie,
> This cursed juge wolde no thynge tarie,
> Ne heere a word moore of Virginius. (VI.192)

Apius' ears fail to fulfil their social duty by failing to hear Virginius' pleas. As such, Apius' ability to perform morally in the prescribed political structure dimishes further. The text shows Apius' immoral tongue pronouncing an unjust judgement:

> But yaf his juggement, and seyde thus:
> 'I deeme anon this cherl his servant have;
> Thou shalt no lenger in thyn hous hir save.
> Go bryng hire forth, and put hire in oure warde
> The cherl shal have his thral, this I awarde.' (VI.197)

Lastly, Apius' eyes are lamented by Virginius just before the execution of his daughter: 'Allas, that evere Apius the say' (VI.227)! As we can see, each of the body parts meant to be represented by the judge are represented in this case as corrupt, unjust examples of what are meant to be the higher functions of the body politic.

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[50] *Policraticus*, p. 93.

This analogy between body and social system continues with the other major characters as well, as the text works its way through the hierarchical system of social association by challenging the representative body parts in the characters. Virginius, represented in the social structure by his hands, is virtually stripped of any other bodily part. His eyes are ineffective; he is not able to see the treachery before it is planned or to stop it once he is called to court. The only real mention that Virginius' eyes are given is their futility to witness his accuser (VI.191). His tongue is likewise useless, as he is not given the chance to defend himself and his ears can only be assaulted by the treacherous judgement pronounced by Apius. His head – or mind – fails to identify the real nature of the issue and his heart is stricken with pity (VI.211). All that Virginius has at his disposal, by social right and by way of literary device, are the hands of a soldier. Those hands, of course, contribute to the ultimate tragedy of the tale by delivering the fatal and unwise decapitation of Virginia. Like the judge, the knight represents the ruling power in the social hiearchy. Here the minds of both men are infected with a failure to make their will, reason and action rightly.

By the authority of medieval convention, exemplified by the *Policraticus*, Virginia is a member of a degenerate, 'inferior sex', and, as such, has no real place at all in the hierarchical social stucture.[51] Although Lomperis and Delany provide significant evidence for a non-biblical source of the tale, one of the few stories in the *Policraticus* that relates a specific reference to a woman bears some interesting similarities to the situation surrounding Virginia. The text mentions the story of Judith: blessed by a superior beauty by God, Judith is faced with the unholy desires of an evil judge. Just as Virginia's beauty is said to be so powerful that it beguiles Apius, Judith appears

[51] *Policraticus*, p. 90. The women and effeminate men of the book are infamously maligned, often referred to as 'shameless' (p. 31), 'the weaker sex' (p. 171), the 'inferior sex', or people who are justly subject to lower standards of education and are disposed to higher degrees of vanity (p. 184). In one of the few instances that the text depicts a female ruler, she is chastised for being foolish enough to allow a stranger into her court. The 'frivolity' of Dido typifies 'the end of the rulership of women and the effeminate because, although it may have a foundation in virtue, it could by no means devise a course towards subsequent propriety' (p. 131).

'incomparably elegant to everyone's eyes'.[52] Holofernes, like Apius, specifically has his heart changed by the woman's beauty, and had made plans to own her since he first saw her.[53] But whereas Judith's 'pious deception' earns her the opportunity to '[smite] twice upon his neck with all her might, and she took away his head from him' (Judith 13.8), Virginia's beauty only earns her the opportunity to have her head taken off by her father. Judith takes the head of Holofernes to show to the elders of her city and the people all rejoice (Judith 13.15-17); Virginius takes the head of his daughter to Apius' court, wherein the people rush in to save the knight from Apius' rage. The links may seem tenuous, but the social ramifications of the association of Judith/Virginia with the physical head of the body are significant. Even more interesting are the implications of the decapitation and the situation of the female character's position as either the executor or the executed; the association, the decapitation and the difference of the female character from active agent of justice to passive recipient of injustice deserve critical attention.

The female association with the head is an interesting challenge that the text makes to the social infrastructure, in that it serves to initiate a general upheaval of the neo-Platonic social order. Any strict application of the socio-political metaphor cannot work, as any presumption of power obtained by placing Virginia as the head of a political body is eliminated by her decapitation. Whereas the political value of the text has been dismissed by Delany and recentred to the body by Lomperis, neither critic develops the implications of the association of the political aspects of the body parts addressed. This omission becomes important in view of the fact that most of the criticism regarding Virginia and the beheading focuses solely on the virginal nature of

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[52] *Policraticus*, p. 208.
[53] *Bible*, King James. 'Judith', from the *Holy Bible*, King James version (Apocrypha) Electronic Text Center, University of Virginia Library, [accessed 12 August 2003], <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/etcbin/toccerew2?id=KjvJudi.sgm&images=images/modeng&data=/texts/english/modeng/parsed&tag=public&part=13&division=div1>. All other references to the story of Judith will be from this edition and cited parenthetically.

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the victim, rather than the social or political significance of her dismemberment. That is not to say that her virginity is unimportant, or that the criticism that addresses the implications of virginity in the tale is at all misplaced or unwarranted. There is, however, another aspect of Virginia's beheading that has yet to be explored.

Judith's story centres on God's ability to make the faithful overcome the wicked, regardless of any inherent difference in social class, strength or intellectual ability (notice that it took two swings of the blade to cut of the head off Holofernes). If we look at *The Physician's Tale* in reference to Judith's, we see that the disregard for social classification is once again being inserted into the socio-political metaphor. Despite her unfortunate end, Virginia's role as the head of the story – and the fact that her head is severed from its physiological body – serves to shake up the remaining parts of the political body as well.

In the Physician's narrative, it is clear that the woman is returned to a victimised state, thus negating any potential message of feminist power. This interpretation of the events does not allow for the possibility that Virginia's death serves to advance any politically feminine agenda. However, by refocusing the tale on the body of a passive, innocent victim, Virginia's unjust decapitation allows the peasantry to re-install the political motif of righteous revolution implicit in what is the most likely source for Chaucer's text.[54]

However unjustly the tale deals with women, by symbolically removing the head of the socio-political structure, and later literally removing the judge who wields power within in, the tale implies a challenge to the model of traditional political order set out in the *Policraticus*. As is the case in the source materials cited by Lomperis and Delany, the tale alludes to violent political upheaval. However, unlike these source materials, Chaucer's 'peple' do not revolt crudely or mindlessly: they revolt with surgical

[54] See Delany and Lomperis for detailed descriptions of the probable sources of the tale, each of which has overt political themes.

precision and righteous equity.[55] Instead of acting like a mob of enraged idiots, their position on the neo-Platonic hierarchy of society is given value. Although representing the lowest extremity of the symbolic body politic, the villagers are the only characters who are can recognise the truth regarding Apius and his churl. They, of course, know of his plan and of his lechery: their pursuit and punishment of Apius and Claudius is the only judgement, the only 'remedye', that is both just and compassionate. The text promotes their standing above all other members of society and, by doing so, arguably challenges the strictly hierarchical structure which is meant to define their social roles.[56]

The text confronts the established political order and suggests that the lines which are meant to delineate the differences between social standing (and relative inherent worth) may not be as clear-cut or as static as some critics might wish us to believe. Is Chaucer's text, at least momentarily, advocating widespread revolution and social reform? Probably not – or at least if it is, the evidence is not necessarily explicit. By addressing the neo-Platonic hierarchy of social value, the text is at least questioning the social views derived from neo-Platonism in general. They may also put into question the philosophical foundations upon which contemporary medicine is based. In other words, whereas the tale may not be a call to arms for another peasants' revolt, it may in some degree serve as a sympathetic expression of solidarity against the rigid sociological and philosophical premises that disallow any inherent worth in the peasantry.

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[55] It is worth noting that the medieval meaning of the word 'peple' fluctuated greatly, from the most common use (the general public), to other uses that may have implied a lower social status. The *MED* lists at least one of these latter uses as 'the lower classes, the masses, the populace' (as used explicitly in *The Knight's Tale*, I.2350), and also states that it is often confused with other usages, including 'those present at a feast, church service, etc.; an assemblage' (as used by Chaucer in *The Pardoner's Tale* (VI.961), and 'subjects of a king or lord' (as in *The Clerk's Tale*, IV.112). Although the explanatory notes to the tale suggest the more common usage of the word here, it is not unreasonable to explore a similar 'confusion' in this case.

[56] See also Lynn Staley Johnson, 'The Prince and His People: A Study of the Two Covenants in the *Clerk's Tale*', *The Chaucer Review*, 10 (1975), 17-29; or David Wallace, 'Chaucer's Body Politic: Social and Narrative Self-Regulation', *Exemplaria*, 2 (1990), 221-40.

Conclusion

Successful Platonic medicine is the ability to manipulate love and to create harmony from discontinuity. *The Physician's Tale* demonstrates a distinct inability safely to 'separate fair love from foul', or to 'eradicate' love without killing the patient. *The Physician's Tale* is filled with demonstrations of misdiagnosis and poorly considered treatments. Does this imply the fictional narrator's awareness of these problems? His characters pay the ultimate price for his lack of skill in reconciliation. Even the other characters of the *Tales* are adversely affected by the Physician's story. As Brian Lee says, the Host 'turns from [*The Physician's Tale*] quickly, joking at the expense of the Physician. But when he says that he almost 'caught a cardynacle' (VI.313), he speaks more wisely than he knows'.[57] Although Lee continues by arguing for the inability of the Physician to service the spiritual needs of the Host, one can also argue that the reaction of the Host to the tale is indicative of the Physician's Platonic failure to able to heal, either through theory or through practice. The elusive theoretical morality of his tale is befuddling. The tale itself causes more practical harm than good. Instead of moving the storytelling along merrily, the host praises the Physician warmly, 'myn owene maister deere, [...] I pray to God so save thy gentil cors' (VI.301-304), then proclaims, 'But wel I woot thou doost myn herte to erme' (VI.312), and drives him to admit that 'Or but I here anon a myrie tale, / Myn herte is lost for pitee of this mayde' (VI.316). *The Physician's Tale* ends in disharmony not only for its characters, but for its audience. Given the unsettled nature of modern criticism for the tale, it would appear that this disquiet continues, and that the Physician and his tale continue to vex his audience.

[57] 'The Position and Purpose of the *Physician's Tale*', p. 157.

Manly Beasts and Beastly Men

Considerations of the Medieval Body/Soul Relationship in Some of *The Canterbury Tales*

Now God did not make the soul after the body, although we are speaking of them in this order; for having brought them together he would never have allowed that the elder should be ruled by the younger; but this is a random manner of speaking which we have, because somehow we ourselves too are very much under the dominion of chance. Whereas he made the soul in origin and excellence prior to and older than the body, to be the ruler and mistress, of whom the body was to be the subject. And he made her out of the following elements and on this wise: Out of the indivisible and unchangeable, and also out of that which is divisible and has to do with material bodies, he compounded a third and intermediate kind of essence, partaking of the nature of the same and of the other, and this compound he placed accordingly in a mean between the indivisible, and the divisible and material.

Timaeus 34b10-35a6

When modern Chaucerians come to talk about 'the body', they usually do so in reference to one of two things: either the body and its relationship to the body of Christ, or the female body and its evaluation in relationship to that of the male body. Although both lines of criticism are worthwhile and add a significant amount of greater understanding to the texts, neither of them addresses a fundamental relationship that the body enjoys in terms of its existence and the question of immortality: the relationship that body has with its soul. Notwithstanding works that address the issue of the body/soul relationship as an aside to supplement a more central argument, recent scholarship regarding aspects of the association between the two elements of human nature in Chaucer's can be seen to be limited to Astell's discussions in *Chaucer and the Universe of Learning*, Reame's comments in 1980 regarding the Cecilia legend, and Yvette Marie Marchand's 'Towards a Psychosomatic View of Human Nature', in which the premises of Platonic theory are established as the governing principles behind the discussion of the body/soul relationship in Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women.*[1] Before that, Kellogg's 'An Augustinian Interpretation of Chaucer's Pardoner' (*Speculum*, 1951) is arguably the next place to find any real attention paid to the special issues raised by such a relationship in Chaucer's work; it is itself almost a half-century after John Livingston Lowe's 'The *Second Nun's Prologue*, Alanus and Macrobius' (*Modern Philology,* 1917).[2] The nature of the soul and its relationship to the human body was one of the most often discussed problems for philosophers, whether of the Middle Ages or of Antiquity. Chaucer, of course, knew intimately, and used as a source for some texts, notably *Troilus*, Boethius' essentially Platonic examination of the relationship of the human's spiritual essence to the material world and the sphere of the emotions. The

[1] Yvette Marie Marchand, 'Towards a Psychosomatic View of Human Nature: Chaucer, Spencer, Burton', in *The Body and the Soul in Medieval Literature*, ed. by Piero Boitani and Anna Torti (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1999), pp. 123-44.
[2] John Livingston Lowe, 'The Second Nun's Prologue, Alanus and Macrobius', *Modern Philology,* 15 (1917), pp. 193-202.

neo-Platonic concept of a spherical cosmology and the difference between this 'wrecched world' and a higher plane of existence is reiterated by Chaucer in some of the final lines of *Troilus*:

> And whan that he was slayn in this manere,
> His lighte goost ful blissfully is went
> Up to the holughnesse of th eighthe spere,
> In convers letyng everich element;
> And ther he saugh with ful avysement
> The erratic 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 hevene above. (v.1807)

After the era of Boethius, and in the face of philosophical challenges both from Aristotleian works on the *anima* and Arabic interpretations, Western Christian philosophy explored the difficult question of what the soul was. A notable text in this is Aquinas' *De unitate intellectus.* Chaucer himself lived in a society where concern for the soul, especially in such matters as confession, prayers for the dead, and anxiety about the fate of souls in purgatory, constantly surrounded members of society in their daily personal and communal life. Furthermore, the Pardoner illustrates contemporary concern over clerics who put money above the fate of the souls of their fellow-Christians.

However, to some extent, the scholarship discussing this subject of souls and how it may manifest itself through the *Tales* seems inordinately sparse. This next chapter attempts to address that imbalance with an investigation into the nature of that relationship and the problems that the text experiences when trying to resolve the issues inherent to the discussion.

The neo-Platonic Tradition of Contrariety and the Body/Soul Relationship

For the ancient neo-Platonists, nothing embodied the principle of contrariety more poignantly – or more problematically – than the relationship between the human body and the human soul. The problem of the body/soul relationship is discussed in Plato's theories, identified and analysed by Aristotle, re-addressed by Plotinus and discussed at length by nearly every thinker thereafter. The following chapter attempts to address the medieval concept of the soul as a particularly troublesome entity in contemporary philosophy and literature. I hope to show how the arguments raised by Aristotle in reaction to Plato's concept of the soul as an 'immortal creature' who 'receives an earthly frame', rather than getting refined or developed, only ever really get expanded upon and complicated by later thinkers. [3] Furthermore, I would suggest that, by the time Chaucer writes *The Canterbury Tales*, the problematic issues surrounding the soul are fundamentally no closer to being resolved than they were in Plato's own time. Matters of the soul, its problematic contrary relationship to the body and the search for the neo-Platonically precious intermediate between the two play a key role in the characters and actions of *The Canterbury Tales*.

The fact that the narrator and characters of *The Canterbury Tales* are at least on some level concerned with the nature of their souls almost goes without saying. Although attention should be paid to Benson's proposition that most of Chaucer's pilgrims seem to be on more of a holiday than a spiritual voyage, the *Tales* grounds itself to some degree on the conceit of a physical and spiritual journey. [4] Perhaps it should come as no surprise, then, that the soul is referenced directly 83 times throughout the tales; so much so that at times, they seem insignificant aspects of the necessary

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[3] *Phaedrus* 246b9-c7, in *The Dialogues of Plato*, trans. by B. Jowett, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), III, pp. 107-190 (p.153). All further references to *Phaedrus* will be from this source.
[4] Larry D. Benson, *Pilgrimages*, (June 2000) <http://icg.fas.harvard.edu/~chaucer/special/varia/pilgrimage/index > [accessed 19 November 2002].

framework or scenery. However, this chapter will explore the possibility that the frequency of reference to the soul is not simply coincidental to the pilgrimage framework of the text. Rather, the text deals with the issue of souls on at least two levels. Firstly, if only superficially, it deals with the popular medieval concern for the state of the soul in a religious context. Secondly, and perhaps more elusively, the text addresses sophisticated issues regarding the particularly complex nature of the human soul: its relative privilege or privation of inherent divinity; its physicality or its incorporeality; and its frustrating relation to time, space and to the body with which it is associated.

This chapter will also explore how useful to an interpretation of body and soul in Chaucer is the neo-Platonic notion that between any two contraries there must be an intermediate substance that can negotiate in both realms of polarity. In the case of the body and soul dilemma, this negotiation of opposites becomes essential to our understanding of the way in which human beings are presented in relation to their intrinsic humanity and to their potential divinity. In short, we shall see how some of Chaucer's texts struggle, in much the same way as the medieval philosophical mind struggles, to mediate the tensions between body and soul and to come to terms with the conflicting medieval philosophical and theological arguments surrounding the issue. The conclusion of *The Second Nun's Tale*, if there is one, seems to indicate that as an intermediate being between the poles of God (pure reason, pure soul, pure limitlessness) and Beast (pure appetite, pure flesh, pure physicality) mankind can, in accordance to neo-Platonic doctrine, exist anywhere on a flexible scale of humanity which demonstrates either a privation or an abundance of emanated divinity.

On one level, it may seem tempting to disregard overt references to the soul in the narrative, as the text deals with salvation, if only coincidentally by way of the nature of the pilgrimage. One might, after all, expect to find references to the nature of the soul

and its salvation in a series of tales concerning a group of travellers who are either working in some aspect of the Church or in the group in order to fulfil a physical journey representative of their soul's progress toward eternal reward. The frame of a pilgrimage and the presence of religious figures and tales does not necessarily mean that the text is primarily concerned with salvation. However, with such a group, on such a journey, one might be inclined to expect that the issues regarding the value of the soul might crop up from time to time as recurring subjects of the collective tales. It remains to be seen, however, what the narrator's and characters' respective depictions of the nature of the soul are and whether those representations corroborate or challenge contemporary philosophical arguments in the field.

The Medieval Concept of the Soul

One of the more basic principles when considering the medieval concept of the nature of the soul is what Augustine (d. 430) would call 'Divine Illumination'. The concept of Divine Illumination, which originates with Plotinus and is adapted thereafter by the Church Fathers (most notably Augustine), states that the essence or being of all things emanate from one divine source and that all things exist in an ever-decreasing order of perfection based on their relative intellectual and spiritual proximity to God. Even without further refinement, this theory intrinsically lends itself to a hierarchical classification of value and purpose, whereby things closer to the source of Being (God) are more perfect and more complete than those farther away from His supreme divinity.[5] The soul, of course, is no exception. According to the general fourteenth-century conception of the soul – and therefore, at this state of the development of thought, according primarily to the Christianised versions of Platonism, Aristotelianism and neo-Platonism of Augustine – souls fundamentally exist in three parts of ascending potentiality: the vegetative, the sensitive and the intellectual. In agreement with neo-

[5] See *On the Trinity* XII.15.24, and for Augustine's discussions of this principle.

Platonic doctrine, the intellectual soul exists in a higher state of illumination than the sensitive soul, and it, in turn, is placed above the vegetative soul. Each soul's potentiality is determined and valued by the highest division of soul that it possesses. Plants, for example, are not privy to reason, just as Man is not expected to act purely in reaction to a physical sensation. Furthermore, each type of soul is divided into its fundamental functions and powers. An oak tree, for example, is limited in its mobility by the powers retained by the highest soul it possesses: the vegetative soul.[6]

The Vegetative Soul

As the vegetative soul is the least capable of the souls, it is limited to four primary powers: those of the attraction of matter (through heat and dryness), reduction of the attracted matter into digestible substances (through coolness and dryness), the digestion and distribution of reduced matter (warmth and dampness), and the expulsion of the unusable reduced matter (cold and wet). The powers, themselves combinations of the four basic physical attributes of existence, are to form, in combination, what James McEvoy describes as the threefold 'fundamental functions of all living things': nutrition, growth and reproduction.[7] Grosseteste (d. 1253) promotes the idea of the vegetative soul, which he develops from Avicenna.

In time, such a notion becomes accepted doctrine rather than simple proposition. In his *On Being and Essence,* Aquinas (d. 1274) states:

> And the more valuable the form, the more its powers are found to exceed the elementary particles of matter, as vegetable life has operations metals do not have, and sense-life has operations vegetable life does not have.[8]

Later, referring to the vegetative soul as the 'nutritive soul', Aquinas sets out to determine whether the different souls within man are essentially different: 'Therefore if

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[6] See especially the last eight books of Augustine's *On the Trinity* for his matured view of the human soul as a indication for a tripartite Godhead; and *Summa Theologica* I.Q78-83 for Aquinas' discussion of the three types of soul and their functions.
[7] James McEvoy, *The Philosophy of Robert Grosseteste* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), p. 292.
[8] *Summa Theologica*, XI, p. 47.

a man receives life from one (the vegetative soul), animal life from another (the sense-soul) and human life from another (the rational soul), man would not be just one thing[...] And you cannot say that [separate souls] are held together through the body's unity, because it is the soul that holds the body together, not the other way round'.[9] Without digressing into any discussion of whether Thomist philosophy dictates the 'oneness' of man, it is clear that there is a distinction between the types of soul available for the composition of a living thing. And whereas Duns Scotus only remarks briefly on the division of souls, it is obvious by his recognition of 'all the parts of the soul' and the differentiation between an act of will and a natural inclination that he recognises the accepted compartmentalisation of the soul. [10]

> A natural desire in this sense is not an elicited act but merely an inclination of nature towards something, then it is clear that the existence of such a natural desire can be proved only if we prove first that the nature in question is able to have such a thing. To argue the other way round, therefore, is begging the question. [11]

Scotus does not spend a lot of time talking about the different types of souls. Rather, he seems to accept the partitioning and ordering of the souls as a matter of fact. His comments concerning the subject are limited, perhaps because of the fact that there was no reason for him to question what had been long accepted as fact.

The *Tales*, too, seem not to question the existence of a 'vegetative' or 'nutritive' soul. As when reading Scotus, however, readers are forced to dig more deeply in Chaucer's work in order to identify the references, as the notion of a purely subsistent soul was an assumption of fact in Chaucer's period rather than a matter of contention. So that when the Knight speaks of 'the ook, that hath so long a norisshynge / From tyme that it first begynneth to sprynge, / And hath so long a lif' (VII.3017); or the 'tree / That blosmeth er that fruyt ywoxen bee' (IV.1461), to which the Merchant refers, the

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[9] *Summa Theologica*, XI, p. 61.
[10] John Duns Scotus, 'The Spirituality and Immortality of the Soul', in *Philosophical Writings*, trans. by Allan Wolter (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1962), p. 150.
[11] Scotus, 'The Spirituality and Immortality of the Soul', p. 158.

characters seem to take for granted that the driving force behind such nutritive acts is a base vegetative soul. That soul, though simple enough in purpose, is definitive of all things. The vegetative soul controls the growth of the trees as well as determining the downward path of the tears that fall from the eyes of Saint Urban in *The Second Nun's Tale* (x.190). In each case objects of experience are following the directions of the most basic type of soul. Each act is without volition, but ruled by primordial necessity. For just as the sea in *The Franklin's Tale* desires to be warmed by the sun, all existent things have natural inclinations that are determined by their vegetative soul (v.1049). The text acknowledges the existence of the 'partitioned' soul and its relative top-down classification; it remains to be seen whether it endorses the static nature of that classification, or whether it represents the soul and its relationship to matter as something less fixed.

The Sensitive Soul

According to Grosseteste, the sensitive soul has within its definition an altogether different set of internal classifications that the text must address. External senses, of which sight is the most privileged, are functions and combinations of the elements.[12] The internal senses, anchored to the *sensus communis*, provide the ability to 'co-ordinate individual senses and combin[e] them into a unity of apperception'.[13] Just as all perception is based in the *sensus communis*, desire is based in the *appetitive capacity,* which is broken into the powers of *concupiscentia specialis* and *irascibilis.* These powers are described as the 'positive and negative affective reactions to the objects of sense-experience', and are coupled in all animals by a relevant power of

[12] See '*Sighte Merveillous*' (below) on the hierarchical classification of senses.
[13] McEvoy, p. 297.

discretion between those sensations that are of benefit and those that are of potential danger.[14]

Other thirteenth-century thinkers considered and expanded on the neo-Platonised Arabic and classical views summarised and refined by Grosseteste. In most cases, the categories of distinction are either multiplied in order to express more refined criteria of difference, or simplified in order to express underlying unity. For instance, according to Aquinas, the souls of animated beings are further distinguishable from the forms of inanimate objects in that they combine natural appetites (the propensity of man to fall to the ground when tripped) with sensuality (the cognitive faculty of living a thing to seek ways to avoid the potentially painful consequences of being tripped in the first place).[15] Aquinas takes the definition of appetitive souls and refines the hierarchy within their definition. In other words, although all beings have appetites, as Grosseteste would assert, cognitive beings also have volition, or expressions of sensual appetites governed by rational discretion.[16]

Beasts and Men

Common to both classical and Christian models of the human being, it is a lack of rational discretion that separates beast from man. This distinction is the source of lament when Palamon speaks of the beast, unencumbered by the will of God, which 'may al his lust fulfille' (I.1317). Chaucer's text is utilising the common understanding that the sensitive soul has within its powers the rudimentary ability to interpret sensory data and motivate the animal in question to act accordingly, with no need for the intervention of judgement or reason. A beast, in its purely sensual capacity, acts upon only what it wants to do, as it is incapable of determining in any way what it should do. If we follow

[14] McEvoy, p. 299.
[15] *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas*, ed. by Norman Kretzmann and Eleonore Stump (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 144.
[16] Kretzmann and Stamp, p. 144.

the development of the consideration of the soul to the more immediate forerunners to Chaucer, we will see that the ideas concerning the nature of the soul change very little. Not only does Aquinas agree that the sensitive soul surpasses the vegetative soul, but he carries distinctions within the animal world in the delineation of animals based on the capacity of their respective sensitive souls.[17] The *Tales* appear to accept this classification as they often give us lists of animals in the Biblically-declared ascending order. For instance, in *The Knight's Tale*:

> For every labour somtyme moot han reste,
> Or elles longe may he nat endure;
> This is to seyn, no lyves creature,
> Be it fyssh, or bryd, or beest or man. (I.1862)

Again, we see that by recounting the established hierarchy of sensitive things, everyone, including Chaucer's Knight, demonstrates an understanding of the fundamental notions of the soul's constituent elements. The text is, of course, following the order laid out by the Bible and followed in all bestiaries of its time. The narrator is not an inventor of a hierarchical classification of animal evaluation. At least since Aristotle, a 'scientific' general classification of the inherent worth of animals has been established. Aristotle's classification was relatively simple: all non-human animals belong to two categories, each of which category is then further subdivided. Subcategories are then also divided, and so on. According to the *History of Animals*, animals are divided first by those with blood and those without. Among blooded animals, we find quadrupeds, birds and fish. Blooded quadrupeds are then distinguished between viviparous (those that give birth to live young) and oviparous (those that lay eggs). Blooded viviparous quadrupeds are then classified by such scientific criteria as hoof division, the possession of horns, the presence of a mane and genital size, shape and placement. Animals without blood – molluscs, crabs and insects – are also defined and organised by similarly seemingly arbitrary criteria: number of feet, method of

[17] *Summa Theologica*, especially XI, pp. 5-83 and 119-191.

movement, and relative hardness of shell are but a few. Although these categories may seem to be subjective and for the most part innocuous, Aristotle not only laid the foundations for all zoological classification to come, but also paved the logical way in which medieval thinkers evaluated their place in the cosmic order. Beryl Rowland mentions that 'the Egyptian Book of the Dead, the Bible, travellers' tales, the works of Herodotus, Aristotle, Pliny, Plutarch and others'.[18] All had considerable influence on the way in which Chaucer's contemporaries viewed animals, and that Isidore of Seville's *Etymologies* added much to the delineation of animals based on 'supposed characteristics of each'.[19] If we remember that in the Aristotelian world-view 'inner characteristics were exemplified by the outward physical form' and that 'both by virtue of [the animal's] position in the Chain of Being and its appearance', then we cannot ignore the fact that certain animals were 'better' than others based on their relevant spiritual proximity to God, or that humans, in general, are better than animals.[20] By acknowledging the traditional chain of being within sensitive animals, the narrator is at once describing the order in which they exist in commonality – that they all have the capacity for rudimentary faculties – and reiterating the fact that man alone stands at the top of the list of material beings because of the fact that his soul contains the highest degree of potentiality: the ability to aspire to seek out the world of the rational soul.

Processes of Perception and Understanding

According to Grosseteste, the rational soul of man has a tripartition of 'speculative virtues': *intelligentia,* wisdom and the vision of God.[21] The full potential of the soul – the unfiltered reception of illuminated knowledge of God – is accessible by man only in abnormal circumstances of extreme spiritual clarity. Such an experience is solely within

[18] Beryl Rowland, *Blind Beasts* (Kent, OH and Chatham: The Kent State University Press, 1971), p. 4.
[19] Rowland, *Blind Beasts*, p. 4.
[20] Rowland, *Blind Beasts*, p. 19.
[21] McEvoy, p. 301.

the capacity of the *intelligentia*, which can grasp knowledge without sense perception. *Intellectus* is that ability in humans to gain knowledge by physical sensation through the medium of a phantasm. Phantasms act as the medium between the immaterial and the corporeal in that they theoretically allow the immaterial object to impress (in some theories literally) information received through the senses on the physical brain. Categories lend themselves to an almost endless series of subcategories and further classification, and these rigid classifications are imbedded in literature by the time Chaucer begins to write *The Canterbury Tales*. The opening section of *The Book of the Duchess*, for example, illustrates Chaucer's interest in and familiartity with a model of perception that sees 'fantasye', the undefined *phantasmata* from sight of the physical world, becoming 'ymagynacioun'—the image-making faculty within the human mind. As yet in the text the narrator and his audience have not achieved adequate understanding, in the *ratio*, of what the subject-matter is that disturbs and puzzles his mind.

As if pre-thinkers had not already painstakingly and uncompromisingly labelled enough parts of the soul, the trend continues. These divisions and subdivisions are well-established by the time the *Tales* begin. For example: whereas the *intellectus* serves to communicate and motivate movement of physical species to the body, the *intelligentia* moves the intellect and provides judgement to balance apparent discrepancies reported by the senses. The *Tales* show some discussion of this subtle difference in *The Franklin's Tale*, where most characters of the narrative are at one time or another deficient in their judgement concerning information transmitted through the senses.[22] Moreover, the Intellectual Soul provides man with the potential to know God directly in this life, as it is only the non-physical mind that has access to a complete knowledge of the Prime Mover. That the intellectual soul exists and that it is the determinate

[22] This is discussed in the chapter entitled 'Sighte Merveillous', below.

difference between man and beast is never in question. This assertion is in direct contrast to Aristotle, for whom, as Olson states:

> [...] what makes man human is his capacity for speech-for speaking together to identify species' interest. Thus, while bees and birds and other collective creatures find out what they should do corporately by listening to instinct, men find out what they should do by talking together in assemblies until they recognise what the common interest is. (*Politics* I.2; III.1; IV.14.)[23]

Olson misinterprets the fundamental distinction being made by Aristotle in this section of the *Politics.* In fact, Aristotle states plainly that although the ability to speak is reserved for man alone, the power of the voice is retained by all animals for the mutual indication of pleasure and pain.[24] Furthermore, Aristotle says:

> And it is a characteristic of man that he alone has any sense of good and evil, of just and unjust, and the like, and the association of living beings who have this sense makes a family and a state.[25]

Grosseteste confirms the fundamental difference between beast and man as the rational capacity rather than a physical capability by stating that 'the natural *differentiae* of the various kinds of being can be used to specify the human powers of understanding constituting in their sum the total intellectual life of man'.[26] At one point, Aquinas adds:

> Now, it sometimes happens that what has one perfection may attain to a further perfection as well, as is clear in man, who has a sensitive nature and, further, an intellective one.[27]

Aquinas expresses the dominance of man based on the relative potential of his soul. However, Aquinas will go on to echo Aristotle's sentiment that intellect is above sense[28] and that 'the human animal, unlike all the others, is called not sensory but rather rational substance because sensation is less than [rationality], which is proper to a

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[23] Paul A. Olson, '*The Parlement of Foules*: Aristotle's *Politics* and the Foundations of Human Society', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer,* 2 (1980), 53-69 (p. 55).
[24] Aristotle, *Politics*, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, trans. by B. Jowett, ed. by Jonathan Barnes, 2 vols (Princeton: The Princeton University Press, 1984), II, pp. 1986-2129 (p. 1988).
[25] *Politics*, 1253a15-18 (p.1988).
[26] McEvoy, p. 301.
[27] Thomas Aquinas, *On Being and Essence*, in *Medieval Sourcebook: Thomas Aquinas: On Being and Essence*, trans. by Robert T. Miller, 1997, < http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/aquinas-esse.html>, [Accessed 01 September 2003].
[28] *Summa Theologica*, pp. 119-211.

human being'.[29] Scotus, in an attempt to establish the immortality of man, puts forth this argument for the unique rational soul of the human animal:

> This much is clear, if any argument proves the resurrection, it must be one based on something that is proper to man and does not belong to other perishable things. But such a thing would not be matter, nor even incorruptible matter. Neither is it some form that can be destroyed. For even if such a form exist in man and indeed, one even more excellent than any brute form, still this would not provide an adequate argument for the resurrection of man as a whole. Hence, the argument must be based upon that form which is specific to man or upon some operation which man enjoys by reason of this form. [...] Furthermore, all philosophers commonly assign 'rational' as the difference that properly defines man, meaning by 'rational' that the intellective soul is an essential part of man.[30]

In an unusual moment of philosophical accord, everyone seems to be in agreement that the one most basic difference between man and all other sentient beings is his capacity for reason. However strong the currents of conformity are on the matter of Man's dominance over the terrestrial chain of being, evidence suggests that the text disputes the prescribed order of being. In fact, once again, we see that the text challenges the accepted hierarchies and classifications it inherits from neo-Platonic precedents.

Soul and Body: The Second Nun's Tale

It could be argued that, in context of *The Knight's Tale*, the text falls back into line quickly. Palamon continues his lament by remarking that unlike beasts, rational man is forced to repress his sensitive desires (I.1317) and carries on suffering after death because of the higher nature of his soul (I.1320), thus reinstating the unique ability of Man's soul to conquer his appetite and to exist beyond physical death. However, evidence suggests that another challenge to the nature and value of souls exists. As Sherry Reames points out in her discussion of the St. Cecilia legend, the normal process of medieval conversion is altered by the narrator in *The Second Nun's Tale* from one of

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[29] *Cambridge Companion to Aquinas*, p. 137.
[30] Scotus, p. 138.

an intelligent choice to one bordering on coercion.[31] Although Reames uses this observation to point out the 'disappearance of the Augustinian ideal' of a conversion theory based on the internal and intelligent choice of the converted to participate in the grace of God, the same evidence can be used to advocate a challenge to the Order of Being as described above. Reames reminds us that Chaucer's version of *Passio S. Caeciliae* dismantles the Augustinian ideal of a truly intellectual enlightenment. If the reader is to accept her argument, the text offers an adaptation of conversion that bypasses Augustine's 'active, informed role in the process' of conversion in order to favour one in which the converted character is 'railroaded' into making the choice to submit to the grace of God.[32] A distinct lack of rational choice takes the characters away from the intellectual ideal, so that early Christian converts and, by extension, all humans, are 'incapable of responding in knowledge and love to the divine initiative'.[33] These converts are not making decisions based on the information acquired by their intellects; they are, in fact, 'chosen, singled out by God, and suddenly set on a new path – whatever the inclinations of His own heart and mind'.[34]

Although Reames is making the claim that the relationship between the converted soul and God is no longer one of intellectual choice to the philosophers of Chaucer's century, the basic premises of the argument can be applied to our ongoing argument as well. In other words, whereas Reames concentrates on the challenge that the text makes to the Augustinian ideal of conversion, the foundations of the argument can just as easily be applied and alternatively emphasised to show how the text challenges the inherent distinctions perceived between Man and Beast based on the relative intellectual capacities of their souls. By removing the intellect from the process of conversion, the text eliminates the primary criterion by which we distinguish the soul

[31] Sherry Reames, 'The Cecilia Legend as Chaucer Inherited It and Retold It', *Speculum*, 55 (1980), 38-57.
[32] Reames, p. 42.
[33] Reames, p. 54.
[34] Reames, p. 51.

of Man from that of Beast. As Reames demonstrates, the tale's potential converts are not interested in the knowledge associated with the intellectual conversions of Augustine, but are, in fact, bullied into conversion and overwhelmed by physical sensation rather than by intellectual epiphany. Valerian, for instance, demands to see the angel guarding his bride's virginity: 'If I shal trusten thee, / Lat me that aungel se and hym biholde' (VIII.163). After himself being overwhelmed with the vision of an angel in white robes (VIII.201), Valerian returns to convince Tiburce to follow a similar path to conversion. His description of the process focuses entirely on the sensation aspects of the visiting angel:

> Valerian seyde: "Two corones han we,
> Snow white and rose reed, that shenen cleere,
> Which that thyne eyen han no myght to see;
> And as thou smellest hem thurgh my preyere. (VIII.253)

Valerian is concentrating not on what he has learned from Urban and from the angel (as far as the text is concerned, nothing is learned at all), but rather on how the angel affected his senses. By doing so, he is removing the decision to become baptised from the realm of the human's rational soul and placing it within the animalistic territory of the sensitive soul. The text has eliminated the unique *intelligentia* of the human soul which would be able to participate in the grace of God without sensation and concentrated on the *sensus communis*, available to all animals. Valerian is not acting according to the full potential of his classification as a rational being: the text seems to suggest that in fact, his decisions are nothing more than appetitive reactions. In other words, Valerian's actions and subsequent communications are entirely based on sensational stimuli rather than an intellectual process defined by Grosseteste and strongly advocated by Augustine. Of course, we must acknowledge that Tiburce's conversion is more reminiscent of the Augustinian model in that we are given the details of his spiritual education. However, the brevity of the lessons - four lines, 'bisily' preached - seems to emphasise again that the intellectual soul of man is not being

completely satisfied (VIII.342). Even Cecile's explanation of the tri-part soul of Man and the Holy Trinity seems rushed to the point that the inclusion of intellect appears to be an afterthought (VIII.339). We cannot ignore even the most subtle of challenges to the assumed order; the discreet manipulation of the Chain of Being weakens the rigidity of the order and, at the same time allows the narrative to reconsider the inherent relationship of each creature with its respective soul. As far as Chaucer's pilgrims are concerned, the most important relationship in that Chain to be discussed is that between the body and the soul.

Having established that the soul is generally considered by Chaucer's contemporaries to be of a multifaceted nature, with nested hierarchies dominating the internal structure as well as the overall composition of the soul, it is necessary that we explore the unique relationship that man has with his soul. Again, this is an aspect of philosophy that, by Chaucer's time, seems almost to have been taken for granted as a matter of fact. In short, the relationship that man's soul – or at least his intellective soul – shares with his body is one of administration and limitation. In other words, it is clear in the philosophical texts as well as in the *Tales* that the Soul not only serves to facilitate the physical potential of the human body, but to inform it of God's existence and love. The body is a limitation of the soul that, only when released, is able to sustain its potential of direct knowledge of God. Grosseteste speaks of the soul as 'both mover and form[...]present everywhere in the body without being located in an organ, but it acts directly only through affecting the luminous spirits, the intermediary between spirit and matter favoured by all neo-Platonists'.[35] Aquinas supposed that:

[35] McEvoy, p. 267.

> Similarly, above this perfection of having a form such that three dimensions can be designated in it, there can be joined another perfection, as life or some similar thing. This term body, therefore, can signify a certain thing that has a form such that from the form there follows in the thing designatability in three dimensions and nothing more, such that, in other words, from this form no further perfection follows, but if some other thing is superadded, it is beyond the signification of body thus understood. And understood in this way, body will be an integral and material part of the animal, because in this way the soul will be beyond what is signified by the term body, and it will supervene on the body such that from these two, namely the soul and the body, the animal is constituted as from parts.[36]

However, Aquinas pushes the stipulation of the essence of man as his soul one step further. By reducing man's soul from three 'co-operating substantial forms' to the essential element of what it is to be a human being (rationality), Aquinas found his own way of defining the necessary distinction between body and soul and, by extension, the immortality of the human soul.[37] This, of course, establishes the opportunity for souls to exist after the physical death of the body that they were informing. Aquinas goes on to postulate that the human soul, by nature of its essential incorruptibility, indeed has the inherent capacity for immortality.

Scotus is not so easily convinced. In fact, by the time Scotus arrives at the question, the limitations of the previous arguments have left him without intellectual reason to believe that the soul exists after death. That is not to say that he does not believe that it does: only that he is unable to formulate a satisfactory logical reason as to why it MUST be so. In other words, while his predecessors were content to devise logical arguments that demonstrated the necessary existence of man's eternal nature, Scotus could not reach such a conclusion. As Scotus replies to the arguments he has inherited, he states:

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[36] *On Being and Essence*, in *Medieval Sourcebook: Thomas Aquinas: On Being and Essence*, trans. by Robert T. Miller, 1997, < http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/aquinas-esse.html>, [Accessed 01 September 2003].
[37] *Cambridge Companion to Aquinas*, p. 131.

> Frequently, what they gave was nothing more than rather persuasive probable arguments or what was commonly held by earlier philosophers... And this reply would suffice for all the testimonies [from the philosophers] cited above; even if they clearly asserted the proposed conclusion, they still do not establish it.[38]

He goes on to evaluate all of the previous arguments for the resurrection, as well as to propose several new ones, each failing his own stringent tests of logical scrutiny. His conclusion is far from optimistic:

> To put it briefly, then, we can maintain that natural reason cannot prove that the resurrection is necessary, neither by way of a priori reasons such as those based on the intrinsic principle in man, nor by *a posteriori* arguments, for instance, by reason of some operation or perfection fitting to man. Hence we hold the resurrection to be certain on the basis of faith alone.[39]

Although Scotus cannot adequately prove by his own laws of reason that the soul of man exists eternally, he is persuaded to believe so by Scripture and by the testimony of the Church thinkers such as Augustine. Perhaps due to the ancient precedents of this, the idea that faith supersedes reason is a well-established aspect of late medieval theology, one that seems to transcend any need for logical explanation, Scotus is quite happy to carry on believing in the immortality of the human soul, without being able to prove it. Almost as a last resort, Scotus appeals to the Bible, 'Where Christ tells us: "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul".'[40]

The Soul and Freedom from the Body

Chaucer's texts can also be seen to subscribe to the belief that the soul is capable of existing without a physical body. Even Chaucer's presentation of evil characters can remind his readers, in its wording, of this belief. The Summoner's Limiter claims that his 'spirit hath his fostryng in the Bible' (III.1845) and that his soul is nourished despite the meagre sustenance he receives. This simple quotation, though put into the mouth of

[38] Scotus, p. 149.
[39] Scotus, p. 159.
[40] Scotus, p. 159.

a greedy hypocrite, reiterates the specific sentiment expressed by Scotus: that the scriptures are enough to feed the faith, and that the soul will survive on such nourishment regardless of the physical condition of the body. The wife of the merchant in the *Shipman's Tale* swears 'by that God that yaf me soule and lyf' (VII.115), again in ironically irreligious context, but nonetheless reminding readers of the inseparable connection between Life and the Soul (but not necessarily the body) made by Augustine in Chapter 9 of his *On the Immortality of the Soul.*[41] Although there are numerous references that indicate a faith-based belief in the eternal existence of the soul, the exact nature of the relationship between body and soul as portrayed by the text has come under recent scrutiny.

As Ann Astell highlights in *Chaucer and the Universe of Learning*, there are several interpretations of the relationship between body and soul that are depicted in the tales. Whereas the 'Second Nun and her protagonist [represent that] the body is the soul's prison from which it is to be released', Astell claims that the Man of Law 's Custance's sea voyages 'associate the body as the soul's companion and shelter and emphasise the soul's dependence upon and near-inseparability from the body'.[42] This controversial argument addresses the pattern of challenging established beliefs in several aspects. Firstly, Galenic medical precedent (following the Aristotelian hylomorphic model) would allow that the soul is a tangible, treatable entity. A 'diseased' soul could be treated medically to some degree, just as the actions of a healthy soul could be affected by herbs, music and drugs such as alcohol. This is not to say that all levels of the soul could be addressed physically, but that at least to some extent, the physical world had access to what was, medically speaking, another combination of humours. It is absolutely imperative to note, however, that although the

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[41] Augustine, *On the Immortality of the Soul*, in *Readings in Medieval Philosophy*, ed. by Andrew S. Schroedinger (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 264-74, p. 270.
[42] Ann Astell, *Chaucer and the Universe of Learning* (London and Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), pp. 140-1.

contemporary Galenic model allowed for 'directly physical' access to the soul, medieval Galenism approached treatment of the soul as an indirect science, acting on 'the organs or organs which acted as its instruments'.[43]

Philosophical precedent, however, demands that the body is, indeed, a hindrance to the true potential of the soul, that the soul fared much better after being released from the body and that, furthermore, it would have been considered impossible for the soul to be considered to be reliant on any physical thing. *The Knight's Tale* is a notable example of fourteenth-century poetry attempting to work with philosophical ideas that combine Christian and pre-Christian worldviews. It is partly dependant on its sources, of course, but it includes some of Chaucer's most memorable images of the relationship of soul and body. Arcite's death invokes several images regarding this relationship. Firstly, as he lays dying, Arcite calls Palamon and Emelye to his bedside, and declares:

> To yow, my lady, that I love moost,
> But I biquethe the servyce of my goost
> To yow aboven every creature,
> Syn that my lyf may no lenger dure. (I.2767)

Then, when Arcite's body leaves his soul, a clear distinction is made as the relationship between the body and the soul is severed:

> Oonly the intellect, withouten moore,
> That dwelled in his herte syk and soore,
> Gan faillen whan the herte felte deeth.
>
> [...]His spirit chaunged hous and wente ther,
> As I cam nevere, I kan nat tellen wher. (I.2803, 2809)[44]

The Knight's Tale demonstrates, if only briefly, that Chaucer is aware of the developing medieval concept of the soul and its relation to the physical body. Philosophically speaking, the rules of engagement between body and soul seem clear: although the soul perfects and informs the body, the reverse simply is not possible.

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[43] For an extensive discussion of the development of the medical concept of the soul, see Angel Gonzalez De Pablo's 'The Medicine of the Soul', *History of Psychiatry*, 5 (1994), 483-516.
[44] It is worth noting too that Troilus's soul's flight to a celestial realm is borrowed from Boccaccio's *Teseida*. See *The Riverside Chaucer*, p. 840.

Jeremy Citrome makes this relationship even more poignant by reminding us that the medieval mind saw a correlation between spiritual illness and physical maladies. He also states that 'the Augustinian conceit of Christ as Physician is a familiar feature of the medieval religious polemic'.[45] Simply put, the line of causation is top-down only, and the reverse would not have been considered, as such a consideration would ultimately imply that man could somehow affect God. Contemporary belief, in general, states that every living thing is endowed with two 'distinct principles, one to explain composition, and the other to explain life'.[46] Whereas any specific soul depends on a corresponding material body for initial formation, nothing material – including the body – ever acts upon the soul itself. Scotus states without reservation that any claim that the soul would rely upon the body for its well-being is categorically untrue, as the soul:

> communicates to the compound and maintains it in the harmony of qualities and proportions necessary for the vegetative, sensitive and intellective life. When for one reason or another this equilibrium of dispositions in the compound is broken, and the soul, no longer finding the indispensable conditions for its permanence in the body, withdraws from it [...] the form of the compound still remains.[47]

Furthermore, Aquinas states clearly that the soul 'has its existence raised above the body and does not depend on it'.[48] In fact, Aquinas states unequivocally that the human soul is united with a body 'because it is imperfect and exists potentially in the genus of intellectual substances, not having the fullness of knowledge in its own nature, but acquiring it from sensible things through the bodily senses'.[49] That Astell uses Aquinas' model of the soul as being 'moved' by the body is recognition of a significant challenge to the chain of causation. By definition, the body cannot act upon the soul, as the body clearly exists below the soul in the established hierarchy of being. Although there seem to be some unanswered questions regarding the soul, the unilateral causal

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[45] Jeremy J. Citrome, 'Medicine as Metaphor in the Middle English Cleanness', *The Chaucer Review,* 35 (2001), 260-280 (p. 262).
[46] Efrem Bettoni, *Duns Scotus: The Basic Principles of his Philosophy* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1978), p. 69.
[47] Bettoni, p. 70.
[48] Aquinas, *Questiones Disputatae de Anima,* IC, in *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas*, p. 136.
[49] *Summa Theologica* 1.Q76.

nature of its relationship to the body seems philosophically without question. That is, of course, until we examine the special circumstances by which the intellective soul exists independent of the physical restraints of materiality: the very specific case of the angel.

Somewhere in Between: The Medieval Problem of Angels

Angels and demons represent the fundamental dilemma of the Chain of Being. They are, in a way, the Yeti of medieval thought – they make sense in theory as a point of mediation between the extremes of mortal Man and immortal God, but they are frustratingly elusive to demonstrate or to explain. The origins, composition and subsequent limitations (if there are, indeed, any limitations) of Angels become essential to the debate over the same aspects of the human soul. Once again, the debate seems unresolved, either in medicine, philosophy or in the *Tales*. Dyan Elliot tells us that the fundamental argument regarding the actual nature of Angels emanates from the Augustinian desire to reserve 'the privilege of absolute incorporeality for God alone'.[50] Whereas 'there is little doubt that both angels and demons had bodies in the first three centuries of the Christian era', the matter gets considerably more muddled by the twelfth century, by which time there is no real consensus regarding the existence of angelic bodies in any form.[51] Elliot reminds us that even after the scholasticism of Bonaventure (d. 1274), which allows for incorporeal bodies to realign elements to form a temporary body that is neither permanent nor completely transient – angelic power holds the elements together as long as necessary before the elements are returned to their original state.[52]

Grosseteste, writing around the same time, also spends a great deal of time discussing angels and their inherent peculiarities. He describes them as 'purely

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[50] Dyan Elliot, *Fallen Bodies* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), p. 129. See also *Summa Theologica* 1.Q31; and 1.Q50.
[51] Elliot, p. 128.
[52] Elliot, p. 133.

unembodied and intellectual substances, the energies of whose intelligence are inflexibly fixed upon the Trinity'.[53] One of these purely intelligent beings 'must act on the body it assumes in the same immaterial way as does the human spirit: its will affects the subtlest and least material energy of the body, light or bodily spirit, which in turn moves the nerves and muscles'.[54] By the time Aquinas approaches the question, he feels compelled to refute propositions that purely incorporeal creatures can exist:

> There must be some incorporeal creatures. For what is principally intended by God in creatures is good, and this consists in assimilation to God Himself. And the perfect assimilation of an effect to a cause is accomplished when the effect imitates the cause according to that whereby the cause produces the effect; as heat makes heat. Now, God produces the creature by His intellect and will (Question [14], Article [8]; Question [19], Article [4]). Hence the perfection of the universe requires that there should be intellectual creatures. Now intelligence cannot be the action of a body, nor of any corporeal faculty; for every body is limited to "here" and "now". Hence the perfection of the universe requires the existence of an incorporeal creature.[55]

Having established a necessary need for the existence of angels, Aquinas goes on to ascribe to them a place between God and corporeal creatures. Angels exist in form only, without matter and without locality, temporal displacement or mobility as all of these categories of being require finite being. In other words, purely intellectual beings cannot be limited to matters of time or space, as those are the predicates of matter, of which intellect has none. Therefore, angels exist without the necessity of matter and therefore without the constraints of location or time. Thomism demands that Angels – and demons, for that matter – exist as creatures of pure intellect and without bodies.

Scotus, on the other hand, takes a different view on the nature of angels. Firstly, he contends that they are finite. Scotus argues that any 'finite form is limited first in itself before it is limited in respect to matter... The finite character of the angelic essence, then, is something that is prior to the nature of its existence'.[56] Scotus' only

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[53] McEvoy, p. 60.
[54] McEvoy, p. 57.
[55] *Summa Theologica* 1.Q50.
[56] Scotus, 'The Existence of God', in *Duns Scotus: The Philosophical Texts*, ed. by Allan Wolter (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1962), p. 7.

real comments on angels seem to be that there must be some kind of finite element to their existence; otherwise their individualisation would be impossible. He does not seem to question that they exist or that they exist as part of a hierarchy that places them between man and God.

In his article examining the use of mirrors in Dante's work, Gilson states:

> It was after all the sixth-century Christian Platonist, Pseudo-Dionysius the Aeropagite, who did more than any other thinker to organize the cosmos into a cascade of illuminations by presenting the angelic hierarchies as mirrors which received and transmitted divine light.[57]

He is, of course, referring to the Dionysian treatise entitled *The Celestial Hierarchies*, in which the Pseudo-Dionysius establishes the nine orders of angels which demonstrate the emanation and mediation from God to Man.[58] Gilson also states that 'Dionysian ideas on angelic mediation had become commonplace by the late thirteenth century', so it would appear prudent to assert that the role of angel as a reflector to God's intellect would be available both to Chaucer and to his audience.[59] Furthermore, this unique role as intermediate and vessel of the light of the intellect of God to man seems to be the notion which Chaucer's text takes up as its idea of the angel. And although several of the tales present the classic images of demons and angels, each presents an aspect of the inconclusive arguments for and against angelic embodiment.

From the beginning of *The Second Nun's Tale*, the text is fairly orthodox regarding the philosophical certainties of the incorporeality of angels established by Aquinas.[60] In line with Thomist doctrine, we are introduced to the problematic lover of Cecile that represents the current state of indecision in reference to the physicality of angels. Whereas Cecile's angel lover is incorporeal to the point that he may not be seen

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[57] Simon A. Gilson, 'Light Reflection, Mirror Metaphors and Optical Framing in Dante's *Comedy*: Precedents and Transformations', *Neophilologus*, 83 (1999), 241-52 (p. 245).
[58] For a discussion of the physical implications of that mediation, see Matthew Fox and Rupert Sheldrake, *The Physics of Angels* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1996), 29-76.
[59] Gilson, p. 245.
[60] Of course, Chaucer is weaving together material from several sources. See Sherry L. Reames' study of the sources in *Sources and Analogues of the Canterbury Tales*, ed. by Robert M. Correale and Mary Hamel, 2 vols (Cambridge: Brewer, 2002), vol. 1, pp. 491-527.

except by the faithful, he clearly occupies physical space and can make contact with the physical world through the manipulation of the senses (VIII.218). The angel's garlands are physically brought 'fro paradys' and produce strong sensational reactions even in the senses of the as-of-yet unsaved:

> And [Tiburce] syede, "I wondre, this tyme of the yeer,
> Whennes that soote savour cometh so
> Of rose and lilies that I smelle heer.
> For though I hadde hem in myne handes two,
> The savour myghte in me no depper go.
> The sweete smel that in myn herte I fynde
> Hath chaunged me al in another kynde. (VIII.246)

The power of the roses and lilies are being sensed through the nose and through the heart. It is noteworthy that as of yet, the garlands are not addressing the mind. Once again, two aspects of the human soul are being acknowledged while a third and most distinctive partition is being ignored. Chaucer is close to one of his sources here, yet the wording of his stanza is significant in terms of the model of perception and the relationship of sensation to understanding. He adds the image of the smell going deeper into the human consciousness and the allusion to the 'herte' receiving the impression of the physical sensation of smell.[61]

By occupying time and space, the Second Nun's angel not only has an aspect of corporeality, but is also able to bring gifts and to manipulate human senses. He is not the completely disembodied entity asserted by some pre-Thomist doctrines. By the late thirteenth century, angels had, to some extent, been established as 'austere entities, comprised of pure intellect and will'.[62] The angel presented in *The Second Nun's Tale*, and its sources for this saint's life however, is philosophically problematic because of its refusal to adhere rigidly to any of the possible arguments for angelic embodiment or disembodiment, choosing rather to be found somewhere in the middle of the two. As such, he follows the observations of angels made by Aquinas when he states that they

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[61] Compare the passage in II.95-100, in Reames' edition and translation of *In festo Sancte Cecilie virginis et martyris*, in Correale and Hamel, pp. 52-21.
[62] Elliot, p.134.

can occupy time and space, and can affect the sensations of bodies through internal and external stimulation.[63]

Furthermore, we see once again that the angel is not appealing to the intellect of Tiburce but, rather, to his senses: Chaucer mentions the sweetness of the smell twice (VIII.247-8, 256). The conditions of his conversion are to this point entirely sensitive; another reminder that the text chooses to emphasise the corporeal rather than the intellectual aspects of the human body/soul relationship. This is not the only challenge that the text makes to the presupposed exceptional nature of mankind's rationality. If we reconsider the lament of Palamon mentioned above, we see that the passage is particularly interesting in that it comes at the conclusion of Palamon's appeal to the 'cruel goddes' who seem to take no more notice of mankind than they do of sheep in the fold (I.1303-8). The lament is based primarily on the fact that mankind is *meant* to have a degree of priority in relation to the beasts, but, just like the irrational animals they are meant to have dominion over, 'slayn is man right as another beest, / And dwelleth eek in prison and arreest / And hath siknesse and greet adversitee' (I.1309). Again, we see that the lament is based on the very neo-Platonic notion of privation; Palamon is feeling as if he is not enjoying all of the potential divinity to which he is entitled as a human.

The Rational Soul

The text seems to be raising doubts as to whether the fundamental distinction between man and beast, the existence of a rational soul, is either existent or practically relevant. What good is a rational soul, especially in the context of Palamon and Arcite, when the evidence he observes cynically suggests that, at best, mankind is treated no better than livestock? To make matters worse, the human being is burdened his entire life with the rational desire to follow the will of God and thereby to curb his animalistic hungers, only to be rewarded after death with possibly more pain and suffering (I.1315-

[63] *Summa Theologica*, I.Q52, I.Q53, I.Q110 and I.Q11.

23). What good is the just life that filled with 'greet pyne ys', when beasts and beastly men ('a serpent or a thef') spend their lives in freedom and relative unaccountability (I.1324-5)? Of course, it could be well argued here that the human in question is not acting out of reason, but out of the 'lovesickness' with which he has been afflicted. In that limited sense, Palamon is *not* acting as a reasonable man, but, rather, as someone who is being controlled by his appetitive soul. The same could, in fact, be said of anyone who acts contrary to reason. However, one could argue that the fact that mankind in general is meant to be uniquely able to use reason to direct his 'lower' soul, reiterates the argument that his supposed superiority over the beasts is in jeopardy.

The text can be seen not only to be challenging some of the essential distinctions made between rational men and irrational beasts, but also to be raising concerns as to the overall practical benefit of indulging the rational and tempering the unreasonable. By blurring those assumed boundaries that are meant to lay between man and beast, Chaucer's text the tale addresses both the internal and the external hierarchies that are dependant upon those assumptions. If the rational soul is of no real benefit to mankind, or if the rational human is ultimately of no greater inherent worth than irrational beast, than we must begin to wonder whether the compartmentalised soul is really as segregated as we were meant to believe, or, indeed, whether the 'great chain of being' (in regard to the application of different levels of soul-potentiality) applies as rigidly as it has been proposed that it should.

Such challenges add dimensions to the discussion of what is at work when the Nun's Priest describes Chantecleer's reaction to seeing a fox crouched in the tall grass: 'for natureelly a beest desireth flee / fro his contrarie, if he may it see, / Though he never erst hadde seyn it with his ye' (VIII.3279). Undoubtedly, this passage refers to the sensitive soul of the cock that would require it to flee from perceived danger. However, with this brief passage, we also begin to get a hint of how the text is challenging the

rigidity of medieval soul type classifications. A direct reference to the bestiary 'Phisiologus' (VII.4461) reminds us of the common practice of using animals to illustrate specific human characteristics, comparing humans with animals to highlight characteristics associated with baser creatures. Such comparisons are usually just useful illustrations, but they also serve to highlight the possibility that people were at some level able to conceptualise a reasonable 'beast' or, by contrast, a 'beastly' human. After all, the fox goes on to comment on the angelic sounds of the cock's song, prays for the soul of Chantecleer's departed father (VII.3295), and even goes as far to say 'That ther nas no man in no regioun / That hym in song or wisedom myghte passe' (VII.3310). On a purely philosophical level, this further blurs the distinction between the appropriate souls of animals and man, as only the intellect (which is unique to humanity) is able to survive after death. The argument is furthered by Pelen's article 'The Escape of Chaucer's Chauntecleer', in which he not only argues for the correlation made previously by Levy and Adams between the Priest's cock and the fall of humanity, but also points out that the tale deals ironically with the human being's salvation as well.[64] Although Pelen's conclusion has more to do with semiotics than with souls, the reasoning still stands that the general order of Being is, at least on some level, being challenged by the text. By blurring the different definitions of potentiality assumed to exist between man and beast, the use of the conceits of the beast fable provides an avenue to contest the entire structure of cataloguing. At the very least, this can be seen as a demonstration that the rigid classifications of the neo-Platonists between the sensitive and the rational soul are susceptible to scrutiny.

The relationship between the souls of the characters in the *Tales* has become as important as the souls of those within the framework of the pilgrimage to Canterbury. As many of the tales' respective narrators are presented in an imperfect state of spiritual

[64] Marc M. Pelen, 'The Escape of Chaucer's Chauntecleer: A Brief Revaluation', *The Chaucer Review*, 36 (2002), 329-335 (p. 332).

development, so too are the subjects of their tales depicted somewhere between the possible extremes. The Soul, in general, may or may not be as segregated or as departmentalised as some scholars of the late fourteenth century, a century that was heavily indoctrinated with Platonic, neo-Platonic and Aristotelian concepts of corporeality, contrariety, continuity, evaluation and hierarchy, would ask modern critics to believe. In fact, evidence shows that the potential supremacy of the human soul because of its unique capacity for reason (as determined by the philosophical legacy at work behind the texts) may also be a matter still under scrutiny. It would seem presumptuous to imagine that Chaucer's text offers any real alternatives to systematic categorisation of the Soul and its relationship to the body; what the chapter claims to do, as much perhaps as Chaucer's text could claim to do, is to provide an opportunity at least to consider the issue in another way. Neither this chapter nor the *Tales* are able to provide an ultimate and unwavering solution to the problem of humans' relationship to their souls - with any luck, the best either can hope to do is to illustrate that the matter is still very much open to debate. In reference to the state and nature of the human soul, it would seem that Chaucer proves himself to be, as Shoaf predicted he would become, 'a poet of uncertainties and a master craftsman of multiplicities'.[65] However, the dilemma of the matter of Soul leads to another crisis in medieval secular thought that is heavily influenced by the philosophical tenets that have filtered their way from antiquity to the medieval mind. If the unique and potentially pure rationality of the human being is indeed in question, what is the epistemological alternative? We are, of course, left to only our senses and, as the next chapter demonstrates, all of the inherent uncertainties that they entail.

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[65] R.A. Shoaf, 'Notes Towards Chaucer's Poetics of Translation', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 1 (1979), 55-66 (p. 55).

'Sighte Merveillous' or Sleight of Hand?
The Fallibility of Sight and Medieval Problems of Empirical Knowledge in *The Franklin's Tale*

The sight in my opinion is the source of the greatest benefit to us, for had we never seen the stars, and the sun, and the heaven, none of the words which we have spoken about the universe would ever have been uttered. But now the sight of day and night, and the months and the revolutions of the years, have created number, and have given us a conception of time, and the power of enquiring about the nature of the universe; and from this source we have derived philosophy, than which no greater good ever was or will be given by the gods to mortal man.

Timaeus 47a1-b2

Chaucer's work abounds in references to arguments regarding the senses in general and several which express some regard for contemporary optical theory. Even as we thumb through *The Canterbury Tales*, we cannot help but be struck by the visual nature of the work. Of course, the descriptions of the characters and their tales are a necessary element of the storytelling itself, but the incorporation of sensory and optical motifs in the tales raises the interest of any reader who is familiar with the problems the eyes cause for philosophical texts. Even apart from the colourful visual descriptions of the pilgrims in the Prologue, Chaucer's text soon invites readers to recall and to engage with medieval theories of vision. The Knight's Palamon is the first to lament as his heart is pierced through the sight of Emelye – only momentarily before Arcite is likewise afflicted by the sight of the princess as she passes the prison window. In what is generally seen as the most blatantly philosophical of the *Tales*, the impetus of the conflict is generated through the medium of sight, though the bulk of philosophically-orientated criticism tends to focus (not unjustly) on the Boethian qualities and a discussion of free will versus fate.

Likewise, the lewd comedy of the *Miller's Tale* focuses on the absence of sight or recognition, as do the slightly more disturbing elements of the *Reeve's Tale*. Of course, the *Merchant's Tale* deals directly with the loss of sight, the importance of sight in obtaining the truth, and, to some extent, may even deal with the medieval understanding of the connection between sight and the sexual organs. In Chaucer's other writings, of course, references to sight and its connection to great philosophical issues are common. The dream poems speak of visions of a different sort, but even those are connected physiologically and metaphysically to the process of sight. To the medieval mind, and certainly from the texts themselves, the faculty of sight is the key to understanding – or, as is the case with so many of the works, the *mis*understanding of the truth. The prominence of the eyes and the consistent correlation between their

functionality physically, psychologically and spiritually, especially in *The Canterbury Tales*, raises issues that can only really be discussed thoroughly in a discourse that includes the philosophical antecedents that the stories employ. This discussion has not received much critical attention; the premise that the function of the mechanics and epistemological utility of sight is discussed in detail in *The Franklin's Tale* serves as the basis for the following chapter.

The Franklin's Tale is not a tale at all; it is a literary legerdemain. As an epistemological exercise, it embodies the very principles of misdirection and deceit against which it warns. All too often, readers are so engulfed in the 'sighte merveillous' of the courtly project of the tale that they may fail to recognise a significant alternative reading of the text: one that addresses the fundamental principles behind our sensory interaction with 'truth' and the reliability of the information so obtained. The following chapter will attempt to attend to those sleight-handed issues of epistemology and authority by exploring the relationship between the main characters of the tale and relative constituent parts of the process of sense perception they may be understood to represent. Specifically, I will argue that the tale can serve as an exploration of the medieval state of optical theoretical debate, as well as to acknowledge the debt the text acknowledges that the late fourteenth century owes to neo-Platonic theories of the optical process and its significance in relation to *a posteriori* knowledge. Finally, I intend to discuss those theological, philosophical and medical precedents in regard to the characters and situations portrayed by the Franklin in his tale. I hope to be able to demonstrate that the physical and metaphysical processes of sensation are intrinsically invested in the principles of contrariety presented in the ongoing argument of the thesis. Furthermore, I want to show that these theoretical and physical aspects of sensation are significant and contested factors in the late medieval epistemological argument; the *Tales* speak to this debate through *The Franklin's Tale* by demonstrating the unresolved

possibilities between the theories opposing each other and themselves at both ends of the spectrum of optical theory in Dorigen, Arveragus, Aurelius and the Clerk of Orléans.

Appearance and Truth in The Franklin's Tale

This is a tale that addresses the principles of empirical knowledge: it is a tale centred on the representation – or the misrepresentation – of truth. Joseph Dane argues that the issue of 'trouthe' plays an important, if not primary role in uncovering the work's more elusive meanings. [1] In fact, Dane goes as far as to suggest that the different meanings that the word can encompass (personal loyalty, linguistic truth and factuality) define the central conflict in the tale. [2] In Arveragus' ultimately ironic statement that 'Trouthe is the hyeste thyng that man may kepe' (V.1479), there is an implication that the storyline is centred on misrepresenting the truth, misunderstanding the truth, or denying and concealing the truth altogether. Given a medieval understanding of the limitations of the senses in regard to knowledge, it can be argued that the text may be addressing Augustinian, if not directly neo-Platonic, theories of epistemology.

The specific roles of truth and knowledge in a medieval context and in the tale are a starting point for this argument. Notwithstanding Dane's views about the different levels of truth we encounter in the tale, it may suffice to suggest that truth, or the absence of it, dominates every aspect of the tale: its teller, his introduction and numerous aspects of the plot of the story itself indicate that truth, not courtly love or

[1] Joseph A. Dane, 'Double Truth in Chaucer's Franklin's Tale', *Studia Neophilologica*, 63 (1991), 161-7 (p. 162).
[2] Dane, p. 164.

marriage, is the meat of the argument presented by the text.[3] Even before the story begins, we are introduced to it by a series of gentle untruths. The Franklin has already stated how nice it is to be able to converse with the Squire:

> In feith, squier, thow hast thee wel yquit
> And gentilly. I preise wel thy wit,
> Quod the frankeleyn, considerynge thy yowthe,
> So feelyngly thou spekest, sire, I allow the!
> As to my doom, ther is noon that is heere
> Of eloquence that shal be thy peere,
> If that thou lyve; God yeve thee good chaunce,
> And in vertu sende thee continuance!
> For of thy speche I have greet deyntee. (V.673)

Although he freely admits to being impressed by the eloquence and fluidity of the Squire's words, the Franklin is, in effect, showing that he is still the Squire's superior by reminding him that the level achieved by the young man is admirable, 'considering his youth'. The Franklin is, then, placing himself at least socially level, if not above, the Squire by the former's ability to recognise the eloquence and by his desire that his son take after such skills of conversation:

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[3] There are, of course, many possible meanings of the word 'truth' in contemporary medieval literature; meanings which seem to have evolved over time and which lend themselves to an uncertainty of significance to both a medieval and a modern audience. The *MED* articulates the difficulty in pinning down which sense is meant in any given instance when it states 'the word *treuth* and the concepts it expresses defy rigid categorisation. Frequently a specific gloss entails or implies yet another; it would be misleading to suggest that the assignment of a quotation to a sense excludes other glosses' (p. 895). In *The Franklin's Tale*, Chaucer uses several of these meanings, ranging from being used as part of an oath V.1231, to several declarations of a promise (V.759, 910, 998), to assertions of fidelity (V.758, 984). Chaucer can be seen to be working with the ironic ambiguity of the word, perhaps not only as a contemporary concept, but also in awareness of the historical development of the use of the word over time. In other words, if we are to accept (as the *MED* seems to suggest) that the meaning of the word fluctuates in the language between several concepts ranging from the more established meanings regarding moral and practical obligations (fidelity, a promise, an undertaking) to the developing concepts dealing with epistemological concerns (actuality, reality, correspondence to the ultimate or fundamental nature of things), then we might also be willing to accept that Chaucer had a significant degree of flexibility in how he employed the word in the tale . This section of the thesis bases much of its argument on the premise that Chaucer used such an awareness of the fluidity of senses of 'treuth' to his advantage, and approaches the tale with the later concepts foremost in its arguments.

I have a sone, and by the trinitee,
I hadde levere than twenty pounnd worth lond,
Though it right now were fallen in myn hond,
He were a man of swich discrecioun
As that ye been! fy on possessioun,
But if a man be vertuous withal!
I have my sone snybbed, and yet shal,
For he to vertu listeth nat entende;
But for to pleye at dees, and to despende
And lese al that he hath, is his usage.
And he hath levere talken with a page
Than to comune with any gentil wight
Where he myghte lerne gentillesse aright. (V.682)

The Franklin wishes at once to acknowledge the Squire's eloquence while establishing himself as a source of authority on the matter of *gentillesse*. By already cementing the Franklin as 'a worthy vavasour' (I.360), the narrator has completed the Franklin's introduction as a man of indulgence, wealth and society.

However, the Franklin immediately dismisses his own qualifications, in an act which can be interpreted as one of literary conceit, humility or irony. In any case, the means by which to achieve the end result is that of subtle deception. The Franklin, like many of the storytellers, belittles his abilities to do the story justice:

Which I shal seyn with good wyl as I kan.
But, sires, by cause I am a burel man,
At my bigynnyng first I yow biseche,
Have me excused of my rude speche.
I lerned nevere rethorik, certeyn;
Thyng that I speke, it moot be bare and pleyn.
I sleep nevere on the mount of pernaso,
Ne lerned Marcus Tullius Scithero [Cicero].
Colours ne knowe I none, withouten drede,
But swiche colours as growen in the mede,
Or elles swiche as men dye or peynte.
Colours of rethoryk been to me queynte;
My spririt feeleth noght of swich mateere.
But if yow list, my tale shul ye heere. (V.715)

The Franklin has, in fact, set himself up to be unlearned and untrained in the art of rhetoric: he is deaf to the muses and ignorant of the art defined by Cicero.

The opening of the tale introduces a plot in which appearances will be in constant conflict with truth. In other words, what appears to be the case may not always

be what is, and we are thus presented with our first tastes of neo-Platonic contrariety in the tale: that between reality and experience:

> Of his free wyl he swoor hire as a knyght
> That nevere in al his lyf he, day ne nyght,
> Ne sholde upon hym take no maistrie
> Agayn hir wyl, ne kithe hire jalousie,
> But hire obeye, and folwe hir wyl in al,
> As any lovere to his lady shal,
> Save that the name of soveraynetee,
> That wolde he have for shame of his degree. (v.745)

Initially, this marriage agreement seems ideal, in that it proposes that neither husband nor wife suffer from the usual constraints of medieval marriage: in exchange for her fidelity, he promises never to exercise his authority over her. However, the contract is based fundamentally on appearances, as Arveragus makes it clear that, for the sake of his honour, it must appear that he is master in public. This is the first instance in which the way things appear is misaligned to how they really are. Although the two lovers have agreed to a contract in which both seem happy to oblige, it must appear to everyone else that the husband is master over the wife. Deception enters the tale from the beginning, and is thereby poised to underline each of the tale's main events and characters.

The next major event to be seen differently in light of the issue of truth is the moment when Aurelius declares his love for Dorigen. Aurelius, who is described as 'a man of worshipe and honour' (v.962), immediately is shown to be deceitful and manipulative. Aurelius, by the very nature of his courtly interest in Dorigen, is proven to be of necessarily questionable character, as he is presented not only as the instigator of an adulterous proposal, but as an opportunistic companion as well. Hidden amongst the language of courtly romance, the text is presenting another dishonest situation. In this case, the truth in question is Aurelius' intention to seduce Dorigen: an intention of which she herself claims not to have been aware:

Is this youre wyl, quod she, and sey ye thus?
Nevere erst, quod she, ne wiste I what ye mente.
But now, Aurelie, I knowe your entente,
By thilke God that yaf me soule and lyf,
Ne shal I nevere been untrewe wyf
In word ne werk, as fer as I have wit;
I wol been his to whom that I am knyt.
Taak this for fynal answere as of me. (v.980)

Dorigen appears genuinely surprised and offended by Aurelius' deception; her reaction is enough to indicate to the audience that the potential suitor was, in fact, operating under false pretences. However, Dorigen may very well be playing her courtly role in rejecting the advances of an obvious suitor, thus continuing the courtly game and keeping her honour intact. Either way, we are shown another aspect of the plot that has as its foundation the misrepresentation or the ignorance of fact. Appearing to be a comfort and a confidant, Aurelius has swooped in at the first opportunity to take advantage of Dorigen's grief and Arveragus' absence.

Aurelius' flirtations with truth continue as he attempts to hold Dorigen to her promise, again, by means of deception. Whereas Dorigen's promise is to love Aurelius if he 'remoeve alle the rokkes, stoon by stoon' (v.993), Aurelius conspires to work around the demand by appealing to the god Phoebus. Phoebus, as the manifestation of Apollo as the sun, becomes important on two levels. Firstly, it is important to note that Apollo is the Greek god of musical and poetic inspiration. As such, he represents the muses whose sacred mountain, Parnassus, is referred to by the Franklin in the prologue to his tale (v.721). This further strengthens the argument that the Franklin himself is invested in deceit, as the self-referential nature of the use of Phoebus is an alteration that the text has made from Boccaccio's original plot, wherein the supplicant asks that a summer garden blossom in the middle of winter.[4] Apollo is also the god of divination and prophecy, both of which are centred on the discovery of future or hidden truths. Lastly, as will be discussed later in this chapter, Phoebus represents Light which, in

[4] This is an important difference in that the original tale asks that the feat be completed actually, whereas Chaucer's version demands that the miracle only seem to be actualised.

medieval terms, is essential to the understanding of the process of vision and appearance.

However, it is not only Aurelius' invocation of Apollo which is interesting in terms of deception; the appeal itself is of note. Although Dorigen asks that the rocks be removed, it is clear that Aurelius never plans to fulfil the request. In one sense, he is reluctant to read correctly the meaning of Dorigen's promise (that removing all of the rocks would be impossible; therefore, becoming her lover is similarly unattainable). Fortunately, he is perfectly willing to accept the spirit of the agreement when he plans to make it only appear that the rocks have been removed. His request to Apollo is not that he should remove the rocks, but that he should make it seem that the rocks have been taken from the shore. Literally, he would not be fulfilling his part of the agreement, as Dorigen states clearly that the rocks are to be moved, not hidden. Aurelius, then, has a clear intent of deceit in regard to obtaining Dorigen's love, and it is a further pursuit of this deception that at last grants him the right to claim his prize.

Truth, in one way or another, already appears to be a theme in the tale. However, we must also be able to recognise that all of the 'truths' discussed are relative to their perception by the characters through the medium of sight. If the concept of truth is important to the tale, the general theories of sensation and the specific epistemological value of vision must somehow be related to its discovery.

Sight in The Franklin's Tale

Although many senses are addressed, none gets more attention than that of sight and for good reason: eyes, to the medieval natural scientist, are the keys to knowledge. Everything relating to sight (light, illusion, colour, etc) demands special attention in fourteenth century epistemological studies owing in great part to the positive and negative attention it had received by its Aristotelian and neo-Platonic investigators. For example, Plato tells us blatantly in the *Theaetetus* that sense-perception is not

knowledge when he asks whether: 'Thus, then, the assertion that knowledge and perception are one, involves a manifest impossibility'.[5] Plato, who asserts that 'truth is given in reflection, in the judgement, not in bare sensation', insists that sense-perception is too focused on unstable entities to allow for any real knowledge.[6] In fact, knowledge (as opposed to opinion) only occurs when the mind is dealing directly with stable and unchanging forms and not, as sensation does, with the ever-changing realm of the material world.

This opinion is ratified by Augustine, who 'follows the Platonist tradition in asserting that knowledge is not derived from sense-perception or experience'.[7] In fact, Augustine claims that the mind alone is incapable of real knowledge as well. Divine illumination is needed in order to make accurate judgements about our experience in the world. God, who is the light of the mind, is the power that allows the rational mind to achieve its inherent cognitive potential.[8] Alan D. Fitzgerald's invaluable reference, *Augustine through the Ages*, refers to *De Genesi ad litteram* (*On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis*), during which Augustine states that 'the senses then act as messengers to the soul, so that it can form within itself the object that is called to its attention from the outside world'.[9] Carol Harrison's contribution to the article seems to indicate that most of Augustine's time spent dealing with the issues regarding sensation encourages an understanding of the transitional nature of sensation in knowledge; sensations form an 'image of the object sensed [...] without a moment's delay in the spirit of the one who sees'.[10] For Augustine, the pre-eminent authority on all things medieval, sensation is a very neo-Platonic activity; it is merely a medium through which

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[5] Plato, *Theaetetus* (164b8-9), trans. by B. Jowett, in *The* Dialogues *of Plato*, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), III, pp. 191-320 (p. 262).
[6] *A History of Philosophy*, ed. by Frederick SJ Copleston, 9 vols. (London: Burns and Oates, 1966), I, p. 145.
[7] *From Aristotle to Augustine (Routledge History of Philosophy Vol. 2)*, ed. by David Furley (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 395.
[8] *From Aristotle to Augustine*, p. 395.
[9] Allan D. Fitzgerald, et al., eds, *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopaedia* (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), p. 766.
[10] Fitzgerald, p. 766-7.

imperfect physical manifestations of reality are presented to the intellect for interpretation. Interestingly, Harrison also clarifies the distinction made by Augustine between physical sensation and those perceived by the *Spiritual Senses*. By 'Spiritual Senses', Harrison is referring to the 'complete anthropology of the inner man' established by Augustine throughout his commentaries on the Gospels and in the *City of God*. Ultimately,

> 'Augustine identifies three sorts of vision. The first, corporeal vision (*visio corporalis*), is concerned with the bodily eyes and sense perception [...]; the second, spiritual vision (*visio spiritualis*), with the inward perception, in terms of images stored in the mind or memory, of what has been sensed externally; the third, intellectual vision (*visio intellectualis*), is concerned purely with what the mind knows and sees interiorly, unmediated by external sense perception and without corporeal images'.[11]

The final vision, the intellectual vision, is the only vision capable of 'seeing' God, because of his necessarily indeterminate – and therefore invisible – nature. Despite his neo-Platonic account for multiple, non-physiological visionary capacities, Harrison insists that Augustine's account of mediated physical sensation closely mirrors the principles found in Aristotle, the Stoics and the neo-Platonists.[12]

On the other hand, Aristotle tells us plainly that, 'seeing, regarded as a supply for the primary wants of life, and in its direct effects, is the superior sense'.[13] In this brief statement, Aristotle not only proclaims an ability of sensation to supply directly the 'wants of life', but establishes sight as the most appropriate of the five senses to accomplish this ambitious epistemological task. Furthermore, Aristotle claims that sight, 'most of all the senses make us know and brings to light many differences between things'.[14] Lindberg and Steneck say:

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[11] Fitzgerald, p. 767-8.
[12] Fitzgerald, p. 766.
[13] Aristotle, *On the Sense and the Sensible* (437a4-5), trans. by J.I. Beare, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, 2 vols (Chichester: Princeton University Press, 1984), I, 693-713 (p.694).
[14] *Metaphysics*, 980a26-27 (p. 1552).

> the sense of sight is first in the order of knowing. This was the conclusion reached, so far as we are able to judge, by every medieval and renaissance philosopher who considered the matter. Albertus Magnus and Duns Scotus defended it; so also did Thomas Aquinas, Perre d'Ailly, Zabarella, and many others.[15]

From Aristotle onwards, the sense of sight dominates medieval thought as the primary way in which the human animal interacts with, and gains some degree of knowledge of, reality. Christian tradition also places sight at the top of the sensual hierarchy. Norman Klassen says 'the imagery of vision and light dominates the Christian scriptures from the first verses of Genesis to the last of the Apocalypse'.[16] The sense of sight enjoys a consistently primary role in the development of knowledge theories through Pseudo-Dionysius, Boethius, Bonaventure, Witelo, Aquinas, and Julian of Norwich among others.[17]

As far as Augustine is concerned, epistemological emanation can be seen as the most flexible of terms that has to accommodate the transition from ancient neo-Platonism to Christian neo-Platonism. For although Augustine rejects unintelligent or accidental emanation as a rule, he tends to agree with neo-Platonists, who see 'ideas as thoughts of God and place them in Nous, or the divine mind, which emanate from the One as the first proceeding hypostasis'.[18] In general, Augustine adapted the neo-Platonic theory of emanation to state that 'the light which comes from God to the human mind enables the mind to see the characteristics of changelessness and necessity in the eternal truths'.[19] In other words, by incorporating neo-Platonic principles and adapting them to Christian ideological constraints, Augustine at once both reinforces the influence of neo-Platonism of medieval thought and re-establishes emanate light and

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[15] David C. Lindberg and Nicholas H. Steneck, 'The Sense of Vision and the Origins of Modern Science', in *Science, Medicine and Society in the Renaissance*, ed. by Allen G. Debus (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1972), 29-46.
[16] Norman Klassen, *Chaucer on Love, Knowledge and Sight* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 1995), p. 6.
[17] Klassen describes the development and perpetuation of the primacy of sight as he establishes the literary tradition of conflict between love and intellect, and the role that sight plays in that conforming to and confusing that inherent juxtaposition. On this literary development, see pp. 2-38 especially.
[18] Copleston, *History of Philosophy*, II, p. 60.
[19] Copleston, *History of Philosophy*, II, p. 61.

Divine Illumination as the foundational metaphors for knowledge. References to light and sight have implications in medieval literature; the investigation of optics is inextricably related to contemporary theories of epistemology. It is not Augustine's optical theories which are important, but, rather the implications of his work and the metaphors he employs in regard to light and sight which profoundly affect both the development of optical theory and the application of those developments in the social discourses which were to become the framework of *The Franklin's Tale.*

It is not surprising, then, to find sight as a reoccurring theme in *The Franklin's Tale* when the tale is dealing with matters regarding the perception of truth. It is unclear, however, how that interaction worked and to what degree an understanding of reality was limited by the use of sight.

The Franklin's Tale and Contemporary Theories about Vision and Knowledge

There are two fundamental components of medieval theories of vision: how sight works and what, if anything, it means in relation to reality.[20] The tale presents the contemporary stalemate between the opposing schools within these two aspects of theories of vision: the practical matters of optics and philosophical issues of epistemology. Written in a time when the debates over how the eye works and what vision can say about reality had yet to be resolved, the tale offers the reader an insight into the current state of indecision in the two disciplines. Epistemologically, the tale parallels contemporary philosophical discourses, which themselves are based on neo-Platonic systems (the current incarnation of which shares basic tenets with Aristotelianism as well). As a whole, these systems promote sight as the primary source of any knowledge attainable through physical sensation and rely heavily on metaphorical inferences to sight as the foundation of its epistemological system.

Plato's discussion of vision is centred in, but not limited to, the *Timaeus*. The claim that Plato takes the extramissionists'[21] point of view is usually taken from the following passage:

[20] Although it may seem reductive, I use capital letters here to denote philosophical absolutes, rather than practical relatives. In other words, 'reality' refers to that which actually is, whatever that may be.
[21] 'Extramissionists' and 'intromissionist' are terms coined to differentiate between the two schools of thought regarding the process of vision. As the names suggest, an 'extramissionist' would believe that the primary functions of the eye occur because of an outward radiation of a medium from the eye to the external subject of vision. On the other hand, an 'intromissionist' would claim that the eye is a passive organ, acted upon by an external causation.

> And of the organs they first contrived the eyes to give light, and the principle according to which they were inserted was as follows: So much of fire as would not burn, but gave a gentle light, they formed into a substance akin to the light of every-day life; and the pure fire which is within us and related thereto they made to flow through the eyes in a stream smooth and dense, compressing the whole eye, and especially the centre part, so that it kept out everything of a coarser nature, and allowed to pass only this pure element. When the light of day surrounds the stream of vision, then like falls upon like, and they coalesce, and one body is formed by natural affinity in the line of vision, wherever the light that falls from within meets with an external object. And the whole stream of vision, being similarly affected in virtue of similarity, diffuses the motions of what it touches or what touches it over the whole body, until they reach the soul, causing that perception which we call sight.[22]

Plato's views seem clear enough: a 'gentle light' issues forth from the eye and mixes with its like, daylight. This mixture of 'eye-light' and daylight form 'one body' 'which serves as a material intermediary between the visible object and the eye'.[23] Emanations from the visible object must encounter this mixture of 'ocular emanation' and daylight for the motion of the visible object to be detected as sensation by the soul. Plato goes on to say that particles of colour may be of varying size, and therefore may lie outside the range of perceptibility:

> Colours are flames which emanate from all bodies, having particles corresponding to the sense of sight. Some of the particles are less and some larger, and some are equal to the parts of the sight. The equal particles appear transparent; the larger contract and the lesser dilate the sight. White is produced by the dilation, black by the contraction, of the particles of sight. There is also a swifter motion of another sort of fire which forces a way through the passages of the eyes, and elicits from them a union of fire and water which we call tears. The inner fire flashes forth, and the outer finds a way in and is extinguished in the moisture, and all sorts of colours are generated by the mixture. This affection is termed by us dazzling, and the object which produces it is called bright.[24]

Although Plato never attempts a systematic discussion of the optical process, we can gather from pieces of his work the general idea that he favoured the theory that light was emitted from the eye and mixed with light from the sun in order to facilitate the detection of motion in the visible world. Moreover, particles 'emanate from all bodies' which, when interacting with the medium of eye-light and daylight, produce colours and

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[22] *Timaeus*, 45b2-d3, (pp. 731-732).
[23] David C. Lindberg. *Theories of Vision from Al-Kindi to Kepler* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), p. 5.
[24] *Timaeus*, (pp. 655-656).

various other optical phenomena. For Plato, then, the eye is not a passive instrument receiving stimuli from its environment. Rather, it issues a ray of fire which mixes with existent daylight to transmit the awareness of motion – be it of large bodies or of particles – to the rational soul.

Aristotle sees this theory as completely untenable. Flatly, he states:

> If vision were the result of light issuing from the eye as from a lantern, why should the eye not have had the power of seeing even in the dark? It is totally idle to say, as the *Timaeus* does, that the visual ray coming forth in the darkness is quenched.[25]
>
> Aristotle's theory of vision depends chiefly on his valuation of the medium between the eye and the object of vision. This transparent medium (air) must be present, as 'neither an object separated from the eye by void space nor an object placed directly on the eye can be seen'.[26]

Light, therefore is the actualisation of the transparent medium through which the motions of colour are made visible. If time permitted, this theory could be discussed in relation to phantasm and the concept of memory as it serves as a facility of maintaining that original sensational imprint. However, it must suffice at this time only to realise that, according to Aristotle, the sights are objects of vision, not agents of vision as previously postulated by Plato.

Major developments in the field can be attributed to Euclid, Ptolemy and al-Kindi (mathematical extramissionists) on the one hand, and Galen, Avicenna, Averroes (intromissionists) on the other.[27] However, it is important to note, as Lindberg does, that the different theoretical disciplines are difficult to compare, as they are directed with different aims. In other words, although we cannot implicitly compare the mathematical concerns of Euclid with the anatomical discipline of Galen simply on the basis that both deal with the eye, we cannot, on the other hand, deny that many 'anatomical' and 'mathematical' works are heavily influenced by religious and philosophical concerns.

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[25] *On Sense and the Sensible*, 437b11-16, (p. 695).
[26] Lindberg, *Theories of Vision*, p. 7.
[27] A complete discussion of the progress can be found in Lindberg, above.

Similarly, when speaking of the medieval development of optics, we need to mention, if only briefly, Augustine as a major influence in the field simply for the reason that everything he wrote seems to have been widely read and accepted by most thinkers after him in the Middle Ages. In his writing, we see evidence of an established return to the extramission theory of vision, a recession that can only be explained by the lack of availability of the Arabic Alhazen and the ubiquity of encyclopaedic references to Plato's *Timaeus* provided to the early Middle Ages by Calcidius. Augustine, in *On the Trinity*, expresses his extramission theory clearly: 'For the same rays, as they shoot forth each from its own eye, are affected several [...]'.[28] Although Augustine does not elaborate much on his extramission theory (or at least on his agreement of the existing Platonic notion), the fact that he takes as certain the reality of the emanation of light from the eye re-enforces his Platonic influences and his neo-Platonic interpretation of the original material.[29]

Further developments in the field of optics between the relative times of Augustine and Chaucer would add fuel to the debate and further reinforce the importance of vision as a means to acquire knowledge. William of Conches, Abelard of Bath and Robert Grosseteste developed optical theories in the Middle Ages which incorporated their own discoveries and utilised the information brought about by the twelfth-century revival of neo-Platonism and discovery and 'assimilation of Arabic learning'.[30] In general, theories of optics developed further as the understanding and accessibility to ancient works grew. By the time we arrive at Chaucer's most contemporary author on the subject, Roger Bacon, most optical theorists were familiar with at least some of the writings of Euclid, Avicenna, Aristotle, and al-Kindi.[31] What

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[28] *On the Trinity*, in *The Works of Aurelius Augustine*, ed. by Rev. Marcus Dods, 15 vols (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1873), VII, p. 266.
[29] Lindberg, however, does note that Augustine makes another comment on the extramission of rays of light from the eye in his commentary on Genesis (p. 90).
[30] Lindberg, *Theories of Vision*, p. 93.
[31] Lindberg, *Theories of Vision*, p. 94.

Bacon does with this wide variety of information and points of view is to set the stage of optical theory for the next 300 years.

Although primarily a mathematician and experimental scientist, Bacon's research and commentary on the issue of *perspectiva* laid the cornerstone of mathematical theories of optics and the philosophical implications thereof for generations to come. By examining Bacon's work, primarily his *Opus Majus*, we can not only trace the development of scientific thought concerning the sense of sight, but also recognise the philosophical ramifications of such theories which would have been present at the time of the writing of *The Franklin's Tale.*

Working from a knowledge base rooted in ancient Greece, Bacon begins his examinations of the process of vision where Plato, Aristotle, Euclid, Augustine and Isidore of Seville leave off. [32] At the time of Bacon's *Perspectiva*, there were two dominating theories of light, neither of which had claimed a complete victory over the other. On one hand, many medieval contemporaries held the Platonic view that vision rays were emitted from the eye to external things.[33]

In the fourteenth century, Plato's and Aristotle's respective theories of the extramissionist or the intromissionist nature of sight are to be replaced by Bacon's somewhat confused and self-contradictory amalgamation of the two. In the end, although he was able to present a sophisticated understanding of the mathematical and anatomical natures of vision, he was unable to reconcile the debate between the Platonists and the Aristotelians as to whether light was emitted from or received by the eye. In fact, it becomes clear from examining his work that, although he began his

[32] As Lindberg reminds us, however, it is clear that the Greek discoveries of 'Euclid, Aristotle, Ptolemy and others' were not directly available to the Latinate of the Middle Ages. See his *Roger Bacon and the Origins of Perspectiva in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. XXV-XXXII, for more details of the transition from the Greek schools of optics through the encyclopaedic resources of the early Middle Ages to Bacon's time.
[33] Lindberg, *Origins of Perspectiva*, p. XXIX.

studies as a staunch Aristotelian in regard to optics, he was undoubtedly influenced by Platonic, neo-Platonic and Pythagorean methodologies.[34]

Ultimately, the state of optical theory in Chaucer's time, is likewise unclear. On one hand, the age inherits a strong sense of Platonic extramission theory through the philosophical, medical and theological records. On the other, the scientific community stressing theories of Aristotelian intromission, and struggling to find a balance between evidence of radiation (which would support extramission) and experiments with human vision which support intromission. Bacon is particularly representative of the state of indecisiveness that pervades the thinking concerning vision at the time of *The Franklin's Tale*. Although the general knowledge concerning the principles of optical anatomy has improved, the overall understanding of process of sight is left in a state of scientific limbo, and would remain in this state of confusion until Kepler and Galileo. This fundamentally precarious state of optical affairs is the medical environment into which Chaucer was born and which envelops the writing of *The Franklin's Tale*.

With this state of indecision in mind, the characters in *The Franklin's Tale* can be seen in a new light. One of the central themes of *The Franklin's Tale* is vision itself. The tale itself can be seen as an implicit investigation of the points covered by this contemporary debate. The characters can be interpreted in terms of elements of contemporary optical theory discourses and their respective roles in the text re-emphasise the current lack of scientific consensus on the matter.

Two Optical Theories and The Franklin's Tale

The Franklin's Tale can be read as a dialogue about the issues inherent to the medieval debate of optical epistemology. Medieval optical tradition has support in all three camps of theoretical possibility: sight as a receptive effect, sight as active causation and sight as a physical and metaphysical combination of the two. A character

[34] Lindberg, *Origins of Perspectiva*, p. XXIX.

representing the projection of light or of movement, would be concerned as acting as an agent of vision, of creation and of relative causality. Such a 'mover' would need to be invested in producing a visual stimulus, rather than receiving it. Such a character is, of course, Aurelius. The reception of visual stimulus, however, would be represented by someone who is largely affected by external forces: someone who receives images and may be seen to demonstrate the difficulties in epistemology encountered in such reception.

Readers with neo-Platonism in mind might recognise Dorigen as a receptive object of the optical process. In contrast to Aurelius, Dorigen's tale is intimately concerned with how she is affected by the things she sees, rather than how she projects herself to others. She is described physically in only one almost throw-away generic poetic line of superlative hyperbole: 'For she was oon the faireste under sonne' (v.734). She is given few, if any, physical attributes other than that. At no time are we specifically told how she appears to others. As she is not described by how she appears, the text chooses to portray her by that which appears to her. As a result, readers are only informed of her entirely by descriptions of how she responds to visual stimuli. Her actions, on the whole, are limited in description by how and what she sees. Even more accurately, Dorigen's psychological relationship to knowledge is based consistently upon what she does not see. In other words, Dorigen's happiness (or lack thereof) is centred primarily on the knowledge she receives through a relative vacuity of visual input. What she does not know does indeed hurt her, as she is psychologically and physically affected by that which she cannot see. For instance, as soon as her husband is removed from her sight, she begins to suffer:

> For his absence wepeth she and siketh,
> As doon thise noble wyves whan hem liketh.
> She moorneth, waketh, wayleth, fasteth, pleyneth;
> Desir of his presence hire so destreyneth
> That al this wyde world she sette at noght. (v.817)

In this passage, Dorigen's actions are controlled by her lack of vision. As her husband is removed from her company and therefore her sight, she is distressed. It is only the consolation of her friends which finally impresses upon her hope and reason; yet another example of Dorigen more as a receptive object rather than as an agent of causality.

In fact, it is clear that many of Dorigen's activities are likewise defined. Even when she finally agrees to come out of isolation and take a walk in the countryside, she is disturbed by the sight of the ships on the sea, none of which carry her lord home to her (v.853-6). Another such walk yields the vision of the 'grisly rokkes blake' (v.859) on the shoreline which keep her husband from returning. Such is the despair caused by such a sight that she initially questions the fundamental (neo-Platonic) principle that all things, even the shore's rocks, are good because they emanate from God. The conclusion of her friends is to lead her away from the shoreline which is causing her so much 'disconfort' (v.896), to a walled garden where the images which enter her vision can be controlled. More importantly, the garden represents a place where images that do not enter her vision can also be controlled.

Not surprisingly, it is in this confined and controlled space that the characters of Aurelius and Dorigen are introduced to each other. Aurelius' demonstrations of courtly love and Dorigen's eventual observation and realisation of his intentions are initially met with disbelief: Dorigen claims not to have seen what he meant in his attentions. The apparent initial alarm, however, is resolved by a contract of Dorigen's inception: that the offensive and dangerous rocks be removed stone by stone from the shoreline, 'that ther nys no stoon ysene' (v.996). By making the demand, Dorigen has challenged Aurelius to remove the rocks from sight, thus relieving her of her torment. This challenge sets up the series of events which demonstrate Aurelius' role as the allegorical extramissionist, as well as the climactic conclusion to the two characters' interaction.

Appearance, Projection and the Courtly Man

From his first appearance in the tale, Aurelius is someone who is concerned to project images of courtly pursuit:

> That fressher was and jolyer of array,
> As to my doom, than is the month of may.
> He syngeth, daunceth, passynge any man
> That is, or was, sith that the world bigan.
> Therwith he was, if men sholde hym discryve,
> Oon of the beste farynge man on lyve;
> Yong, strong, right vertuous, and riche, and wys,
> And wel biloved, and holden in greet prys. (v.927)

Aurelius is a visual character: all of his attractive qualities are meant to be observed, and most are to be seen. Only his singing and his wisdom are observable in a way other than by sight alone; the other virtues attributed to him are ways in which he is perceived primarily through vision. This, of course, is in perfect agreement with courtly convention, but also serves to illustrate that in Aurelius we find a man who produces images, someone who projects a vision of courtly sexuality. He is, in fact, the best projector of such an image the world has ever seen: he is a personification of a fourteenth-century courtly suitor. From his introduction, Aurelius is not presented as a character who is affected by the others, but rather how he affects the vision of his audience.

This trend continues throughout his appearances in the tale. At most times, he is described in terms of the image he projects. He asks Phoebus to 'se the teeris on [his] cheke'(v.1078), after which he immediately collapses in a demonstrative heap (v.1080). While he again exhibits the signs of courtly distress and lovesickness by weeping and wailing in his brother's company (v.1116), his brother is inspired to seek out the help of the man who will in turn inarguably cement Aurelius' role as a producer of vision: the Clerk of Orléans.[35]

[35] Potentially the subject of another doctorate, the effect of 'lovesickness' on Aurelius does, in this case, serve to remind us that Aurelius is concerned with the extramissional powers of sight.

The Clerk-magician of Orléans is the most accessible demonstration of the power to produce images. Upon his introduction to Aurelius and his brother, the Clerk initiates a series of illusions to impress the desperate men:

> [the magician] shewed [Aurelius], er he wente to sopeer,
> Forestes, parkes ful of wilde deer;
> Ther saugh he hertes with hir hornes hye,
> The gretteste that evere were seyn with ye.
> He saugh of hem an hondred slayn with houndes,
> And somme with arwes blede of bittre woundes.
> He saugh, whan voyded were thise wilde deer,
> Thise fauconers upon a fair ryver,
> That with hir haukes han the heron slayn.
> Tho saugh he knyghtes justyng in a playn;
> And after this he dide hym swich plesaunce
> That he hym shewed his lady on a daunce,
> On which hymself he daunced, as hym thoughte.
> And whan this maister that this magyk wroughte
> Saugh it was tyme, he clapte his handes two,
> And farewel! al oure revel was ago. (v.1189)

Here, we see that the magician is not only a creator of images, but a causality of sight as well. It is important to note that the word 'illusion' — especially in the medieval sense of deception — is not used in the description of the events. Aurelius 'saugh' everything that is presented. All of the images – harts, hounds, forests, women, falcons, etc. – are seen by Aurelius and his brother. Even after the vision abruptly disappears, and Aurelius and his brother realise that they have not moved from the magician's study, they are said to have seen a 'sighte merveillous' (v.1206) and not portrayed to have been mistaken. In other words, the magician has joined Aurelius as a personification of the argument for extramission in what can be seen as a demonstration of the true power of image production and external stimuli. The Clerk of Orléans has shown us that images can be produced which can then be received by a sense organ or an audience (nothing more than a group of sense organs) in order to facilitate vision. As he then becomes the employee of Aurelius, Aurelius once again is established as the senior agent of image production.

The reader is left, then, with two presentations of optical theory. On one hand, we encounter Dorigen, who is offered to us in terms as an optically-passive recipient of information. On the other hand, we have the Clerk of Orléans and Aurelius, who are primarily concerned with the production of images and the disbursement of information or, as is the case, misinformation. Rather than reading the tale allegorically as a line-by-line investigation into medieval optical theory, it is more useful to look at *The Franklin's Tale* as an acknowledgement of the inherent possibilities and relative shortcomings of the feuding schools of metaphysics and optics: one that localises both camps' respective fundamental weakness in the common problem of authority. In other words, both the intromissionists and the extramissionists must ultimately deal with the source of their sensory information and how the awareness of that source affects the validity of the information provided.

Illusion and the Black Rocks

At this point, the discussion turns from optics to epistemology, moving beyond the realm of how we might see and into the convoluted discussion of what such sight can tell us in terms of its relationship to reality. Undeniably, the most important passage of the tale in terms of epistemology is the scene in which the Clerk of Orléans, acting as an agent of sight, interacts with both Aurelius and Dorigen, both of whom are reliant on the Clerk for their information. As far as this relationship is concerned, the central scene involves the 'removal' of the rocks from the shoreline by the Clerk of Orléans. It is of course, at most a deceitful magic trick and at worst a well-timed acknowledgement of the unusually high tides predicted from charts. As the Franklin tells us:

> This is to seye, to maken illusioun,
> By swich an apparence or jogelrye –
> I ne kan no termes of astrologye –
> That she and every wight sholde wene and seye
> That of britaigne the rokkes were aweye,
> Or ellis they were sonken under grounde. (v.1264)

Even if it were not supported later in the text, it is clear by this passage alone that the miracle for which Aurelius has prayed will not come to be through factuality. This, of course, is a key difference between Chaucer's tale and its probable source in Boccaccio: whereas Boccaccio's heroine is required to taste of the fruit grown in the factual garden created by the herbalist, Dorigen is not even asked to inspect the shoreline which has been relieved of its rocks.[36]

It must come as no surprise, then, when the rocks are 'taken' from the shore by means of some unknown magical phenomena:

> But thurgh his magik, for a wyke or tweye,
> It semed that alle the rokkes were aweye. (v.1295)

Of course, it has been the topic of much discussion that the rocks are, in fact, not gone at all, but only 'semed' to be so. The terms of the agreement between Aurelius and Dorigen have not actually been met, and it is only through a misrepresentation of reality that Dorigen feels obliged to commit either suicide or adultery. Wood in 1966 pointed out that the Clerk assists in the propagation of false knowledge.[37] What has been largely ignored in scholarship since Chauncey Wood's article is the role in which the Clerk also participates in the propagation of the false knowledge. Wood's work on the tides of medieval Brittany claims that there exists a convincing argument that the unusually high tides that covered the shore's rocks were in fact not caused by magic, but predicted by science.

The long passage describing the Clerk's preparation for the required task is riddled with language which suggests that all of the fuss-making was a mere delay and distraction, smoke and mirrors, much like mechanical devices used in court to supply

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[36] Chauncey Wood, 'Of Time and Tide in the Franklin's Tale', *Philological Quarterly*, 45 (1966), 688-711 (p. 709). For Boccaccio's version, see the fifth story of the tenth day of *The Decameron* (London: Penguin Books, 1995), 736-731.
[37] Wood, pp. 700-701.

the visions reported by Aurelius' brother .[38] The use of words to introduce the display such as 'japes' and 'wrecchednesse' indicate not only the Franklin's disposition towards non-Christian "miracles", but the level of deceit that is necessarily to be employed in their working. What follows is an elaborate display of astronomical knowledge, designed to divert the audience's attention away from the fact that the show is merely one of illusion and the calculations are important not only in that they look impressive, but also in that they buy the Clerk the time he needs for his natural occurrence to appear supernatural in origin. Ultimately, after 'no lenger maked he delayes' the 'illusioun' is ready and the rocks seem to disappear. The Clerk, in agreeing to deceive Dorigen that the rocks have been removed, has also succeeded in tricking Aurelius into believing that he is a great magician, or, in fact, that he did anything at all.

In regard to optical theory, the resolution of the tale is as problematic as the events that lead to it. In optical terms, there is ultimately *no* real resolution presented.[39] It becomes increasingly clear, then, that if we are ostensibly dealing with a tale about the physical process of vision, we are ultimately dealing with a tale which is addressing the common problem in both of the predominant optical theories: that neither the intromissionists nor the extramissionists can escape being epistemologically useless if we do not first question the authority of our information. In the end, this interpretation of *The Franklin's Tale* suggests that the text rejects the great undecided state of affairs in late medieval epistemology. Chaucer's text has taken the argument of medieval

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[38] See Laura Hibbard Loomis, 'Secular Dramatics in the Royal Palace, Paris, 1378, 1389, and Chaucer's Tregetoures', *Speculum*, 33 (1958), 242-44; and (V.1139): 'For I am siker that ther be sciences / By whiche men make diverse apparences, / Syche as thise subtile tregetoures pleye. / For ofte at feestes have I wel herd seye / That tregetours, withinne an halle large, / Have maad come in a water and a barge, /And in the halle rowen up and doun. / Somtyme hath semed come a grym leoun; / And sometyme floures sprynge as in a mede; Somtyme a vyne, and grapes white and rede; / Somtyme a castel, al of lym and stoon; / And whan hem lyked, voyded it anon. / Thus semed it to every mannes sighte'.

[39] Of course, there are other significant considerations of Dorigen in general and her role in the gender-charged resolution of the tale. For specific discussions of Dorigen, see Nina Manasan Greenberg, 'Dorigen as Enigma: The Production of Meaning in *The Franklin's Tale*', *The Chaucer Review,* 33 (1999), 329-49; Francine McGregor, 'What of Dorigen? Agency and Ambivalence in *The Franklin's Tale*', *The Chaucer Review*, 31 (1997), 365-78; or Anne Thompson Lee, '"A Woman True and Fair": Chaucer's Portrayal of Dorigen in *The Franklin's Tale*', *The Chaucer Review,* 19 (1984), 169-178.

knowledge away from inconclusive arguments regarding the processes by which humans might come across information and reminded the reader of the value of first evaluating the authority of the information itself. As Traugott Lawler says in his discussion of relationships with the one and the many, the principle of authority defines many aspects of the *Tales*, including the way in which characters 'unwittingly' become authorities themselves by telling their tales. [40] Although it is not necessary to apply Lawler's theories of *exemplum* to the tale, his insight demonstrates how important the concept of authority is in determining the value of information we receive. Once it can be determined *how* best to communicate information regarding reality, how to communicate that information to others can then be considered. As the next chapter attempts to cover, the mode of communication of the truth to others is just as important, and just as rife with binary categories of opposition, as the method of its discovery.

[40] Traugott Lawler, *The One and the Many in the Canterbury Tales* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1980), pp. 83-4.

Poetry Does Philosophy

The Squire's Tale as a Argument for the Epistemological Utility of Poetry

For the melodies of Olympus are derived from Marsyas who taught them, and these, whether they are played by a great master or a miserable flute-girl, have a power which no others have

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Criticism of *The Squire's Tale* has focused particularly on the issues of its unfinished state, its affinity with chivalric romance, its preconception of the East, but, above all, questions of style and rhetoric have attracted the most attention. This chapter proposes to explore the idea that it may address a developing fourteenth-century anxiety about the justification for fiction and secular poetry. Whereas this question has been addressed in relation to other *Tales*, it has yet to be considered at length in relation to *The Squire's Tale*.[1] Specifically, this chapter proposes that *The Squire's Tale* ultimately seeks to validate the fantastic, unimportant, unfinished poetry that it embodies.

The following chapter intends to discuss how the tale addresses the medieval inheritance of ancient Platonic, Aristotelian and neo-Platonic themes of poetic theory in order to establish a claim of significance not only for the Squire, but for the craft of poetry as a whole. It must be stressed that the goal of such a discussion is not to presume that the text speaks directly to any contemporary understanding or immediate knowledge of Platonic source material. The argument can only be made that the influence is residual in contemporary culture, and must be made only as an attempt to add some minor repost to the ongoing critical discomfort with the unfinished, unresolved, and arguably under-appreciated tale.

A suspicion of the fictional is not new to Chaucer or to the late fourteenth century; it runs right through the culture of the Christian Middle ages. Such distrust is implicit in the famous Anglo-Saxon question 'What has Christ to do with Ingeld'?[2] In the late fourteenth century, suspicion about the morality of fictions was raised anew and powerfully by Wycliff and his followers.[3] There is significant evidence to suggest that the ancient philosophical themes and, in some cases, commentaries on the original texts themselves existed and were prominent enough for Chaucer to be aware of the

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[1] See Lee W. Patterson, 'The *Parson's Tale* and the Quitting of the *Canterbury Tales*', *Traditio*, 34 (1978), 331-80, for discussions on the Parson's, the Manciple's and the Physician's tales.
[2] See Michael D. Cherniss, 'Ingeld and Christ: Heroic Concepts and Values in Old English Poetry', *Speculum* 50 (1975), 482-485.
[3] Helen Phillips, *An Introduction to the Canterbury Tales* (Baskingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 221-2.

fundamental enmity they held for poetry.[4] This is strengthened in Christian culture by the tradition that distrusted fiction, an attitude associated with Wycliffite thinking and represented by Chaucer's Parson who establishes himself as a 'Southren man' who ignores alliterative verse and also as one who dismisses fables as 'wrecchednesse'.[5] Lines 31-35 of *The Parson's Prologue*, which draw on I Timothy 4.7, and II Timothy 4.4 further remind the reader that the question is partly a religious one, to do with Christians' use of their time, but it remains also partly a philosophical one, with its history going back to Plato's distrust of what was not 'true'.[6] It will be on that general distrust of fiction that this chapter focuses, as well as on the craft of the story teller which, as Helen Phillips argues, is in part what *The Squire's Tale* is about.[7]

Ancient Influences on the Medieval Perception of Poetry

By Chaucer's time, the philosophical perception of poetry has made only relatively minor advances since its damning evaluation by Plato, especially as it is represented in Books Nine and Ten of the *Republic*. The major development, however, is the effect of Christian belief on ideas about the justification for fictional and secular reading—especially for members of religious orders (the main educated group in the earlier Middle Ages). Chaucer would not have known the Republic directly. The absence of a text, however, does not ensure the absence of the themes it presents. Commentaries on the original texts themselves existed and were prominent enough for

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[4] As for the medieval awareness of poetic theory, the philosophical issues addressed by Plato's *Republic* are potentially problematic. Although there is little evidence to support a claim that Chaucer would have been able to turn the pages either of the *Republic* or one of its commentaries, that is not to say that some evidence does not exist that he was aware of their content. We know, for example, that Averroes wrote a commentary on the *Republic* in Arabic around 1177, at the same time that he was commenting on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (E.I.J. Rosenthal, *Averroes' Commentary on Plato's Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), p. 10. However, we also know that no version that Chaucer could have read was available until Jacob Matinus' Latin translation of 1539, leaving Chaucer either three centuries too late or nearly one and a half too early for any direct reading of Plato (Rosenthal, p. 8).

[5] The geographical association of the Parson in the South, is in geographical and attitudinal opposition to the North, 'where much alliterative poetry was written'. *Riverside Chaucer*, p. 287 (X, 34-44).

[6] *Riverside Chaucer*, p. 955.

[7] *Introduction to the Canterbury Tales*, pp. 133-6.

Chaucer to be aware of the fundamental enmity they held for poetry. This is strengthened in Christian culture by the traditions, both orthodox and Wycliffite, represented by Chaucer's Parson.

Although the text itself was not available, the ideas presented in the *Republic* seemed to have fed into medieval Christian culture. Sherron Knopp traces 'the Chaucerian Imagination' to Augustine and, by extension, to the Platonic, Aristotelian and neo-Platonic foundations upon which he built the pillars of Western medieval thought. Book I of Augustine's *Confessions* refers directly to 'Plato's magisterial indictment of poetry in the *Republic*'.[8] Knopp argues that Augustine's early experiences with poetry reflected Plato's dismissal of poetry and ultimately 'generated the cliché of patristic and scholastic diatribes: and created the paradigm for subsequent discussions of poetry in the Middle Ages'.[9] Chaucer's narrators are, Knopp argues, 'caught up in all the well-known [Platonic/Augustinian] indictments of poetry: it traffics in fantasy and illusions, it contains no truth'; Augustine himself focuses on the 'fantasy and illusion inherent in the images of poetry', while Chaucer 'emphasises their incontestable power'.[10]

These Platonic indictments carried on without the Platonic text are to surface in the late fourteenth century as what A.J. Minnis and A.B. Scott would identify as the late scholastic theories which 'classified [poetry] as the lowest branch of logic'.[11] However insistent Minnis and Scott are that late medieval poetic theory was based on 'the terms of reference of Aristotle's *Physics* and *Metaphysics*', they must concede that these principles, as well as those established by Aristotle's *Poetics*, 'reinforced trends which

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[8] Sherron E. Knopp, 'Augustinian Poetic Theory and the Chaucerian Imagination', in *The Idea of Medieval Literature*, ed. by James M. Dean and Christian K. Zacher (London: Associated University Press, 1992), pp. 91-107 (p. 93).
[9] Knopp, p. 94.
[10] Knopp, p. 95 and p. 102.
[11] A.J. Minnis and A.B. Scott, eds, *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism: The Commentary Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 9.

were already well established and in which other sources, notably the pseudo-Dionysian discussions of imagery and symbolic language, [that] figured far more largely'.[12]

As far as the *Poetics* itself is concerned, the possibility of its more direct influence on late fourteenth-century thought is perhaps more easily appreciated. Minnis and Scott demonstrate the general availability of Hermann the German's Latin translation of Avicenna's *Middle Commentary on the Poetics* of 1256.[13] It seems likely, then, that the ideas presented in the Platonic and Aristotelian texts were enjoying critical attention long after (or between) the accessibility of the texts themselves. The concern of this chapter is with the identification of those ideas and not with mapping the direct connection between Chaucer's texts and the texts from which some of their philosophical themes may have sprung.

In the *Republic*, Plato questions the ability of art of any kind to be epistemologically accurate. The arts (sculpture, paintings and especially poetry), according to Plato and due entirely to his fundamental view that material things are imperfect copies of unknowable forms, are relegated to being 'thrice removed from the king and from the truth'.[14] The inability of an artist to illuminate any kind of truth is best illustrated in Book Ten of the *Republic*, where the speakers discuss the 'thrice removed' model of the artisan's relationship to reality as it relates to the production of a bed. God, the 'the author of this and of all other things', is a 'creator'. A carpenter is also a creator. However, a painter is 'imitator of that which the others make' who 'is third in the descent from nature an imitator'. This argument is then applied to the Poet, who 'is thrice removed from the king and from the truth'.[15]

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[12] Minnis and Scott, p. 3, parenthetical interjection mine.
[13] Minnis and Scott, p. 3. For a more complete discussion of the transmission of Aristotle's *Poetics* to the West from the Arabic commentaries, see Ismail M. Dahiyat's *Avicenna's Commentary on the Poetics of Aristotle* (Leiden, Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1974), especially page 9, which graphically details the transmission of the text from its lost Greek manuscript around 700 AD to Hermann's translation of 1256.
[14] *Republic*, 597e7-8 (p. 471).
[15] *Republic*, 597d1-e8 (p. 471).

Plato clearly has little time for the artists; they are merely 'imitators' and as such, cannot contribute any epistemological value to the State. Having established God as the only true Creator, the carpenter (and therefore all craftsmen) as at least partially creative, Plato is not content with dismissing the artist as merely imitative.[16] He goes on to describe the poet as ignorant, able to gain an appreciative audience only of simpletons.[17]

According to Platonic authority, poets are represented generally as being at worst liars and, at the very best, maliciously deceptive. The intention of poets is that of trickery or manipulation of well-targeted audiences who would seem to know less about the subject of the art than the artist themselves. *The Squire's Tale* presents its magic gifts as a form of intricate 'craft'. Sentiments of distrust are evident in the reception of the gifts presented to the court in *The Squire's Tale*. Joyce Tally Lionarons points out that, 'even if the so-called "magic" is really technology; it is still suspect precisely *because* it is based on uncommon knowledge and can therefore be used by the learned to deceive the ignorant'.[18] This mistrust occurs most sharply in regard to the brass horse which is, ironically, the only gift for which full operational instruction is given by the text.[19] As the text puts it, 'they kan nat the craft' (v.185). The text begins by addressing the Platonic assumption that poetry is deliberately misleading, and that those who do not understand it are being manipulated by its conventions. The point that poetry is a tool by which the artist can manipulate the unaware is furthered when Plato comments that any lover of poetry finds merit in it 'because he himself was unable to analyse the

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[16] *Republic*, 598a1 (p. 471).
[17] *Republic*, 598b6-c4 (p. 472).
[18] Joyce Tally Lionarons, 'Magic, Machines and Deception: Technology in the *Canterbury Tales*', *The Chaucer Review,* 27 (1993), 377-386 (p. 379).
[19] For a better discussions of the mechanics of the horse and the reason for its detailed explanation by the text, see Lionarons, 'Magic, Machines and Deception', or Craig A. Berry, 'Flying Sources: Classical Authority in Chaucer's *Squire's Tale*', *English Literary History*, 68 (2001), 287-313. Each offers explanations as to why the text takes considerably more time to explain the mechanisms behind the horse than it does in presenting the other gifts.

nature of knowledge and ignorance and imitation'.[20] In other words, poets are most successful when they are able to fool those more foolish than themselves.[21] By positioning poets as the deceptive entertainers of 'children or simple persons', Plato is making a specific accusation about the lower mentality and the malignant intention of the poet. He is also beginning to set up the true nature of his attack on poets: that they are a tax on the producers of a society and ultimately dangerous to the well-being of the State.

In contrast, by the fourteenth century, poetry, the craft of composing poetry has (as we have seen in the *General Prologue*) a distinctly social role and validation. It is part of the skill required for a nobleman, something taught in youth. The Squire is introduced in these terms. This social justification for secular poetry is itself an opposition, in Chaucer's time, to the centuries-old doubts of the Church about the role of fiction in a Christian society.

Considering all of Aristotle's debts to Plato and, therefore, the influence of Plato through Aristotle on medieval neo-Platonism, it is surprising to note that poetry comes out slightly better with Aristotle than it did with his predecessor. In fact, Aristotle's view that Forms exist inseparably to and in participation with Matter enables him to be much more accommodating when it comes to the value of the arts in society as well as in epistemological concerns. Halliwell alludes to the immensity of the task attempted by Aristotle if he is to overcome successfully the stigma attached to poetry by Plato:

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[20]*Republic,* 598d4-5 (p. 472).

[21]*Republic,* 601a6-b5 (p. 475): In like manner the poet with his words and phrases may be said to lay on the colours of the several arts, himself understanding their nature only enough to imitate them; and other people, who are as ignorant as he is, and judge only from his words, imagine that if he speaks of cobbling, or of military tactics, or of anything else, in metre and harmony and rhythm, he speaks very well-such is the sweet influence which melody and rhythm by nature have. And I think that you must have observed again and again what a poor appearance the tales of poets make when stripped of the colours which music puts upon them, and recited in simple prose.

> That poetry could continue to be regarded as a vehicle of truth did in fact depend on much broader assumptions, in particular on the supposition that poets could claim to portray, as no one else before the philosophers could plausibly do, the nature of the divine world and its control over the world of men. And if poets had religious truths to offer, they could also arrogate moral wisdom.[22]

In other words, the task set before Aristotle is that he must be able to demonstrate the epistemological value of poetic insight without directly opposing Plato's views.[23] Halliwell is able to suggest that Aristotle and Plato differ fundamentally only on the use of the term mimesis, or imitation, and to what extent mimesis can actually be truthful or productive. Whereas it has been shown that Plato views artistic mimesis to be 'parasitic on reality' and artistic works to 'deceive, or are intended to deceive; their credentials are false', Aristotle is allowed to take a different turn on poetry based on his different interpretation of the function, utility and nature of imitation.[24]

Aristotle tends to turn the measure of poetic value inward, rather than the outward scrutiny with which Plato approaches the subject. Much of what is considered to be the first of four parts of the *Poetics* concerns itself with a new evaluation of the mimetic process and the ability of such an endeavour to reveal something of nature. [25] Although Aristotle agrees with Plato that art is an act of imitation, Aristotle suggests

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[22] Stephen Halliwell, *Aristotle's Poetics* (London: Duckworth, 1986), p. 11.
[23] Halliwell calls this ability of Aristotle's 'subtle, revisionist position' to Plato (p. 22).
[24] Halliwell, p, 22. The term 'mimetic' should be clarified, as there seems to be a difference between the way Plato and Aristotle use the word and the way that critics such as Shirley Sharon-Zisser uses the term in 'The *Squire's Tale* and the Limits of Non-Mimetic Fiction', *The Chaucer Review,* 26 (1992), 377-94. In essence, the definition of the term 'mimesis' is the same in that both the classical sources and modern critics mean the way in which a piece of work imitates reality. The fundamental difference in the two uses of the term is what constitutes 'reality'. Sharon-Zisser seems to adopt a modern distinction between 'mimetic fiction' and 'speculative fiction', which implies that mimetic works are those which accurately reflect persons, events or conditions that are to be rationally expected in experience. By this terminology, the events of *The Squire's Tale* are non-mimetic in that they do not depict such realistic criteria. However, Plato and Aristotle have a different definition of mimesis, in that they have a very different definition of 'reality'. Their definition of 'reality' would be that which is perfect. In this case, all physical manifestations of things are, in some respect, mimetic. Poetry is especially mimetic in that it copies in words what has already been copied in creation. So although Sharon-Zisser's use of the term is accurate in a modern critical context, it is important to note that the classical definition of the term 'mimesis' has very different consequences for all manifestations of artistry.
[25] George Depue Hadzsits and David Moore Robinson, *Our Debt to Greece and Rome* (New York: Cooper Square, 1963), p.15.

that the act of imitation is natural to the human being and, indeed, one of the factors that separates him as a higher being.

> It is clear that the general origin of poetry was because of two causes, each of them part of human nature. Imitation is natural to man from childhood, one of his advantages over the lower animals being this, that he is most imitative creature in the world, and learns at first by imitation. And it is also natural for all to delight in works of imitation.[26]

Aristotle attempts to establish imitation as natural and, more importantly, educationally useful. The ability of the human being to learn by way of imitation has helped him rise above the other animals and has, therefore, been the organisational factor in his Nature that has allowed him to establish the State that Plato insists imitation threatens. Aristotle goes on to state that all men, regardless of mental capacity, enjoy participating in imitation as a learning process. In fact, as this part of the *Poetics* continues, Aristotle addresses the separation of Philosopher and Poet proposed by Plato:

> To be learning something is the greatest of pleasures not only to the philosopher but also to the rest of mankind, however small their capacity for it; the reason of the delight in seeing the picture is that one is at the same time learning – gathering the meaning of things, e.g. that the man there is so-and-so; for if one has not seen the thing before, one's pleasure will not be in the picture as an imitation of it, but will be due to the execution of colouring or some similar cause.[27]

Aristotle asserts that the act of imitation that is intrinsic to the human learning process is the same for all mankind regardless of his knowledge base. It therefore, cannot be seen as a dependent form or creation, as Plato suggests by his distinction between the Craftsmen and the Artist, as Aristotle points out that even people who are

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[26] Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1448b5-9, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, trans. by I. Bywater, ed. by Jonathan Barnes, 2 vols. (Princeton: The Princeton University Press, 1984), II, pp. 2316-2340 (p. 2318). It is interesting to note that the Gutenberg e-text (taken from Butcher) translates this section differently, with a few minor changes: 'Poetry in general seems to have sprung from two causes, each of them lying deep in our nature. First, the instinct of imitation is implanted in man from childhood, one difference between him and other animals being that he is the most imitative of living creatures, and through imitation learns his earliest lessons; and no less universal is the pleasure felt in things imitated,' S.H. Butcher, trans, 1999. Although one key difference is the use of the term 'implanted', one also needs to recognise the use of the word 'universal' in that it represents an allusion to the human form of the soul, a reference that Barnes does not make directly. Both translations are fundamentally consistent, with minor differences in emphasis.

[27] *Poetics*, 1448b12-20 (p. 2318).

not familiar with the subject matter of a piece of work can still appreciate its appearance and delight in its presentation.[28]

A Chaucerian Defense of Poetry: the Gifts of Cambyuskan

Elements reminiscent of Plato's specific arguments against poetry are found in *The Squire's Tale* by way of the gifts mentioned in the tale. The four magical presents given to the court can be seen as mindful of the criticism aimed at poetry by Book Ten of the *Republic*. One of the ways to regard the mysterious gifts is to look at them in terms of what poetic functions they can be seen to perform; each gift can be seen to be addressing a specific epistemological element of poetry.

The most overtly unusual gift is a horse that can, when operated properly, take its rider anywhere in the world in the space of 24 hours (v.115-131). The myth of a flying horse is not unknown to the fourteenth century; nor is ancient Greek mythology their only antecedent. However, there are interesting connections to be made between the Squire's flying horse and those referred to in Plato. Craig A. Berry is among recent critics to notice a link between the brass horse and the mythical Pegasus, not only in the textual reference to the beast (v.207), but to other aspects of the brass horse's functionality that link it to classical sources as well.[29] However, although Berry is quick to acknowledge the original appearance of a Pegasus-like myth in the *Phaedrus*, he does little to elaborate on any further connections between *The Squire's Tale* and Plato's dialogue. The *Phaedrus* makes reference to two 'winged steeds' as the nature of a soul. In reference to the Gods, each horse is of a noble breed and they work together in

[28] See the argument about craftsmen being twice removed from the king (above), as opposed to artists who are thrice removed from the truth.

[29] Berry, 'Flying Sources'. Berry advises that, for an earlier recognition of the prevalence of the Pegasus myth in literature, see A. Bartlett Giamatti, 'Headlong Horses and Headless Horsemen: An Essay on the Chivalric Epics of Pulci, Boiardo and Ariosto', in *Italian Literature, Roots and Branches Essays in Honor of Thomas Goddard Bergin*, ed. by Giose Riminalli et al., (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), pp. 265-307. It may be worth noting here that the connection drawn with Pegasus deals solely with function, not form; Pegasus was believed to be a living (as opposed to mechanical) creature.

harmony. In Man, however, one horse is noble and the other ignoble. Simply put, it is the enduring task of Man to manage the two horses together.

> The soul in her totality has the care of inanimate being everywhere, and traverses the whole heaven in divers forms appearing; - when perfect and fully winged she soars upward, and orders the whole world; whereas the imperfect soul, losing her wings and drooping in her flight at last settles on the solid ground – there, finding a home, she receives an earthly frame which appears to be self-moved, but is really moved by her power.[30]

The flying horse of the Soul is able to transport its 'rider' heaven-ward towards the unchanging perfect world of Platonic forms, and thereby transcend the limitations imposed by the ever-degrading, ever changing material world. Poetry, specifically written poetry, is theoretically likewise able to lift its reader metaphorically to a higher state of understanding, to refer to unchanging truths and to reveal the true nature of things. Poetry, like the flying horse, necessarily must be comprised of both the physical and the intangible: the written word serves as the corporeal wings which are, in turn, the material things 'most akin to the divine', in that they are able to carry things that would normally tend to sink to earth, instead upwards towards 'beauty, wisdom, goodness and the like'.[31] Poetry is, like the horse, a physical thing that can lift Man; whereas the horse physically lifts the rider, poetry elevates the mind to the Good. Even if the text does not refer to the Phaedrus, by referring to the long-standing traditions and well-known implications of flying horses (specifically, the Pegasus myth), the text embraces and incorporates the epistemological elements of that myth into the abilities of its own flying horse. Although a brief reference, the horse – and therefore poetry in general – is able to 'traverse the whole heavens' and uplift its rider physically as well as spiritually.

Ultimately, the tale's horse is able simultaneously to speak to several aspects of Aristotelian and Platonic critical theory. By acting as an embodiment of the human soul and, as Berry suggests, the act of reading and of writing, the mechanical horse is able to empower the acts of reading and writing with the uplifting capacities of intellectual

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[30] *Phaedrus*, 246b7-c6 (p.153).
[31] *Phaedrus*, 246e1 (p. 153).

wings. Reading and writing, when done skilfully, are no longer limited to the mundane imitations of man, but are able to traverse the heavens and to temporarily return the flesh-bound human soul to a semblance of its more glorious intellectual inspiration.

The Mirror of True Intentions

The next gift is that of the mirror which allows its bearer to see the true intentions of its subject. Again, the reader is given a simple story that can be seen as a reply to the ancient doubts about poetry and fiction. That the mirror allows its user to see truth can work as a rebuttal of Platonic concerns regarding poetry. The mirror, by its very nature of reflection and distortion, is an established symbol of the Platonic theory of the third degree of removed formal representation. In other words, what a mirror does is to reflect that which is physical – that what is already twice removed from God or the Good. Mirrors provide nothing real – only two-dimensional images of three-dimensional imitations of Form. As Plato states in Book Ten of the *Republic*, a mirror is just as useful as an artist in that it provides the appearances of reality, not reality itself. When asked how one could become a Creator, Plato answers:

> An easy way enough; or rather, there are many ways in which the feat might be quickly and easily accomplished, none quicker than that of turning a mirror round and round – you would soon enough make the sun and the heavens, and the earth and yourself, and other animals and plants, and all the other things of which we were just now speaking, in the mirror.
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> Yes, he said, but they would be appearances only.[32]

Plato makes a connection between the mirror and the act of artistic reproduction.[33] In the *Timaeus*, Plato again uses mirrors (as well as all reflective surfaces) as a demonstration of inaccuracy:

> [Reflective surfaces] are to be reckoned among the second and co-operative causes which God, carrying into execution the idea of the best as far as possible, uses as his ministers. They are thought by most men not to be the second, but the prime causes of all things, because they freeze and heat, and contract and dilate, and the like. But they are not so, for they are incapable of reason or intellect; the only being which can properly have mind is the invisible soul, whereas fire and water, and earth and air, are all of them visible bodies.[34]

Through both texts, Plato makes the argument that mirrors and artists create nothing but appearances and, therefore in light of Plato's views concerning imitation and its proximity to the Truth of reality, can tell their viewers nothing about either. Mirrors and poems are 'deprived of intelligence and always produce chance effects without order or design'.[35] Artists are creators of falsities: 'the imitator or maker of the images knows nothing of true existence; he knows appearances only'.[36]

On the other hand, the Squire gives the mirror the ability to tell its bearer the ultimate truth of its subjects. Berry sees the mirror as a symbol of the poem, specifically of a courtly poem. He argues that 'the mirror, like any good courtly poem, gives the ruler insight into the designs of his enemy and exposes treachery in love'.[37] Unlike images reflected in a 'Platonic' mirror, the things reflected in the Squire's mirror are no longer simple representations of appearances; they are, in fact, the undeniable truths – the reality – of whatever is reflected in its glass. The Squire's mirror does not provide reality thrice removed – it promises reality itself. Furthermore, not only does this

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[32] *Republic*, 596d6-e5 (pp. 469-470). This thesis will turn at its close to Chaucer's use of the concept of Forms in his 'Philomela': apparently clear evidence in his interest in this philosophical idea in relation to poetry.

[33] I would propose that poetry and painting can be seen as identical in this analogy, as both are seen by Plato to be acts of imitation: 'For as a painter by a knowledge of figure and colour can paint a cobbler without any practice in cobbling, so the poet can delineate any art in the colours of language, and give harmony and rhythm to the cobbler and also to the general; and you know how mere narration, when deprived of the ornaments of metre, is like a face which has lost the beauty of youth and never had any other. Once more, the imitator has no knowledge of reality, but only of appearance. The painter paints, and the artificer makes a bridle and reins, but neither understands the use of them – the knowledge of this is confined to the horseman; and so of other things. Thus we have three arts: one of use, another of invention, a third of imitation; and the user furnishes the rule to the two others. The flute-player will know the good and bad flute, and the maker will put faith in him; but the imitator will neither know nor have faith--neither science nor true opinion can be ascribed to him. Imitation, then, is devoid of knowledge, being only a kind of play or sport, and the tragic and epic poets are imitators in the highest degree' (*Republic*, p. 294).

[34] *Timaeus* 46c9-d8 (p. 733).

[35] *Timaeus*, 46e6-8 (p. 733).

[36] *Republic*, 601b11-c2 (p. 475).

[37] Craig A. Berry, 'Flying Sources', p. 292.

particular mirror demonstrate the ability of poetry to portray simple or obvious truths, but it also endows it with the unique ability to uncover hidden truths as well:

> If he be fals, she shal his tresoun see,
> His newe love, and all his subtiltee,
> So openly that ther shal no thynge hyde. (v.139)

The tale's mirror is the antithesis of both Plato's mirror and his denunciation of poetry.

The Sword

Just as the mirror presents a two-fold defence of poetry against Platonic condemnation, the sword, another of the mysterious guest's gifts to the court, also has a duality of purpose. The magic blade is given the following introduction:

> 'This naked swerd, that hangeth by my syde,
> Swich vertu hath that what man so ye smyte
> Thurghout his armure it wole kerve and byte,
> Were it as thikke as is a branched ook;
> And what man that is wounded with the strook
> Shal never be hool til that yow list, of grace,
> To stroke hym with the plat in thilke place
> Ther he is hurt. (v.156)

The sword is thereby given the powers both to make an eternal wound by slicing through any armour and to be the only cure for that wound. In this sense, the sword serves as venom and antidote, bane and boon. As Derrida suggests when discussing Plato's use of the term *pharmakon*, the audience must be able to see that writing, like the sword, can be seen as both the 'remedy and the poison' to forgetfulness.[38] While we cannot know that Chaucer was aware of the ideas in the *Phaedrus*, the ideas that Derrida draws from Plato on this point seem to illuminate the tale. There are two aspects of the term *pharmakon* that Derrida raises in *Dissemination*, both of which are relevant to our discussion of the sword and of the tale itself. The first characteristic of the term is that, in its original form, the term *pharmakon* has two opposing meanings: that of a remedy

[38] Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, (London: Athlone Press, 1993), p. 94.

and that of a poison. As I discuss in detail below, Plato presents writing as an inferior form of communication compared to speech. This opposition is furthered by the notion that, like the Squire's sword, writing is simultaneously good and bad. In some ways, writing is good in that it promotes the recollection of things already learned. In a much more important way, however, writing is distracting to the natural pursuit of Man because it is not a medium of *knowing*: it is a medium of recollection only.

Plato's *Phaedrus* tells the tale of Theuth, the Egyptian who invented writing. Theuth claims to King Thamus that the art of writing 'will make the Egyptians wiser and give them better memories; it is a specific both for the memory and the wit'.[39] Thamus denies the claim, insisting that Theuth is too close to his invention to be adequately critical, much like a parent to his child. As a rebuttal, Thamus reminds Theuth that writing 'will create forgetfulness in the learners' souls, because they will not use their memories; they will trust to the external written characters and not remember of themselves [...] And so the specific which you have discovered is an aid not to memory, but to reminiscence'.[40] In other words, writing cannot, by definition, claim any grounds to knowledge; in fact, although it helps to 'remedy' the power of recollection, in doing so it destroys the act of actual learning.

In his discussion of Plato's work in relation to writing and the notion of *pharmakon*, Derrida insists that *pharmakon* inevitably acts as both poison and remedy in the establishment of the State. Whereas Plato, Derrida states, 'is bent on presenting writing as an occult, and therefore suspect, power', one cannot escape the fact that Plato's use of the term *pharmakon* must represent both 'poles' of its meaning.[41] In the *Phaedrus*, writing is presented as the problematic remedy to forgetfulness. In other words, writing helps to preserve what the mind cannot retain or recall, but at a significant price. This point of view is taken as the position of ignorance; the King

[39] *Phaedrus*, 274a3-e5 (p. 184).
[40] *Phaedrus*, 275a3-8 (p. 184).
[41] Derrida, p. 97.

Thamus' response to the proposition of writing as a remedy exposes Theuth as a 'simpleton or flimflam artist.'[42] Derrida argues that Plato is both reliant on and dismissive of the two-fold notion of *pharmakon*; he chooses to accentuate the destructive power of writing, rather than to emphasise its curative properties.

The Squire's sword is the antithesis of this argument. Whereas Plato, in his quest to exclude writers from his State, dismisses writing as deceptive and destructive, the text is attempting through the sword to reinstate literature's full potential. It can, as Plato would suggest, act as a destructive force: cutting through the thickest political or religious skin to inflict social damage. No one would suggest that Chaucer's text affirms writing as a potentially purely good thing, nor could anyone suggest responsibly that Chaucer would deny the power of the written word to inflict unjust damage. The use of the sword as the metaphor for writing insists that its destructive powers are being recognised. However, by giving the sword the power to heal the wounds it inflicts, the text chooses to reinstate the healing powers of writing and is thereby revitalising the original sense of *pharmakon* as potentially both poison and remedy. Whereas Plato would have us dismiss the healing properties of writing and accept all writers as dangers to society, *The Squire's Tale* is at least willing to accept that writers can be both conmen and legitimate benefits to the State. Such an interpretation of the tale's argument supposes that the text relies upon the same use of the notion of *pharmakon* that Plato uses in the *Republic*. Unlike Plato, however, the tale does not concentrate on the destructive aspects of writing's capabilities, but, rather, recognises both the destructive and the reparative aspects of writing as *pharmakon*.

There is another aspect of *pharmakon* that informs a neo-Platonic reading of the tale. The notion is derived by Derrida from the *Phaedrus*:

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[42] Derrida, p. 98.

> But, in truth, writing is essentially bad, external to memory, productive not of science but of belief, not of truth but of appearances...Plato thinks of writing, and tries to comprehend it, to dominate it, on the basis of oppositions as such. In order for these contrary values (good/evil, true/false, essence/appearance, inside/outside, etc.) to be in opposition, each of the terms must be simply external to the other.[43]

In the case of the current argument, writing is external to knowledge: it is in opposition to it and therefore cannot participate in it. Rather than limiting the opposing distinctions to the subject matter or general content of a tale, writing itself becomes the 'exotic other' that is so threatening to the courtiers in *The Squire's Tale*. Writing is the tool, or the gift, that must be used by its keepers in such a way so as to harm or to heal its subjects. Derrida states that writing, like any other *pharmakon*, is 'a force whose effects are hard to master, a dynamics that constantly surprises the one who tries to manipulate it as master and as subject'.[44] Whereas Plato would have the audience believe that writing is alone subject to this kind of unwieldy power; *The Squire's Tale* tells us differently. In fact, much of the framework of this particular tale (and, indeed, much of the modern criticism surrounding it) is concerned with the suggestion that the Squire's knowledge is not nearly as good as his recollection. What was previously seen as a typical example of professional *occupatio*, in light of the concept of the *pharmakon*, can now be interpreted as an admission of the spoken word's inordinate sociological position above that of writing:

> But for to telle yow al hir beautee,
> It lyth nat in my tonge, n'yn my konnyng;
> I dare not undertake so heigh a thing
> Myn Englissh eek is insufficient.
> It most been a rethor excellent
> That koude his colours longynge for that art
> If he shoulde hire discryven every part
> I am noon swich, I moot speke as I kan. (V.34)

The Squire is not only acting out the expected role of a humble story-teller. The language employed by the text suggests that oration itself is susceptible to the same

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[43] Derrida, p. 103.
[44] Derrida, p. 97.

epistemological scrutiny that writing suffers at the hands of the Platonic environment of contemporary criticism of poetry. The art of oration, the art of story-telling, in which the Squire has invested himself, is no less the art of imitation of style and of recollection of events that writing is deemed to be. In fact, the Squire admits this himself as he compares his own rhetorical skills to those of the strange knight:

> And after this, biforn the heighe bord,
> He with a manly voys seide his message,
> After the forme used in his langage,
> Withouten vice of silable or of lettre;
> And for his tale sholde seme the bettre,
> Accordant to his wordes was his cheere,
> As techeth art of speche hem that it leere.
> Al be that I kan nat sowne his stile,
> Ne kan nat clymben over so heigh a style. (v.98)

The first part of this selection sets up the strange knight as an exemplar of good story-telling skills, regardless of the fact that he is speaking with a different syntax or language altogether. The wondrous knight speaks at least as well as Gawain, and is able to carry off his story as well as anyone. The Squire, on the other hand, is not as adept: in fact, Chaucer's use of the term 'I kan nat sowne his stile' implies several things, the most innocuous of which is that he is trying to mimic the knight's skills. The definition of the word 'sowne' is given by Benson as to 'repeat, imitate' (*Riverside Chaucer*, p. 170), which is borne out by the entry in the *MED*: 'to show, indicate, reveal, reflect, signify, express [...] also, imitate (someone's style)'. Although the simple definition suffices for the simple interpretation, the entry also indicates that the word could be used mistakenly instead of *sounden*: 'to heal and cause to regenerate' (315). Once again, the reader is reminded of the ongoing argument between the art of imitation and the power of regeneration.

The Ring

Last in the discussion of the parade of gifts offered by the mysterious knight is a ring that enables the reader to understand the speech of every living thing. This ring or, rather, its function, seems to continue the debate already raised regarding the relative values of speech and writing.

> The vertu of the ryng, if ye wol heere,
> Is this: that if hire lust it for to were
> Upon hir thombe or in hir purs it bere,
> Ther is no fowel that fleeth under the hevene
> That she ne shal wel understonde his stevene
> And knowe his menyng openly and pleyn,
> And answere hym in his langage ageyn;
> And every gras that groweth upon roote
> She shal eek knowe, and whom it wol do boote,
> Al his woundes never so depe and
> Wyde. (v.146)

The source of the 'ring' portion of the tale is discussed exclusively and at length by Vincent DiMarco in an attempt to address the 'paucity of references to Moses' magic ring, indirectly alluded to in v(F) 247-51, in comparison with the numerous Jewish, Islamic and Christian legends regarding the magic rings of Solomon'.[45] DiMarco attributes the source of the ring to be a passage from Bacon's *Opus maius*, in which a young Moses makes two rings: one for remembrance and one for forgetfulness.[46] Moses' two rings, alluded to by the text in lines 247-251 as a source of magic comparable to the mysterious knight's ring, had two powers: one made its wearer remember, the other made its wearer forget:

> [Moses] made, since he was a skilful astronomer, two images on rings, one of forgetfulness which he gave to the woman, and the other of memory, which he kept for himself, and thus was freely departed from her with his army and without war.[47]

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[45] Vincent DiMarco, 'A Note on Canacee's Magic Ring', *Anglia*, 99 (1981), 399-405 (p. 399).
[46] DiMarco, 'A Note on Canacee's Magic Ring', p. 403.
[47] Roger Bacon, *Opus Major*, trans. by Robert Belle Burke (Philadelphia, 1928), quoted in Vincent DiMarco, 'A Note on Canacee's Magic Ring', p. 403.

This brief reference to Moses as the source of the ring's literary antecedent introduces the idea of being able to function as both poles of *pharmakon*. Just as Plato laments, the gift has the ability to both help and to hinder its wearer. Forgetfulness is, of course, the main 'side-effect' of writing, according to Plato in the concluding argument of the *Phaedrus*. However, as a matter of reference, it serves immediately to note that Plato argues against writing as opposed to speech because, according to Derrida, in Rob Boyne's phrase, 'writing is inferior, a substitution for original thought or speech'.[48] Plato makes this point as he states that:

> in the garden of letters [the writer] will sow and plant, but only for the sake of recreation and amusement; he will write them down as memorials to be treasured against the forgetfulness of old age, by himself, or by any other old man who is treading the same path. He will rejoice in beholding their tender growth; and while others are refreshing their souls with banqueting and the like, this will be the pastime in which his days are spent.[49]

A writer sows seeds and reaps fruit that is ultimately inconsequential and pleases only those who are interested in similar trivialities. The Squire admonishes himself for wasting time in his tale with irrelevant facts: 'I wol nat taryen yow, for it is pryme / And for it is no fruyt but los of tyme' (v.73). The Squire's admission of frivolity and fruitlessness is directly opposed to the bountiful harvest of words enjoyed by the skilled orator of the Phaedrus. And, although no direct link can be responsibly inferred, the contrast is noteworthy:

> who, finding a congenial soul, by the help of science sows and plants therein words which are able to help themselves and him who planted them, and are not unfruitful, but have in them a seed which others brought up in different soils render immortal, making the possessors of it happy to the utmost extent of human happiness.[50]

If it were at all unclear as to Plato's opinion of writing and speech, the final remarks in the *Phaedrus* leave the reader with little doubt:

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[48] Rob Boyne, *Foucault and Derrida: The Other Side of Reason* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990), p. 95.
[49] *Phaedrus*, 276d1-9 (p. 186).
[50] *Phaedrus*, 276e5-277a4 (p. 186).

> But he who thinks that in the written word there is necessarily much which is not serious, and that neither poetry nor prose, spoken or written, is of any great value, ...and who thinks that even the best of writings are but a reminiscence of what we know, and that only in principles of justice and goodness and nobility taught and communicated orally...is there clearness and perfection and seriousness...this is the right sort of man; and you and I, Phaedrus, would pray that we may become like him.[51]

Phaedrus is admonished to aspire to be like the orator rather than the writer. Oration is the process of knowledge, whereas writing is only privy to the powers of recollection. In the *Phaedrus*, the groundwork is laid so that writing is linked to forgetfulness (in that it causes the mind to get lazy) and speech is correlated to knowledge. In the *Republic*, Plato mentions another ring with magical powers; this one renders its wearer invisible to the rest of the world:

> Now the shepherds met together, according to custom, that they might send their monthly report about the flocks to the king; into their assembly he came having the ring on his finger, and as he was sitting among them he chanced to turn the collet of the ring inside his hand, when instantly he became invisible to the rest of the company and they began to speak of him as if he were no longer present. He was astonished at this, and again touching the ring he turned the collet outwards and reappeared; he made several trials of the ring, and always with the same result – when he turned the collet inwards he became invisible, when outwards he reappeared.[52]

This passage provides a neat opposition to the ability of the rings in the *Phaedrus* and in *The Squire's Tale*. In other words, whereas the *Republic*'s ring makes its wearer invisible, the Squire's ring makes the wearer linguistically intuitive and reveals rather than conceals meaning. Language, the medium of oral conversation, and the relative spiritual value of specific uses of linguistic styles, are central to the *Republic*, and are therefore to be addressed in a more complete manner by the text. Although the description of the ring in both works is brief, it is the only one of the Squire's gifts whose benefits are actually realised in the tale, perhaps giving more credibility to the argument that the relative primacies of different types of language are as central to *The Squire's Tale*'s defence of poetry as it is to the *Republic* and the

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[51] *Phaedrus*, 277e3-278b5 (p. 188).
[52] *Republic*, 359e1-360a2 (pp. 200-201).

Poetics. In one paragraph, the Squire has established that the ring, when even kept close to the body, can serve not only as an interpreter for all languages, but can also reveal the cure for any wound inflicted on the speaker in question.

The Squire's task is to present speech, literally, as an art form. Whereas Plato sees good writing as better than speech, the Squire, like Derrida, sees speech as an intricate form. Of course medieval poetry was written to be spoken; the text of the Squire's tale presents speech as at least as complicated and as problematic as writing. Some modern critics argue that *The Squire's Tale* does not really do much other than force its audience to recognise the skill (or lack thereof) displayed by the Squire. As Scala remarks, partially correctly, '[...] *The Squire's Tale* can do nothing but reveal its teller; its substance or subject is so empty that reader can do nothing but turn to the voice that utters it'.[53] Scala is partially correct because it is only at first glance that the tale presents itself so devoid of valuable substance or subject. On closer inspection, the tale reveals itself to be heavily engaged in the very serious debate about the intrinsic value of poetry as an art form and of the social role of the poet himself. Furthermore, the text suggests that the epistemological advantage supposed by Plato and maintained throughout the fourteenth century to be inherent in speech and missing in writing is no more present in the Squire's spoken words than in the text that reports it. For all of his skills as a public speaker, the Squire is telling the audience nothing new. Like all of the poets Plato dismisses from the *Republic*, the Squire's unconventionally problematic story is not engaged in knowledge but rather in recollection; his spoken word is no more or less truthful than the best poetry and, as such, no more or less a work of art to be scrutinised by its audience. If, as a demonstration of the fallibility of speech, the story challenges Platonic theories of knowledge and authority; as a piece of written work it challenges the very presuppositions made by Platonic theory against poetry and the rigid

[53] Elizabeth Scala, 'Canacee and the Chaucer Canon: Incest and Other Unnarratables', *The Chaucer Review,* 30 (1995), 15-39 (p. 29).

classification of poetic elements indoctrinated by Aristotle's writings. *The Squire's Tale*, in theory and in form, defies categorisation and refutes any claims that poetry, more or less than any other art form, is devoid of meaning or utility.

In doing so, the tale establishes itself as a significant rebuttal of the Platonic, Aristotelian and neo-Platonic themes of absolute contrariety that were dominant forces not only in medieval poetic theory, but in many other aspects of medieval culture as well. Just as we have seen other tales address specific cases of binary opposition at work in medieval concepts of the body, the soul, sex and epistemology, so too does *The Squire's Tale* challenge classical philosophical themes of polarity. In fact, *The Squire's Tale* serves to position poetry as the ultimate argument against such rigid structures of opposition; poetry is the medium of mediation. Not only does good poetry have the ability to mediate across otherwise incompatible cultures and languages, but it also serves as the responsible halfway-house between oration and scholastic writing; it is the buffer between the necessary transience and mutability of the oral tradition and the timeless, static dogmatic formality of presumed authority. Poetry links the rational with the passionate; its characters blur the supposed immovable boundaries between religion and secularity, while they simultaneously flirt between good and evil, mortal and eternal, male and female, perfection and privation. The late medieval poets have at their disposal the power to challenge all of the contemporary conscripts of culture that inform their audiences' perceptions of their society and of themselves. *The Squire's Tale* demonstrates this power not only in its form but in its function: at once portraying and embodying the potential of poetry to replace rigid concepts of contrariety with the sometimes frustratingly inconsistent flexibility of continuity. *The Canterbury Tales* shows recurrent curiosity and anxiety about the status of fiction and poetry: the claim made in the *General Prologue* ('words must be cousin to the deed', I.741) was that Chaucer was giving his audience trust, not invention. Chaucer uses Plato to back up the

idea that 'truth' is superior to invention. Yet, of all course, the citation is a joke: *The Canterbury Tales* is invention, not reporting of the truth at all. *The Parson's Tale*, as Patterson has argued, represents a final challenge to the whole business of story-telling.[54]

> The Parson destroys the poem, in other words, in order to release the poet from his fiction-making, to turn him finally from the shadows to reality. The benefice the Parson offers can be fully appreciated only when we recognize how persistently Chaucer has asked the moral questions raised by his kind of poetry, and how persistently he has refused to answer them.[55]

The Squire's Tale seems to offer further exploration of these themes, with its 'craft' and rhetoric, and its use of a narrative frame to frame a lyric poem. The Squire is the pilgrim – not 'Chaucer the pilgrim' – who is explicitly presented as a poet and artist. Chaucer seems to use the figure of the Squire that introduces the theme of artistry. Yet in his society, despite religious doubts about the validity of 'fables', the concept of the courtly man provides a social justification for cultivation of the arts of composition, in contrast to the doubts about utility of such acts to wellbeing of State, as presented by the ancient philosophers.

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[54] Patterson, pp. 370-80.
[55] Patterson, pp. 376-7.

Conclusion

The previous chapter has argued that *The Squire's Tale* offers Chaucer's readers an opportunity to consider a problem about the status of fiction, a problem that originates from Plato and Aristotle and continued to perplex Western medieval Christian society. At other times, Chaucer makes his debt to Platonic traditions much more explicit. Chaucer invokes Plato at peculiar times; he is clearly interested in conceiving the authors' task in relation to the ancient philosophers, without necessarily being willing to align his texts consistently with the philosophical tenets that such an association might usually be inclined to imply.

This eagerness to cite classical philosophers, while departing creatively from what they actually say is evidenced in at least two ways. Firstly (and perhaps more superficially), 'Plato' himself appears in a few places. 'Plato' is mentioned directly in the *General Prologue* (I.741), several times in the *Canon Yeoman's Tale* (VII.1448-1463), the *Manciple's Tale* (IX.207), and twice in the *House of Fame* (759, 931). Of course, many people are mentioned by Chaucer who do not have a significant impact on the reading of his work.

However, the way in which Platonic influences undulate and trickle through the texts, appropriated and re-constructed by Chaucer, causes the reader to consider Chaucer's awareness of Platonic theories, and to contemplate what relationship the author intends with the ancient texts and their philosophies. For example, Benson argues that *The Knight's Tale* draws upon the Empedoclean principle of 'love's fatal glance', which in turn is based on Platonic optical theory.[1] Later, the tale recounts the Platonic notions of a Prime Mover and the 'chain of being', fundamental to the neo-Platonic worldview. (I.2987-3089). The Miller retells a version of the tale told by Plato in

[1] *Riverside Chaucer*, p. 830.

Theaetetus, changing the philosopher's well into the Campus Pits of Milham Ford.[2] As previously mentioned, the ascension of Arcite's soul in *Troilus* invokes Platonic theories relating to the body/soul relationship, as well as the fundamental structure of the universe.[3]

Plato's influence appears twice in the *Legend of Good Women*. As well as the Platonic principles used in the re-telling of the story of Alceste (as mentioned earlier in this thesis), Chaucer introduces the *Legend of Philomela* with Platonic vocabulary, in Latin and in English: Incipit Legenda Philomene. / Deus dator formarum. / Thow yevere of the formes, that hast wrought / This fayre world and bar it in thy thought' (F 2228-9). A few lines later, he mentions the neo-Platonic principle of a stratified heaven (F 2236). These lines are particularly interesting in that they are much more than a casual reference to Plato, or to a Platonic theory Chaucer may have read somewhere else. These references come at the reader full-on, and provide the introduction to a story that has a significant subject: these concepts of Platonic Forms and hierarchical levels of Being introduce a story which is itself a text about signs, writing and expression. Chaucer, here, does more than drop Plato's name in here and there; he uses Plato, but also clearly has something significant to say about how Plato should be used. As with the passage referring to 'words and deeds', Chaucer takes a Platonic theme, and applies it to the business of being a poet; he employs it for the processes of creativity.

Chaucer draws three times upon the same passage and sentiment regarding the relationship of words to actions as that found in Plato's *Timeaus*. Once in the *General Prologue* (I.742), once in the *Manciple's Tale* (IX.104), and once in the shorter poem, *Lak of Stedfastnesse*, Chaucer makes the point that 'the wordes moot be cosyn to the dede'.[4] The Platonic source makes the same argument more sternly:

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[2] *Riverside Chaucer*, p. 846.
[3] *Riverside Chaucer*, p. 1057.
[4] In *Lak*: 'And now it is so fals and deceivable / That word and deed, as in conclusioun, / Ben nothing lyk, for turned up-so-doun' (3).

> Now it is all-important that the beginning of everything should be according to nature. And in speaking of the copy and the original we may assume that words are akin to the matter which they describe; when they relate to the lasting and permanent and intelligible, they ought to be lasting and unalterable, and, as far as their nature allows, irrefutable and immovable-nothing less. But when they express only the copy or likeness and not the eternal things themselves, they need only be likely and analogous to the real words.[5]

From Plato on, to Ockham, words (signs) can be believed to correspond to realities (philosophical Realism). Ockham argues that it is incorrect to conflate the names of things and the things themselves, and by doing so, adds to a medieval debate about Realism and Nominalism (which, in turn, has fuelled a modern debate about the inclinations in Chaucer to subscribe to one or the other).[6] Chaucer's insistence on loosely appropriating this principle of literary Realism, and his subsequent and immediate refusal to abide by it, complicates and enriches our understanding of his use of philosophical themes. Furthermore, Knapp argues that *The Knight's Tale*, while attempting to endorse an essentially Platonic world of essences (a realist world view), is undermined, partly by the doubts about the benevolence of the cosmos, within his tale, and partly by the juxtaposition of it with *The Miller's Tale*. *The Miller's Tale*, Knapp argues, is 'nominalist' in spirit because in it words do not mean what they seem to mean.[7] B.L. Jefferson sees a Platonic epistemology in Chaucer's picture of the Golden Age in 'Lak of Steadfastnesse'. This is interesting because Jefferson points out that in that poem Chaucer introduces not only the tradition of the Gold Age and Boethian ideas about the contrast between the stable and the mutable, but also, quite specifically, ideas about 'word and deed' (l.4). He argues that Chaucer has transformed the idea of a

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[5] *Timaeus*, 29b. Chaucer would have come across phrase this through Boethius, *De Cons.*, III prosa 12 (205-7).

[6] See Paul Vincenet Spade, 'Ockham's Nominalist Metaphysics: Some Main Themes', in *The Cambridge Companion to Ockham*, ed. by Paul Vincent Spade, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 76-99. This is one of several contributions to the ongoing debate among Chaucer critics (as well as medieval intellectuals) about Realism and Nominalism.

[7] Knapp, pp. 21-3, 38. Some have criticised Knapp for seeming to create too much of a rigid dichotomy, whereby Realism is rigid authoritarianism and Nominalism a rebellious questioning of authority. See Stephen Penn, 'Literary Nominalism and Medieval Sign Theory: Problems and Perspectives', in *Nominalism and Literary Discourse: New Perspectives*, H. Keiper, Christopher Bode and Richard J. Utz, eds, (Atlanta: Rodopi, 1997), p. 173.

corruptible world into a model of language: word and deed should be the same, a Platonic idea.[8]

In contrast, and still trying to decide where Chaucer stands philosophically on the question of 'word and deed', Paul Beek Taylor sees the passage in the *General Prologue* as a comic overturning of the Platonic ideal to a nominalist attitude, because he (Taylor) thinks Chaucer means 'cosyne' to be taken ironically. Word and deed, signifier and signified ought to match (Platonic ideal)—they ought to be cousins—but they often don't—the words may cheat (cozen in the other sense). The possibility that there is no reality relating directly to the words is, Taylor argues, anti-Platonic, if only in jest.[9]

Chaucer is at once subscribing to and also challenging the criteria set forth by both Plato's words and his own. Chaucer appears to be considering how fiction might relate to real life, or how words relate to experience. In one sense, Chaucer is acknowledging the premise that authors of any period or genre have a responsibility to do their best to give an accurate account of events. The apology in the *General Prologue* centres on an admission that the narrator might fail in this duty. Simultaneously, the apology also recognises the stylistic allowances and epistemological limitations of re-telling old tales. Chaucer's texts, especially those that aim to re-tell well-known stories, need only approximate the originals; they must retain and convey the spirit of the original, not necessarily the letter.

In another sense, however, Chaucer rebukes the Platonic admonishment for factuality (a theme that has been discussed in relation to 'fable' in his writing already) and perfect re-presentation in regards to philosophical truths by appropriating, manipulating and employing Platonic principles when and how it suits him or the tale he is trying to tell. Perhaps, by choosing how to interpret Plato and how best to utilize

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[8] B.L. Jefferson, *Chaucer and the Consolation of Philosophy*, (New York; Gordian Press, 1968), pp. 106-7.
[9] Paul Beek Taylor, 'Chaucer's Cosyn to the Dede', *Speculum*, 57 (1982), 315-27.

the conveniently pliable and accessible aspects of his philosophies, Chaucer is suggesting that such a of degree artistic licence is the prerogative of anyone 'whoso kan hym rede' (I.741).

It has been the argument of this thesis that Chaucer's writing is philosophical, even arguably Platonic, at times. It has argued that Chaucer's work is not necessarily following Platonic and Aristotelian ideas faithfully or, indeed, accurately, in his writings and in finding some ancient philosophical principles a creative inspiration. It seems indicative of this impulse that when he cites a Platonic theme, such as words being cousin to deeds, that his independent refashioning of the implications of the principle should concern the writer of fiction and his creative freedoms and constraints. Chaucer's invocation of the philosophical concept of Platonic Forms in Philomela similarly shows him invoking a philosophical theme with reference to the work of the poet: philosophy as inspiration (not just a source) for creativity. Perhaps, at least for Chaucer's use of the 'words and deeds' passage seems to point to a problem for the writer (how words relate to experience), but not actually answer the question: he is moreover pointing out to his audience, rather provocatively, the fictionality of his pilgrims and their tales while invoking an authoritative principle about writing only reflecting factual truth. When the 'worde' was a classical philosophical tenet, and the 'deede' was a modern fictional composition, 'worde' and 'deede' could arguably remain consonant yet allow for creative freedom. Yet Chaucer's freedom lies in the way he, as a creative artist, uses the ancient philosophers and the way his writing constitutes its own testimony to the power over his imagination and thought of some of their ideas, either directly or mediated through writers of later centuries. For Chaucer, the word might not always need be as closely related to the deed as he would have us believe.

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