

Gender, Free Will, and Circumscription in Chaucer

A Dissertation Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Kendra Marie Slayton
May 2019

Copyright © 2019 by Kendra Slayton
All rights reserved.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I owe a great amount of thanks to the many mentors, friends, and family members who have helped me through graduate school and this project. First and foremost, I thank my advisor, Dr. Laura Howes, who offered to be my mentor the first day I met her as a prospective M.A. student. She introduced me to the joys of studying Chaucer and her class on *Troilus and Criseyde* changed the trajectory of my life and my sense of my scholarly identity for the better. I also thank my dissertation committee members, Dr. Mary Dzon, Dr. Mary Papke, and Dr. Jay Rubenstein for their mentorship during coursework and throughout this project. A special thanks also goes to Dr. Thomas Heffernan, who took me on as his Graduate Assistant for the Cambridge Study Abroad program. This opportunity allowed me four summers' experience in the land and places Chaucer lived and moved through, most specially the resting place of that "hooly blisful martir," Canterbury Cathedral. But most importantly, I am grateful for Dr. Heffernan's friendship and mentorship, and for our many and ongoing conversations.

I could not have made it through graduate school and this project without my family. Thanks to my brother, James A. Palmer, who, a few years ahead of me in academia, has offered advice and feedback in everything from graduate school applications, academic life, and the job market. Thank you also to my sister and best friend, Barbara Margrif, whose love and emotional support has encouraged me throughout the Ph.D. program. Finally, thank you to my Dad, Kenneth Slayton, who has always pushed me to aim high and supported me emotionally and financially throughout graduate school.

I am grateful also to my extended family of friends: Rose Anne, who has always offered a kind and listening ear; Debra Cardell, my dear friend since our first year in the M.A. program together; Emily Johnson Roberts, whose friendship I cannot imagine being without these last five years; Kali Mobley Finn, my companion throughout the dissertation project and whose work ethic constantly inspires me; and my writing group colleagues, Jewel Williams and Bradley Phillis, whose companionship and humor made writing a pleasure. Finally, a special thanks goes to my Knoxville archery family. I discovered archery after my comprehensive exams, and the sport has greatly contributed to the mental fortitude needed to complete a project of this size. I especially thank my Coach, Elzbieta Tworek, for teaching me to be confident and aim high, and her husband Jerzy Tworek, whose physical therapy sessions and advice have helped ameliorate the physical effects of the intensive writing process.

This dissertation has also been supported by several fellowships, for which I am very grateful. These include the Joseph Trahern Medieval Dissertation Fellowship and the Norman J. Sanders Dissertation Fellowship, granted by the Department of English at the University of Tennessee; the John Hurt Fisher Memorial Literature Prize, granted by the Marco Institute for Medieval and Renaissance Studies; and the University of Tennessee Humanities Center Dissertation Fellowship, which has granted me time and a room of my own in which to work and grow as a scholar.

Finally, I thank the editors for *The Chaucer Review*. A version of Chapter Three of this dissertation has been previously published as the article "'Tied in lusty leese': Gender and Determinism in *Troilus and Criseyde*," in *The Chaucer Review* 54.1 (2019), Copyright © The

Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA. This article is used by permission of The Pennsylvania State University Press. Many thanks to the anonymous readers for *The Chaucer Review* who provided extensive, helpful feedback on the earlier draft of these arguments. I also extend my gratitude to Pennsylvania State University Press and *Chaucer Review* editors David Raybin and Susanna Fein for their feedback and for permission to include this material in the third chapter of my dissertation.

ABSTRACT

In Chaucer scholarship, theological analyses and gendered analyses have remained largely separate. Theological analyses tend to focus on the importance of a Boethian transcendence of the mortal realm in Chaucer's works, while gendered analyses tend to focus on women's material and social conditions. In this dissertation, however, I examine how Chaucer's theological interests fundamentally inform his social projects, particularly his depiction of women in society. Methodologically, I contextually analyze medieval debates on free will while drawing on semantics and sociological theory to offer a hermeneutic for examining Chaucer's theological, philosophical, and gender projects not as mutually exclusive but mutually essential. Many medieval theologians believed that humans felt a natural inclination towards God as the *summum bonum*, or highest good, but actively followed this inclination through free choice. Several of Chaucer's works, however, question what happens if hyper-masculine social ideologies usurp the role of the *summum bonum*, subjecting individuals to systemic social determinism. In addition, Chaucer's works often explore how antifeminist social circumscription can negatively affect the common good.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Chapter One: Free Will and Circumscription in Medieval Theology.....	13
Chapter Two: Universals, Gender, and Circumscription	95
Chapter Three: Gender and Social Determinism in <i>Troilus and Criseyde</i>.....	177
Chapter Four: Antifeminist Circumscription and the Common Good	217
Conclusion.....	296
Bibliography	311
Vita.....	332

INTRODUCTION

“allas, whom shal I leeve?
 For ther ben grete clerkes many oon
 That destine thorough arguments preve;
 And some men seyn that nedely ther is noon,
 But that fre choise is yeven us everychon.
 O, welaway! So sleigh earn clerkes olde
 That I not whos opynyoun I may holde.”
 — Troilus, *Troilus and Criseyde* (IV.967–73)¹

This dissertation is the result of an unusual and fortuitous confluence of my study of Chaucer and my study of nineteenth and twentieth-century American literary naturalism.² Naturalist literature, such as Stephen Crane’s “Maggie,” Frank Norris’s *McTeague*, and Edith Wharton’s *House of Mirth*, offers a sort of social Darwinism, or social determinism, exploring the ways characters may be delimited by their surrounding social milieus. As Donald Pizer has explained, due to Naturalist writers’ focus on how social conditions may shape human habit, not just environmental or biological circumstances, some scholars have seen an innate pessimism in Naturalist literature. However, Pizer contends that “these writers...were expressing a sense of the worth of the human enterprise whatever the limitations placed on human volition by the immediacies of social reality,” arguing that in their texts is “instance after instance of an author's struggle to confront the conflict between old values and new experience in his time.”³

1. All quotations of Chaucer in this dissertation are from the *Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd ed., ed. Larry Benson.

2. In particular, my earliest ideas for this project germinated while taking Dr. Mary Papke’s ENGL 662 course, “Engendering American Naturalism,” in Spring 2013.

3. Pizer, “Introduction: The Study of American Literary Naturalism,” 6.

During my coursework on naturalism, we discussed a recent critical trend in which scholars and authors apply literary naturalism forward, exploring how in texts by feminist writers in particular, literary naturalism's emphasis on social determinism provides a tool for exposing and indicting matrices of oppression into our present time. These texts on the surface had nothing to do with medieval literature, but I began to wonder about applying literary naturalism backward, for many of our conversations reminded me of Chaucer's demonstrable fascination with the interplay between the individual and society, particular in texts featuring women.

Initially, I did not connect this to theology—I was not interested in Chaucer and theology, or so I thought, because in my experience at that point, traditional theological analyses of Chaucer often did not address his female characters. My main interest was in exploring Chaucer's gender politics. But as I continued to read both Naturalist literature and Chaucer criticism, I began to wonder if this gender gap was inherent in Chaucer's texts or if it was of historiographical making. And as I began to explore medieval theology, I began to realize that when scholars claim a text is Boethian, for example, there are often unspoken assumptions about what it *means* for a text to “be Boethian.”

An overview of scholarship on *Troilus and Criseyde* provides a concise example. In the fourth book of Chaucer's tragic love story, the Trojan parliament agrees to trade Criseyde to the Greeks in exchange for the return of their captured warrior, Antenor. Struggling to decide how to respond to Criseyde's impending expulsion, Troilus begins to question how much free will humans really have, and how their free will coexists with God's omniscience. Troilus quickly perplexes himself in considering the varying positions on these issues offered by “grete clerkes,”

some of whom, he alleges, argue the case for “destine,” or a belief that God predetermines all human action, others making the case the “fre choise is yeven us everychon” (IV.968–71). He attempts to work through the problem by hypothesizing at great length on the causation behind sitting in a chair (IV.1030–1064). Do we sit because God’s divine plan makes us sit? If so, does this not destroy our free choice? Troilus notes that this is an “abusioun,” or heresy, of a belief, as is the belief that human choices cause God’s foreknowledge (IV.1060). Troilus’s abstract puzzle forms part of his larger attempt to sort out if there is anything he can do to prevent Criseyde’s departure from Troy; if he is to believe his own impulse towards a sense of impending doom, there is not, while if he is to believe Pandarus’s counsel, there may be.⁴

Troilus’s speech has captured critical attention in part because a corollary does not appear in Chaucer’s source text, Boccaccio’s *Il Filostrato*; it is Chaucer’s addition, one that he seems to lift partially from his own translation of Boethius’s *Consolation of Philosophy*.⁵ Troilus, however, tends toward fatalism, and as such, has been read as both an earnest Boethian hero and a flawed one—as a hyper-fatalist or as one who seeks earthly pleasures instead of the *summum bonum* [highest good], blinding himself in love.⁶ But, ultimately, in what is seen as the text’s pinnacle Boethian moment, Troilus ascends after heartbreak and death “Up to the holughnesse of

4. For more on Pandarus as an advocate for personal agency, see Palmer, “When *Remedia Amoris* Fails” (2010) and Fewer, “The Second Nature” (2008).

5. See Windeatt, *Troilus & Criseyde: A New Edition of ‘The Book of Troilus,’* 405fn953–9 and Benson, *Riverside*, 1048fn953–1085.

6. On the first, see, for example, Murton, “Praying with Boethius” (2015). On fatalist Troilus, see Utz, “‘For all that comth, comth by necessitee’” (1996); and Fumo, “The Ends of Love” (2010). On blind Troilus, see Shoaf’s argument that Troilus “is rather a ‘citizen’ of the very ‘city’ (Thebes) of confusion, where self-deception, tragic psychic blindness, is the (dis)order of things” (“The Falcon in the Mew,” 162).

the eighth spere” (V.1809), from which he laughs at the human pursuit of earthly goods (V.1814–25). Criticism has generally agreed that *Troilus and Criseyde* urges spiritual transcendence of the fickle, transient mortal world in pursuit of the ultimate, unchangeable good: divine salvation and eternal life.⁷

While apt, such philosophical and theological readings often elide how the other main character, Criseyde, fits into this hermeneutic. As Carolyn Dinshaw has pointed out, this can have the effect of relegating Criseyde “to be a thing of this unstable world” from whom Troilus “must . . . remain detached,” as in such readings—“reading like a man” in Dinshaw’s terms—theological and philosophical transcendence can be had only by Troilus.⁸ Furthermore, the above analyses tend to operate on an often unspoken assumption of what it means for a text to “be Boethian,” chiefly focusing on the ways that Boethius’s text underscores the transience of earthly goods, though, as I will argue in this dissertation, Boethius’s *Consolation* also gestures not only towards transcendence of the earthly realm but also to an interrogation of social structures and human action within it.

Theological analyses of *Troilus and Criseyde* thus have a tendency to focus primarily on Troilus and portray Chaucer as a transcendent Boethianist, and intentionally or not tend to imply

7. See, for example, Donaldson, *Chaucer’s Poetry* (1958), esp. 75, as reviewed by Dinshaw in *Chaucer’s Sexual Poetics*, 31; Bloomfield, “Distance and Predestination” (1957); and, more recently, Murton, “Praying with Boethius,” esp. 313–14 and 319, although Murton adds that in *Tr* Chaucer portrays human love as a means to such transcendence (313).

8. Dinshaw, *Chaucer’s Sexual Poetics*, 31; see also 39, 51–52. Criticism remains in the nascent stages of exploring this gap, but see the following robust analyses on how Criseyde’s character contributes to the text’s philosophical and theological projects: Hill, “*She, This in Blak*” (2006), esp. 4; Nair, ““O brotel wele”” (2006); Fumo, “The Ends of Love” (2010); Rosenfeld, *Ethics and Enjoyment* (2010), esp. 12; and Marelj, “Philosophical *Entente*” (2012).

that women, therefore, are not part of the theological discussion at all. A further implication of such readings is that Chaucer, in assigning the potential for transcendence only to Troilus and men, endorses antifeminist stereotypes of women common in medieval clerical writings in particular. Alcuin Blamires explains in his introduction to *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended* that “in the theological sphere, . . . woman was . . . associated with ‘matter’ as with various other inferior categories.” As an example, Blamires cites Augustine of Hippo, observing that

even Augustine, who took to heart the message of Galatians 3: 26–8 that all people become ‘the children of God by faith’ because therein race, status, and gender disappear . . . , thought woman more than man represented an orientation of the mind towards the material rather than the spiritual.⁹

And yet, readings that intentionally or otherwise align Chaucer’s own theological impulses with this kind of antifeminism do not square with the plethora of robust feminist analyses of Chaucer which see him, as Jill Mann argues, as “dramatizing his sense of the writer’s responsibilities towards women as literary subjects,” particularly in examining the ways the women’s agency may be circumscribed by their surrounding social milieus.¹⁰ These analyses, however, although conducting vital work in exploring Criseyde’s social constraints in *Troilus and Criseyde*, for example, have tended to avoid theological analyses, likely due to the way that the previously described theological frameworks seemingly preclude discussion of gender

9. Blamires, “Introduction,” 3.

10. Mann, *Feminizing Chaucer*, 11.

dynamics and the larger secular world. These two fruitful critical traditions have thus remained largely segregated, each increasingly tailored to rectify the perceived shortcomings of the other, with more sociological, gendered analyses countering theological analyses through an emphasis on Criseyde's inextricable sociality. As Sashi Nair, whose work constitutes an exception in the above gap, observes, "Boethian readings of *Troilus and Criseyde* tend to ignore Criseyde altogether, while recent critical analyses of Criseyde alone have tended to focus upon the social constraints that dictate her actions, exhibiting little interest in the Boethian elements of her characterization."¹¹

While the narrative voice at the end of *Troilus and Criseyde* seems to recommend that its readers transcend the mortal world with Troilus, accepting this recommendation at face value, and in isolation from the text as a whole, comes with the risk of eliding how the larger narrative urges readers to first scrutinize and indict that mortal world—and its circumscription of Criseyde—before we leave it behind. *Troilus and Criseyde*, however, constitutes but one of many examples in which Chaucer meditates on intersecting issues of gender and free will, in ways which imply that theological questions cannot be divorced from the social realm. In this dissertation, I thus join a nascent field that seeks to bridge gender and theology in Chaucerian scholarship. My work contextually analyzes medieval debates on free will while drawing on semantic and sociological modes of interpretation to offer a hermeneutic for examining Chaucer's theological, social, and gender projects not as mutually exclusive but mutually essential.

11. Nair, "O brotel wel," 43.

While theologians such as Thomas Aquinas believed that humans exercised free choice in following a natural inclination toward God as the *summum bonum*, or highest good, this dissertation views Chaucer's fictions as thought experiments casting such ideals into the social realm. Chaucer's works, I argue, apply the terms of the theological debates on free will to an examination of the lived experiences of women within nexuses of circumscription stemming from necessity imposed not by God, but by man. His texts thus portray and indict a form of social, antifeminist determinism, while also dramatizing the ways this determinism negatively affects not only women but men and the broader common good as well.¹²

Outline

Chapter One begins with an overview of the medieval debates on the nature of human free will, and its relation to God's omniscience and omnipotence, which Troilus refers to in the epigraph at the start of this introduction. The theological and philosophical writers treated in this chapter range from classical authors like Aristotle to those more contemporary to Chaucer himself, encompassing a broad range of texts and ideas in circulation in Chaucer's fourteenth

12. A note on terminology: The term "theology" of course encompasses a much broader and complex nexus of issues than are treated here; for the current project, I focus primarily on theological debates on human free will, in relation to both divine power and to the forces that may circumscribe free will. Throughout the dissertation, I use "social determinism" in a Naturalist sense implying society's delimitations of the individual; however, I use "self-circumscription" instead of "self-determination," as the latter in more modern contexts can imply a view of the individual as exercising more agency and control of their lives. The term "antifeminist" I use over the course of my arguments at first as it is standardly used in medieval criticism, referring to a particular body of largely clerical works (see again Blamires); I then gradually extend this to apply to a larger body of both written works (for example, the literary traditions to which Chaucer responds) and sociocultural ideologies.

century. The chapter traces three main findings relevant for looking at intersecting theological and sociological issues in Chaucer's text. First, while the theologians considered in this chapter varied in the ways they justified the coexistence of human free will and God's omniscience, they were all adamant on the existence of free will—without it, there could be no morality, and no just punishment of sin. Second, many writers pointed to the ironic use of an individual's own free will to make choices that ultimately circumscribe that individual somehow. Boethius and Aquinas, for example, present fairly optimistic theories of human natural inclination toward God, but even then, they emphasized human capacity for self-circumscription, a point further enhanced by later thinkers such as Duns Scotus. And third, moving closer to Chaucer's own era, the final portion of Chapter One considers the influence of nominalism on fourteenth-century writing. Nominalism participated in the reemergence of long-standing debates on universals and particulars and featured a rejection of the former in favor of the latter, alongside an emphasis on both God's will and the human will as radically free (thus associating the movement with voluntarist theology). As I will further explore in the chapter, Chaucerian scholars like Sheila Delany and Richard Utz have theorized that this rise in nominalist thought (sometimes also called "materialist") corresponded to the great amount of social upheaval in the fourteenth century, including famines, the Black Death, populist revolts and the Hundred-Years war; these events made it feel that while there might be a divine chain in heaven, human choices were driving the world and other peoples' experiences in the world. As I conclude in the chapter, the question for nominalist-leaning thinkers becomes this: If a human's natural inclination is *not*

necessarily towards God as the *summum bonum*, what *is* it towards? What happens if the *summum bonum* is perverted—if the ends which we follow are not divine, but man-made?

Chapters Two and Three then begin to explore the ways that many of Chaucer's works touch upon these medieval debates on the nature of human free will. In Chapter Two, I begin with an analysis of the "Nun's Priest's Tale," Chaucer's chicken fable which features a debate on divine destiny that takes place between a husband and wife. Interestingly, the tale aligns the positions with gender, Chauntecleer the husband representing a sort of fatalist belief in destiny and Pertelote the wife a voluntarist belief in the efficacy of the individual human (or in this case avian) will. While thus raising the question of if individuals possess free will, the text also considers the ways that individuals may ironically circumscribe themselves through both the abuse and occlusion of their free will, taking an Aristotelian approach to the negative effects of habitually indulging in vice—for it is Chauntecleer's gluttony and pride which ultimately endanger him. In its denouement, the tale suggests a mediated position between Chauntecleer and Pertelote, one which recognizes that while there may be events beyond our control, we have free will in choosing our response to such situations, and even the power to save ourselves from the jaws of a real or proverbial fox.

The second part of Chapter Two then analyzes, in contrast, Chaucer's "Knight's Tale." While the "Nun's Priest's Tale" takes a somewhat light-hearted approach to issues of free will and gender, in the "Knight's Tale" Chaucer more seriously dramatizes the human capacity for self-circumscription, considering how Arcite and Palamon, believing in fate, "aventure," and "destynee," fail to recognize the consequences of their own actions and the actions of others. The

“Knight’s Tale,” however, also demonstrates the ways that Arcite and Palamon’s self-circumscription is socially conditioned, encouraged by a broader social ideology, of which Theseus stands as a symbolic figurehead, that privileges male valor and power to the detriment of others, particularly women like Emelye. Furthermore, through his subversion of his source material, Chaucer in the “Knight’s Tale” also metaliterarily indicts the romance genre itself, pointing to the ways that the genre’s emphasis on masculine valor and chivalry functions as an ideological universal that overlooks the particular, material, embodied experiences of women and even men.

Chapter Three then turns to an analysis of *Troilus and Criseyde*, Chaucer’s most sustained inquiry into the social determinism of women and the intersection of this phenomenon with theological questions of free will. Unlike Boethius’s vision in the *Consolation of Philosophy* of God as the benevolent *summum bonum* toward which all humans naturally incline, *Troilus and Criseyde* powerfully explores the deterministic potential of secular society when its ideology subverts the Christian *summum bonum*. The “Knight’s Tale,” as I argue in my second chapter, sympathetically portrays Emelye’s circumscription within a hyper-masculine ideology but primarily dramatizes the negative effects of this ideology on Arcite and Palamon. *Troilus and Criseyde*, however, masterfully considers the effects of such ideologies on women, considering how Criseyde’s very subjectivity is affected by her surrounding social conditions. I undertake this analysis through the use of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus*, which he defines in the *Logic of Practice* as “durable, transposable dispositions” that individuals learn through observation of their social conditions, and which “ensures the active presence of past

experiences . . . deposited into each organism in the form of schemes of perception, thought and action.”¹³ Although Criseyde believes in her independence, declaring “I am myn owene womman” (II.750), Chaucer’s employment of words with circumscribing connotations, such as *lusty leese* and *muwe*, undercuts her self-perception, demonstrating the ways that her social milieu conditions her to unwittingly submit to systems of power which circumscribe her. In addition to this semantic slippage, Chaucer imbues his text with ghosts of the violent classical past by subverting his primary source, Boccaccio’s *Il Filostrato*, with references to darker classical texts like Statius’s *Thebaid* or Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* in order to point towards the atemporal quality of the social snare in which Criseyde is trapped, circumscribing her past, present, and future.

Finally, in Chapter Four, I argue that other of Chaucer’s texts dramatize how this kind of antifeminist circumscription also adumbrates a systemic perversion of the common good. I begin with an analysis of how Criseyde’s circumscription is tied in *Troilus and Criseyde* to broader questions of what constitutes the common good; in *Troilus*, for example, the Trojan parliament believes that the exchange of Criseyde for Antenor will do the greatest good for the Trojan community by enabling them to better fight the Greeks; ultimately, however, Antenor betrays the Trojans, perhaps implying that ideologies dependent on the circumscription of women for pursuit of masculine valor in battle are doomed to fail. I then turn to an analysis of three more of Chaucer’s works, beginning with the *Legend of Good Women*. In the “Prologue” to the *Legend*, Chaucer, through the character of Alceste, touches on philosophical and theological writings on

13. Bourdieu, *Logic of Practice*, 30.

the nature of good rulership and how to achieve the common good. In the individual legends that follow, I argue, such as the “Legend of Philomela,” antifeminist circumscription and violence, resulting in the symbolic or literal loss of the female voice, are directly connected to an indictment of male rulers who focus on private goods and desire over communal interests. I then extend this analysis to two of the *Canterbury* tales, the “Wife of Bath’s Prologue” and “Tale” and the “Clerk’s Tale,” both of which further problematize the loss of the female voice in the wake of masculine, monolithic social ideologies and textual traditions. In my conclusion, I then consider the alternative social structures Chaucer suggests in stories like the *Parliament of Fowls* and the “Tale of Melibee,” in which the inclusion of a woman’s voice counters the reproduction of circumscribing and potentially violent social ideologies. In the final analysis, I conclude, Chaucer’s works thus demonstrate that the social circumscription of women’s God-given free will harms not only women but men and the common good as a whole; and it is only through endeavoring to end this antifeminist circumscription, in both social and literary practice, that a healthier *communitas* can be achieved.

CHAPTER ONE:

FREE WILL AND CIRCUMSCRIPTION IN MEDIEVAL THEOLOGY

Free Will: A Historical Overview

To appreciate the manifold ways in which Chaucer not only refers and alludes to theological debates throughout his oeuvre but also the ways he employs their terms to an interrogation of gender politics and social concerns, it is necessary to understand how his theological and philosophical predecessors and contemporaries wrestled with the issues themselves. This is vital not only for general purposes of historical contextualization, but also more specifically to bring a more concretely medieval perspective into a conversation on what is ultimately an exploration of the forces constituting and delimiting “agency”—a term which while absolutely essential for my overall project in this dissertation of exploring women, circumscription, and the common good in Chaucer’s works, is likewise fraught with its own (and often unacknowledged) modern theoretical baggage.

To unpack this term, “agency,” denser and more complex than its easy invocation may imply, I turn to an overview of medieval perspectives on the role of human free will and the forces which may both enable and constrain it, before exploring in my later chapters how these interests manifest in connection to female agency throughout Chaucer’s body of works. That is, I explore questions such as: How do medieval writers reconcile divine foreknowledge and omnipotence with human free will? What are the limitations and overall characterizations of that free will according to competing theological treatises from late antiquity to the late Middle Ages,

and on what points do they reach consensus? To investigate these questions, I begin with an outline of Aristotle's theories of the will and its ultimate end before exploring the manifold ways that later Christian writers reconcile the coexistence of both divine foreknowledge and human free will, examining Boethius, Augustine, Aquinas, and Duns Scotus. As I approach writers more contemporary to Chaucer himself, I will likewise consider the related fourteenth-century nominalist movement, which emphasized particulars over universals, through the writing of William Ockham, and reactions to this movement, as represented by Thomas Bradwardine.

Aristotle

While Chaucer may not have used Aristotle as directly as, for example, Boethius, Aristotle's profound and lasting influence on theologians throughout the Middle Ages necessitates a consideration of the implications of his theories for later formulations of human free will. In both the *Eudemian Ethics* and the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle expounds his theory that all humans aim for happiness, which is the ultimate "good," or "end." His commentaries on free will in both are part of this larger project, rather than being his ultimate aim, unlike many of the medieval writers I will explore later in this chapter. Nonetheless, in Aristotle there are themes which continue to run, albeit revised and in many ways Christianized, throughout the writing of later periods, including (1) his conception of the ultimate good (for him, happiness, or *eudaimonia*) as divine in nature; (2) his theory of a dual nature of the soul, one rational and commanding, controlling the will, the other irrational but obeying; and (3) a rejection of Fortune in favor of an emphasis on the free, voluntary ability of human beings to

pursue happiness, the ultimate good; for Aristotle, this is wrought by consciously and habitually pursuing virtue over vice by following a “golden mean” which he stresses as subjective and individual.

Eudaimonia and the Divine

In both the *Eudemian Ethics* and the *Nicomachean Ethics*, as Aristotle describes the ultimate good (happiness) and how it may be achieved, he continuously stresses that it is a good attainable by all, though it must be actively pursued by each individual. Specifically, Aristotle surmises that while humans achieve *eudaimonia* through their own choices, *eudaimonia* itself has a divine nature; that is, it is not wholly human in character, or simply naturally endowed (though he believes that it is natural for men to pursue it). In the *Eudemian Ethics*, he optimistically stresses happiness’s universal attainability with a “view to the hope people have of attaining what is upright” (*EE* 1215a12). He contrasts two scenarios, first writing, “If the noble life consists in what is due to fortune or to nature, it would be something that many cannot hope for, since its acquisition is not in their power, nor attainable by their care or activity” (*EE* 1215a13–14). Then he provides reassurance that “if it depends on the individual and his personal acts being of a certain character, then the good would be both more general and more divine, more general because more would be able to possess it, more divine because happiness would then be open to those who make themselves and their acts of a certain character” (*EE* 1215a15–19).

When Aristotle revisits these ideas in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, he continues to emphasize this duality—that a divine character marks *eudaimonia*, not only because of its own intrinsic qualities (certainly few would deny the goodness of happiness) but also because it is attainable by all; it is not a good doled out by Chance, Fortune, or circumstances of birth. Again, he explains that a central philosophical question on happiness is whether it “is to be acquired by learning or by habituation or some other sort of training, or comes from some divine providence or again by fortune” (*NE* 1099b10–11), and he reiterates that “even if it is not god-sent but comes as a result of virtue and some process of learning or training, is evidently among the most divine things; for that which is the prize and end of virtue seems to be the chief good and something divine and blessed” (*NE* 1099b14–19). Throughout both *Ethics*, then, Aristotle reasserts that while humans must actively strive for happiness, it is a good which is divine in its ultimate goodness and which is accessible to all, for “all who are not disabled as regards virtue may win it by a certain kind of learning and care” (*NE* 1099b20).

Reason, Virtue, and the Duality of the Soul

As Aristotle describes the processes by which humans desire and pursue *eudaimonia*, he theorizes that a sort of cooperative duality characterizes the soul. In the *Eudemian Ethics*, he proposes that the soul pursues reason by two different schemes which “partake [in reason] not in the same way, but the one by its natural tendency to command, the other by its natural tendency to obey and listen” (*EE* 1219b30). Likewise, there are two kinds of virtue, “the moral and the intellectual,” which belong, respectively, to the commanding and the obedient schemes of the

soul, for “since the intellectual virtues involve reason, they belong to that rational part of the soul which gives commands by its possession of reason, while the moral belong to the part which is irrational but by its nature obedient to the part possessing reason” (*EE* 1220a10).

Neither of these schemes alone is enough to enable a person to become reasoning or virtuous. Aristotle compares the soul’s pursuit of virtue to the natural movement of objects; a stone, for example, “which by nature moves downwards cannot be habituated to move upwards, not even if one habituates it by throwing it up ten thousand times; nor can fire be habituated to move downwards, nor can anything else that by nature behaves in one way be habituated to behave in another” (*NE* 1103a21–25). Similarly, he concludes, “Neither by nature, then, nor against nature do virtues arise in us: rather we are adapted by nature to receive them, and are made perfect by habit” (*NE* 1103a26). The correspondence of virtues and the soul can be understood thusly (from *EE* 1220a10; 1221b 26–30; *NE* 1103a26): one part of the soul is commanding, rational, truthful, intellectual, and habituated, while the other part is obeying, irrational, desiderative, moral, and natural.

In Aristotle’s theory, the pursuit of reason and of virtue requires both a natural, inherently obeying aspect of the soul, which stands ready to “receive” virtues, and an intellectual, commanding aspect of the soul which enables humans, by their free choice, to build habits that enable a virtuous, and thus ultimately happy, life. Of the former, Aristotle asserts in the *Eudemian Ethics* that “by nature one wants the good but against nature and by perversion the bad as well” (*EE* 1227a30). In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, he expands more specifically upon this, explaining that “the aiming at the end is not self-chosen—rather, one must be born with an eye,

as it were, by which to assess things nobly and choose what is truly good” (*NE* 1114b6–10). While such adaption by nature, as the first step in achieving *eudaimonia*, may seem in a way circumscribing, particularly with Aristotle’s illustrating example of the impossibility of unnatural movement, Aristotle very carefully explains that such natural inclination stands entirely separate from conversations on voluntary and involuntary action. To return to his example of the natural movement of a stone, he explains that when objects “move according to their natural internal impulse, we do not speak of force; nor do we call it voluntary either: rather, there is no name for this antithesis”—in fact, he claims, it is “when they move against this impulse” that “we say they move perforce” (*EE* 1224a19–22). Aristotle’s conviction that such natural adaptation and impulses do not cancel out human action is so strong that he bluntly declares that “to entrust to fortune what is greatest and most noble would be a very defective arrangement” (*NE*1099b25), an expansion upon his point, noted earlier, that “all who are not disabled as regards virtue may win it [happiness] by a certain kind of learning and care” (*NE* 1099b25; 1099b19).

Voluntary Action and Habituation

Aristotle thus sees human action as the locus for our ability to develop virtue and happiness for ourselves, though he believes that nature likewise plays a role in preconditioning humans to understand virtue. As he explains, “it is better to be happy thus than by fortune” (*NE* 1099b21). Fortune, for Aristotle, can only lead to “blessedness,” which he differentiates from the *eudaimonia* that comes from humans’ own actions when, having been adapted by nature to understand virtue, they choose to build habits which in turn lead to a virtuous and therefore

happy life (*NE* 1100b22–35). He insists that “the man who is truly good and wise...bears all the fortunes of life becomingly and always acts as nobly as the circumstances allow,” and therefore that “the happy man can never become wretched—though he will not be blessed if he meets with fortunes like those of Priam” (*NE* 1101a1–7). Voluntary actions make humans able to make the best of “fortunes like those of Priam,” which, though such fortunes may leave a person without blessedness, they cannot strip away virtue and *eudaimonia*, since the latter depends on repeated, conscious decisions to pursue virtue, while the former depends on more fickle, transitory forces.

It is on repeated action that Aristotle places the most emphasis, particularly in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, where he declares that “moral virtue comes about as a result of habit” (*NE* 1103a16). Even amongst “the things that come to us by nature,” he believes, “we first acquire the capacity and later exhibit the activity,” a process that he compares to that of becoming a carpenter, a musician, or a crafter. Similarly, he adds, “we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, courageous by doing courageous acts” (*NE* 1103a28–1103b1). Aristotle’s emphasis on habit has sociopolitical implications beyond the individual, because no one is born with habits, of course—they are learned, from parents, from education, and from other sociopolitical institutions. It is through “performing the acts that we do in our transactions with other men” that “we become just or unjust” and, therefore, “it makes no small difference, then, whether we form habits of one kind or of another from our very youth—it makes a very great difference, or rather all the difference” (*NE* 1103b15; 25).

Habit and the Golden Mean

With the vitality of habit thus established, the question becomes that of which actions to choose, which virtues to embrace and which vices to shun, and to what degree. In the *Eudemian Ethics*, Aristotle refers to the search for virtue as the search for such a golden mean, stating that

Since we have supposed that virtue is that sort of state from which men have a tendency to do the best actions and through which they are in the best disposition towards what is best, and best is what is in accordance with correct reasoning, and this is the *mid-point* between excess and deficiency relative to us, it follows that *moral virtue is a mean* in each case and is concerned with certain *mid-points* in pleasures and pains and in the pleasant and the painful. (*EE* 1222a6–10, emphasis added)

Aristotle returns to this point repeatedly: individual virtues develop through avoidance of both excess and deficiency, and an overall morally virtuous character is achieved through habitually aiming at these means. He repeats the point in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, and while the two *Ethics* often overlap in content in this and other regards, it is particularly in this later work that Aristotle emphasizes not only the pursuit of virtue as the pursuit of this golden mean, but also the subjective, individualized nature of the golden mean itself. He describes, for example, that

both fear and confidence and appetite and anger and pity and in general pleasure and pain may be felt both too much and too little, and in both cases not well; but to feel them *when* you should, with *reference* to what you should, *towards the people you should*, with *the end* you should have, and *how* you should—this is what is both midway and best, and this is characteristic of virtue. (*NE* 1106b19–24, emphasis added)

Though virtue can be attained by aiming at a mid-point, in this description, discovering the mid-point itself depends on timing, context, and audience, as well as on one's ends and goals. The mid-point at which one achieves virtue "is not one, nor the same for all" but instead "is a state concerned with choice, lying in a mean relative to us, this being determined by reason and in the way in which the wise man would determine it" (*NE* 1106a33; 1107a1).

Given the relativity of this mid-point, the development of virtue—that is, not just the performance of one or two virtuous acts but rather the lifelong habituation of virtuousness—is non-prescriptive, and instead relates closely to personal experience, and to an acknowledgement of particular cases as well as universal examples. Aristotle gives the example of wisdom, explaining, "Nor is wisdom concerned with universals only—it must also recognize the particulars; for it is concerned with action and action is concerned with particulars" (*EE* 1141b15). As humans only gradually encounter and experience various particulars, Aristotle surmises that the young cannot truly be considered wise, for although they may acquire a great deal of knowledge and make good decisions, particulars "become familiar from experience, and a young man has no experience; for it is length of time that gives experience" (*EE* 1142a14–15). Only through the years can a man, as he matures, be exposed to enough variable experiences to begin to understand how to seek the mid-point at which virtue may be attained.

Such experience is also required for understanding the subjective, flexible nature of virtue's golden mean. In pursuing virtue, Aristotle argues, "judgment is neither about things that are always and are unchangeable, nor about any and every one of the things that come into being; rather, it is about things about which one might raise problems and deliberate" (*EE* 1143a5–8).

Speaking more directly to individual decision making, in the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle argues that both universals and particulars when taken alone tend in their own way towards non-specificity, and thus that “the agents themselves must in each case consider what is appropriate to the occasion, as happens also in the art of medicine or of navigation” (*NE* 1104a1–10). That is, neither universal precepts nor particulars alone suffice, “For among statements about actions those which are universal apply more widely, but those which are particular are more true, since actions have to do with individual cases, and our statements must harmonize with the facts in these cases” (*NE* 1107a29–34, p247). Universal statements may overlook the essential, unique facts of individual decision-making moments, just as only considering these particular facts without considering broader precepts may likewise lead to flawed pursuit of virtue.

The pursuit of virtue in Aristotle’s theory thus becomes less about the accumulation of knowledge and more about the actions men take in particular circumstances. As he states, “knowledge or awareness is of two sorts, one the possession and the other the use of knowledge” (*EE* 1225b11). Knowledge is nothing without application; only through its use may virtue be judged. Yet Aristotle provides an interesting caveat as to the exigence and agency behind actions: “both virtue and vice,” he explains, “have to do with matters where the man himself is the responsible origin of his actions” (*EE* 1223a14–15). This observation implies that in some matters, something or someone other than a man himself may be the origin of his actions. Parsing when man is and is not the “responsible origin of his actions” thus becomes an essential step in the evaluation of virtue and vice: “We must then grasp of what actions he is himself the responsible origin. We all admit that for acts that are voluntary and done from the choice of each

man he is responsible but for involuntary acts he is not himself responsible” (*EE* 1223a16–18). This, then, becomes the crux in the pursuit of virtue and ultimately happiness—for if virtue cannot develop without man’s deliberate, voluntary cultivation of it, virtue requires free will, and by implication, a lack of free will may hinder virtue.

Virtue and (In)voluntary Action

What, then, constitutes voluntary and involuntary acts, and what are the circumstantial exigencies behind each? Aristotle first carefully differentiates the voluntary itself from choice and desire. The voluntary, he explains, is not merely “action in accordance with desire,” and likewise, “the voluntary is not the same as what is in accordance with choice” (*EE* 1223b37–38). Instead, “it remains that the voluntary consists in action with some kind of thinking” (*EE* 1224a7). Furthermore, the context of this thinking itself—whether it is done with or without ignorance—is the fulcrum upon which the voluntariness of an action hinges. Aristotle explains,

By the voluntary I mean...any of the things in a man’s own power which he does with knowledge and not in ignorance either of the person acted on or of the instrument or of the end, ...each such act being done not coincidentally nor perforce....Therefore that which is done in ignorance, or though not done in ignorance is not in the agent’s power, or is done perforce, is involuntary. (*EE* 1135a24–35).

Here, Aristotle’s explanation of the circumstances constituting ignorance relates closely to his emphasis upon the subjective nature of the golden mean. Without contextual awareness—knowledge of circumstantial particulars as well as universal precepts—individuals cannot take

voluntary action. Aristotle therefore urges us to judge choices, rather than deeds (even though, as noted, he defines the “voluntary” as more than just desire or choice alone), “because men do base acts under compulsion,” or “perforce,” as he phrases it elsewhere, “but no one chooses them so” (*EE* 1228a15). Instead, “we control our actions from the beginning to the end if we know the particular facts” (*NE* 1114b31), and ignorance acts as a primary circumscribing force.

The question thus remains: If individuals are not responsible for involuntary actions done in ignorance, who or what is? From where does ignorance stem? How does it develop, or rather, how does systematic knowledge and awareness fail to develop? These are not Aristotle’s primary concerns in either the *Eudemian* or the *Nicomachean Ethics*, but his explanation in each that involuntary actions—or to phrase it alternately, circumscribed actions—stem primarily from ignorance has strong implications pertaining to the growth of the individual vis-à-vis his or her sociopolitical and familial circumstances. If ignorance has the capacity to become a circumscribing force that can preclude habituated development of virtue and ultimately *eudemonia*, and if, as Aristotle argues, development of virtue also requires years of experience and exposure to a variety of particular circumstances, then an individual’s sociocultural circumstances themselves may become the “responsible origins of his actions,” if the ideology and institutions of that community cultivate ignorance instead of awareness and knowledge.

Augustine of Hippo

While Aristotle calls attention to the potentially circumscribing force of not only a personal failure to pursue the golden mean of virtue, but also, by implication, of broader social

and institutional circumstances, Augustine, writing centuries later, rejects Aristotelian theory as an influence in his own development as a Christian. In his *Confessions*, he repeatedly (though not exclusively) blames his years of struggle against conversion on his education, rooted in rhetoric and arts. He writes, for example, that in his twenties he “was deceived and deceived others in various forms of self-assertion, publicly by the teaching of what are called the liberal arts, privately under the false name of religion” (*Conf* IV.I.1). He later rails at length against Aristotle specifically; upon having read his *Categories*, he remarks,

Not only did all this not profit me, it actually did me harm, in that I tried to understand You, my God, marvelous in Your simplicity and immutability, while imaging that whatsoever had being was to be found within these ten categories—as if You were a substance in which inhered Your own greatness of beauty, as they might inhere in a body. In fact Your greatness and Your beauty are Yourself. (*Conf* IV.XVI.29)

Yet as T. D. J. Chappell has argued, Augustine and Aristotle frequently show thematic similarity.¹⁴ Furthermore, Augustine does not reject all classical writings. He cites Cicero’s now-lost *Hortensius* as a source of great inspiration, one which “changed the direction of my mind, altered my prayers to You, O Lord, and gave me a new purpose and ambition” (*Conf* III.4.7).¹⁵ Specifically, he explains, “the one thing that delighted me in Cicero’s exhortation was that I

14. Chappell, T. D. J., *Aristotle and Augustine on Freedom: Two Theories of Freedom, Voluntary Action and Akrasia* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995), xi. Chappell argues that “for all his professions of Platonism, we know that St Augustine read Aristotle’s actual words, but we do not know that he ever read Plato’s actual words,” and that Augustine seems to conflate Plato and Aristotle (xi).

15. Many thanks to Thomas J. Heffernan for directing me to Augustine’s interest in Cicero’s *Hortensius*.

should love, and seek, and win, and hold, and embrace, not this or that philosophical school but Wisdom itself, whatever it might be” (*Conf* III.4.8), though he laments that Cicero was of course not a Christian. Augustine’s praise of *Hortensius* is particularly interesting in light of his rejection of Aristotle because, as Michael P. Foley explains in his edition of the *Confessions*, “the *Hortensius* was loosely based on Aristotle’s *Protreptikos*, also no longer extant except in fragments.”¹⁶ Aristotle and Augustine have more in common than it might first seem. Chappell argues that “it is striking that both their descriptions of voluntary action show that voluntary actions must be (i) uncompelled; (ii) not ignorant; and (iii) done in pursuit of perceived attainable goods.”¹⁷ Augustine, like Aristotle, views following a two-step process of developing knowledge in order to achieve true, eternal happiness as the natural goal of all humans, though of course for Augustine, the core of this eternal happiness is eternal life with God. Both writers, moreover, emphasize that this is a goal that can only be subverted by individuals’ own freely-made choices, and both reject any belief in either fatalism or Fortune.

Divine Order

While for Aristotle the role of voluntary action is part of his broader theory, Augustine makes it, or rather mankind’s divinely-bestowed free will, his primary subject in *De Libero Arbitrio*, or *On Free Choice of the Will (OFC)*, as well as a frequent topic in his *Confessions (Conf)*. In Augustine’s theories, the apparent fickleness of earthly life, including mortality and

16. Augustine, *Confessions*, Ed. Michael P. Foley, Trans. F. J. Sheed, Intro. Peter Brown, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2006, III.4.7fn16

17. Chappell, *Aristotle and Augustine on Freedom*, xi.

even sin, are part of a larger divine order. God “disposes all things sweetly” through his wisdom (*OFC* II.11), but also bestows humans with free will, and it is man’s own proclivity for pursuing vice that has the most self-circumscribing power. While God effects changes throughout the world, he himself “is omnipotent, and not changeable in the smallest respect” (*OFC* I.2). Through such unchangeableness, Augustine argues, “we understand that everything is governed by his providence. For if everything that exists would be nothing without form, then that unchangeable form—through which all changeable things subsist, so that they complete and carry out the numbers of their forms—is itself the providence that governs them. For they would not exist if it did not exist” (*OFC* II.17). For Augustine, that the existence of all natural things (or “substances”) lies in God’s own ultimate, unchangeable form (itself a rather Platonic idea) is evidence enough of God’s divine providence over those natural things, including human beings. While men may despair of their mortality, or of worldly transience, even these have a place in God’s divine plan. Augustine takes such despair to task, chastising, “it is quite absurd to say that temporal things should not cease to be” (*OFC* III.15). Instead, he explains, such changeability in the mortal world allows for the chronological unfolding (from the human point of view) of God’s plan; transient things, he argues, “have been placed in the order of things in such a way that they must cease to be, so that things to come can take the place of things past, so that the full beauty of times may be completely realized according to their kind” (*OFC* III.15).

The Natural Place of the Soul

Augustine includes in his concept of divine order a theory about the natural, rational capacity of the human soul to receive God's commandments as well as, subsequently, the capacity of the human will to choose to obey it. Augustine theorizes that

the nature of reason grasps the commandment, and obedience to the commandment brings wisdom. And just as the nature is what grasps the commandment, the will is what obeys the commandment obedience to the commandment is what deserves to be rewarded with wisdom. (*OFC* III.24).

The theory is rather shockingly comparable to Aristotle belief that "we are adapted by nature to receive [virtues], and are made perfect by habit" (*NE* 1103a26). Furthermore, just as Aristotle compares such processes of the mind and soul to the natural movement of objects (such as stones), Augustine makes a similar comparison. God's love, he explains, lifts the human soul towards eternal life, its natural place, away from mortality and the transient world: "A body tends by its weight towards the place proper to it—weight does not necessarily tend toward the lowest place but towards its proper place," just as, he explains, "fire tends upwards, stone downwards. By their weight they are moved and seek their proper place" (*Conf* XIII.9.10). Augustine believes it natural for both souls and objects to seek this proper place: "things out of their place are in motion: they come to their place and are at rest" (*Conf* XIII.9.10). He explains this metaphor for the motion of the soul toward God at length, writing that just as a stone's weight naturally brings it down,

My love is my weight; wherever I go, my love is what brings me there. By Your Gift we are on fire and borne upwards: we flame and we ascend....It is by Your fire, Your beneficent fire, that we burn and we rise, rise towards the peace of Jerusalem, since I have rejoiced in those who said to me: *We shall go to the house of the Lord*. There our good will shall place us, so that we shall desire nothing but to remain there forever”
 (Conf XIII.9.10, original emphasis).

In Augustine’s theory, then, an individual’s love for God, if voluntarily pursued as he deems most natural, acts upon his or her soul much like gravity upon a stone, bringing that soul to salvation and eternal life.

For Augustine, such natural order even applies to events or human choices that seem to violate God’s plan. As he explains in the *Confessions* in a direct address to God, “not only to You, but to Your whole creation likewise, evil is not: because there is nothing over and above Your creation that could break in or derange the order that You imposed upon it” (Conf VII.13.19). Things “which we call evil because they do not harmonise with other things,” Augustine explains, “do harmonise with still others and thus are good”—the apparent disruption of order from a human point of view is merely a matter of the shortcomings of human perception in understanding God’s larger plan (Conf VII.13.19). Humans should not despair about such apparent evils in the world, or amongst their fellow humans, for, Augustine reassures, “even upon the ill desires of souls You [God] impose Your order, setting limits how far the waters shall be allowed to go, so that their waves break upon themselves” (Conf XIII.17.20).

Divine Foreknowledge and Free Will

Augustine shows repeated sensitivity to how such a notion of divine order, established by God's omniscience and foreknowledge, may seem to have problematic implications for free will. Addressing this concern comprises the bulk of the second half of *On Free Choice of the Will*. In the text, written as a dialogue between Augustine and his pupil Evodius, the latter remarks, "I very much wonder how God can have foreknowledge of everything in the future, and yet we do not sin by necessity. It would be an irreligious and completely insane attack on God's foreknowledge to say that something could happen otherwise than as God foreknew" (*OFC* III.2, p73). Augustine acknowledges his hesitation, replying, "you fear that this argument forces us into one of two positions: either we draw the heretical conclusion that God does not foreknow everything in the future; or, if we cannot accept this conclusion, we must admit that sin happens by necessity and not by will" (*OFC* III.2).

Augustine explains to the troubled Evodius that his concerns stem in part from a misconception of God's foreknowledge, pointing out that Evodius's unspoken assumption is that foreknowledge inherently implies necessity. He illustrates by both positive and negative examples: on the one hand, he reassures Evodius, "simply because God foreknows your future happiness—and nothing can happen except as God foreknows it, since otherwise it would not be foreknowledge—it does not follow that you will be happy against your will. That would be complete absurd and far from the truth" (*OFC* III.3). Likewise, he adds, "your blameworthy will (if indeed you are going to have such a will) does not cease to be a will simply because God foreknows that you are going to have it" (*OFC* III.3). Again, the conundrum centers upon the

shortcomings of human perception. More bluntly addressing Evodius's concerns, Augustine rationalizes that "God's foreknowledge does not force the future to happen. And just as you remember some things that you have done but did not do everything that you remember, God foreknows everything that he causes but does not cause everything that he foreknows." When it comes to the evils wrought by man's free will, he adds, "Of such things [God] is not the evil cause, but the just avenger" (*OFC* III.4).

In this vein, Augustine continues to elucidate how such evils do not undermine divine order, because for Augustine, the human will itself is inherently good even if wielded poorly. As he explains, "God, in the bounty of his goodness, did not shrink from creating even that creature whom he foreknew would not merely sin, but would persist in willing to sin" (*OFC* III.5). Creating a creature imbued with no free will would give God neither pleasure nor glory, Augustine argues, "for a runaway horse is better than a stone that stays in the right place only because it has no movement or perception of its own; and in the same way, a creature that sins by free will is more excellent than one that does not sin only because it has no free will" (*OFC* III.5). For Augustine, even an individual who sins through his or her own free will remains a testament to God's divine order, power, and magnanimity; as he concludes, "what is necessary to the perfection of the universe is not our sins or our unhappiness, but the existence of souls that, simply because they are souls, sin if they so will and become unhappy if they sin" (*OFC* III.9).

Free Will, Virtue, and Genuine Freedom

Augustine indeed finds it more helpful to illustrate how man's free will itself can enable either virtue or vice. On the one hand, he believes that free will can lead to the ultimate good, not unlike Aristotle's own theory of *eudemonia*, or happiness, which individuals achieve through pursuit of virtue. If a will is "good," Augustine believes, it is "a will by which we desire to live upright and honorable lives and to attain the highest wisdom" (*OFC* I.12). Likewise, such a will becomes its own reward. As he explains, "If by our good will we love and embrace that will, and prefer it to everything that we cannot retain simply by willing to retain it, then...we will possess those very virtues that constitute an upright and honorable life" (*OFC* I.13).

Building on this, Augustine argues that only through such a willful pursuit of uprightness and "the highest wisdom" can human beings achieve what he classifies as "genuine freedom," which transcends the limits of human mortality. Augustine notes that often, when people discuss freedom they refer to "the sort of freedom that people have in mind when they think they are free because they have no human masters" (*OFC* I.15). He contrasts this earthly freedom to divine, eternal freedom, explaining that "the only genuine freedom is that possessed by those who are happy and cleave to the eternal law" (*OFC* I.15). This, he explains, is the ultimate kind of freedom, for it is only through cleaving to this eternal law that God "frees us from death" and "from the state of sin" (*OFC* II.13.). Transience and inevitable loss mar the former kind of freedom, he argues, while in contrast "no one can lose truth and wisdom against his will" other than through his or her own "perverse will that loves inferior things" (*OFC* II.14). He concludes that "therefore, when the will, which is an intermediate good, cleaves to the unchangeable good

that is common, not private—namely, the truth...—then one has a happy life. And the happy life...is the proper and principal good for a human being” (*OFC* II.19). For Augustine, while an individual may have earthly freedom, true freedom is not possible unless that individual willfully chooses to seek the eternal good above individual goods, which is the only lasting good.

Free Will, Vice, and Original Sin

Augustine thus explains how God’s foreknowledge does not preclude free will, and how an individual’s happiness and ultimate freedom rests on his or her choice to exercising that will in the pursuit of virtue. However, individuals may use their free will to sin, instead, for “the very thing by which man begins to be capable of receiving a commandment is that by which he begins to be able to sin” (*OFC* III.24). This possibility, Augustine argues, does not make free will a bad thing; after all, “no one can act rightly except by that same free choice of the will, and...God gave us free choice in order to enable us to act rightly” (*OFC* II.18). However, pursuing sin instead of God’s eternal law has ramifications. As Thomas Williams, translator of Augustine’s *On Free Choice*, has noted, “the soul that submits to the truth and loves the good will be free, while the soul that is fixed on lesser things is at the mercy of forces beyond its control.”¹⁸ While the will which cleaves to the eternal law seeks that commonly attainable good, genuine freedom, the perverse will of its own volition (not due to God’s foreknowledge of its sins) seeks its own desires in mortal experiences, which can provide no lasting security.

18. Thomas Williams, “Introduction,” in Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will*, trans. and ed. Thomas Williams, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993, xi–xix, at xviii.

Such a perverse movement of the will, Augustine argues, has circumscribing ramifications, both on the level of all humanity and on an individual level. In his *Confessions*, Augustine compares his past resistance to conversion to a greater tendency towards willful perversion and, seeking the cause of such perversion, ascribes it to Adam's original sin. He writes, "I strove with myself and was distracted by myself," which he argues is proof not of a Manichean duality between good and evil but instead of "the punishment of my own mind...it was not I who caused it but *the sin that dwells in me*, the punishment of a sin more freely committed by Adam, whose son I am" (*Conf* VIII.10.22, original emphasis). Such a statement seems to be the culmination of his earlier writing on original sin as a potentially circumscribing force upon human beings, a repeated topic in *On Free Choice* as well. There, he explains that "When someone acts wrongly out of ignorance, or cannot do what he rightly wills to do," as in the above example from his later *Confessions*, "his actions are called sins because they have their origin in that first sin, which was committed by free will. The later sins are the just results of that first sin" (*OFC* III.19).

Augustine goes on to parse the meaning of "human nature" with this view of original sin in mind. "In the strict sense," he explains, "we mean the nature with which human beings were first created, a nature blameless after its kind. But we can also mean the nature of those of us who are born under the penalty of that sin: mortal, ignorant, and enslaved to the flesh" (*OFC* III.19). Augustine emphasizes this differentiation between human nature before and after original sin because it again puts the onus for human sin on human abuse of free will itself, not on a flaw in God's divine plan or foreknowledge. As he states, "to struggle against the pain of carnal

bondage and not be able to refrain from acts of inordinate desire: these do not belong to the nature that human beings were created with; they are the penalty of a condemned prisoner. But when we speak of free will to act rightly, we mean the will with which human beings were created” (*OFC* III.18). Augustine firmly believes that all human beings retain this will even as they bear the heavy penalties of original sin, penalties which make the human soul ignorant and confused, “bound by the chains of mortality and brought so low that it must try to understand invisible things by conjectures drawn from visible things” (*OFC* III.10).

Such inherited, universal penalties for Adam’s original sin might seem to be an utterly circumscribing force. Indeed, Augustine argues that it may have such power—but not necessarily so. Despite his emphasis on original sin’s pollution of human nature, Augustine insists on individual free will, and individual responsibility for overcoming original as well as personal sin. Though humans suffer the “penalty of a condemned prisoner,” Augustine also argues that “no one is prevented from leaving behind the disadvantage of ignorance and seeking the advantage of knowledge, or from humbly confessing his weakness, so that God, whose help is effortless and unerring, will come to his assistance” (*OFC* III.19) Despite the disadvantages of original sin, individual sin remains voluntary; as Augustine reassures Evodius, “If you fear it, do not will it; and if you do not will it, it will not exist” (*OFC* II.20), for, as he adds later, “nothing can make the mind a slave to inordinate desire except its own will” (*OFC* III.1). He expounds at length upon individuals’ choice to either remain under penalty and perpetuate sin or seek the eternal law by using the “natural judgment” God grants human beings through his grace; through its exercise, Augustine believes that the soul “might attain by diligent labor the wisdom and peace

that it does not have by birth.” It is only through failure to choose to do this that an individual’s soul is “justly held guilty of sin, since it did not make good use of the ability that it was given. For although it was born into ignorance and difficulty, no necessity forces it to remain there. (*OFC* III.20).

Individual Sin and Self-Circumscription

Augustine thus believes that neither God’s foreknowledge or divine plan dictates man’s sin; not even the penalty of original sin necessarily circumscribes man, unless combined with an individual’s voluntary pursuit, through free will, of inordinate and earthly desires. The later path becomes its own punishment, creating a viscous circle of sin and suffering. Much as Augustine clarifies dual meanings of the term “human nature,” he likewise differentiates between two semantic uses of the word “sin,” explaining that “we use the word ‘sin’ not only for what is really sin in the strict sense, which involves actions performed knowingly and by free will, but also for the necessary result of the punishment of sin in the strict sense” (*OFC* III.19). As Augustine describes it in *On Free Choice of the Will*, an individual’s sin itself has the power to be more perniciously self-circumscribing than even original sin.

In further explaining this concept, Augustine theorizes about the force of habit in a way that recalls Aristotle’s theories of habituation, even if coincidentally. Augustine argues that using the will itself requires learned skill, and that even if an individual wishes for happiness, he or she may will it improperly, chiefly by not also willing to “live rightly” (*OFC* I.14). Thus, he states, “when we say that it is by the will that human beings are unhappy, we don’t mean that they will

to be unhappy, but that their will is in such a state that unhappiness must follow whether they will it or not” (*OFC* I.14). This sort of ineffective will, he adds, results primarily from what he calls “the resistance of carnal habit,” which he links to both an individual’s own habits and the taint of original sin, explaining that it “develops almost naturally because of the unruliness of our mortal inheritance,” as “the most just penalty for sin that we should lose what we were unwilling to use well” (*OFC* III.18). Thus, if an individual does not will to overcome original sin and instead repeats his or her own personal sin, the result is a sort of self-circumscription, original sin becoming a self-sustaining penalty. Such individuals, Augustine concludes, will be “justly punished by being cast into deeper ignorance and greater difficulty,” a punishment targeting not the taint of original sin itself in that individual but instead that his or her soul, having failed to “apply itself to learn” and to “work to acquire ease in acting rightly” (*OFC* III.22).

Augustine further illustrates the circumscribing weight of an individual’s “carnal habit” by narrating his own struggles with sin in his *Confessions*, again bearing similarity to Aristotle’s theories on the importance of habit. He writes that in his early years, “because my will was perverse it changed to lust, and lust yielded to become habit, and habit not resisted became necessity” (*Conf* VIII.5.10). The weight of these developments accumulated, he writes, like “links hanging on another—which is why I have called it a chain—and their hard bondage held me bound hand and foot” (*Conf* VIII.5.10), resulting in what he later calls “a will half-wounded” (*Conf* VIII.8.19). While during this time, he recalls, he began desiring to worship God and fully convert, he explains that this “new will,” as he calls it, “was not yet strong enough to overcome

that earlier will rooted deep through the years. My two wills, one old, one new, one carnal, one spiritual, were in conflict and in their conflict wasted my soul” (*Conf VIII.5.10*).

Interestingly, Augustine laments the extreme difficulty of overcoming bad habits just as Aristotle declared that “it makes no small difference, then, whether we form habits of one kind or of another from our very youth—it makes a very great difference, or rather all the difference” (*NE 1103b25*). In Augustine’s case, he explains, his sinful habits made it so “the body more readily obeyed the slightest wish of the mind, more readily moved its limbs at the mind’s mere nod, than the mind obeyed itself in carrying out its own great will which could be achieved simply by willing” (*Conf VIII.8.20*). He describes this status as metaphorically symptomatic of a disease, proof of a “sickness of the soul...so weighted down by custom that it cannot wholly rise even with the support of truth” (*Conf VIII.9.21*), a sickness which during this time of his life made it so that “the lower condition which had grown habitual was more powerful than the better condition which I had not tried” (*Conf VIII.11.25*). As Thomas Williams summarizes Augustine’s broader theory of human free will, “human beings can voluntarily wreck their lives by running afoul of the laws that govern their nature.”¹⁹ Through the example of his own life experiences, Augustine thus envisions one of the greatest circumscribing forces as stemming not from some kind of divine determinism but rather, from an individual’s own repeated pursuit of sin. As Alexander Jensen observes, “Sin, for Augustine, is not merely individual, voluntary actions or an ethically controllable inclination, but a profound and fundamental loss of freedom.

19. Williams, “Introduction,” xix.

The fallen person is enslaved by sin.”²⁰ Pursuit of sin combined with the taint of original sin and a failure to seek God’s grace in overcoming it, begets further sin and suffering as well as an exponentially increasing likelihood to continue failing to heal one’s “half-wounded” will and transform one’s lower condition to a better one.

Boethius

If Augustine often expresses ambivalence towards classical philosophers such as Aristotle, despite exhibiting some compelling similarities in his theories on the habit of the will, Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius turns to them for guidance roughly one hundred years later as he writes his *De Consolatione Philosophiae*. His impetus is eminently social, the *Consolation* written as a comfort to himself while imprisoned and awaiting execution for alleged treason, product of a tumultuous sociopolitical context. Boethius writes the *Consolation* as a dialogue between an oft-confused pupil, the fictive Boethius, and his patient teacher, Lady Philosophy, who has come to lead him out of despair through the use of reason. Much of the *Consolation* concerns the fictive Boethius’s fear that bad men go unpunished, and that we stand in the world mere pawns to their machinations and to Fortune. The main consolations that Philosophy offers to allay these fears are that life seems unpredictable only because human perception fails to perceive overarching divine order, and that what counts in the face of such misfortunes are an individual’s chosen actions and reactions.

20. Jensen, Alexander S. *Divine Providence and Human Agency: Trinity, Creation and Freedom*. Surrey: Ashgate, 2014, at 76.

Divine Order, Providence, and Fate

The fictive Boethius proves a slow learner for Lady Philosophy's teachings, who must painstakingly explain to him not only the false trust men put in Fortune, but also the nature of divine order, often wrongly conflated with chance. Halfway through the *Consolation* he still remains somewhat unconvinced of her prior reassurances that while he feels betrayed by Fortune, "there comes a time when she does not deceive...when she manifests her true self, removes her mask, and proclaims her ways" (*Cons* II.8.1).²¹ Rather than bemoaning bad Fortune, Lady Philosophy has explained, he ought to recognize that "adverse Fortune benefits people more than good," as "adverse Fortune is always truthful" in revealing her fickleness—teaching men like Boethius not to put their faith in her (*Cons* II.8.1–3).

The prisoner claims to accept Lady Philosophy's statements about Fortune, but then turns his attention to "those brutal and criminal minds" who he feels are "permitted to go on the rampage, and to cause the destruction of good men" (*Cons* IV.4.1). She assures him that "they are not so permitted" (*Cons* IV.4.2). Having not quite understood her message, he complains again that he does not understand God's governance: "Since he often dispenses kindnesses to good men and harsh treatment to the bad, but then on the other hand extends harsh treatment to the good and grants the bad their dearest wishes, what apparent difference is there between this and the random process of chance...?" (*Cons* IV.5.6). Philosophy explains that discussing what

21. All English translations of the *Consolation* are taken from *The Consolation of Philosophy*. Trans. and ed. P. G. Walsh. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999. The Latin is taken from: Boethius. *Consolatio Philosophiae*. Ed. James J. O'Donnell. Bryn Mawr, PA: Bryn Mawr College, 1984.

appears to him to be “random chance,” despite their earlier disavowal of Fortune, necessitates discussion of “the single nature of Providence, the chain of Fate, the suddenness of chance events, God’s knowledge and predestination, and the freedom of the will” (*Cons* IV.6.2-6).

Some of what humans perceive as chance, she explains, consists merely of God’s “chain of Fate” which humans cannot comprehend. As she explains it, “Providence is the divine reason itself”²² and “Fate is the order imposed on things that change, through which Providence interlinks each and every object in their due arrangement” (*Cons* IV.6.9–10).²³ She assures him that this order is at work even when imperceptible to human beings, noting that “the general picture may seem to you mortals one of confusion and turmoil because you are totally unable to visualize this order of things,” but that “all of them none the less have their own pattern, which orders them and directs them towards the good” (*Cons* IV.6.21–22). Due to this flaw of perception, humans often attribute seemingly haphazardous events to chance.²⁴ Lady Philosophy envisions the structure of this divine order as a sort of hierarchy: divine intelligence, which is singular, whole, and immutable, creates Providence, “the complex plan of the course of events,” which itself encompasses what “has been labelled Fate by men of old” (*Cons* IV.6.8). Fate, in turns, relates “to the things which that intelligence [Providence] moves and orders” (*Cons* IV.6.8); Fate “organizes the separate movement of individual things, and allocates them

22. “providentia est ipsa illa divina ratio”

23. “fatum vero inhaerens rebus mobilibus disposition, per quam providentia suis quaeque nectit ordinibus”

24. For more on human perception, causality, and chance, see Eleanor Johnson, *Practicing Literary Theory in the Middle Ages: Ethics and the Mixed Form in Chaucer, Gower, Usk, and Hoccleve*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013.

according to place, shape, and time.”²⁵ In other words, “Fate” is simply Providence having been “separated and unfolded at various times” (*Cons* IV.6.10).²⁶ Fate is thus divine Providence as it operates from the perspective of the mutable and transient world of mankind. She concludes that “what is absolutely clear is that the unmoving; undivided patterns of events as they unfold constitutes Providence, whereas Fate is the movable nexus and the ordering in time of what God’s undivided nature has planned to be carried out” (*Cons* IV.6.13).

Lady Philosophy illustrates with a metaphor of “concentric circles revolving round the same axis” (*Cons* IV.6.15).²⁷ The innermost, she explains, “lies closest to the single nature of the central point,” and is the immutable, motionless, and divine “highest Mind” (*Cons* IV.6.15). The outermost, in contrast, encompasses Fate, or rather “becomes enmeshed in the broader chain of Fate”²⁸ and “travels round in a wider circle, and the further it departs from the undivided middle point, the more widespread is the area over which it extends” (*Cons* IV.6.15). All circles stem from the inner, remaining under the purveyance of divine Providence, though the outer circles are the realm of changeability and gradually unfolding events.

The ontological Boethius’s explanation of this hierarchy of circles invokes Platonic language; as translator and editor P. G. Walsh notes, the inner circle is “presumably the Forms, envisaged by Neoplatonists as thoughts in the mind of God.”²⁹ The outer circles, in contrast, are

25. “fatum vero singular digerit in motum locis, formis ac temporibus distribute”

26. “explicata temporibus fatum vocetur”

27. “orbium circa eundem cardinem sese vertentium”

28. “quod longius a prima mente discedit, maioribus fati nexibus implicatur”

29. P. G. Walsh, trans. and ed., *The Consolation of Philosophy*, Oxford University Press, 1999, at 153fn14.

perhaps the realm of particulars and future contingents, although Boethius does not expressly use such terms here. Boethius's chosen metaphor seems to relate to Augustine's aforementioned concept of freedom. For Augustine, only those who "cleave to the eternal law" attain genuine "freedom" (*OFC* I.15). Here, Boethius argues that "the closer to the axis of the world which a thing approaches, the freer it becomes from the control of Fate," and that "if in fact a thing clings fast to the unchanging nature of the divine Mind, it becomes motionless, and it also passes beyond the necessity imposed by Fate" (*Cons* IV.6.16). Given the fictive Boethius's inability to see that the actions of "those brutal and criminal minds" are in fact part of the orchestration of divine Providence, acting through the outer circles of Fate, his fixation on their injustices scarcely differs from his earlier belief in Fortune. In both instances he has sought fleeting happiness within a realm that, while ultimately ordered by God, consists of transient goods. In contrast, Lady Philosophy has explained, he could find eternal happiness by cleaving to God's all-knowing and immutable inner circle, reassuring himself that it directs the course of the universe and thus his own life.

Lady Philosophy's explanation of divine order, Providence, and Fate, however, at times feels deterministic. She declares that both ontologically and in her metaphor of concentric circles, the

chain of Fate...constrains the actions and fortunes of men by an unthinkable interlinking of causes...For the best possible ordering of the world exists only if the undivided nature which abides in the divine Mind inaugurates an unvarying sequence of causes, and this sequence with its own immutability constrains ("incommutabilitate coherceat") the world

of change (“res mutabiles”) which would otherwise float away at random. (*Cons* IV.6.18-20).

The seemingly haphazard world of change, the nature of the outermost circle in the previous metaphor, may be a place of contingents and mutability, but operates within the constraint of a divine plan. Even chance, which Lady Philosophy defines as when “something is done with a particular purpose in mind...and as a result of certain causes something other than was intended occurs,” in fact stems from this divine plan (*Cons* V.1.13). As she explains, “What causes the conjunction and the coincidence of these causes is that order which unfolds in an irresistible chain (“inevitabili conexione”) descending from its source in Providence, and allocating all things to their due place and time” (*Cons* V.1.19). Considered with human free will in mind, this image both comforts and troubles, for the implication becomes that whether directly and immediately as in the inner circles, or indirectly and gradually as in the outer circles, God arranges all possible unfolding of events.

Divine Foreknowledge and Human Free Will

Boethius, however, anticipates this concern about free will and devotes most of the fifth and final book of the *Consolation* to an explanation, again through Lady Philosophy, on how it coexists with divine Providence. His fictive persona, upon hearing Lady Philosophy’s explanation of Providence and the “chain of Fate,” wonders, “in this sequence of interlocking causes, do we have any free will, or does the chain of fate constrain the movements of men’s minds as well?” (*Cons* V.2.2). She assures him clearly that “there is free will,...for no rational

nature could exist if it did not possess freedom of will” (*Cons* V.2.3). Continuing to describe the link between free will and reason, Lady Philosophy explains that reason allows individuals to separate “what must be avoided from what is desirable,” and likewise to “see[k] what he judges to be desirable,” demonstrating that “creatures which themselves possess reason also possess the freedom to will or not to will” (*Cons* V.2.4–6). In this explanation, reason requires free will—otherwise, reason itself becomes an exercise in futility, if it cannot act through free will upon, or in relation to, that which it has perceived and judged.

When the prisoner then declares that “there seems to be a considerable contradiction and inconsistency...between God’s foreknowing all things and the existence of any free will,” Lady Philosophy explains that this perception stems only from his innately human inability to understand the nature of God’s foreknowledge (*Cons* V.3.3). Whereas Augustine explains that divine foreknowledge and free will coexist because God’s knowing a thing (an individual’s “future happiness,” for example) does not equate God forcing it to happen (that is, against that individual’s free will) (*OFC* III.3), Boethius temporally parses God’s foreknowledge. Lady Philosophy declares that human rationality “cannot attain to the simplicity of divine foreknowledge” (“*divinae praescientiae simplicitatem*”) because it is a simplicity outside the limits of human experience (*Cons* V.4.2). She explains that “God’s status is abidingly eternal and in the present” (“*deo semper aeternus ac praesentarius status*”) and therefore that “his knowledge too transcends all movement in time. It abides in the simplicity of its present, embraces the boundless extent of past and future, and by virtue of its simple comprehension, it ponders all things as if they were being enacted in the present” (“*quasi iam gerantur*”) (*Cons* V.6.15).

In this rationalization, God foresees all things with a “knowledge of the unceasingly present moment,” as “they will emerge at some time in the future”—that is, the future as relates to human perception of time (*Cons* V.6.16; V.6.21).³⁰ As John Marenbon explains, this conception of God’s foreknowledge differs from applying an “atemporal” appellation to God’s foreknowledge.³¹ Rather than believing that “God exists simultaneously with events and therefore knows them in the present,” Marenbon argues, “the ordinary, human present” simply “provides a comparison by which we can understand something of God’s eternal present and so of God’s way of knowing.”³² This difference in the perception and experience of time, Lady Philosophy concludes, explains how humans still have free will—for “a future happening which is necessary when viewed by divine knowledge seems to be wholly free and unqualified when considered in its own nature” (*Cons* V.6.26). That is, such things operate through conditional, not simple (direct) necessity, “necessary as related to God’s observation of them, through the condition of his divine knowledge; but considered in themselves they do not forfeit the total freedom of their nature” (*Cons* V.6.31–32).³³ Such things, Marenbon explains of Boethius, are “future contingents,” conditionally necessary from the divine perspective but “no more constrained than anything happening in the present.”³⁴ As implied by Philosophy’s description of

30. “scientiam numquam deficientis instantiae rectius aestimabis”; “qualia in tempore olim future provenient”

31. Marenbon, *Boethius*, 136.

32. Marenbon, *Boethius*, 138; 137.

33. “per se vero considerate ab absoluta naturae suae libertate non desinunt.” For a more detailed explanation of simple and conditional necessity in Boethius’s writing, see Marenbon, John, “Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Online Winter 2016 edition*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, at section 6.

34. Marenbon, *Boethius*, 143.

the nature of divine foreknowledge, then, Providence's "chain of Fate" does not totally negate human free will, despite its appellation which might seem to imply the contrary.³⁵

Free Will and Self-Circumscription

Free will thus preserved, Lady Philosophy further explains that God therefore fairly judges human action, since the objects of such judgments are "acts of will which are free of all necessity" (*Cons* V.6.44). Here, Boethius echoes Augustine: no future punishment can be unjust, because individuals freely choose to pursue either good or vice. It follows accordingly that, also as in Augustine's theology, for Boethius the exercise of free will can either lead to ultimate happiness or self-circumscription. According to Lady Philosophy, while human souls do not exercise a free will which is as "free" as those of "heavenly and divine creatures," they are "necessarily free when they devote themselves to the vision of the divine mind" (*Cons* V.2.8).³⁶ By so doing humans may enhance their agency, similar to Augustine's concept of how individuals may achieve "genuine freedom" if they choose to "cleave to the eternal law" (*OFC*

35. John Marenbon argues that Lady Philosophy herself does not resolve the differences between her "chain of Fate" explanation and her defense of free will. The gap between the beliefs expressed by her in Books IV and V, Marenbon argues, showcases that Boethius's *Consolation* both praises the tools and guidance that classical philosophy offers even as it also "explores its limitations," a strategy, he argues, further supported by Boethius's choice to utilize the rhetorical and stylistic structure of Menippean satire, which likewise alternates between prose and meter (*Boethius*, 162; 146). For Boethius, Marenbon argues, Lady Philosophy is the "leader and representative of the true tradition of philosophy" but not "divine" (*Boethius* 154). That is, "Philosophy is seen as unable to establish by reasoning a fully satisfactory position, where every element fits together. To this extent, the pretensions of her goddess-like initial appearance are satirized in the *Consolation*. But the satire is combined with an evident respect for Philosophy and her deliverances" (*Boethius*, 162).

36. "liberiores quidem esse necesse est, cum se in mentis divinae speculatione conservant"

I.15). But because humans do not possess “perceptive judgement, uncorrupted will, and the power to achieve what they desire” easily or necessarily, unlike “heavenly and divine creatures,” humans may easily use their free will to turn to vice. While such a turn is freely made, it itself raises the likelihood of the repetition of similar choices. Lady Philosophy emphasizes that

the furthest degree of slavery is reached when they devote themselves to vices, and abrogate the possession of reason which is theirs; for once they lower their eyes from the light of the highest truth down to the world of darkness below, they are then shrouded in a cloud of ignorance (“*inscitiae nube caligant*”), and become confused by destructive emotions (“*perniciosis turbantur affectibus*”). (*Cons* V.2.9–10)

The “destructive emotions” which issue from this ignorance, if individuals “yield” and “consent” to them, in turn “intensify the slavery which they have brought upon themselves, and in a sense they become prisoners through the exercise of their freedom (*Cons* V.2.10-11).

The resulting “slavery” and self-imprisonment so mars those who pursue vice that “evil men cease to be what they had before”; while “the very appearance of the human frame which they still possess shows that they were men,” they will “have lost their human nature” (*Cons* IV.3.15). This, Lady Philosophy explains, is a fitting component of just punishment as earlier described, for “since goodness alone can raise a person above the rank of human, it must follow that wickedness deservedly imposes subhuman status on those whom it has dislodged from the human,” whom can no longer be “regarded as a man” as he is “so disfigured by vices” (*Cons* IV.3.16–17).³⁷ She provides a series of metaphors, likening a man who pursues covetousness and

37. “*quem transformatum vitiis videas, hominem aestimare non possis*”

greed to a wolf; the pugnacious man to a dog; thieves to foxes; and so on (*Cons* IV.3.17–20).

Thus, “he who abandons goodness and ceases to be a man cannot rise to the status of a god, and so is transformed into an animal” (*Cons* IV.3.21). As P. G. Walsh notes, this argument, which may itself stem from Cicero, likewise takes form in Augustine’s philosophy when he warns that “carnal habit” may grow so habitual that a “lower condition” becomes “more powerful than the better condition” (*Conf* VIII.11.25);³⁸ and both Augustine’s and Boethius theories, of course, show resemblance to Aristotle and the importance he places on habit and the golden mean.

In summation, over the course of the *Consolation of Philosophy*, Boethius emphasizes that neither what humans perceive as mere chance nor divine foreknowledge itself negates human free will; instead, human free will may negate itself, for humans lose something of their agency in pursuing vices and making a habit of destructive behavior. Again, as in Aristotle and Augustine’s theories, human action itself can be the most immediate source of human constraint and instability. As Norman Kretzmann argues, referring both to the *Consolation* and Boethius’s commentaries on Aristotle’s *De Interpretatione*, “the fundamental insight in Boethius’s theory...is his recognition that we ourselves are the sources of all real contingency.”³⁹ Even predestined things correspond befittingly to human choices, according to Lady Philosophy when she declares that “the eye of Providence, which gazes on all things from eternity, observes these developments, and arranges predestined things according to the merits of each” (*Cons* V.2.11).⁴⁰

38. Walsh, *Consolation of Philosophy*, 147–148fn16.

39. Kretzmann, Norman. “*Nos Ipsi Principia Sumus*: Boethius and the Basis of Contingency,” in T. Rudavsky, ed., *Divine Omniscience and Omnipotence in Medieval Philosophy* (D. Reidel, 1985): 23–50, at 40.

40. “suis quaeque meritis praedestinata disponit”

It is up to each individual to choose the “course of attaining virtue” and to “join battle keenly in mind with every kind of fortune” so as to never be “overthrown,” nor “corrupted” (*Cons* IV.7.20). Likewise, it falls to each individual to “maintain the middle ground,” for “it lies in your own hands to fashion for yourselves the kind of fortune which you prefer” (*Cons* IV.7.21–22).⁴¹

Thomas Aquinas

As demonstrated with Aristotle, Boethius, and Augustine, both classical philosophers and the religious thinkers of late antiquity exhibit interest in exploring the nature of the will, emphasizing its powers for either self-improvement or self-destruction, with Christian writers in particular likewise exploring how that free will operates vis-à-vis an overarching divine power. In the late Middle Ages, moving closer to Chaucer’s own era, these continued to be topics of frequent discussion and debate. Writing in the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas, like many Christian theologians before him, conceives of mankind’s free will as bestowed by a God who orders all things, and who has created mankind to have a natural inclination to pursue God as the ultimate good, in a theology that seems as inspired by Aristotle as by writers like Augustine.

Aquinas, however, counters the pessimism both Augustine and Boethius sometimes express about the foibles of the mortal world. He instead offers detailed and comparatively optimistic analyses of human action in the present world, in addition to explicating Trinitarian and soteriological doctrines. As Leonard Boyle argues, Aquinas’s choice to structure his *Summa*

41. “firmis medium viribus occupate”; “in vestra enim situm manu, qualem vobis fortunam formare malitis”

Theologiae (*ST*) with the bulk of his treatment of human behavior and ethics flanked between doctrines on the Trinity and Incarnation allows him to demonstrate the contextuality and subjectivity of “Christian morality,” showing it as “more than a question of straight ethical teaching of vices and virtues in isolation.”⁴² Aquinas’s theories on human ethics go beyond the individual, demonstrating as Stephen Pope argues “a great awareness of the communal contexts of the moral life.”⁴³ Furthermore, Aquinas’s writing in the *Summa* demonstrates an impressively optimistic belief about human potentiality; Boyle explains that for Aquinas, “inasmuch as the person was an intelligent being who was master of himself and possessed of freedom of choice, he was in the image of God. To study human action is therefore to study the image of God and to operate on a theological plane.”⁴⁴

Divine Order

Like Augustine and Boethius, Aquinas sets human free action within the broader framework of divine order. This contextualization is much like Boethius’s in Book V of the *Consolation*, and scholars such as Alexander Fidora have noted that Aquinas shows an affinity

42. Boyle, Leonard E, O.P, “The Setting of the *Summa Theologiae* of St. Thomas—Revisited,” in *The Ethics of Aquinas*, Ed. Stephen J. Pope. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2002. 1–16, at 7.

43. Pope, Stephen J, “Overview of the Ethics of Thomas Aquinas,” in *The Ethics of Aquinas*, Ed. Stephen J. Pope. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2002, 30–53, at 40.

44. Boyle, “Setting of the *Summa*,” 7.

for Boethius that was largely unparalleled in the thirteenth century.⁴⁵ Aquinas, however, goes on to clarify Boethius's claims about the "chain of Fate" with an even greater emphasis on operation of human free will within divine order than that which Lady Philosophy provides in the final book of Boethius's *Consolation*.

At the beginning of his section on the government, or *gubernatione*, of created things, Aquinas firmly opposes "certain ancient philosophers" who "denied the government of the world, saying that all things happened by chance [*fortuito*]" (*ST* I.q103.art1).⁴⁶ Instead, Aquinas argues, even simple observation of nature itself reveals that "things happen always or nearly always for the best; which would not be the case unless some sort of providence directed nature towards good as an end; which is to govern" (*ST* I.q103.art1). He explains that such providence includes both the "constituent principles of species, but also...the individualizing principles"; that is, "all things are subject to divine providence, not only in general, but even in their own individual selves" (*ST* I.q22.art.2). Aquinas further illustrates this by way of metaphor, comparing God to an archer "who knows the end unknown to the arrow" which he shoots (*ST* I.q103.art1.rep1). In Aquinas's view, Chance exists not ontologically but only insofar as humans

45. Fidora, Alexander, "Augustine to Aquinas (Latin-Christian Authors)," in *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, Eds. Brian Davies and Eleonore Stump. Oxford University Press, 2012. 45–54, at 48.

46. English translations of Aquinas are taken from *Summa Theologica*. Trans. and ed. Fathers of the Dominican Province. Benzinger Brothers, 1947. Online edition at *Dominican House of Studies Priory of the Immaculate Conception*, n.d. Web. 5 Jan. 2016. Latin quotations are from *Summa Theologiae*. Ed. Enrique Alarcón. Online edition at *Corpus Thomisticum*, 2000–2017. *Fundación Tomás de Aquino*. <http://www.corpusthomicum.org/iopera.html>

fail to understand the operation of divine providence, in agreement with Boethius. He provides yet another metaphor to explain:

Now it happens sometimes that something is lucky or chance-like as compared to inferior causes, which, if compared to some higher cause, is directly intended. For instance, if two servants are sent by their master to the same place; the meeting of the two servants in regard to themselves is by chance; but as compared to the master, who had ordered it, it is directly intended. (*ST I.q116.art1*)

Thus, like many earlier writers, for Aquinas the limitations of human perception can lead to a mistaken belief in Chance, which occludes the operation of divine government over all things.

Natural Inclination

In Aquinas's theory, part of the operating force behind God's divine government is what he calls "natural inclination," or *naturalem inclinationem*. Aquinas's theology feels notably Aristotelian here, and in fact, the frequency of Aquinas's citations of Aristotle comes second only to his citations of Augustine himself.⁴⁷ Aquinas, James Doig explains, echoes an Aristotelian belief in "the life of the individual human being as an agent voluntarily acting for an end through the performance of virtuous activity."⁴⁸ Like Aristotle, Aquinas believes that humans naturally incline towards a shared good, though for Aquinas this good is not just

47. Pinckaers, Servais-Théodore, O.P, "The Sources of the Ethics of St. Thomas Aquinas," in *The Ethics of Aquinas*, Ed. Stephen J. Pope. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2002. 17–29, at 17.

48. Doig, James, "Aquinas and Aristotle," in *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, Eds. Brian Davies and Eleonore Stump. Oxford University Press, 2012, 33–44, at 37.

happiness or *eudaimonia* in general but that which is found in the divine; as he declares, “God alone constitutes man's happiness,” and therefore “final and perfect happiness can consist in nothing else than the vision of the Divine Essence” (*ST* II-1.q2.art8; *ST* II-1.q3.art8). According to Aquinas, all things not only seek this happiness themselves, but they also attempt to share it. As he explains in detail, “natural things have a natural inclination not only towards their own proper good, to acquire it if not possessed, and, if possessed, to rest therein; but also to spread abroad their own good amongst others, so far as possible. Hence we see that every agent, in so far as it is perfect and in act, produces its like” (*ST* 1.q19.art.2). For Aquinas, this concept originates in God’s own nature: “if natural things,” he adds, “in so far as they are perfect, communicate their good to others, much more does it appertain to the divine will to communicate by likeness its own good to others as much as possible” (*ST* 1.q19.art.2). Being the ultimate good and source of happiness, the divine will wishes to spread its goodness.

Aquinas’s *naturalem inclinationem* thus operates on two levels: the divine (its origin) and the human. In the case of God, the natural inclination to “produce his like” entails willing mankind both to be and to possess a similar natural inclination: “He wills both Himself to be, and other things to be; but Himself as the end, and other things as ordained to that end; inasmuch as it befits the divine goodness that other things should be partakers therein” (*ST* 1.q19.art.2). But whereas God’s natural inclination is simply in sharing his happiness, the human natural inclination, through God’s ordering, entails both seeking the happiness of the aforesaid “vision of the Divine Essence” *and* in sharing and spreading that good. For Aquinas, this inclination is “nothing but a kind of impression from the first mover,” which he compares to how “the

inclination of the arrow towards a fixed point is nothing but an impulse received from the archer” (*ST I.q103.art8*). But from the perspective of humans and other created things, he adds, the inclination is freely pursued; through God’s careful design, “every agent, whether natural or free, attains to its divinely appointed end, as though of its own accord. For this reason God is said ‘to order all things sweetly’” (*ST I.q103.art8*).

In these beliefs, Aquinas expresses some similarities with Augustine, who likewise believes in a natural movement towards God, though Augustine focuses a great deal on how that natural movement becomes impeded through a poorly trained habit of will and inherited original sin in particular. In addition to echoing Augustine but with a greater touch of optimism, Aquinas also varies somewhat from Boethius. While Boethius describes the “chain of Fate” as part of his explanation of divine order, his focus in doing so lies primarily in describing the reassurances that a belief in such divine order can offer, more so than looking at how individual inclinations help bring that divine order to fruition. It is perhaps in Aquinas’s slight variations from both of these sources that he reveals the influence Aristotelian theory has had on him. As Servais-Théodore Pinckaers explains, “St. Thomas considered Aristotle an expert on human nature and borrows from him the basic structure of his morality,” including “the ordering to happiness as our final end.”⁴⁹ Aristotle’s non-Christian beliefs apparently do not trouble him; instead, “as a witness to humanity, Aristotle becomes in St. Thomas’s eyes a servant of the Gospel.”⁵⁰ Aquinas is thus unique in his use of both Christian and non-Christian thinkers in exploring divine and

49. Pinckaers, “The Sources of the Ethics,” 20.

50. Pinckaers, “The Sources of the Ethics,” 22.

human nature. As Pinckaers concludes, Aquinas stands as “heir to the fathers, who saw in nature the work of the creator God of Genesis, and in the human person—through reason and free will—the image of God called to fulfillment in the divine vision and union.”⁵¹

Aquinas’s theory of natural inclination, like Augustine’s theory of the biological inheritance of original sin and like Boethius’s chain of Fate, may seem deterministic. He acknowledges this implication in one of his objections, wherein he imagines that someone might protest, “Further, what is ‘free is cause of itself,’ as the Philosopher says (Metaph. i, 2). Therefore what is moved by another is not free. But God moves the will” (*ST I.q83.art1.obj3*). He takes pains, however, to allay such fears in part by explaining, in more than one place in his *Summa*, that the natural inclination humans have towards God operates without violence. He notes, first, that “necessity of coercion,” whereby “someone is forced by some agent” in such a way that “he is not able to do the contrary,” is “altogether repugnant to the will. For we call that violent which is against the inclination of a thing” (*ST I.q82.art1*). Aquinas does not envision natural inclination as operating with such force. On the one hand, he explains, “the will must of necessity adhere to the last end, which is happiness” (*ST I.q82.art1*), but on the other hand, the will itself is granted to humans by God, and the “necessity of end is not repugnant to the will, when the end cannot be attained except in one way: thus from the will to cross the sea, arises in the will the necessity to wish for a ship” (*ST I.q82.art1*).

Furthermore, Aquinas contends, there are many means to an end, from which humans can chose freely; choice, in fact, is another essential part of his defense of mankind’s free will in the

51. Pinckaers, “The Sources of the Ethics,” 22.

face of divine order and foreknowledge. As he writes, “We are masters of our own actions by reason of our being able to choose this or that. But choice regards not the end, but ‘the means to the end,’ as the Philosopher says (*Ethic. iii, 9*). Wherefore the desire of the ultimate end does not regard those actions of which we are masters” (*ST I.q82.art1.rep3*). God causes “human action” insofar as humans receive their rationality, will, and inclinations all from God, but does so in a way that allows such actions to remain freely chosen. For Aquinas, a rational creature must necessarily have free will, but both “its intellect and will...require to be governed and perfect by the Divine intellect and will” (*ST I.q103.art5.rep3*). As he explains at length,

Free-will is the cause of its own movement, because by his free-will man moves himself to act. But it does not of necessity belong to liberty that what is free should be the first cause of itself, as neither for one thing to be cause of another need it be the first cause. God, therefore, is the first cause, Who moves causes both natural and voluntary. And just as by moving natural causes He does not prevent their acts being natural, so by moving voluntary causes He does not deprive their actions of being voluntary: but rather is He the cause of this very thing in them; for He operates in each thing according to its own nature. (*ST I.q83.art.rep3*).

In Aquinas’s greater theological scheme, then, human liberty lies in free will, which for him is not any less free due to its ultimate source in God, the first cause and the first mover.

Divine Foreknowledge, Contingents, and Free Will

One essential part of Aquinas's strategy for explaining the coexistence of free will and God's divine order is thus his explanation of the non-violence of natural inclination. A second strategy lies in describing the nature of God's foreknowledge itself. Like Augustine, Aquinas maintains that foreknowledge does not imply necessity, and like Boethius, he justifies this in part by explaining that God's foreknowledge sees all in a sort of constant present, instead of linearly as with human perception. He explains of God that "His knowledge is measured by eternity, as is also His being; and eternity being simultaneously whole comprises all time....Hence all things that are in time are present to God from eternity, not only because He has the types of things present within Him, as some say; but because His glance is carried from eternity over all things as they are in their presentiality" (*ST I.q14.art13*). As in Boethius's theory, humans are necessarily limited to a chronological, linear perception of events, but God sees all at once, and thus foreseeing human events or choices does not imply subsequent, direct causation by God. Rather, God's eternal present perception sees all human acts both in their deed itself as well as the causes and effects of those acts in one moment.

Aquinas's conception of God's knowledge as an eternal present depends upon a third related strategy for explaining the coexistence of divine foreknowledge and order with free will: contingents, which also relate back to his discussion of natural inclination. He theorizes a taxonomy of "contingents," of which he explains that "the works of men are contingent, being subject to free will. Therefore God knows future contingent things" (*ST I.q14.art13*). In other words, future contingents are the realm in which human free will operates within the larger

scheme of divine order and omniscience. But, what makes a thing “contingent,” and specifically, a “future contingent”? Here, Aquinas draws on the work of his predecessors. While Boethius does not explicitly cover contingents in his *Consolation* itself, he does discuss them in his commentary on Aristotle’s *De Interpretatione*; furthermore, the concept seems to be in accordance with Boethius’s explanation of the outer circles of the “chain of Fate” in the *Consolation*, where God’s divine order and plans unfold indirectly. Kretzmann summarizes well Boethius’s basic categorization of causes into necessities and contingents. A necessity, on the one hand, is an action or event that “is present in its causes for some time prior to its occurrence and is therefore inevitable (or theoretically predictable with certainty) for some time prior to its occurrence.”⁵² On the other hand,

an event is contingent if and only if it is brought about not by nature alone but either (C1) by free agency alone or (C2) by free agency and nature together in such a way that the actual outcome either (C2a) is or (C2b) is not the one consciously and rationally intended by the agent(s) whose free choice is a contributory cause of the event. No event satisfying condition (C1) is inevitable at any time prior to its occurrence, and the only events satisfying (C1) are the decisions of free agents. (38).⁵³

52. Kretzmann, “Boethius and the Basis of Contingency,” 37.

53. Kretzmann, Norman. “Boethius and the Basis of Contingency,” 38.

As Kretzmann summarizes, Boethius essentially explains contingencies “in opposition to determinism,” perhaps by way of solving the paradox between God’s omniscience and mankind’s free will.⁵⁴

Aquinas explicitly ties the concept of contingents to his defense of human free will itself in the face of God’s foreknowledge. He argues that, “for the building up of the universe,” God’s will orders the world both through things done necessarily and things done contingently—again, perhaps a similarity to Boethius’s inner circle on his “chain of Fate” (ordered by direct necessity) and outer circles (ordered by indirect contingents) (*ST I.q19.art8*). Aquinas explains the differences between these two methods in detail:

to some effects He has attached necessary causes, that cannot fail; but to others defectible and contingent causes, from which arise contingent effects. Hence it is not because the proximate causes are contingent that the effects willed by God happen contingently, but because God prepared contingent causes for them, it being His will that they should happen contingently. (*ST I.q19.art8*).

For Aquinas, God necessarily can still foresee all such contingent events. As already noted, like Boethius, he describes God’s foreknowledge as existing in a constant, eternal presence, in which mankind’s freely chosen actions, as contingencies, have efficacy: “[God’s] glance is carried from eternity over all things as they are in their presentiality. Hence it is manifest that contingent things are infallibly known by God, inasmuch as they are subject to the divine sight in their

54. Kretzmann, Norman. “*Nos Ipsi Principia Sumus*: Boethius and the Basis of Contingency,” in T. Rudavsky, ed., *Divine Omniscience and Omnipotence in Medieval Philosophy* (D. Reidel, 1985): 23–50, at 23.

presentiality; yet they are future contingent things in relation to their own causes” (*ST* I.q14.art13). Humans perceive these contingent events, he adds, successively, chronologically, where God perceives them simultaneously (*ST* I.q14.art13).

Aquinas’s addition of future contingents to the discussion of divine foreknowledge allows him to more fully explain the coexistence of divine omniscience and human free will. He even responds directly to those deterministic aspects of Book IV of Boethius’s *Consolation*, or rather, to what he sees as a potential misreading of Boethius’s theories, summarizing that misreading (in one of his “objections”) as follows: “Further, Boethius says (*De Consol.* iv, 6): ‘Fate from the immutable source of providence binds together human acts and fortunes by the indissoluble connection of causes.’ It seems therefore that providence imposes necessity upon things foreseen” (*ST* I.q22.art4.obj3). Aquinas counters this belief, arguing that “Divine providence imposes necessity upon some things; not upon all, as some formerly believed,” and that those things which are not ordered by necessity are ordered through contingents, “according to the nature of their proximate causes” (*ST* I.q22.art4). The realm of contingents seems to be the realm of free will; while divine foreknowledge sees all, divine providence works sometimes through necessity and sometimes through contingents, with future causes rooted in freely chosen human action. Summarizing this relationship between God’s foreknowledge and free human action, James Brent explains that

in one glance at himself God comprehends the whole panoply of individual creaturely free choices and comprehends each choice *as* an essentially free contingent act. Such comprehension of our choices, although it is prior to our choices, does not predetermine

our choices. Rather, God’s prior comprehension of them is a comprehension of them *as* essentially free contingent acts.⁵⁵

Thus, while Aquinas does believe that “the order of divine providence is unchangeable and certain, so far as all things foreseen happen as they have been foreseen, whether from necessity or from contingency,” he maintains that this does not preclude mankind’s free will (*ST* I.q22.art4.rep2). For Aquinas—as with Augustine—foreknowledge does not impose necessity. As he stresses, “When it is said that God left man to himself, this does not mean that man is exempt from divine providence; but merely that he has not a prefixed operating force determined to only the one effect” (*ST* I.q22.art2.rep4).

Aquinas’s theories on divine order, natural inclination, and human free will are thus resolved through his conception of contingents. God designs men to incline toward a particular end—that is, the happiness to be found in God himself, who inherently wishes to share his happiness with others—even while also allowing the means toward that end to vary. Jensen observes that Aquinas thus ensures that his theology portrays “human (and other creaturely) agents” as “not merely puppets in the divine theatre, but real agents within the agency granted to them by God,” even as he still emphasizes God’s governance, for Aquinas shows how “God uses all kinds of causes, necessary and contingent ones, as well as real creaturely agents in order to govern the world.”⁵⁶ In other words, for Aquinas, even though God’s providence orchestrates

55. Brent, James, O.P. “God’s Knowledge and Will.” *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*. Eds. Brian Davies and Eleonore Stump. Oxford University Press, 2012. 158–172, at 163.

56. Jensen, Alexander S. *Divine Providence and Human Agency: Trinity, Creation and Freedom* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2014), at 120.

natural inclination as befits his sweetly ordered plan, humans necessarily have free will, and in fact the fulfillment of some divine plans requires freely-chosen human action.

Free Will, Virtue, and Vice

In Aquinas's schema, then, the onus for action remains with mankind, and any potential circumscription stems not from God—the ultimate end and thus the source of ultimate freedom if men choose to cleave to this their natural end—but from man himself. It falls to humans to choose, and in fact he declares that “the proper act of free-will is choice: for we say that we have a free-will because we can take one thing while refusing another; and this is to choose” (*ST* I.q83.art3). Through such choices, he believes, humans commit either good or evil; God himself “neither wills evil to be done, nor wills it not to be done, but wills to permit evil to be done; and this is a good” (*ST* I.q19.art9.rep3). In other words, God wills possibility to mankind, and men either pursue various means to achieve their natural, ultimate end—happiness in God—or, turning away from their natural inclination, instead pursue vice.

The latter, for Aquinas, is the root of any evil. As he explains, “when... a human action tends to the end, according to the order of reason and of the Eternal Law, then that action is right: but when it turns aside from that rectitude, then it is said to be a sin” (*ST* II-1.q21.art1). According to Aquinas, God allows such evil for two reasons. First, permitting evil seems a requisite part of granting free will to human beings, for God has created human will “as an active principle, not determinate to one thing, but having an indifferent relation to many things,” so that “its movement remains contingent and not necessary, except in those things to which it is moved

naturally” (*ST* II-1.q10.art4). Secondly, God permits evil because, as per his larger divine plan, evil acts can nevertheless lead to good, directly or indirectly. Aquinas explains that “it belongs to His providence to permit certain defects in particular effects, that the perfect good of the universe may not be hindered, for if all evil were prevented, much good would be absent from the universe,” adding, for example, that “there would be no patience of martyrs if there were no tyrannical persecution” (*ST* I.q22.art2.rep2).

But whether an individual chooses good or evil acts, due to the liberty God grants the human will, God does not predestine so much as foresee, judging souls accordingly after death. Aquinas surmises that “since a rational creature has, through its free will, control over its actions, ...it is subject to divine providence in an especial manner, so that something is imputed to it as a fault, or as a merit; and there is given it accordingly something by way of punishment or reward” (*ST* I.q22.art2.rep5). Of salvation and predestination more specifically, he writes that “it does not impose any necessity, so that, namely, its effect should take place from necessity,” because while “predestination is a part of providence,” it is not the case that “all things subject to providence are necessary; some things happening from contingency, according to the nature of the proximate causes, which divine providence has ordained for such effects” (*ST* I.q23.art6). Thus, as Stephen Pope explains, in Aquinas’s theology, “each person bears the responsibility for directing all of his or her choices to the universal good and to resist being driven by impulse, social pressure, or other influences.”⁵⁷

57. Pope, “Overview of the Ethics of Thomas Aquinas,” 33.

Judgment of human choices, however, must include consideration of circumstances, which Aquinas argues that the theologian must likewise consider when weighing the goodness of any human act. Aquinas seems to echo Aristotle's emphasis on the subjective nature of the golden mean of virtue in his explanation of the importance of circumstances. He writes that "acts are made proportionate to an end by means of a certain commensurateness, which results from the due circumstances. Hence the theologian has to consider the circumstances" (*ST II-1.q7*). Furthermore, he adds, "the theologian considers human acts according as they are found to be good or evil, better or worse: and this diversity depends on circumstances," in addition to depending on how voluntary or involuntary the act is (*ST II-1.q7.art2*). Thus, God's judgement of human souls includes not only his foresight of the individual acts humans will choose (which as future contingents enact, in their way, divine providence), but also the larger realm of circumstances (which Aquinas also calls "accidents," *ST II-1.q7.art1*) and other contingents in which those actions will be chosen.

Free Will and Self-Circumscription

Through his careful explication of divine foreknowledge and judgement, as well as of human free will and non-violent natural inclination, Aquinas constructs a theological vision of God as a creator, shaper, and overseer, but not as a figure imposing constraint. What, then, are sources of constraint upon human beings, according to Aquinas? On the one hand, Aquinas, like Augustine, believes in the weight of original sin upon individuals, writing that "all men born of Adam may be considered as one man, inasmuch as they have one common nature, which they

receive from their first parents” (*ST* II-1.q81.art1). However, he believes that Baptism removed original sin’s “guilt, in so far as the soul recovers grace as regards the mind” (*ST* II-1.q81.art3.rep1), and focuses less on the circumscribing effects of original sin upon individuals.

Instead, Aquinas focuses largely on a discussion of the self-circumscribing power of repeated pursuit of sin, channeling Aristotle’s theory of habit in particular, as well as those Aristotelian elements in Boethius and Augustine. As noted, Aquinas believes that free will comes down to choice, or *electio*; as David Gallagher explains, “At each point on the chain, a person is determining him or herself, and, with each choice, the person becomes affectively committed to some good.”⁵⁸ In accordance with his statements of foreknowledge and predestination, Aquinas believes that God does not randomly mete out guilt, but rather that humans earn (or avoid) it. He writes that “guilt proceeds from the free-will of the person who is reprobated and deserted by grace,” in punishment for repeated sin. “In this way,” Aquinas adds, “the word of the prophet is true---namely, ‘Destruction is thy own, O Israel’” (*ST* I.q23.art3.rep2). The cause of such sin lies not in God’s predestination; instead, “the soul, by its own action, defiles itself, through cleaving to them inordinately, against the light of reason and of the Divine law” (*ST* II-1.q86.art1.rep1).

While Aquinas emphasizes original sin less than Augustine, he does include a theory of another sort of inherited sin: the transmission of habits from parents to children. If parents are prone to sin, he writes, children themselves are in turn “more prone to sin through being brought

58. Gallagher, David M. “The Will and Its Acts (Ia IIae, qq.6–17).” *The Ethics of Aquinas*. Ed. Stephen J. Pope. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2002. 69–89, at 80.

up amid their parents' crimes, both by becoming accustomed to them, and by imitating their parents' example, conforming to their authority as it were" (*ST II-1.q87.art8.rep1*). This, however, does not provide any reasonable excuse to such children for sinning, nor any easement of subsequent penalties. Instead, Aquinas argues, children should learn from their parents as negative exempla, noting that "when a man is brought up amid the sins of his parents, he is more eager to imitate them," and that "if he is not deterred by their punishments, he would seem to be the more obstinate, and, therefore, to deserve more severe punishment" (*ST II-1.q87.art8.rep3*).

For Aquinas, habits, whether learned from one's own parents or not, lie at the center of an individual's choices to pursue either vice or virtue, and thus he believes, like Aristotle whom he quotes here, that "moral virtue is a habit of choosing the mean" (*ST II-1.q64.art1*). Aquinas points to the interrelation of the will and habit, explaining, "Every power which may be variously directed to act, needs a habit whereby it is well disposed to its act. Now since the will is a rational power, it may be variously directed to act. And therefore in the will we must admit the presence of a habit whereby it is well disposed to its act" (*ST II-1.q50.art5*). Habits, in turn, develop from repeated actions, which lead to tendencies toward either virtue or vice (*ST II-1.q51.art2*). On the one hand, repeatedly exercising one's reason in pursuit of virtue forms a positive habit, through which it gradually becomes easier to incline one's will towards virtue. On the other hand, negative habits forge an ill will that becomes increasingly difficult to change, as habits can only be removed "with difficulty" (*ST II-1.q53.art1.rep1*). While "a habit of moral virtue makes a man ready to choose the mean in deeds and passions," Aquinas surmises, "when a man fails to make use of his virtuous habit in order to moderate his own passions or deeds,....

virtue is destroyed or lessened through cessation from act” (*ST II-1.q53.art3*). Habits become a primary force of circumscription, insofar as one’s own habits constrain the range of choices one will likely make. An individual’s negative habits lead to a warped will which turns away from God, and increasingly toward a perpetual cycle of self-destruction that God foresees but does not cause, and for which only that individual deserves blame.

John Duns Scotus

John Duns Scotus, writing shortly after Thomas Aquinas, continues his predecessor’s legacy of explicating the nature of human free will and its relationship with divine order and foreknowledge, as well as with morality. Rik Van Nieuwenhove notes the mixed reception Scotus’s works have received in the past and present, explaining, “John Duns Scotus is often disparaged as the author responsible for the start of the decline of medieval scholasticism, who expressed views which eventually resulted in the modern climate”; this may be particularly due to a link some draw between Scotus’s theories and those of the late nominalists, who will be considered here after Scotus.⁵⁹

59. Nieuwenhove, Rik Van. *An Introduction to Medieval Theology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, at 230.

Voluntarism and the Divine Will

One transformation in thinking notable in Scotus's work, Nieuwenhove argues, is a stronger prominence of voluntarism in his conception of divine freedom, later utilized by nominalists such as Ockham.⁶⁰ Mark Murphy explains that in theological voluntarism, also known as "divine command theory," "what God wills is relevant to determining the moral status of some set of entities."⁶¹ This judgement likewise relates closely to the nature of God's foreknowledge. As demonstrated above, theologians such as Aquinas envisioned God's foreknowledge as a kind of constant, eternal present, as a way of explaining how foreknowledge does not itself determine human free will and choices. Scotus slightly disagrees with this basic proposition, focusing more on the different types of perception through which divine foreknowledge operates. As Richard Cross points out, Scotus is adamant that "nothing outside God is necessary for the existence of anything in God," which means that "God's knowledge of creatures is not in any sense caused by the creatures themselves," a prime example of his voluntaristic approach.⁶² Furthermore, Scotus' voluntarism, Alexander Jensen argues, makes the world "contingent in so far as creation is the result of a free choice made by the creator's will," thereby "break[ing] the essential relation between God and the world" in a way that differs radically from how that relationship is perceived by, for example, Thomas Aquinas.⁶³ That is,

60. Nieuwenhove, *Introduction to Medieval Theology*, 230.

61. Murphy, Mark, "Theological Voluntarism." In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Spring 2016 Edition, ed. Edward N. Zalta.
<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2014/entries/voluntarism-theological/>

62. Cross, *Duns Scotus*, 48–49.

63. Jensen, *Divine Providence*, 123.

unlike in Aquinas's view in which "the world participated in the divine being and therefore expressed it," for Scotus, divine voluntarism makes it so "the world does not participate in God's being any longer."⁶⁴

Scotus, however, further complicates God's foreknowledge. As Cross explains, Scotus divides the objects of God's knowledge into three categories: his own "divine essence," "necessary truths and all logical possibilities" (which Cross refers to as N-objects), and "contingent truths" (C-objects).⁶⁵ Essentially, Scotus argues that God can perceive N-objects not because they are "already there prior to God's thought" but because "all N-objects are somehow *caused* by God" in the first place, in response to how he perceives his own preexisting divine essence.⁶⁶ Thus, it is not that God perceives N-objects, "necessary truths, logical possibilities, and possible individuals," from outside of himself, but rather, they "are brought into existence by God," and become "the secondary objects of divine knowledge" subsequent to the "primary object" of his foreknowledge—his own essence.⁶⁷ Cross explains that for Scotus, God's foreknowledge of contingents operates similarly. God's perception of N-objects, as explained above, does not, he points out, "tell him which of these contingent possibilities is *actual*," but the way that God knows which are actual is similar—"because he has freely caused them."⁶⁸

64. Jensen, *Divine Providence*, 123.

65. Cross, *Duns Scotus*, 49.

66. Cross, *Duns Scotus*, 50–51.

67. Cross, *Duns Scotus*, 51.

68. Cross, *Duns Scotus*, 52.

Scotist Voluntarism and Human Understanding

The implications of Scotus's apparent voluntarism, and connection of all contingents to God's will and acts of creation, become part of the central grounds on which scholars debate his stance on free will—does God's creation of all logical possibilities and thus also all actualized contingents circumvent free will? Some scholars criticize Scotus for an emphasis on the divine will allegedly so extreme that it circumvents the human role in morality.⁶⁹ However, Wolter and others argue that such criticism overlooks the finer points of Scotus's theology.⁷⁰ Claims that Scotus circumvents the human role in morality may be based in part on his statements on the unknowability (at least in a complete sense) of God and his will. Thomas Williams explains that according to Scotus, because in acts of creation God was utterly free, that is, "there was nothing constraining him or forcing him to create one thing rather than another," humans cannot fully perceive *why* some things were created and not others.⁷¹ Similarly, Williams adds, "The same is true about the moral law. Why is there an obligation to honor one's parents but no such obligation toward cousins? Because God willed that there be an obligation to honor one's parents, and he did not will" the other, though he could have if he had so chosen, and "nothing whatsoever except the sheer fact that he did will that way" can explain this.⁷² Additionally,

69. For a summary of such readings, see Wolter, Alan B. "Introduction." *Duns Scotus on the Will and Morality*. Translation Edition. Trans. Alan B. Wolter. Ed. William A. Frank. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1997. 3–123, at 3–4.

70. Wolter, "Introduction," 4. See for example Wolter's citation of Copleston, Frederick, *A History of Philosophy*, Vol. 2. Westminster, Md: Newman Press, 1950, at 545.

71. Williams, Thomas, "John Duns Scotus," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Spring 2016 Edition, Ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2016/entries/duns-scotus/>, at 5.1.

72. Williams, "John Duns Scotus," 5.1.

Copleston explains, due to his voluntarism, some see in Scotus “the beginning of the first stage of the theological authoritarianism in ethics which was to become much more marked in the thought of William Ockham.”⁷³

Nevertheless, Scotus believes that the human intellect can understand God’s truths “by the exercise of its own natural powers,” and “therefore opposes both skepticism, which denies the possibility of certain knowledge, and illuminationism, which insists that we need special divine illumination in order to attain certainty.”⁷⁴ That is, even if Scotus’s beliefs on the divine will are excessively voluntarist, as his critics argue, Scotus maintains a clear belief in the accessibility of the divine will and its moral edicts to the human intellect.

Scotist Voluntarism and Free Will

Scotus maintains a strong conviction in human freedom, seeing humans as reflecting divine nature through their possession of “both the powers and the opportunities for determining their own actions.”⁷⁵ This conviction restores some onus for mortality on humans and their free choices. In explaining *how* humans pursue moral choices, Scotus revises previous, Aristotelian theories on natural inclination, such as those propounded by Aquinas. In his *Quaestiones*

73. Copleston, *A History of Medieval Philosophy*, 227.

74. Williams, Thomas, “John Duns Scotus,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Spring 2016 Edition, Ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2016/entries/duns-scotus/>, at 4.3.

75. Cross, *Duns Scotus*, 53.

quodlibetales (QQ),⁷⁶ Scotus argues for the importance of establishing a semantic difference between things that are “natural” and things that are “free.” He draws a parallel between these two concepts and, respectively, the intellect and the will, believing that “the will is essentially a free power,” but that “the intellect is not. For it cannot but assent to the truth of a proposition when the truth is perceived, whereas the will always remains free, even in heaven.”⁷⁷ It is the latter, he emphasizes, that “always functions in its own peculiar way, viz., freely. That is why when it concurs with the intellect, as in the production of artifacts, the whole effect is said to be produced freely and intentionally or with deliberation, since the intention is the superior and immediate principle of the extrinsic production” (QQ 16.41). He clarifies that if the will and intellect concur in an act, “the action...is properly speaking ‘natural,’” but that “since the act as a whole falls under the will, we employ the subordinate potency freely and we are said to act freely by virtue of the higher power” (QQ 16.41). He concludes that “the will *per se* is never an active principle that acts naturally,” but instead, “is a freely active principle, which is precisely why it is called ‘will.’ It can no more be naturally active than nature, as other than will, can be freely active” (QQ 16.42).

Part of why this distinction matters to Scotus is that he believes that human morality must be based on more than just pursuit of a *eudaimonistic* ultimate good. That is, he believes that morality must be more than just about fulfilling personal goals of happiness (which the intellect

76. All quotations in this section from Scotus’s *Quaestiones quodlibetales* are from *God and Creatures: The Quoadlibetal Questions*. Trans. and Ed. Felix Alluntis and Allan B. Wolter. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975.

77. Copleston, *A History of Medieval Philosophy*, 225.

would “naturally” do without the aid of another power), though cleaving to God’s law and love does, he is clear, make one happy (as well as moral). Scotus differs significantly here from Aquinas. As Richard Cross explains, Aquinas, adapting Aristotle’s theory of *eudaimonia* as the ultimate end into a Christian framework, believes that “achieving happiness and acting morally well...coincide, and moral decision-making is ultimately a matter of making the correct prudential calculations as to how best to achieve happiness.”⁷⁸ Scotus, however, sees the human will as possessing two inclinations, or affections, the *affectio commodi* and the *affectio iustitiae*, and “relegates concerns about happiness to the *affectio commodi* and assigns whatever is properly moral to the other affection, the *affectio iustitiae*.”⁷⁹ The split, Richard Cross reasons, allows Scotus to demonstrate that “the will is not a purely natural power,” and must therefore “have some way of modifying its basic natural inclination” from what would otherwise, if the intellect’s *affectio commodi* operated without the will’s *affectio iustitiae*, be simply a “slavish seeking after the natural goals of human existence.”⁸⁰

Scotus’s theory is not meant to imply that there is no happiness involved in cleaving to the divine law, but rather, that the moral impetus for doing so extends beyond potentially egotistic goals. Instead, the happiness and human love that comes with pursuing the divine parallels God’s own love, who, as Copleston describes, “does not love other beings as means to his own advantage” but instead “loves them altruistically. God’s love is the measure of love.”⁸¹

78. Cross, *Duns Scotus*, 85.

79. Williams, “John Duns Scotus,” at 5.2.

80. Cross, *Duns Scotus*, 87.

81. Copleston, *A History of Medieval Philosophy*, 226.

The resultant love, Wolter adds, is one that gestures towards a broader social community, insofar as it is a “‘love’ that is neither private nor jealous, but rather one that inclines us to invite others to admire and share it with us.”⁸²

Scotist Voluntarism and the Hierarchy of Necessity

For Scotus, the operation of the will’s *affectio iustitiae* makes it most free; without this highest inclination, it would be slave to solely its *affectio commodi*. Scotus likewise establishes a hierarchy of necessities that further demonstrates that his voluntarist impulses do not negate his belief in human free will, arguing that “one necessary thing may in some way be more determined than another” (*QQ* 16.44, 385). He gives the example of a stone, which, while “determined to descend...does not receive from its progenitor the act of descending, but only that principle which naturally causes it to descend” (*QQ* 16.44). If, however, “the caused will necessarily wills anything, it is not determined by its cause to will such in the way the weight is determined to descend. All it receives from the cause is a principle by which it determines itself to this volition” (*QQ* 16.44). In this analogy, then, the stone’s natural inclination to fall downward exhibits more determinism than an individual who through their will chooses an action, even if the possession of such a will in the first place stems from God, and even if that decision, foreknown by God, is part of a broader scheme of divine order.

82. Wolter, Alan B, “Introduction,” in *Duns Scotus on the Will and Morality*. Eds. Alan B. Wolter and William A. Frank. Trans. William A. Frank. (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1986): 1-123, at 12.

Scotus's hierarchy of necessities thus corresponds to his conception of the divine will as creating all possibilities, contingencies, and ultimately chosen actions, as described above. The human free will, most free when it follows its *affectio iustitiae* and not simply its *affectio commodi*, is not determined by its natural principles but is liberated, and God's foreknowledge does not make its actions determined, because "what he knows to be true of a free agent, he knows from all eternity, but he knows it as contingent truth, one which might not have been the case and hence was not something inevitable."⁸³ Scotus thus sides in particular with Augustine in arguing that for God, foreknowing a thing does not determine that thing; as he writes, "Although the necessity of the foreknowledge or of the foreknown as foreknown is one of immutability, it is not simply a necessity of inevitability or absolute determination. It is only inevitable on the assumption that God foreknows that this will take place" (16.47).

For Scotus, establishing this hierarchy of necessity, as well as of the inclinations or affections, is a necessary step in preserving the role of the human will in morality, thus perhaps providing a preemptive answer to critics who argue that his voluntarist conception of divine will subverts human freedom. Scotus in fact draws a parallel between the divine and human wills (as humans are created in God's image) in preserving the freedom of both. He argues that surely "both freedom and necessity in willing can coexist in the will" because we know that "the divine will necessarily wills its own goodness, and yet is free in willing this; therefore [necessity and freedom coexist there]" (*QQ* 16.30 and 16.31; original amendment). For Scotus, necessity and

83. Alluntis, Felix and Allan Wolter, "Necessity of immutability," in the "Glossary" to John Duns Scotus, *God and Creatures: The Quodlibetal Questions*. Trans. and ed., Felix Alluntis and Allan B. Wolter. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975:493–540, at 524.

freedom *must* be compatible, because if humans could not make free choices through the use of their will, the morality of our actions could not be judged. According to Richard Cross, this forms a large part of why, in fact, Scotus distinguishes his theory of morality from Aristotelian, *eudaimonistic* theories held by those such as Aquinas, because “Aquinas’s view does not do sufficient justice to human freedom.”⁸⁴

Free Will & “Previously Undetermined Options”

Scotus’s main contribution to building a case for human free will, however, comes with the way he distinguishes the nature of the choices available to the human will. Alexander Jensen explains that Scotus “developed the notion of the free will as choosing between previously undetermined options, or, in other words, the ‘self-determination of what otherwise remains undetermined.’”⁸⁵ This holds not over the span of time but instead during any one particular moment, making the theory also known as “synchronic contingency.”⁸⁶ This “radically indetermined” nature of the human will, Cross argues, does ensure that there is a human onus for pursuing morally right choices, as it ensures that humans can commit “genuine wrong-doing” and not just “mistakes.”⁸⁷ For Scotus, this is why God has created and interacts with the world in

84. Cross, *Duns Scotus*, 85.

85. Jensen, *Divine Providence*, 70; quoting David B. Burrell, *Faith and Freedom: An Interfaith Perspective*, Challenges in Contemporary Theology (Malden, MA; Oxford, 2004), p.188.

86. Hoffmann, Tobias. “Intellectualism and Voluntarism.” *The Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy, Volume I*. Eds. Robert Pasnau and Christina Van Dyke. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014, at 425.

87. Cross, *Duns Scotus*, 82.

the way he does; that is, God preserves human choice *because* “from all eternity [He] freely decides to create, conserve, and cooperate with the free actions of his creatures in a contingent way”⁸⁸ (Wolter 11). If indeed human freedom “involve[s] multiple options and the moment of choice,” and if “at the very moment as which I will *x*, I am also able to will *y*,” which is the case in Scotus’s theory,⁸⁹ then humans can only successfully participate in God’s laws of morality through deliberate, free choices, and not merely out of some kind of necessity, obligation, or auto-reflexive *eudaimonistic* natural inclination.

William Ockham

Approaching Geoffrey Chaucer’s own era, in the fourteenth century, a shift in both theological and philosophical writing towards what is called nominalism begins to occur, often seen by scholars as heralded by William Ockham. A Franciscan writing just a few decades after Scotus, Ockham further advances a voluntarist view of the relationship between God and his creation. For Ockham, compared to Scotus, this involves even more emphasis on contingents; for him, “everything is contingent, except God, who is the only being that is necessary.”⁹⁰ In Ockham’s conception the human realm becomes “not an expression of the divine being or divine goodness any longer,” as his Dominican predecessor Thomas Aquinas saw it, but instead as “depending exclusively on God’s inscrutable will,” a theory designed in part to prove a greater

88. Wolter, “Introduction,” 11.

89. Jensen, *Divine Providence*, 70.

90. Jensen, *Divine Providence*, 124.

freedom inherent in the divine will.⁹¹ Some of Ockham’s critics, both medieval and modern, see this move as a “theological overreach,” one which “sacrifice[s] human and divine reason in the name of divine freedom.”⁹² Alexander Jensen, for example, seems to share this assessment, arguing that Ockham’s theories have severe consequences for human freedom because they turn “divine agency and creaturely agency into competitors. Whatever God does reduces the agency of creatures, and whatever creatures freely do diminishes divine agency.”⁹³ Likewise, Richard Cross observes that Ockham’s “modern detractors” criticize his “apparent acceptance of a divine-command metaethic: the view that...an act is morally right if, and only if, it is commanded by God; and...morally wrong if, and only if, it is prohibited by God.”⁹⁴

However, the other side of Ockham’s allegedly hyper-voluntarist coin—as Jensen points out—is a contingent world. Though the writers considered up to this point have varied somewhat in both defining the nature of contingents as well as their scope and temporality, most see free will operating in this realm of contingents, as seen in Boethius and Aquinas, and even in Scotus, who makes them synchronous and not future contingents, as noted above. Ockham likewise emphasizes contingents (for him, future) in *Tractibus de praedestinatione et de praescientia Dei et de futuris contingentibus* (*De Praedest*). On the one hand, he argues that “it must be held beyond question that God knows with certainty all future contingents—i.e., He knows with

91. Jensen, *Divine Providence*, 124.

92. Jensen, *Divine Providence*, 125, paraphrasing Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. Robert M. Wallace, Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983, at 181-203).

93. Jensen, *Divine Providence*, 125.

94. Cross, *Medieval Christian Philosophers*, 202–203.

certainty which part of the contradiction is true and which false” (*De Praedest*, Assumption 6). He adds, however, that God “wills contingently,” and “therefore He can *not* will the one part and He can will the other part, inasmuch as the other part can come to pass” (*De Praedest*, Assumption 6).

Ockham makes similar arguments about God’s foreknowledge, explaining that “many things that God knows will be, contingently will be and not necessarily” (*De Praedest*, QII, P, Part Five). He argues that “God Himself, or the divine essence, is a single intuitive cognition as much of Himself as of all things creatable and uncreatable—[a cognition] so perfect and so clear that it is also evident cognition of all things past, future, and present” (*Ordinatio*, Distinction 38, M). What this implies, he argues later, is that semantically, saying God wills a thing is not the same as saying God directly necessitates a thing; the latter is made available by the nature of contingency itself. In other words, Ockham here seems to share a similar belief as Augustine, insofar as he does not see divine foreknowledge as necessarily necessitating necessity, as part of divine foreknowledge operates over contingent matters pertaining to the realm of human agency.

Ockham thus maintains a firm belief in both divine *and* human free will. While Ockham clearly states that he disagrees with Scotus’s conception of the human free will as possessing “a double capacity for opposites” (*De Praedest*, QIII, A, p71), he believes that “God’s will (as regards what is external to it), as well as the created will, acts contingently at the instant at which it acts” (*De Praedest*, QIII, D, p76). This allows room for human free will, which Ockham believes would otherwise be extinguished without contingencies. Ockham explains his position by reasoning that if “the determination of a created will necessarily follows the determination of

the divine will,” then “the will necessarily acts...just as fire does, and so merit and demerit are done away with” (*PPFC* Assumption 6, p49). Instead, as Richard Cross explains, Ockham insists upon two related things: first, that “there are true propositions about future contingents—indeed, it is possible to formulate a true proposition about *any* future contingents, and God knows all of these,” and secondly—and most importantly, for human free will—that “the truth of these propositions, prior to the occurrence of the contingent event itself, does not subject that event to any kind of inevitability or necessity: it is and remains *contingent*.”⁹⁵ It is through careful explication of theories such as this that Ockham balances divine power and human free will, “assigning created free choice a criterial role”⁹⁶ and ensuring, in agreement with Augustine, that “God is not a punisher before man is a sinner.”⁹⁷ In some ways, then, Ockham’s allegedly extreme voluntarism makes a compatibilist approach to the paradox of divine foreknowledge and free will more plausible, for although he believes that all creation depends directly on God’s will, the separation of the divine realm from the human, hyper-contingent realm means that human free will operates more widely in the latter.

Overall, Cary Nederman argues that Ockham’s scholarship challenges perceptions of the Middle Ages as “a period in which hierarchy, interdependence, and communal holism were emphasized to the virtual exclusion on the individual.”⁹⁸ Ockham’s more political writings,

95. Cross, *Medieval Christian Philosophers*, 201–202, original emphasis.

96. Kretzmann and McCord Adams, “Introduction,” 30

97. McCord Adams, 1329, quoting *Ord* I, d.41, q.u, (OTH IV, 604).

98. Nederman, Cary J. “Individual Autonomy.” *The Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy*, Vol. II. Revised Edition. Eds. Robert Pasnau and Christina Van Dyke. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014. 551–564, at 551.

Nederman explains, seem to exhibit some parallels to his theological, particular insofar as Ockham “embrace[s] several ideas that demonstrate a high degree of regard for the individual, especially in connection with the religious authority of the church and its hierarchy.”⁹⁹ Ockham believes, among other things, in not only the power but the suitability of individuals to oppose perceived heresy, “even if it stretches to the upper reaches of the church’s official structure,” a position which Cary Nederman notes correlates strongly with Ockham’s own well-documented, problematic relation with the papacy.¹⁰⁰ But more generally, as Nederman argues, Ockham thus repeatedly demonstrates “high level of confidence in the capacity of individuals to form judgments about fundamental truths for themselves, separate and distinct from communities or institutional authorities,” one which he correlates to Ockham’s beliefs about human free will, as already explored.¹⁰¹

Nominalism

Scholars today consider William Ockham a leading figure of nominalism, though this is largely considered a “retrospective” appellation.¹⁰² In general, nominalism is often framed as concerning mainly logic and philosophy. Nominalist thinkers take up the debates stemming back

99. Nederman, “Individual Autonomy,” 562.

100. Nederman, “Individual Autonomy,” 562. Nederman explains that Ockham eventually opposed the Pope by supporting “would-be emperor” Ludwig of Bavaria, at 561. McCord Adams also points out that 51 of Ockham’s propositions were censured by a papal commission in 1326.

101. Nederman, “Individual Autonomy,” 562.

102. Biard, Joël. “Nominalism in the Later Middle Ages.” *The Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy, Volume II*. Revised Edition. Eds. Robert Pasnau and Christina Van Dyke. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014. 661–673, at 662.

to antiquity on the nature of universals and particulars, largely rejecting the ontology of the former in favor of emphasizing the significance of the latter in what is now known as the *via moderna* approach to philosophy, as opposed to the *via antiqua*, or realist, philosophical thinking as represented by writers like Aquinas.¹⁰³ Ockham, for example, in accordance with his emphasis on a hyper-contingent mortal world, relegates universals to mere mental concepts, considering any belief in their reality to be “the worst error in philosophy”¹⁰⁴ and insisting that “no universal thing is a substance existing outside the mind.”¹⁰⁵ According to Marilyn McCord Adams, for nominalists, the main issue at stake regarding universals is “whether similarity must be grounded in identity,” and “whether universal concepts supply us with any knowledge of reality.”¹⁰⁶

Ockham’s nominalist take on philosophy and logic, however, is not divided from his theological opinions, both for himself or for his contemporaries. Joël Biard explains that at the end of the Middle Ages, Ockham’s theories are not invoked only in logic, but also in theology, regarding, for example, the status of created charity as separated or not in the soul, the nature of the divine act that justifies or condemns, and the contingency of the divine commands that ground the moral law.¹⁰⁷

Ockham’s opinions on the ontological importance of particulars over universals, then, may correlate with his opinions on free will more than at first meets the eye. If universals exist only

103. Copleston, *History of Medieval Philosophy*, 230. For more of an overview on realists versus nominalists, see Williams, “John Duns Scotus,” 3.3

104. McCord Adams, Marilyn. *William Ockham Volumes I–II*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987, at 13.

105. *Summa logicae* I, c. 15, (OPh I, 5), quoted in McCord Adams, 31 fn63.

106. McCord Adams, *William Ockham*, 12.

107. Biard, “Nominalism,” 672.

as mental concepts and signifiers, an emphasis on particulars seems to imply an emphasis on individuation, and on unique and potentially subjective experiences as well as situations in which people make free choices. Interestingly, while Ockham, as noted, has come to be identified with the so-called *via moderna* instead of the realist *via antiqua*, his views on human free will link him nevertheless to some earlier thinkers, a view which also may have been attractive to other writers interested in free will, such as Geoffrey Chaucer. Russel Peck in fact argues specifically that Ockham may have influenced Chaucer, exploring Chaucer's use of nominalist thought in demonstrating both the positive potential and potential pitfalls of individual will. Specifically, Peck argues that Ockham's "placement of the efficacy of the will at the center of his epistemology makes his views all the more compatible with Chaucer's strongly Boethian orientation."¹⁰⁸ He adds, however, that in works such as the *Book of the Duchess*, *Troilus and Criseyde*, and the *Knight's Tale*, Chaucer dramatizes the potential traps the will must face—"the limitations of human perception and the likelihood of one's being prisoner to his own ideas."¹⁰⁹

Like Peck, Richard Utz also theorizes that nominalist thinkers like Ockham may have intrigued Chaucer, who witnessed various social upheavals in the fourteenth century, upheavals which "presented a radical contingency and uncertainty that questioned the existing order of things and the analogical relationality constructed to keep it in place."¹¹⁰ During a time of such unrest and rapid change, Utz reasons, nominalism may have gained traction due to its "critique

108. Peck, Russel, A. "Chaucer and the Nominalist Questions." *Speculum* 53 (1978): 745-760, at 746.

109. Peck, "Chaucer and the Nominalist Questions," 757.

110. Utz, Richard. "Philosophy." *Chaucer: An Oxford Guide*. Ed. Steve Ellis. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005. 158-173, at 169.

of the systemic limitations of analogy” in theology and the related nominalist belief that the “world [was] a potentially contingent place, one in which the complex motivations of human agency replace God’s determining and eternally reliable master plan.”¹¹¹ While Chaucer himself was not, of course, a clerk or monk trained in nominalism, Utz believes that Ralph Strode, the “philosophical Strode” to whom dedicates *Troilus and Criseyde* (along with “moral Gower”) was “a follower of the nominalist *via moderna*,” and that therefore Chaucer’s work in *TC*, and perhaps other works, shows nominalist concerns.¹¹²

Bradwardine

The rise in nominalism, however, did not go unchallenged. One of William Ockham’s contemporaries, Thomas Bradwardine, balked at the great emphasis upon human free will that he found in his fellow theologians’ writing. Admittedly, in his own work he does not deny the existence of free will; on the contrary, he insists on it and, like many of his predecessors, sees it as operating in the realm of contingents. Furthermore, his basic definition of contingents itself is not unusual when compared to Aquinas, for example, or Ockham. Gordon Leff explains that according Bradwardine, “contingency...is anything that is possible: which can be or not be. Thus

111. Utz, “Philosophy,” 169. See also Sheila Delany’s similar argument, cited by Utz in “Literary Nominalism,” 209, in “Undoing Substantial Connection: The Late Medieval Attack on Analogical Thought,” *Mosaic* 5.4 (1972): 33-52.

112. Utz, “Literary Nominalism,” 208. See, however, Watt’s counter-argument about the difficulty of pinning any certain influence of nominalism and Strode specifically onto Chaucer, in Watts, William H, “Chaucer’s Clerks and the Value of Philosophy,” in *Nominalism and Literary Discourse: New Perspectives*, eds. Hugo Keiper, Christoph Bode, and Richard J. Utz. (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1997): 145–155, at 149–150.

something is contingent which is the act of a free agent, which, having considered the consequences which will naturally follow a certain action, does not necessarily adopt it, but considers equally the alternative.”¹¹³ In addition, Bradwardine sees contingency and necessity as compatible, although he insists that “a contingent action must...result from freedom of choice and not be determined.”¹¹⁴ For Bradwardine, Leff explains, “the scope of contingency is in no way contradicted by necessity; for everything that is contingent is necessary as coming from the first cause [God]; conversely, everything necessary must be contingent by virtue of the infinite freedom which resides in the first cause.”¹¹⁵ In other words, for Bradwardine, because God’s freedom extends infinitely, the contingents he creates must necessarily also invoke freedom, though, stemming from God, must also be necessary. In some ways, then, Bradwardine’s basic conception of free will resembles Augustine’s—a divine cause does not subvert the existence of free will.

Divine Grace and the Inefficacy of Human Free Will

However, Bradwardine’s conception of the power and scope of human free will differs radically from that of his nominalist contemporaries, and from that of earlier thinkers such as Aquinas, as he finds theological theories which emphasize the efficacy of human free will offensive. Instead, he sees much to agree with in Augustine’s theories of the biological

113. Leff, Gordon. *Bradwardine and the Pelagians: A Study of His ‘De Causa Dei’ and its Opponents*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957, at 99–100.

114. Leff, *Bradwardine and the Pelagians*, 100.

115. Leff, *Bradwardine and the Pelagians*, 100.

inheritance of original sin and the human incapacity to overcome the warped will which results from it without God's assistance; as Eric Saak explains, "Bradwardine represents a renewed emphasis on Augustine, and on Augustine in the context of a perceived renewed Pelagianism."¹¹⁶

For Bradwardine, this alleged Neo-Pelagianism stems largely from insufficient acknowledgement of the power of divine grace and how it can make human free will, otherwise utterly mired, effective, leading him to famously complain in *De causa Dei* that "when he had studied philosophy at Oxford, 'what he heard day in, day out, was that we are the masters of our own free acts, that ours is the choice to act well or badly, to have virtues or sins.'"¹¹⁷ For him, this kind of exultation of human free will is tantamount to "an assault on God's sovereignty," and he frames his opposition to those who would claim that "we are the masters of our own free acts" in no uncertain terms.¹¹⁸

Bradwardine declares at the outset of his *De causa Dei* that "I burn with ardour for God's cause, knowing that I thrust my hand into a terrible flame, for I am not unaware how the pestilential Pelagians are wont to harass an agitated mind with tumult and abuse, and how they will strive to tear this small treatise with their savage teeth" (*De causa Dei*, Preface i).¹¹⁹ Bradwardine's impressive virulence in this passage perhaps speaks to the prevalence of the

116. Saak, Eric. *Creating Augustine: Interpreting Augustine and Augustinianism in the Later Middle Ages*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, at 45.

117. Luscombe, David. "Monks and friars." *The Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy, Volume I*. Revised Edition. Eds. Robert Pasnau and Christina Van Dyke. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014: 63–75, at 73–74. Quoting from Leff, *Bradwardine and the Pelagians*, at 14.

118. Saak, *Creating Augustine*, 42.

119. Ed. Savile; quoted in Leff, *Bradwardine and the Pelagians*, 14.

debates on free will and divine properties, including grace, in the fourteenth century. From Bradwardine's opponents, Leff explains, "saw man where Bradwardine insisted that they should see God; free will for them came before grace; they measured the nature of the future and of contingency in human not divine terms."¹²⁰ Bradwardine's stance on the insufficiency of human free will also leads him to disagree with theories which see mankind and the mortal world as reflections of the divine. Whereas Duns Scotus, for example, saw humans as reflecting God through "both the powers and the opportunities for determining their own actions,"¹²¹ Bradwardine finds such comparisons almost insulting. He believes instead that human "free will, by its very incapacity to do good, cannot be identified with God's will," because "it must have...a special gift from God to act with Him to good," being otherwise insufficient.¹²²

The Necessity of Foreknowledge

In accordance with this program to return emphasis to divine grace rather than human free will, Bradwardine also disagrees with some of his contemporaries on the relationship between God's foreknowledge and necessity. Ockham, for instance, does not believe that foreknowledge implies necessity of any particular acts, as discussed above. Bradwardine insists that it does, though he also insists that this does not have problematic implications for the existence of human free will, maintaining that there "can be no contradiction between freedom

120. Leff, *Bradwardine and the Pelagians*, 13.

121. Cross, *Duns Scotus*, 53.

122. Leff, *Bradwardine and the Pelagians*, 95.

and necessity.”¹²³ Edith Dolnikowski observes that beginning with his early works, such as *De futuris contingentibus*, Bradwardine attempts to “prove that God has complete foreknowledge of all future contingents by virtue of his eternal nature.”¹²⁴ However, he differs greatly from his contemporaries like Ockham, as well as from Aquinas, in describing the nature of this foreknowledge. As Leff explains, for Aquinas, God’s foreknowledge acts as a sort of “neutral intelligence,” but for Bradwardine, it becomes “active approbation: with him, what God foresees, He forewills,” with the resulting implication that “the future is as determined as the past and the present.”¹²⁵

Divine First Causes and Secondary Human Causes

Accordingly, although Bradwardine believes in contingents, as noted above, he makes them “secondary causes” which stand “dependent upon God’s will as their first cause.”¹²⁶ In other words, while humans exercise their free will in the contingent realm, these are choices already precisely predetermined, their power not of themselves because Bradwardine believes that “no second cause can itself be entirely the first cause of an effect, since it is not absolute.”¹²⁷ This makes “God’s will...the direct cause of all His creatures do,” Leff explains, and in turn Bradwardine believes that God “must, therefore, be involved in [humans’] own contingent

123. Leff, *Bradwardine and the Pelagians*, 104.

124. Dolnikowski, Edith Wilks. *Thomas Bradwardine: A View of Time and a Vision of Eternity in Fourteenth-Century Thought*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995, at 159.

125. Leff, *Bradwardine and the Pelagians*, 105.

126. Leff, *Bradwardine and the Pelagians*, 104.

127. Leff, *Bradwardine and the Pelagians*, 98.

actions,” making “contingency...as much a part of God’s necessity as of free will.”¹²⁸ In this system, God exercises what Leff calls an “active” power, whereas humans, “can only accept or reject what is put before them,” making theirs a “passive, conditioned power.”¹²⁹ Thus, in Bradwardine’s theory, God as the creator of all contingents acts more directly on both the options available to humans and the choices they make than in, for example, Aquinas’s conception of the contingent realm (although of course also created by God) as an arena in which God’s influence on human choices is indirect. Bradwardine makes this no minor point in his theories, making clear how high he sees the stakes in this debate when he states that “Were God not eternally to preordain everything by His will, all established order between Him, as first and immediate cause, and His creatures would be overturned.”¹³⁰

Bradwardine’s Realist Determinism

Thus, although Bradwardine insists on the existence of free will, as ineffective as it might be when unaided, many scholars view his theology as utterly deterministic and as severely curtailing mankind’s powers due to his conception of contingents, divine foreknowledge, and necessity. Gordon Leff, for example, argues that in his efforts to emphasize the primacy of God’s omniscience and grace over all else, Bradwardine has “not only...vindicated God’s future knowledge, but, in doing so, he has virtually excluded contingency from any real place in human

128. Leff, *Bradwardine and the Pelagians*, 98–99.

129. Leff, *Bradwardine and the Pelagians*, 102.

130. Leff, *Bradwardine and the Pelagians*, 107.

affairs. It comes through God's will alone."¹³¹ He concludes that despite Bradwardine's claims to a compatibilist approach, "by making God the most immediate cause of all that they do, men were left with no autonomy," for "the whole world became, in effect, nothing more than the extension of God's will, with no part of it capable of acting but by His immutable decree."¹³² Katherine Walsh likewise observes that Bradwardine's beliefs are often seen as "an extreme statement of a theology based entirely on faith as opposed to the skepticism of many of his contemporaries," and that scholars accordingly typically portray Bradwardine as fashioning himself as "the man who provided the answer of faith and dogma to those who upheld the power of human reason and the freedom of the will."¹³³ D. P. Baker notes that even in the fourteenth century, similar interpretations were made of Bradwardine's theological heirs; as Baker explains, "Bradwardine's nuanced views on necessity and contingency had been inherited and, to some extent, simplified and carried to the very edge of orthodoxy by Wycliff," and this in turn may have been how fourteenth-century authors like Chaucer received their understanding of Bradwardine and his adamantly realist position.¹³⁴

Not all scholars entirely agree on these interpretations of Bradwardine's positions. Heiko Oberman, for example, offers an interpretation counter to Leff's, in which Bradwardine's main project is to prioritize God's grace and power, not necessarily to constrict man's free will, a

131. Leff, *Bradwardine and the Pelagians*, 109.

132. Leff, *Bradwardine and the Pelagians*, 15.

133. Walsh, Katherine. *Richard Fitzralph in Oxford, Avignon and Armagh: A Fourteenth-Century Scholar and Primate*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981, at 29–30.

134. Baker, D. P. "A Bradwardinian Benediction: The Ending of the Nun's Priest's Tale Revisited." *Medium Ævum* 82.2 (2013): 236–243, at 238.

move which Oberman says “coincides with a theocentric view” and therefore “could create” for Bradwardine “the impression of being a determinist.”¹³⁵ Edith Dolnikowski acknowledges that Bradwardine takes a rather blunt, almost pugnacious approach in explaining his stance on free will and determinism in *De causa Dei*, but also argues that he may have been somewhat less divisive than modern criticism tends to portray him, noting that he indeed shares some beliefs with, for example, Ockham.¹³⁶ She adds that while many scholars, whether Bradwardine’s contemporaries or today’s historians, see a radical determinism in Bradwardine’s work that entirely subverts human free will, Bradwardine did not necessarily see his own work in this way. Dolnikowski instead argues that Bradwardine attempts to find a sense of “order and rationality in the created universe,” and that “in an intellectual environment of intense speculation about what God could or could not do, Bradwardine’s approach to God can be seen as optimistic and a positive inducement to all kinds of human endeavor rather than a grim, paralyzing sort of determinism.”¹³⁷

If Utz correctly assesses the rise of nominalism as a reaction to the social upheavals of the fourteenth century,¹³⁸ then Bradwardine’s approach perhaps simply embodies a different reaction to the same perceived instability. Such is Dolnikowski’s interpretation of Bradwardine, who argues that “he intended not to frighten people but to reassure them, in the face of

135. Oberman, Heiko A. *Archbishop Thomas Bradwardine: A Fourteenth Century Augustinian*. Utrecht: Kemink and Zoon, 1957, at 70. For more on Leff and Oberman’s differing interpretations, see Dolnikowski’s summary of the debate in *Thomas Bradwardine*, at 9.

136. Dolnikowski, Edith Wilks. *Thomas Bradwardine: A View of Time and a Vision of Eternity in Fourteenth-Century Thought*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995, at 7 and 13.

137. Dolnikowski, *Thomas Bradwardine*, 168

138. See again Utz, “Philosophy,” 169.

disquieting remarks by some theologians that God might intervene in the world without observing his own natural laws or that his knowledge of the future might be altered by acts of human will.”¹³⁹ While Bradwardine’s opponents, such as the nominalists, emphasize man’s free will to provide a sense of human control and stability, Bradwardine takes the strategy of returning to an Augustinian sense of divine grace and divine control. In other words, both allegedly determinist theologians like Bradwardine and nominalists like Ockham may simply be taking two different approaches to reassure those unsettled by an era of seemingly wild contingency: one which places the control of those contingents and the choices made by humans in reaction to them entirely in God’s direct control, and one in which, while those contingents are still ultimately created by God, places more direct control in the hands of human free will. But interestingly, when considered from the perspective of each individual writer and not their opponents, all the approaches addressed in this chapter, ranging from the realist to the skeptic to the nominalist, indicate ambivalence toward the potentially circumscribing force of humans themselves. Even in the writings of Augustine, Boethius, or Bradwardine, who perhaps place the greatest emphasis divine order, the greatest threat to human free will stems not from divine necessity but from the deficiency of human nature itself. Likewise, while theologians such as Aquinas and later, to a more radical degree, Duns Scotus and Ockham, go at a greater length to emphasize the efficacy of human free choice by temporally parsing God’s omniscience and explicating hierarchies of contingents, they too cast doubt on the human will’s ability to consistently choose paths which will lead them to the greatest good, the divine, and therefore the

139. Dolnikowski, *Thomas Bradwardine*, 168.

greatest freedom. For example, while Bradwardine and Duns Scotus, for example, express clear theological differences, particularly in regard to contingents and the origin and nature of the choices available to human beings, both express skepticism in the human will's ability to inherently choose well, whatever the circumstances. Thus, while the Middle Ages is known for a belief in the Great Chain of Being, in the writings of many medieval theologians, the heaviest chains upon the human soul are wrought by the corruption of the will through its repeated transgression, particularly in choosing egoistic pleasure and goods over the divine good made common to all.

CHAPTER TWO:
UNIVERSALS, GENDER, AND CIRCUMSCRIPTION

Gender and Self-Circumscription in the “Nun’s Priest’s Tale”

Of all the *Canterbury* tales, the “Nun’s Priest’s Tale” most candidly takes on the popular medieval debate over how to rationalize the coexistence of human free will and God’s foreknowledge. Considered against Chaucer’s entire oeuvre, the tale’s directness in doing so is rivalled only by *Troilus and Criseyde* and Troilus’s now-infamous anxiety about whether or not, if he chooses to sit in a chair, he sits because he has truly and freely chosen to do so, or if he sits because he is compelled to do so by God’s necessity and divine plan (*TC* IV.960–1078). In the “Nun’s Priest’s Tale,” the narrator likewise touches on this issue, alluding directly to “the opinion of certain clerkis” and “the greet altercacioun / In this mateere, and greet disputisoun” in theological schools (VII.3235–3238). But while Chaucer takes up what is a serious, pressing issue amongst his theological predecessors and contemporaries, in the *Canterbury Tales* he chooses to dress up this paradoxically problematic question in the guise of a beast fable. The tale concerns the prize rooster, Chanticleer, owned by a poor widow. Chanticleer’s nightmare of being snatched by a fox leads him to a near nervous breakdown, and to a debate between himself and his hen-wife Pertelote pertaining to whether dreams can accurately portend the future (Chanticleer’s position); if so, whether Chanticleer can affect that future or his fate at all; or if dreams arise merely from physical, bodily causes (Pertelote’s position). In the tale’s denouement the dream does come true; fox snatches rooster and then in wild pursuit follow Chanticleer’s

hen-wives, the widow, her daughters, their dogs, and apparently much of the village. Chauntecleer ultimately outwits the fox (and arguably re-wits himself), and the Nun's Priest declares that he has largely told his tale "in my game" (VII.3262) and that his fellow pilgrims, as his audience, can "taketh the moralite" and separate the "fruyt" from the "chaf" of the story as they see fit (VII.3440; 3443).

Despite the tale's trappings as a comedy of fowls, it retains beneath this comic surface weightier theological roots and a commentary on the human, social world. According to Steven Justice, for example, the tale's theological exploration shares a space with a simultaneous parody of John Gower's reaction to the 1381 Peasant's Revolt in *Vox Clamantis*. Justice argues that in the "Nun's Priest's Tale," Chaucer alludes to the 1381 rebellion when he describes how "hydous was the noyse" that the humans make as they pursue the fox and compares their fury to that of "Jakke Straw and his meynee / ...Whan that they wolden any Flemyng kille" (VII.3393–3396);¹⁴⁰ Straw, a historical figure, was believed to be at the head of the rebellion.¹⁴¹ This allusion helps reveal what Justice sees as a parody of Gower throughout Chaucer's tale. In the *Vox*, Justice explains, Gower condemns the peasant "noise" as "a confusion of furious animal noises" and instead sets himself up as "a prophet who declares the consensus of the realm."¹⁴² Chaucer, Justice believes, finds this absurd and thus parodies Gower by making him Chauntecleer, who holds a near-hysterical belief that his dreams portend the future and that all is

140. Stephen Justice, *Writing and Rebellion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 207.

141. See Cavanaugh, *Riverside* 935, note to line 3394.

142. Justice, *Writing and Rebellion*, 209.

necessitated by one divine plan; Justice points out that in the *Vox*, “Gower says that ‘fear added wings to feet, and in my flight [from the rebels] I was a bird,’” and that “Chaucer does him the compliment of taking him at his word: for Chauntecleer—bird and singer and dreamer of terrifying beast-dreams—is John Gower.”¹⁴³ Gower-Chauntecleer finds himself squawking in terror, his voice indistinguishable from the unsympathetic “animal fury” with which Gower portrayed the rebels in his own *Vox*. Justice concludes that instead of pursuing alleged consensus like Gower in his *Vox*, a consensus that in fact only represents the personal interests of Gower and his milieu, Chaucer’s tale instead “dramatizes diverse, unintended, potential audiences,” as well as “Chaucer’s consciousness that the author cannot control the social reach of the text.”¹⁴⁴

Steven Justice’s analysis in *Writing and Rebellion* thus showcases one way in which Chaucer’s tale of a rooster captured by a fox extends beyond its comedic surface to comment on one of the most incendiary social issues of Chaucer’s time—the social upheavals which fourteenth-century England witnessed, and which came to both an ontological and symbolic head in the 1381 Revolt. But the issues the tale also raises about divine foreknowledge and human free will—whether dreams portend the future, and whether that future is entirely preordained or whether free will still exists—historically were equally incendiary, both prior to and during Chaucer’s fourteenth century. Chaucer also dramatizes this debate in the “Nun’s Priest’s Tale,” showing, I will argue, that individual free will can ironically contribute as much, if not more, to circumscription as any seemingly preordained events. The tale furthermore suggests that unequal

143. Justice, *Writing and Rebellion*, 214.

144. Justice, *Writing and Rebellion*, 210; 222; 223.

gender dynamics can further propagate self-circumscription, and that consideration of the efficacy of free will as ontologically experienced requires consideration of social ideology as well. Though hidden in the guise of a beast fable, Chaucer fundamentally intertwines the theological and the social in this tale which is much more complex than it seems on its comedic avian surface.

In the narrative, shortly before Chauntecleer's dream comes to fulfillment, the Nun's Priest outlines what he sees as the three main positions one could take on free will and necessity. One position maintains that "Goddes worthy forwityng [foreknowledge] / Streyneth [constraints] me nedely [of necessity] for to doon a thing," which he calls "simple necessitee" (VII.3243–3245);¹⁴⁵ the second maintains that "free choys be graunted me / To do that same thing, or do it noght, / Though God forwoot it er that I was wroght" (VII.3246–3248); and the third, comprising something a of middle ground, maintains that God's "wityng streyneth never a deel / But by necessitee condicioneel" (VII.3249–3250). Here, the Nun's Priest touches on the complexities examined above. None of the theologians discussed there can fairly be said to entirely deny the existence of free will—that is, to emphasize exclusively the "simple necessitee" that the Nun's Priest lays out in the first position. They do, however, vary greatly, as demonstrated, in their conception of the scope of human free will's power and in their rationalization of how that power exists in relation to the divine. In this variation can lie the semblance of binary thought—consider, for example, the alleged hyper-determinism of realists such as Bradwardine against the nominalist emphasis on contingency and free will. In laying out these three approaches, broadly

145. Bracketed translations through are taken from the *Riverside Chaucer* glosses.

stated, the Nun's Priest himself attempts, however vaguely, to "bulte it to the bren [bolt (sift) it to the husks]" the paradox of divine foreknowledge and human free will, despite his declaration that he "kan nat" do so as well as "Augustyn, / Or Boece [Boethius], or the Bisshop Bradwardyn" (VII.3240–3242).

Some scholars have argued that the tale never clearly or entirely endorses any of the three stances. Stephen Justice concludes, as noted above, that Chaucer designs the "Nun's Priest's Tale" to "dramatiz[e] diverse, unintended, potential audiences."¹⁴⁶ Somewhat similarly, Alcuin Blamires, examining Chauntecleer's fear and subsequent extreme bravado in response to Pertelote's rebuke of that fear, argues that "the tale's wobbly explorations of 'drede' and 'negligence' manage ingeniously and comically both to confirm and deny negative and positive implications of the state of fear, exploiting with great wit the muddle that is inherent in available traditions and their attendant gendering baggage."¹⁴⁷ Ann Astell likewise sees polyvalence in the tale's conclusion, arguing that it "panders to the audience, presenting a multitude of possible *sententiae*, expecting us to hear what we want to hear."¹⁴⁸

Manish Sharma has recently taken a slightly different approach, arguing in his essay "Hylomorphic Recursion" that in his trifold explanation, the Nun's Priest touches not just on free will but on the arguably broader scholastic opposition between two philosophical approaches,

146. Justice, *Writing and Rebellion*, 222; 223.

147. Blamires, Alcuin. *Chaucer, Ethics, and Gender*. Oxford University Press, 2008, at 180.

148. Astell, Ann, "Chaucer's 'Literature Group' and the Medieval Causes of Books," *English Literary History* 59 (1992): 269–287, at 281; quoted in Sharma, Manish, "Hylomorphic Recursion and Non-Decisional Poetics in the *Canterbury Tales*," in *The Chaucer Review* 52.3 (2017): 253–273, at 259.

one formalist, one materialist. A formalist approach, Sharma explains, concerns an emphasis on realism, universals, and necessity, while a materialist approach concerns nominalism, particulars, and contingency.¹⁴⁹ These approaches, he argues, correspond with those offered by the Nun's Priest concerning free will: the scenario in which everything is constrained and put into action by God is the formalist approach; that emphasizing utter free will the materialist; and the third approach, called "conditional" by the Nun's-Priest narrator, a blend, which Sharma identifies largely with Boethius.¹⁵⁰ Sharma argues that Chaucer exercises a deliberate, artistic "(non)synthesis of realism and nominalism" in the "Nun's Priest's Tale," which differs, he clarifies, from what he sees as a Boethian synthesis of binaries such as freedom/necessity, realist/nominalist, and formalist/materialist.¹⁵¹ He concludes that "according to the logic of the tale, we simply cannot decide whether an author has imposed a final cause on the text (formalism) or whether the text is totally open to the vagaries of reception (materialism)."¹⁵²

Treating the "Nun's Priest's Tale" as a solely theological or philosophical exercise gives Sharma's argument traction: the narrator does not forthrightly endorse any one position in the tale. This may indeed be *not* an effort to leave it up to the readers, as Sharma argues, disagreeing with Ann Astell's "now standard reading of the *Nun's Priest's Tale*," but, instead, an effort to emphasize "the text's undecidability."¹⁵³ But the tale is set firmly in the mortal, transient, social world, avianly emblemized. Given this context, Chaucer's tale neither leaves it up to readers,

149. Sharma, "Hylomorphic Recursion," 254.

150. Sharma, "Hylomorphic Recursion," 256.

151. Sharma, "Hylomorphic Recursion," 260.

152. Sharma, "Hylomorphic Recursion," 259.

153. Sharma, "Hylomorphic Recursion," 259; 260.

nor emphasizes undecidability itself, but rather showcases indirectly, through implication and nuance, that undecidability itself is a non-position in the social realm of lived experience. The tale indeed offers a third position, one which does hybridize realism and nominalism, a point from which I deviate from Sharma, but this hybridization is enabled by the common ground of the binaries Sharma delineates, as I will demonstrate: an ambivalence towards the ability of the will of any one person (or in this case, chicken) to choose just goods over private, egotistical interests.

As explored in my previous chapter, medieval theologians varied in their explanations of how free will and divine foreknowledge can coexist, but all touched upon one common source of circumscription *other than* any that might be wrought by God's divine plan and foreknowledge: self-circumscription. A mixed consideration of theories both on free will and morality, such as expounded by Aristotle, helps showcase the importance of this potential source of "predestination," as it were. But setting these intellectual considerations within the social, lived realm of Chauntecleer and Pertelote adds a further dimension, one which indicates that individuals alone cannot circumvent the shortcomings of their own free will. That is, the will's self-circumscribing capacities, when free choice is repeatedly used to pursue vice, can only be rectified through the introduction of an outside rationality that ministers to the blind spot the will itself cannot see—blind spots which the "Nun's Priest's Tale" renders as gendered gaps.

Manish Sharma, to return momentarily to his discussion in "Hylomorphic Recursion," adds gender to the binary positions outlined above, noting that in much of medieval thought, form, necessity, and universals were equated with the male sex and matter, physicality, and

contingency with the female.¹⁵⁴ Sharma's main project lies outside the scope of exploring the implications of this potential gendering and as such gender does not play a significant role in his reading of the "Nun's Priest's Tale" itself, but the connection he makes offers tantalizing possibilities for connecting gender politics and theological discussions of free will in the "Nun's Priest's Tale." Sharma's gendering of the formalist and materialist positions gains traction when considered together with the phenomenon of medieval antifeminism which manifested in theological as well as medical writing. Alcuin Blamires explains that women were often seen as the embodiment of almost animalistic sexual temptation, distractions from the spiritual and intellectual realm; in the antifeminist trope, they were the potential pesky wives who sought to dominate their husbands through nagging, and who sought only physical and material pleasures.¹⁵⁵ The trope of women as of the "animal, material, household, pragmatic realm while men (intelligent men, anyway) are of a realm of higher deliberation which shuns the 'animal,'" Blamires explains, can be traced back to "Greek physiology."¹⁵⁶ In this Greek tradition, the "male principle" is "'soul' or 'form' and the female principle... 'body' or 'matter,'" making man's "the 'active', formative role" and "woman's the 'passive', receptive role."¹⁵⁷

The theologians explored in the previous chapter, whether realist, nominalist, or otherwise, do not gender their theories, so to speak; but the potential gendering of them in the

154. Sharma, "Hylomorphic Recursion," 254.

155. Alcuin Blamires, "Introduction" to *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended: An Anthology of Medieval Texts*. Eds. Alcuin Blamires, Karen Pratt, and C. W. Marx. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992, at 1.

156. Blamires, "Introduction," 2.

157. Blamires, "Introduction," 2.

“Nun’s Priest’s Tale” helps to further nuance the tale’s position on determinism and free will. The primary clash of genders that the tale offers comes in the form of the debate between husband and wife, Chauntecleer and Pertelote, in response to the former’s nightmare. Awaking in terror, Chauntecleer implores Pertelote to “my swevene [dream] recche [interpret] aright, / And kepe my body out of foul prisoun!” (VII.2896–2897). Pertelote rebukes his belief that his dream predicts the future, contending that such dreams simply result from “replecciouns,” or overeating, which causes “humours” to “been to habundant in a wight” (VII.2923–2925). Chauntecleer ought to take a laxative, Pertelote argues, to cure himself of this problem wrought by his overindulgence (VII.2943). A debate on the accuracy of dreams ensues: husband and wife offer competing interpretations of authorities such as Cato, and furthermore, Chauntecleer proposes following the lessons of experience against Pertelote’s citation of written authorities, arguing that there are many books which “han wel founded by experience / That dremes been significaciouns / As wel of joye as of tribulaciouns / That folk enduren in this lif present” (VII.2978–2981).

Pertelote’s position deserves further analysis beyond the comic hilarity of the detail and zeal with which she explains how Chauntecleer might go about procuring such a laxative. As noted, though Chauntecleer calls “experience” to his side to argue against Pertelote, echoing the opening invocation of personal experience in the “Wife of Bath’s Prologue,” he does not really offer any analysis of his *own* experiences; he in fact simply offers his personal interpretation of written authorities such as Macrobius or the Bible. He seems unable (or unwilling) to reflect on how his personal choices—over-eating—may or may not have contributed to his current

predicament. Instead, he jokingly masks his concerns and dismisses Pertelote's argument by mistranslating "*In principio, / Mulier est hominis confusio,*" declaring it to mean "Womman is mannes joye and al his blis," instead of "woman is the destruction of man" before reflecting on his lust for her (VII.3163–3166).

Pertelote's diagnosis, however, seems plausible. The narrative casts Chauntecleer's overeating, particularly when compared to the opening description of the poor widow, as a vice of immoderation—a failure to follow an Aristotelian principle of seeing "moral virtue" as "a mean in each case...concerned with certain mid-points in pleasures and pains" (*EE* 1222a6–10). The narrator explains of the widow that "no deyntee morsel passed thurgh hir throte; / Hir diete was accordant to hir cote. / Repleccioun [overeating] ne made hire nevere sik; / Attempree [moderate] diete was al hir phisik" (VII.2825–2838). According to the mock-heroic epic description of Chauntecleer's body as "fyn coral" and "a castel wal," as well as to Pertelote's diagnosis, Chauntecleer knows no such hardship. In fact, the desire to eat leads him to "fley doun fro the beam" after the conclusion of his debate with Pertelote; the narrative explicitly adds, as the final clause in the same sentence, that he flew down "for he hadde founde a corn, lay in the yerd" (VII.258). Several critics point to his amorous desire for Pertelote as the main cause, and excessive lust may certainly be one of his vices. But while Chauntecleer has indeed just claimed that Pertelote's "beautee" has made "al my drede for to dyen" (VII.3160–313162), and while ultimately "he fethered Pertelote twenty tyme, / And trad hire eke as ofte, er it was pryme" (VII.3177; 3178), we are also reminded of Chauntecleer's immoderate interest in eating with this subtle narrative kernel.

The next scene described is that of apparent destiny—some weeks later, Chauntecleer “in al his pryde” is out walking with his hen-wives when suddenly we meet “a col-fox, ful of sly iniquitee,” leading to the apparent fulfillment of Chauntecleer’s dream (VII.3191; 3215). The ensuing flurry of action, fox snatching rooster, humans pursuing fox, is preceded by the Nun’s Priest’s own preemptive antifeminist interpretation of his own tale, immediately following his aforementioned overview of the scholastic debates on free will. Letting the difficulties of resolving those debates slip from his grasp, the Nun’s Priest falls back on an antifeminist interpretation of his tale, declaring,

‘I wol nat han to do of swich mateere;
 My tale is of a cok, as ye may here,
 That tok his conseil of his wyf, with sorwe,
 To walken in the yerd upon that morwe
 That he hadde met that dreem that I yow tolde.
 Wommennes conseils been ful ofte colde;
 Wommannes conseil broghte us first to wo
 And made Adam fro Paradys to go.’

(VII.3251–3258).

The Nun’s Priest, before narrating the fox attack, thus resorts to placing the blame not on predestined events, not on the fox, but on the council of Chauntecleer’s wife, who, as a woman, the priest believes is one of the *mulier* who is *hominis confusio*. He then attempts to backtrack this antifemism by declaring it to be said only “in my game,” referring his audience of fellow

pilgrims to “auctours” who “trete of swich mateere” and claiming that for him personally, “I kan noon harm of no womman divine” (VII.3262 –3266); the immediate disavowal of the in-fact running joke that women are “hominis confusio” perhaps demonstrates Chaucer’s interweaving of his pilgrim-characters’ backgrounds into their tales—in this case, as Peter Goodall has argued, an attempt by the Nun’s Priest to placate his employer, the Nun.¹⁵⁸

But in addition, the Nun’s Priest’s comments here perhaps indicate a short-sightedness that Chaucer attempts to make his real audience see as the priest narrates this avian epic to his fictive pilgrim-audience. This is, after all, a favorite tactic of Chaucer’s: to dismiss the very thing the narrative’s design begs the readers to ponder, in this case, not only the stakes of the free-will debate but also the ways in which gender politics are fundamentally interwoven into those stakes. The Nun’s Priest either attempts to occlude this point or, at best, unintentionally misses it in its entirety. As Lesley Kordecki argues, his jab at women here falls in line with other antifeminist *Canterbury* narrators (and, I would add, alluded-to sources, such as those the Wife of Bath rails against in her “Prologue”); in these comments, Kordecki points out, “the Nun’s Priest’s censorship of Pertelote is very self-conscious.”¹⁵⁹ Furthermore, as Jill Mann has noted, despite the Nun’s Priest’s blame game, “the cock did *not* take ‘conseil of his wyf’ on the significance or otherwise of his dream; on the contrary, he vigorously rejected her view in favour of his own.”¹⁶⁰

158. See *Chaucer’s Monk’s Tale and Nun’s Priest’s Tale: An Annotated Bibliography 1900 to 2000*, ed. Peter Goodall, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009, at fn366.

159. Kordecki, *Ecofeminist Subjectivities* 110.

160. Mann, *Feminizing Chaucer*, 150.

To truly appreciate the “Nun’s Priest’s Tale,” we must disavow the interpretation that the Nun’s Priest offers before he describes its conclusion, for, as Jill Mann notes, there is “a blatant contradiction between tale and moral”—that is, the Nun’s Priest’s somewhat narrow-minded interpretation of his story as primarily indicating that women’s counsel is not to be trusted stands at odds with the larger shape the story takes.¹⁶¹ As D. P. Baker has recently argued, the Nun’s Priest, who can be read as himself a supporter of Bradwardine’s realist, formalist theological approach emphasizing universals and God’s will, “evidently thinks he has told a Bradwardinian fable,” but “Chaucer has stocked it” with the material of Bradwardine’s theological adversaries, such as Robert Holcot,¹⁶² and with representations, as Manish Sharma argues, of both the formalist/realist/universal approach and the materialist/nominalist/particular approach.

Refusing to take the Nun’s Priest at his own word, we must recall Pertelote’s advice that Chauntecleer seek the cause of his own discomforts in his own actions, advice that the Nun’s Priest, intentionally or not, is himself unable to offer. The first hint indicating that the chaos which ensues is less divine than implied by the narrative lament against “O destinee, that mayst nat been eschewed!” (VII.3338) is the description of the fox himself. Shortly before the Nun’s Priest’s overview of scholastic debates, he sets the fox up to attack. We learn that “in the grove” he “hadde woned yeres three,” and that “by heigh ymaginacioun forncast, / The same nyght

161. Mann, *Feminizing Chaucer*, 150.

162. Baker, D. P. “A Bradwardinian Benediction: The Ending of the Nun’s Priest’s Tale Revisited.” *Medium Ævum* 82.2 (2013): 236–243, at 240. Baker offers a compelling comparison of the Nun’s Priest’s closing benediction and Bradwardine’s *De causa Dei*, and himself points to scholarship which explores the influence of Robert Holcot, theological and philosophical heir to Ockham, and his Book of Wisdom on the “Nun’s Priest’s Tale.” For the latter, see Pratt, Robert A., “Some Latin Sources of the Nonnes Preest on Dreams,” *Speculum* 52 (1977): 538–70.

thurghout the hegges brast / Into the yerd ther Chauntecleer the faire / Was wont, and eek his wyves, to reaire” (VII.3216–3230). While the word “forncast” has been interpreted as indicating the predestined nature of the events about to unfold, it may simply indicate the cunning nature of the fox.¹⁶³ Norman Davis argues compellingly for the latter, pointing out that when Chaucer uses “forncast” elsewhere in his works, “the sense in both is clearly ‘planned or arranged beforehand, premeditated,’” and that this use of the word has legal analogies.¹⁶⁴ This usage of the word “forncast” seems particularly plausible, I add, when considered with the implication that the fox has been waiting, observing Chauntecleer’s habits—that he “was wont” to walk in the yard as he does now—for *three years*. He now lies in the cabbage bed “waitynge his tyme on Chauntecleer to falle” because he has learned precisely Chauntecleer’s habits. Eyvind Ronquist proposes that the “forncast” line shows the Nun’s Priest’s interpretation of the unfolding events as “a dream inspired by God,” and that this “highlights the imperiousness of omniscient and didactic narration.”¹⁶⁵ But in my differing interpretation of the line, I share Ronquist’s conclusion. That is, adding Ronquist’s reading to the equation, we can say that the line functions to show the tension between the narrative the Nun’s Priest is trying to tell his fellow pilgrims—that everything which happens in the tale is “forncast,” or divinely preordained,

163. See Benson’s overview of the “forncast” debate in *The Riverside Chaucer*, at 939, note to line 3217.

164. Davis, Norman, review of *A Book of London English 1384–1424* reissued 1967, by eds. R. W. Chambers and Marjorie Daunt, *Medium Ævum* 40.1 (1971): 75–80, at 79, original emphasis. Davis points to the use of “forncast” in *Troilus and Criseyde*, describing how Pandarus arranges Troilus’s interactions with Criseyde (*TC* III.521), and in the *Parson’s Tale* and the narrator’s rebuke of “macile ymaged, avised and forncast” (*ParsT* I.445–450).

165. Ronquist, Eyvind. “Chaucer’s Provisions for Future Contingencies.” *Florilegium* 21 (2004): 94–118, at 103.

and that Chauntecleer is wrong to trust in his wife's counsel against this—and the narrative that Chaucer is subtly revealing to his readers—that what happens is “forncast” by human action (or, in this case, by a fox's premeditation).

The implication extends even further than to placing the blame for events not on the divine but on personal action, the fox's careful planning. For again, Chauntecleer's *habits* have been the object of the fox's study. We have already learned of his habit of overeating—Pertelote has made this clear in her previous diagnosis (VII.2923), as has Chauntecleer's own hustle from beam to yard when he finds “a corn” there (VII.3175). Overeating, however, turns out to be but one of Chauntecleer's habits. Another—that Russel the fox now employs against him—is overindulgence in another kind: in his opinion of himself.

When Chauntecleer, having now spied Russel lurking in the yard, “wolde han fled” (VII.3283), the fox explains that “the cause of my comynge / Was oonly for to herkne how that ye synge” (VII.3289–3290). Interestingly, the fox employs a term here—“cause”—that immediately recalls theological debates on free will, for the debate chiefly concerns causes: if they are all predestined, stemming from God's foreknowledge, or if they can be found in human free will. Recall Augustine's belief that “God foreknows everything that he causes but does not cause everything that he foreknows” (*OFC* III.4). Aquinas, too, explores causes explicitly, explaining that God “is the first cause” but that he allows for “voluntary causes” through imbuing mankind with free will, which “is the cause of its own movement” (*ST* I.q83.art.rep3). That is, Aquinas argues that while God is the “first cause” in creating mankind and giving humans free will, he does not subvert the voluntary or second causes resulting from their own

freely-chosen actions which are taken in a contingent world. Bradwardine's use of causes in explaining his position on free will and divine foreknowledge is evident from the very title of his *De causa Dei*. While Bradwardine takes a somewhat similar approach to the previous theologians insofar as he still insists on human free will, he as noted radically emphasizes God as the first cause more than his predecessors or contemporaries, in the wake of what he perceives as an over-emphasis on the efficacy of the secondary causes left to mankind through their God-given free will.

So here, in the "Nun's Priest's Tale," just after the Priest has alluded to and then dismissed debates on free will as too intricate both because he is no "Augustyn, / or Boece, or the Bisshop Bradwardyn" (VII.3241–3242), and because, after all, his story is just "of a cok, as ye may here" (VII.3252), the narrative directly alludes straight to those debates with the explanation, from the fox himself, of his own "cause." But this is not the only moment that Chaucer's "Nun's Priest's Tale," as a whole, points to the importance—and great impact—of freely-chosen individual action. For the fox's real cause was indeed to *claim* to come "for to herkne how that ye [Chauntecleer] synge" but then to trick, to pounce (VII.3290). Now he employs his knowledge of Chauntecleer's habit of overindulgence in his own opinion of himself—his pride. He flatters Chauntecleer by describing his reputation for singing as well "as any aungel hath that is in hevne" (VII.3292); as having more sense of music than "Boece" (VII.3294); and as recalling the talents of Chauntecleer's own father, who, the fox claims, used to close his eyes and "strecche forth his nekke long and small" to make his voice even louder and clearer (VII.3305–3308). It works; Chauntecleer becomes "ravysshed with his flaterie"

(VII.3324) and mimics the behavior that his father was allegedly wont to exhibit and which he has apparently inherited, perhaps in a demonstration of both the Aristotelian theory of learned habits, and of the Augustinian theory of inherited sin—pride.

The fox attacks, able to capture Chaucer now that he is enraptured in the apparent glory of his own song. It is thus quite difficult to blame “destinee,” as the Nun’s Priest urges, when the narrative places such emphasis on personal action—unless that destiny comes not in the form of a plan completely set in motion only through God as the first cause and foreknower of all, but instead of God as foreknowing but not directly causing the human (or in this fable, avian) capacity for self-circumscription, “streyn[ing]” through “symple necesitee,” to use the Nun’s Priest’s own self-forgotten words (VII.3244–3245). Chaucer perhaps condemns himself to nightmares through a habit of overeating, and now makes himself susceptible to attack through his vice of pride.

Chaucer’s subsequent reversal of his seemingly dire situation, that of captivity—the “foul prisoun,” fowl as well as foul, that he has long feared (VII.2897)—further confirms the emphasis that Chaucer’s “Nun’s Priest’s Tale” puts on human action and free will’s ironic capacity for self-circumscription. Likely about to be devoured by the fox, Chaucer learns to turn the tables and now encourages his captor to indulge in another form of pride—boasting. At this moment, the humans of the farm chase after the fox and prize rooster. In this chaos, Chaucer encourages his captor to shout defiantly at the humans, to order them to “turneth agayn,” for he, the fox, “wol hym ete, in feith, and that anon!” (VII.3409–3413). Now the fox is duped; he opens his mouth to boast, and Chaucer seizes the opportunity to fly away to a safe

perch in a tree. Eyvind Ronquist reads this moment as an example of contingents at work, arguing that “‘I wol hym ete’ . . . is a proposition about a future contingent, and not ‘necessarily true,’” demonstrating that “‘Chauntecleer had freedom to act while in dire constraint,’” but that, ironically, Chauntecleer only discovers this because he still, just before this moment, adheres to his “fatalism,” believing death to be nigh.¹⁶⁶

The two animals now recite the lessons they have learned; avoiding another trick by the fox, Chauntecleer remarks,

first I shrewe [curse] myself, bothe blood and bones,
 If thou bigyle me ofter than ones.
 Thou shalt namoore thurgh thy flaterye
 Do me to synge and wynke with myn ye;
 For he that wynketh, whan he sholde see,
 Al willfully, God lat him nevere thee [prosper]! (VII.3426–3432).

The rooster has not only learned, but now articulates, his lesson; he rejects the vice that he has discovered in himself, pride, and further acknowledges the capacity that vice has had to blind him. Russel too learns his lesson, responding, “God yeve hym meschaunce, / That is so indiscreet of governaunce / that jangleth [chatters] whan he sholde holde his pees” (VII.3433–3435). Both, then, recognize their flaws, or sins—pride, for Chauntecleer the rooster, and a boasting and indiscreet tongue, for Russel the fox. Both are violations of the ethical and moral

166. Ronquist, “Chaucer’s Provisions,” 102; 101–102.

precepts of following Aristotle's golden mean, just as Chauntecleer's vice of overeating is;¹⁶⁷ and both, as Ronquist has noted, demonstrate how the Nun's Priest's own tale gets away from him, as both rooster and fox recite "morals distant from fatalism."¹⁶⁸ But most significantly, both animals—their characteristics representing those of humans in the mode of a typical medieval beast fable—have come to learn the self-circumscribing capacities of these sins.

Neither Chauntecleer's nor Pertelote's perspectives—nor the Nun's Priest's—seem entirely correct, in the end. A fox does, indeed, lurk in the yard and snaps up Chauntecleer, lending credence to his belief that his dreams fully portend the future that Fate has set in store for him. But Pertelote's perspective is not therefore to be entirely dismissed; earlier, she has urged him to overcome his fear and take action, and at the moment of the denouement, Chauntecleer, though he seems to find himself in the clutches of Fate, finally enables himself to do just that. Chauntecleer never attributes his new life-saving introspection to Pertelote, and neither does the Nun's Priest. But Chaucer's narrative as a whole shows the way to this reading, through its framing, and through the particular words employed. We must necessarily consider the tale outside of the Nun's Priest's own limited perspective (his character drawn, as we have seen, partially on the basis of the stereotypical antifeminist priest, who in turn would believe in antifeminist stereotypes). Chaucer has designed his narrative to point towards a middle way. We must turn to the things the Nun's Priest has disavowed—the counsel of a wife; the intricacies of

167. See Alcuin Blamires's related use of Aristotle's golden mean to analyze the "Nun's Priest's Tale," wherein he particularly emphasizes Chauntecleer's excesses of fear and bravado in response to both his nightmare and Pertelote's rebuke of his reaction to it. In *Chaucer, Ethics, and Gender*, at 175–179.

168. Ronquist, "Chaucer's Provisions," 103.

the relationship between God's foreknowledge and human free will—to find the kernel of truth layered throughout the narrative, as Chaucer invites us to do.

Chaucer's "Nun's Priest's Tale" demonstrates that our worldly, personal experiences may feel both entirely preordained and entirely contingent. One's nemesis may eternally be the conniving fox, lurking in the cabbage patch, waiting to bite. Life may present dangers and mishaps which leave one feeling entirely at the mercy of whatever event or being has suddenly seized us. But Chaucer's lesson, when the Nun's Priest's perspective is stripped away, lies between. Even if some things are indeed preordained—set by simple necessity—one still can exercise free will in reacting to those events, and avoid, like Chauntecleer ultimately does, "being prisoner to his own ideas."¹⁶⁹

Beyond simple necessity, the effects of individual free will—be they self-circumscribing or fox-circumscribing-fowl—are ignored only dangerously.¹⁷⁰ God may have "foreseen" what would happen and sent a prediction to Chauntecleer in the form of a dream, but God has exercised foresight inferentially, conditionally, and not through simple necessity. The fox's "only cause" of coming to the cabbage patch was to capture Chauntecleer by capitalizing upon his vice of pride. That is, the causes are more "simple"—but more deceptive—than divine "simple

169. Peck, "Chaucer and the Nominalist Questions," 757.

170. Or, human-circumscribing-animal. See Kordecki's argument in *Ecofeminist Subjectivities* that the "Nun's Priest's Tale" adds to the complexity of debates on free will through its human-animal power dynamics. Specifically, she argues that "The notion of conditional necessity also becomes satirized when we acknowledge species, for we realize that Chanticleer really has no choice to make, since his ability to direct his fate has been totally abrogated by his domesticated status. Like with oppressed women, the freewill/predestination argument falls very short for a creature under human control, with liberty merely to hole up in the henhouse or to strut smugly in the yard" (111).

necessity.” The causes lie in the capacity of freely-chosen human (or avian) actions to form habitual vices, particularly when the *affectio commodi* operates without the mediation of the *affectio iustitiae*, to paraphrase Duns Scotus, making an individual’s own free will act against them as a self-circumscribing force; in this flawed machinery, contingents become necessities due to human, not divine, determination. The potential danger of failing to recognize this capacity is dire—devouement for Chauntecleer the rooster; hunger for the now dinnerless Russel the fox. And, if Pertelote’s advice is entirely dismissed in the wake of the antifeminist tropes which the Nun’s Priest and his character Chauntecleer cast her, we are left only with Chauntecleer’s extreme belief in Fate, of everything being constrained by simple necessity, with only a formalist attitude towards theology, philosophy, and life.¹⁷¹ Without the voice of the women in the tale, the middle way in the debate on divine foreknowledge and free will is lost.

In essence, then, the “Nun’s Priest’s Tale” demonstrates that Chauntecleer’s flaws constitute their own echo-chamber. Chauntecleer emphasizes theological necessity and realism, the stasis of pre-ordained things, locking himself into his own ways and nearly ensuring his own otherwise entirely avoidable death. Pertelote, in contrast, believes in the happenstance of contingents, the material world, and self-affectable change, but this position by itself is not redemptive; as noted, some of her suggestions gesture toward the absurd. Neither can escape potentially self-circumscribing flaws without the other, and as Paul Strohm has argued, the tale demonstrates a “socially charged assumption that diverse levels of argumentative style, socially

171. See again Sharma’s gendering of formalist (realist) and materialist (nominalist) approaches in “Hylomorphic Recursion,” 254.

conditioned genres and forms, and kinds of utterance can inhabit the same literary space, cooperating for the profit . . . of all.”¹⁷² The individual needs the community to succeed; an outside perspective, which can only be gained in a social setting, through encounters with others, is needed to temper one’s own negative impulses.

“The Knight’s Tale” and Circumscribing Masculinity

In the above reading, I have suggested that the “Nun’s Priest’s Tale” takes a somewhat optimistic approach to the effect of living in a society upon an individual; that is, only through interactions with others can one’s own self-blinding habits be rectified. But Chaucer’s depictions of the social world do not always hold such optimism; indeed, they often showcase its potential pitfalls. In particular, while the “Nun’s Priest’s Tale” demonstrates the potential for gender-balanced social interaction to mediate the individual echo-chamber of negative habit, other Chaucerian texts, such as the “Knight’s Tale,” warn of how social ideology can constitute a larger echo-chamber for individuals living by its axioms, particularly when such ideologies are hidden under the guise of inalterable destiny or Fortune. That is, the “Knight’s Tale” portrays self-blinding, chivalric masculinity as symptomatic of a conditioning social ideology which circumscribes men and especially women, and reproduces society’s negative and violent capacities.

Chaucer accomplishes this theme in part through the revisions he makes to his primary source, Giovanni Boccaccio’s *Teseida*. The plot at its most basic remains the same: Theseus

172. Paul Strohm, *Social Chaucer*, 166.

(Teseo in the *Teseida*), leader of Athens, returns from waging war with the Amazons, bringing with him as his wife the defeated Queen Ypolita together with her sister Emelye (Emilia). Near Athens, they encounter a group of lamenting women, who explain that Creon, leader of Thebes, is refusing burial rights to the men recently killed in the siege of Thebes. Theseus vows to kill Creon, and engages him in battle and does so. But this results in more dead soldiers, and amongst them, Palamon (Palemone) and Arcite (Arcita) are discovered, two Theban noblemen and cousins. Theseus has them imprisoned, and eventually, through their prison windows, they see Emelye, and both fall in love. Arcite eventually is freed, but exiled from Athens, through the intercession of his and Theseus's mutual friend. Arcite then disguises himself and returns to Athens as a squire so as to be near to Emelye. Palamon, in turn, eventually escapes, and when both men are accidentally reunited, they fight for Emelye's hand. Theseus happens upon them as they fight and intervenes, arranging for them to fight instead under controlled and public conditions in the form of an elaborate and lavish tournament. Arcite wins the fight, and Theseus declares him the winner of Emelye's hand, but the gods intervene: a Fury appears, terrifying Arcite's horse and causing it to throw him from the saddle. Within a few days, Arcite dies of his injuries, and, eventually, Theseus arranges for Emelye to marry Palamon instead.

While this outline remains the same between the *Teseida* and the "Knight's Tale," Chaucer's revisions, omissions, and additions leave a significant mark on the story's emotional tone and ideological project. DiMarco notes how thoroughly Chaucer revises Boccaccio's material, observing that "Of the 2249 lines in *The Knight's Tale* only about 700 correspond,

even loosely, to lines in the *Teseida*.”¹⁷³ Like the *Teseida*, from the outset the “Knight’s Tale” seems to be characterized by an exploration of masculine chivalry and by characters’ belief, which at times borders on fatalism, in divine destiny and Fortune. But the unique way that Chaucer intertwines them in his text, from the beginning, is no coincidence. For Chaucer’s male characters in particular, ascription to chivalric values itself becomes a sort of self-imposed fatalism in its circumscribing capacity, a circumscription Chaucer subtly and slowly reveals through changes to Arcite and Palamon’s characters in particular. But the text begins more subtly than that, in rosier, more romantic terms—for, after all, a knight, we are meant to believe, is its teller, and he is attempting to tell a tale which will please the masses—the other pilgrims—and win him his supper.

Chivalry and Fortune

At the beginning of his tale, the Knight invokes “olde stories” (I.859) and assures his audience that his protagonist, Theseus, stands as a paragon among men. “Gretter was ther noon under the soone,” the Knight assures us—and in particular it is Theseus’s “wisdom and chivalrie” that foster his success; with it, “Ful many a riche contree hadde he wonne,” including conquering “al the regne of Femenye” (I.859; 862–66). The Knight’s description intertwines conquest with wisdom and chivalry, thus beginning a tone of praise for masculine chivalry that he attempts to maintain throughout the text. He describes Theseus’s homecoming—together with his new bride Ypolita, queen of the recently conquered “regne of Femenye” or Amazons—as

173. *Riverside* 827, introductory note to the “Knight’s Tale.”

marked by “muchel glorie and greet solempnytee” as he rides home to Athens “with victorie and with melodye” (I.870; 872). So insistent is the Knight on this characterization that he repeats it nearly verbatim in the next stanza when he declares it would be too time-consuming to tell the whole story of “How wonnen was the regne of Femenye / By Theseus and by his chivalrye” (I.877–878). While in these lines “chivalry” has been understood to mean “knights,” it echoes the previous characterization of Theseus personally. In fact, the term’s efficacy lies in its ability to work both ways. Whether it refers again to Theseus’s character or to the men who serve under him (the latter even enhancing the sense of the former), the effect remains to emphasize his power and efficacy as chivalric conqueror. In case the point has been missed, the narrator repeats it a third time, describing Theseus a few stanzas later as “in his hoost of chivalrie the flour,” a paragon of chivalric behavior amongst his sea of chivalric men (I.982). The Knight-narrator certainly makes his point, but paradoxically begs the question of why he is so anxious to do so from the outset of his story—almost as though he fears he may not be believed. Such anxiety betrays that there are other possible readings of Theseus—readings that, despite the Knight’s best efforts, ultimately undercut his romantic presentation of chivalry.

The Knight’s narrative, however, continues these romanticized, chivalric characterizations of Theseus throughout the text. Theseus approaches Athens “in al his wele [prosperity] and in his mooste pride” (I.895). When shortly thereafter he comes about a group of grieving Theban women, the Knight-narrator describes his reaction in chivalric terms: the “gentil duc” listens to them “with herte pitous,” thinking “his herte wolde breke” as they explain that they are widows and that Creon has banned them from burying their dead kinsmen, slaughtered

in the Siege of Thebes that resulted from the strife between the brothers Eteocles and Polynices (I.952–954). The Knight paints a picture of Theseus as comforter of the oppressed and disempowered, assuring his audience that Theseus “hem conforteth in ful goode entente” as he “swoor his ooth, as he was trewe knight” that he will right the wrongs that “the tiraunt Creon” has imposed upon the Theban women (I.958–961). Indeed, when Theseus reaches Thebes he “alighte / Faire in a feeld” (I.983–84), “slough hym [Creon] manly as a knyght” (I.987), and thereupon “to the ladyes he restored again / The bones of hir freendes that were slayn” (I.991–92). Even much later on in the story, the Knight invokes similar language: when word spreads that Arcite and Palamon will participate in an epic battle for the hand of Emelye, warriors everywhere desire to participate:

every wight that lovede chivalry
 And wolde, his thanks, han a passant name,
 Hath preyed that he myghte been of that game
 every lusty knyght
 That loveth paramours and hath his might,
 Were it in Engelond or elleswhere,
 They wolde, hir thanks, wilnen to be there—
 To fighte for a lady, benedicitee!
 (I.2106–2115)

Hosting the warriors who do come to participate provides the Knight-narrator with another opportunity to praise Theseus as the flower of chivalry, detailing how Theseus houses and feeds

the men with great diligence (and great cost) before the tournament (I.2190–2205) and how he does the same for the men—and especially the injured—afterwards (I.2715–2740).

Nearly matching the narrator’s insistence upon praising chivalry, Theseus’s in particular, the characters and even the narrator persist throughout the text in beliefs in Fate, chance, “aventure,” and “destynee”—concepts which Boethius and other theologians, to be sure, would differentiate between, as explored in my previous chapter, but which in the hands of the Knight-narrator’s characters become conflated. The fatalistic overtones of these repeated invocations on the surface paint a fatalistic picture throughout the “Knight’s Tale” that enhances its sense of tragedy, culminating in the gory and protracted death of Arcite after a Fury causes his terrified horse to throw him shortly after he wins the tournament against Palamon for Emelye’s hand, an outcome no one could have predicted. As J. A. Tasioulas notes, the tale is one in which at first appearance “We see the whole planetary machinery at work as the lives of mortals hang in the balance.”¹⁷⁴

The narrator frequently ascribes plot development as chance; for example, when Arcite and Palamon have been imprisoned and fall in love at first sight with Emelye, whom they can see in the garden from the prison window, we are told that it “so bifel by aventure or cas” (I.1074). Palamon’s later prison-break is described as happening “were it by aventure or destynee, / As whan a thyng is shapen it shal be” (I.1465-1466). Similarly, Fortune’s “snare” is what brings Arcite to the woods on a hunting trip with Theseus, where he will meet Palamon again, who himself is there “by aventure” (I.1490; 1516). Finally, the first two lines of the narrator’s

174. Tasioulas, “Science,” 179–80.

reintroduction of Theseus in the *Pars Secunda*, “forth I wole of Theseus yow telle” and “This mene I now by mighty Theseus” (I.1662/1673), bookend a discussion of determinism in which the narrator wonders at the strength of “the destine, minister general / That executeth in the world over al.../ certainly oure appetites heere, / Al is this reuled by the sighte above” (I.1663-1672). Though here the discussion is more specifically of God’s “purveiaunce” and destiny (I.1665), as noted above, chance and a more divine sense of determinism can easily become conflated and furthermore often serve similar functions from characters’ perspectives.

Characters, too, ascribe to a sort of fatalism involving a sense of both chance and determinism despite signs to the contrary. The lamenting women Theseus first encounters in the opening lines, for instance, blame their woes on “Fortune and hire false wheel” (I.925). Similarly, Arcite, after he and Palamon first see Emelye in the garden through their prison window, blames their subsequent lovesickness—and inability to act on it—on a malevolent higher power: “Som wikke aspect or disposicioun / Of Saturne by som consteallacioun / Hath yeven us this” (I.1087-1089). In turn, Palamon, still imprisoned after Arcite has been freed, laments:

O crueel goddess that goverene
 This world with byndyng of youre word eterne...
 What is mankynde moore unto you holde
 Than is the sheepe that ronketh in the folde?...
 What governance is in this prescience
 That giltlees tormenteth innocence?

(I.1303-1314)

Palamon's speech recalls the language of Boethius's prisoner—but only before receiving Lady Philosophy's enlightenment. As Richard Utz has argued, Boethian thought often appears in Chaucer's texts missing Philosophy's illuminations ("Philosophy" 171). Theseus too credits chance, as when, explaining the tournament that he will arrange for Arcite and Palamon to win Emelye's hand, he declares that "ech of yow shall have his destyne / As hym is shape," utilizing the passive voice to indicate a controlling force beyond man's power (I.1842-1843). These lines provide a particularly strong example of the relevance of such terms to the entire text: "shape" or "shapen," as in "destined," appears eight times throughout the "Knight's Tale," such as when the narrator declares that "whan a thyng is shapen it shal be" (I.1466);¹⁷⁵ "destyne" five;¹⁷⁶ "purveiaunce" (providence) three;¹⁷⁷ "aventure" eleven, often used to indicate particularly unusual coincidences, especially by the narrator;¹⁷⁸ and "fortune" or "fortunest" twelve.¹⁷⁹ This list is by no means exhaustive—"cas," for example, is sometimes used interchangeably with "aventure"—but even so, these words indicating some sort of a predestination arranged by a higher power total a staggering thirty-nine instances.

175. "shape": I.1225 (A); I.1843 (T). "shapen": I.1108 (P); I.1392 (Mercury); I.1466 (N); I.1566 (A); I.2323 (E); I.2541 (herald). Abbreviations indicating who each term is used by are as follows: A = Arcite; P = Palamon; T = Theseus; E = Emelye.

176. "destyne": I.1108 (P); I.1465 (N); I.1663 (N); I.1842 (T); I.2323 (E)

177. "perveiaunce": I.1252 (A); I.1665 (N); I.3011 (T)

178. "aventure": I.1074 (N); I.1160 (A); I.1186 (A); I.1236 (A); I.1288 (P); I.1465 (N); I.1506 (N); I.1516 (N); I.2357 (Diana); I.2703 (N); I.2722 (N).

179. "fortune": I.915 (widow); I.925 (widow); I.1086 (A); I.1238 (A); I.1242 (A); I.1252 (A); I.1490 (N); I.1861 (T); I.2659 (T); I.2682 (N); "fortunest": I.2377 (A).

Although Arcite has often been interpreted as the more active of the two cousins, and although he at one point claims that “Fortune is changeable” (I.1242), his eleven uses of these circumscribing terms is surpassed only by the narrator’s use of them twelve times.¹⁸⁰ The paradox he therefore embodies indicates a greater semantic slippage characterizing Chaucer’s text, particularly when it comes to the nature of actions versus how they are described, and to the ways these quasi-philosophical and theological statements contrast with the beliefs of medieval theologians as described in my previous chapter. Tellingly, the word “fate” does not appear even once in the “Knight’s Tale,” although the language of its narrator and characters makes this surprising; only “destyne” appears, as detailed above. In the *Consolation of Philosophy*, Boethius describes “fate” as God’s “order imposed on things that change, through which Providence interlinks each and every object in their due arrangement” (*Cons* IV.6.9–10).¹⁸¹ Perhaps, then, “fate” is missing from the “Knight’s Tale” because there is no true order in its fictional world, no Providence linked to a benevolent God but only the whims of the gods such as Saturn, Venus, and Mars, who are shown to be as petulant as humans. Furthermore, “constreyn” or “constreyneth” is also notably absent, though used by Chaucer in works such as *Troilus and Criseyde* and the “Tale of Melibee”—perhaps indicating that although the characters

180. On Arcite as active, see Hoxie Neale Fairchild, “Active Arcite, Contemplative Palamon,” *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 26.3 (1927), cited in Vincent J. DiMarco’s note in the *Riverside* 827. DiMarco notes that other scholars have offered the opposite interpretation, such as Albert H. Marckwardt in *University of Michigan Contributions in Modern Philology* V (1947): 1–23. More recently, Carl C. Curtis III has also argued that once he is no longer literally imprisoned, Palamon is the more active of the two (217).

181. “fatum vero inhaerens rebus mobilibus disposition, per quam providentia suis quaeque nectit ordinibus”

of the “Knight’s Tale” invoke fatalistic terms, they are in fact acting freely, and it is not only the whims of the gods but those of men driving events.

Throughout the “Knight’s Tale,” both the romantic imagery with which masculine chivalry is described and the characters’ varying and conflated attributions of events to Chance, Fortune, or Providence are subverted. While Chaucer invokes seemingly traditional romance language, as Laura Howes has argued, “despite surface appearances—the appearance of conventionality or of a deep conservatism—Chaucer is often his most critical of established social and literary systems when he appears his most conventional.”¹⁸² This is true even of the Knight-narrator, whom I read as a character himself and whose own biases color the story he tells. C. David Benson cautions against “the ‘dramatic theory’ of the *Canterbury Tales* (the view that the Canterbury pilgrims are fully-developed human characters and that the tales they tell are expressions of their individual psychologies,” believing instead that “it is in leaving behind tellers . . . and instead enjoying the richness of the tales that we do most justice to Chaucer as a poet and to ourselves as readers.”¹⁸³ My reading, however, aligns with critics like Donald Howard, who sees a “mock-epic quality” in much of the Knight-narrator’s language.¹⁸⁴ Howard argues that we should therefore “read the tale as a dramatic monologue spoken by its teller but understand that some of Chaucer’s attitudes spill into it,” and that “this feature gives the tale an

182. Howes, *Chaucer’s Gardens*, 11–12.

183. C. David Benson, “Trust the Tale,” 33.

184. Howard, *Idea of the Canterbury Tales*, 230.

artistry which we cannot realistically attribute to the teller” (Howard, *Idea of the Canterbury Tales*, 231).¹⁸⁵

With the “Knight’s Tale” in particular, the affinity that the Knight-narrator shares with his knight-characters Palamon, Arcite, and Theseus, particularly as evinced by his valorization of their chivalry, offers intriguing opportunities to consider how the text revokes its own apparent ideals, much like the “Nun’s Priest’s Tale” encourages its readers to look beyond its narrator’s pronouncements. As Cameron Cross has recently argued, “Although violence pervades every moment of the introduction, it is nearly hidden from our sight thanks to the Knight’s effusive language, a kind of diglossia between the ideal and the real that rebrands every destructive act as a badge of nobility.”¹⁸⁶ Theseus’s treatment of the widows, Cross argues, is a classic example. While Theseus eventually agrees to help the women, Shimomura notes that he first exhibits a “prompt negative reaction,” for Theseus initially asks why they “perturben so my feste [feast] with cryng[e]?” (I.906). The women’s “disruption of the praise due to Theseus,” Shimomura notes, “threatens to unmake his performance of chivalry, and hence render his actions and victory meaningless. His response reveals the intrinsic instabilities behind the construction of chivalric fame.”¹⁸⁷ Theseus’s subsequent siege of Thebes and slaying of Creon soothes his anxieties about such instability, but the text at large has left the anxieties themselves unmasked,

185. Alcuin Blamires notes a similar narrative strategy in the *Man of Law’s Tale*, which he notes as “exist[ing] in tension with a prefatorial voice that pretends to repudiate the very acceptance of providence which the tale will describe,” in *Chaucer, Ethics, and Gender*, 111.

186. Cameron Cross, “Illicit Rage,” 401.

187. Shimomura, “Walking Dead,” 6.

and the Knight-narrator's continual praise of chivalric actions like Theseus's thus stands on unstable ground.

Arcite, Palamon, and Self-blinding Human Action

As part of this narrative approach, despite the claims made by characters and the Knight-narrator, Chaucer imbeds clues throughout the "Knight's Tale"—unique to his version when compared to Boccaccio's *Teseida*—that point towards the role human choice and action play in tragic events, a move that simultaneously entails undercutting both the story's apparent fatalism and the Knight-narrator's own praise of masculine, chivalric pursuits. Differences in the ways the two men are introduced in the two texts set in motion this larger thematic change. In the "Knight's Tale," similarly to the *Teseida*, Arcite and Palamon are found in a heap of bloody bodies, "Nat fully quyke, ne fully dede" (I.1015), in limbo between life and death. In Boccaccio's version, they are brought to Teseo and speak with him, explaining disdainfully that they had fought alongside Creon. In response, Teseo "was very conscious of their regal disdain but did not respond in the way their hostility [*ira*] justified. Instead he took pity [*pio*] on them further, and making use of all the skill his physicians possessed he had all their wounds dressed and then kept them as prisoners in readiness for his solemn triumph" (II.89).¹⁸⁸ In contrast, the men do not speak in Chaucer's text; instead, they are simply known to be noble "by hir cote-

188. "Ben conobbe Teseo nel dir lo sdegno / real ch'avean costor, ma non seguio / però l'effetto a cotale ira degno; / ma verso lor più ne divenne pio, / e co' medici suoi, con ogni ingegno, / fê sì che tutte lor piaghe guario; / e poi con gli altri in prigion li ritenne, / lor riservando al triunfo solenne" (II.89). English translations of the *Teseida* are quoted from N.R. Havely's *Chaucer's Boccaccio*. Italian quotations are from Mario Marti's edition.

armures and by hir gere” (I.1016). The men are brought to Theseus’s tent, but there is no mention of Theseus’ pity for them or of orders to care for their wounds; they are sent away quickly by Theseus, to “dwellen in prisoun / Perpetually—he nolde no raunsoun” (I.1023–24). While Chaucer scholars have noted that Theseus’s actions would not have been unusual in the fourteenth century,¹⁸⁹ Chaucer notably omits Teseo’s hospitable order to “the gaoler to guard them well and treat them honouably [*facia loro onore*]” (II.98).¹⁹⁰ While in the *Teseida* the other prisoners “were all locked up,” in contrast Palemon and Arcita “were accorded somewhat easier treatment since they were of royal blood,” and Teseo “had them lodged within the palace and kept them thus inside a chamber with all their wants attended to” (II.99).¹⁹¹

In the next book of the *Teseida*, several lines are devoted to chivalric, romantic descriptions of the two men after they both see Emilia for the first time. Palemone is described as “cheerful in appearance, pleasant-looking and well-spoken” and made “modest and gentle in manner” by love; he is of “excellent intelligence and discreet conduct; rose-complexioned, extremely graceful, dignified in stance and abounding in courage” (III.49).¹⁹² Similarly, Arcita is “cheerful in expression,” his complexion compared to “an April rose”; he has “a modest manner

189. In his note to line 1024, Vincent J. DiMarco notes that “Perpetual imprisonment for prisoners who have not surrendered and who pose a threat of further war was an acceptable practice; see Reidy, in *Epic in Med. Soc.*, 399–402. The topic of ransom is not raised by Boccaccio” (*Riverside* 829).

190. “e tosto al prigioniere ha comandato / che ben li guardi e facia loro onore” (II.98).

191. “Li prigion furon tutti incarcerati / e dati a guardia a chi ’l sapea ben fare; / e questi due furon riservati / per farli alquanto più ad agio stare, / perché di sangue reale eran nati; e così in una camera tenere, faccendo lor servire a lor piacere” (II.99).

192. “Era Palemon . . . / nello aspetoo lieto, / con dolce sguardo e nel parlare arguto; / ma ne’ sembianti umile e mansueto, / poi chef u innamorato, divenuto; / d’alto intelletto e d’operar secreto, / di pel rossetto e assai grazioso, / di moto grave e d’ardir copioso” (III.49).

and an air of nobility. He had fine eyes and a steady gaze, but showed great vigour in his speech, and anyone could see how agile and nimble he was” (III.50).¹⁹³ Such blazons are entirely absent from the “Knight’s Tale,” with the exception of when Arcite, freed from prison and disguised as a chamberlain named “Philostrate,” is described as “so gentil of condicioun / That thurghout al the court was his renoun” (I.1431–32). That Chaucer chose to omit such descriptions perhaps indicates an empty performativity of masculine chivalry in the “Knight’s Tale”—the men are, after all, known to be noble only from their gear in Chaucer’s text.

Paralleling this reduction of reader’s sight of the two men, Chaucer’s text calls attention to the ways in which Arcite and Palamon cannot see themselves. The men act blindly, in prisons only partially of Theseus’s making; they also circumscribe themselves, in no small part due to the chivalric ideology to which they ascribe. The Knight-narrator explains that Palamon remains not only physically imprisoned by Theseus but also becomes a prisoner of his own mind, lovesick from the sight of Emelye. Fearing that Arcite, having been freed, will find a way to make Emelye his, Palamon indulges in despair, indicating the double-nature of his entrapment:

I moot wepe and wayle, whil I lyve,
 With al the wo that prison may me yive,
 And eek with peyne that love me yeveth also,
 That doubleth al my torment and my wo.
 (I.1295–98)

193. “Arcita era . . . di sembianza lieta; / . . . com’ rosa d’aprile / . . . e mansueta / statura aveva, e abito gentile; gli occhi avea belli e guardatura queta; ma nel parlar gran coraggio mostrava, / e destro e visto assai a chi ’l mirava” (III.50).

Palamon recognizes the prison-like effect of one's own emotions but does not indicate any awareness that he has any choice other than to "weep and wail." Instead, Palamon blames the "cruel goddess that governe / This world with byndyng of youre word etern" (I.1303–4). Begrudging the sense of obligation he feels humans unjustly owe the gods, he complains, "What is mankynde moore unto you holde / Than is the sheep that rouketh in the folde?" (I.1303–4). He envies animals, feeling that even if the "giltelees tormenteth innocence," the latter is still "bounded to his observaunce, / For Goddes sake, to letten of his wille, / Ther as a beest may al his lust fulfille" (I.1314–1318).

Here, however, Palamon's understanding of the human will deviates sharply from a Christian, theological context. Explanations as to the split nature of the human will help to show his error. Augustine, for example, emphasizes the importance of reason to the operation of the will, differentiating man from beast: "By the one term, *rational*, man is distinguished from brute animals . . . unless it holds fast to the rational element, it will be a beast" (*Divine Providence* II.31). Similarly, as demonstrated in my analysis of the "Nun's Priest's Tale," Duns Scotus believes that the *affectio commodi* ought to morally regular the *affectio iustitiae*. It is possible for the will to operate with only the *affectio commodi*, as in animals, but while Palamon deems this to be a sort of freedom that he envies the animals for, Scotus counters that pursuing *only* the *affectio commodi* results in a "slavish seeking after the natural goals of human existence"—in other words, such unregulated *affectio commodi* itself is circumscribing.¹⁹⁴ Indeed, regardless of

194. Cross, *Duns Scotus*, 87.

Palamon's lack of self-awareness as to the imprisoning effects of his own emotions, the text indicates that he is indeed a prisoner of his own design:

Who feeleth double soor and hevynesse
 Palamon that love destreyneth so,
 That wood out of his wit he goth for wo?
 And eek therto he is a prisoner
 Perpetually, nought oonly for a year.

(I.1454-1458)¹⁹⁵

The text thus stresses the paradox that, regardless of the terms of Palamon's physical imprisonment, he is an endless prisoner to his woe, driven mad, unable to govern his own emotions.

Arcite offers a slight contrast to Palamon, at times indicating a greater belief in the efficacy of human action in the face of apparent misfortune, though ultimately he, too, tends toward fatalism. While they are both still in prison and arguing over Emelye, Arcite tells Palamon that it is a matter of "ech man for hymself," and that "heere in this prisoun moote we endure. / And everich of us take his aventure" (I.1182; 1185–86), implying that it is up to each of them to seize upon any chance opportunities which present themselves. Later, near the end of the *Prima Pars*, Arcite, having been released from prison and exiled, laments that he will no longer be able to see Emelye daily while Palamon, though in prison, remains near to her. He fears that

195. See Peck, "Chaucer and the Nominalist Questions," for more on prison imagery throughout Chaucer's oeuvre, at 757–8.

because “Fortune is chaungeable,” Palamon may to his “desir somtyme atteyne” (I.1242–43), indicating a belief in the efficacy of the human will. But immediately after, he waivers on this belief when it comes to his own case. He implies that he should have trusted in fortune over his own actions and desires, lamenting,

Allas, why pleynen folk so in commune
 On purveiaunce of God, or of Fortune,
 That yeveth hem ful ofte in many a gyse
 Wel bettre than they kan himself devyse?
 (I.1251–54)

Here, Arcite begins to realize that freedom from prison—which he thought he wanted—has obstructed him from the object of his greatest desire, Emelye. Realizing the magnitude of his loss, he rails against human incapacity to know how to best achieve what we desire:

Infinite harmes been in this mateere,
 We witen nat what thing we preyen heere.
 We faren as he that dronke is as a mous.
 A dronke man woot wel he hath an hous,
 But he not which the righte wey is thider,
 And to a dronke man the wey is slider.
 And certes, in this world so faren we;
 We seken faste after felicitee,
 But we goon wrong ful often, trewely.

(I.1259–1267)

Arcite emphasizes in these lines that humans often obstruct their own happiness themselves (“*we go wrong*”), a counter—in this case—to Palamon’s fatalistic belief that unhappiness has been forced upon him by a higher power. Arcite’s beliefs remain somewhat paradoxical. He believes that fortune is changeable through human action, while also recognizing the potential, unintended effects of human choices and a longing to thus rely on fortune or “*purveiaunce of God*” after all. The text thus sets up a paradox wherein whether physically freed or imprisoned, one can be circumscribed by a perceived prison, which—wittingly or not—itself is prison of one’s own actions and ideology.

But despite his recognition of the human capacity for self-circumscription, Arcite allows his emotions to imprison him just as Palamon does. Exiled, he becomes so lovesick that

feble...were his spiritz, and so lowe,
 And chaunged so, that no man koude knowe
 His speche nor his voys, though men it herde.
 . . . shortly, turned was al up so down
 Bothe habit and eek disposicioun
 Of hym, this woful lovere daun Arcite.

(I.1369–1379).

When eventually he devises a plan to return to Athens, disguised as “*Philostrate*,” he is able to hide true identity because “*sith his face was so disfigured*” (I.1403). Like Palamon, then, Arcite falls victim to imprisonment by his own emotions, his very visage transformed. As Cameron

Cross has argued, the men are “grounded in an erotics that undercut the rationalist principles of self-governance and self-preservation,” which Cross sees as resulting in the “willful surrender of their own autonomy.”¹⁹⁶ However, the text reveals that this self-circumscription, though self-imposed, occurs largely in a state of ignorance, for even though Arcite acknowledges the ways men may lead themselves astray, he still cannot entirely recognize the ways his own actions have lead him to trouble in the first place.

Repeatedly, however, the “Knight’s Tale” draws attention to the very man-made circumstances surrounding Arcite and Palamon’s misfortunes. Arcite is freed from prison because of the intercession of a man, Perotheus, “That felawe was unto duc Theseus / Syn thilke day that they were children lite” (I.1192–93), who also “loved wel Arcite, / And hadde hum knowe at Thebes yeer by yere” (I.1202–3). Likewise, years later when Palamon escapes the prison, although the narrator himself begins the episode by remarking that “were it by aventure or destynce— / As, whan a thyng is shapen, it shal be—” (I.1465–66), his escape is possible due largely to his own actions, not by some divine force: enabled “by helpyng of a freend,” Palamon “brak his prisoun / And fleeth the cite faste as he may go. / For he hadde yeve his gayler drynke so / Of a clarree maad [spiced mead] of a certeyn wyn, / With nercotikes and opie” (I.1468–72). Thus, the text emphasizes that their physical liberation comes not from Fortune but from human actions; as Paul Strohm argues, “providential-seeming interruptions in the scheme of narrative

196. Cross, “Illicit Rage” 402.

causation have the effect of turning the audience's attention heavenward These disruptions reveal, however, a scheme that is anything but providential."¹⁹⁷

Arcite and Palamon, however, remain blind to this reality behind the seemingly providential scheme. While eventually they are each physically freed, the "Knight's Tale" continually demonstrates how they remain psychologically imprisoned. While it could be argued that this is understandable—who would not feel tempted to succumb to woe under such circumstances?—the very moral of Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy* is to resist such temptation, knowing that even if the "giltlees tormenteth innocence" (I.1314) they do not escape punishment for these freely-made choices. Vincent J. DiMarco thus argues that both Palamon and Arcite reflect only a partial Boethianism—they do not articulate any of Lady Philosophy's teachings, only the pre-enlightened prisoner's laments. Arcite, for example, falsely conflates Providence and Fortune.¹⁹⁸ Furthermore, Arcite and Palamon seem to forget that they, too, have made and can still make free choices, even in unideal circumstances—that it is not Fortune and not even exclusively other men but their own actions that are to blame, another central tenet of Boethius's *Consolation*. As noted in my previous chapter, Lady Philosophy emphasizes that "the furthest degree of slavery is reached when [people] devote themselves to vices," for this leads not only to a loss of reason and a "cloud of ignorance [*inscitiae nube caligant*]" but to

197. Strohm, *Social Chaucer*, 138.

198. See *Riverside* 831, note to lines 1251–67 on Providence and Fortune; and note to lines 1303–27 on Lady Philosophy's refutation of the idea that "the suffering of the innocent" is "a contradiction of God's otherwise benevolent governance of the universe."

“destructive emotions [*perniciosis turbantur affectibus*]” that make them “prisoners through the exercise of their freedom” (*Cons* V.2.9–10; V.2.10–11).

It has been argued that Palamon and Arcite’s unenlightened, unrefined Boethianism signals the way the text indicts and others the pagan world; that is, they cannot reach the full enlightenment of Boethius’s prisoner because they lack an understanding of Christian doctrine.¹⁹⁹ Another possibility, however, is that the tale indicts not simply “paganism” but an ideology much closer to Chaucer’s own time. The text deploys a skeptical Boethianism, one which interrogates the masculine, chivalric ideology that the text seemingly espouses—an ideology common in fourteenth-century romance. Like the “Nun’s Priest’s Tale,” the “Knight’s Tale”—not the characters or the narrator, but the tale as a whole, taking into account its moments of slippage and paradox—explores human action in a contingent universe in which material, lived experience and particulars contribute to the unfolding of actions. It thus intimates a brand of Boethianism tempered with the kind of fourteenth-century theological ethics espoused by Scotus and Ockham. Scotus argues that *affectio iustitiae* must regulate the *affectio commodi*, as noted above; such a regulation is of particular importance in a theological worldview such as

199. DiMarco points to Westlund’s argument in “The *Knight’s Tale* as an Impetus for Pilgrimage” in *Philological Quarterly* 43: 526–37. More recently, Cristina Maria Cervone has argued that “the Boethian underpinnings of ‘The Knight’s Tale’ offer readers a means to recognize that there is a higher being whose providence gives order even to the planetary gods, since order in a Boethian universe is systemic Yet, the pagan characters of the tale can only partially conceive of the philosophical resolutions available to its Christian readers,” in “(Im)materiality and Chaucer’s Temple of Mars,” 104–5. Similarly, Carl C. Curtis III, for example, argues that “For Chaucer, the revelation of Christ shows a cosmos Theseus’s eyes cannot see and that alone could lend substance to Theseus’s ideal, marrying both the world of order with the world of love” in “Biblical Analogy,” 219–20.

Ockham's, who envisions human free will as even more radically free than his predecessors did. Boethian principles of self-control apply all the more in such a contingent world, for the stakes of failing to realize such Boethian principles are heightened. As Russel Peck argues, Ockham's "efficacy of the will...makes his views all the more compatible with Chaucer's strongly Boethian orientation."²⁰⁰ But this kind of nominalist, materialist Boethianism places prominence on the power of human free will *and* on its potential misapplication; as Richard Utz has argued, "a nominalist mentality may...explain why Chaucer applied practically all his substantial Boethian passages...without Lady Philosophy's solutions to the Boethian persona's plaintive questions."²⁰¹

Palamon and Arcite's conflicts with each other most fully demonstrate this blend of Boethianism and fourteenth-century nominalism and an emphasis on contingents, showcasing the self-destructive dangers of not recognizing the consequences of one's own actions. Chaucer deviates from Boccaccio's *Teseida* again in heightening the moral stakes of the rivalry between the two men. When Palamon first sees Emelye—"by aventure or cas," the narrator says (I.1074)—he cries, "'A!' / As though he stongen were unto the herte" (I.1078–79). Arcite assumes Palamon bewails their imprisonment, but Palamon soon explains he cries for love. Arcite then sees Emelye and "is hurt as muche as he, or moore," declaring that "but I have hire mercy and hir grace, / That I may seen hire ate leeste weye, / I nam but deed" (I.1116; 1120–22). Palamon responds "dispitously," and "gan knytte his browes tweye," warning Arcite against

200. Peck, "Chaucer and the Nominalist Questions," 746.

201. Utz, "Philosophy," 171.

being “fals” and a “tratour” (I.1124–30). He explains that as he is “thy cosyn and thy brother, /Ysworn ful depe, and ech of us til oother, /That nevere, for to dyen in the peyne, / Til that the deeth departe shal us tweyne, / Neither of us in love to hyndre oother” (I.1131–35), emphasizing that Arcite is “ybounded as a knyght / to helpen me” (I.1149–50).

DiMarco explains that Chaucer’s word choices in this passage indicate that “Palamon and Arcite were not only cousins, but ‘sworn brothers’; i.e., united through oath and formal ceremony in a legally binding relationship, ordinarily for the duration of the lives of the contracting parties.”²⁰² Here, however, the oaths which tie them begin to unravel. Arcite asserts that “positif [man-made] lawe . . . / Is broken al day for love in ech degree. / A man moot nedes love, maugree [despite] his heed [care]” (I.1167–69). This defense, that man-made oaths are secondary to the laws of love, acts as a convenient way for him to both excuse his own oath-breaking and to couch it under the guise of necessity, abrogating his own actions. Declaring his desire for Emelye, Arcite continues, “at the kynges court, my brother, / Ech man for himself, ther is noon oother. / Love, if thee list, for I love and ay shal” (I.1181–84). But the vice of breaking of an oath of loyalty due to jealousy belongs to both men. Shortly after this, Arcite is released from prison. In Chaucer’s text, when Palamon realizes Arcite is gone, he makes “swich sorwe” that “the gret tour / Resouneth of his youlyng and clamour” (I.1277–78), mourning not the absence of his cousin and friend but rather Arcite’s chance to woo Emelye. He complains, “Sith thou art at thy large, of prisoun free, / And art a lord, greet is thyn avauntage / Moore than is myn, that sterve here in a cage” (I.1292–94). The text emphasizes the emotional terms of the breaking of

202. *Riverside* 830, note to line 1132.

their bonds: “Therwith the fyr of jalousie up sterte / Withinne his brest, and hente him by the herte / So woodly that he lyk was to biholde / The boxtree or the ashen dede and colde” (I.1299–1302).

This emphasis on the jealousy between the two men, DiMarco notes, is unique to Chaucer’s text; in the *Teseida*, he explains, “Palemone’s envy of Arcita’s freedom is tempered by sincere fellow-feeling, and at this point stops well short of jealousy.”²⁰³ Indeed, in Boccaccio’s *Teseida* their conversation mostly consists of a friendly contest as to who can explain their lovesickness in more dire terms. The narrator describes them as “two new lovers [*due nuovi amanti*],” each “consoling the other with his words [*conforta nel parlare*]” (III.26). Additionally, their separation occurs on much more positive terms in the *Teseida*, and Palemon laments the loss of Arcita’s company. Before Arcita leaves, “the two companions arose and embraced each other closely with sincere affection and heart felt goodwill [*di buono amor e di cuor volo*]. And shortly after that they kissed each other on the lips and started weeping more bitterly than before, and in broken voices bade each other farewell” (III.81).²⁰⁴ While in the *Teseida* the men do show more jealousy later, it grows more gradually, and while they are separated, Palemon in prison, Arcita free, there are no monologues from either about suspicion as to what the other is doing to obtain Emelye’s favor.

203. *Riverside* 830, note to line 1299.

204. “i due compagni . . . amenduni stretti s’abbracciaro / di buono amor e di cuor volontieri; / e poco appresso in bocca si baciario, e più che prima nel lagrimar fieri, / con rotta voce si dissero addio” (III.81).

But in the “Knight’s Tale,” their vice of jealousy continues to grow as again both men fail to control their emotions, indulging in an unregulated *affectio commodi* which becomes not only imprisoning but destructive. Palamon eventually escapes, as detailed above, and the men happen upon each other in the woods. Palamon overhears Arcite speaking of Emelye, and immediately “for ire . . . quook,” jumping out of the bushes “as he were wood,” exclaiming, “I wol be deed, or elles thou shalt dye . . . For I am Palamon, thy mortal foo” (I.1576; 87; 90). Arcite responds by more directly rejecting the oath that previously bound them, declaring, “I defye the seurete and the bond / Which that thou seist that I have maad to thee” (I.1604–5). They agree to fight for Emelye, at which point there is some inconsistency in the ways their relationship has been described since they first began to argue over Emelye in the prison. Arcite promises to return with food, drink and arms for Palamon so that they can fight more fairly (I.1610–1616), and indeed he does. They even aid each other as they prepare to fight, the narrator describing, “Everich of hem help for to armen oother / As friendly as he were his owene brother” (I.1651–1652).

This apparent inconsistency constitutes another moment showcasing the Knight-narrator’s efforts to idealize and identify with the men’s masculine chivalry, efforts that soon fall apart. Both men again begin to be physically disfigured by their emotions, though now it is jealousy and ire, not merely lovesickness, which renders this transformation as they both “to chaungen gan the colour of hire face” (I.1637). Their subsequent fight is not described in chivalric or romantic terms. Recalling Lady Philosophy’s explanation that man in fact

circumscribes his own free will through vice and “so is transformed into an animal” (IV.3.21), their fight devolves into precisely such a scene:

Thou myghtest wene that this Palamoun

In his fighting were a wood leoun.

And as crueel tigre was Arcite.

As wilde bores gonne they to smyte,

That frothen whit as foom for ire wood.

Up to the anlee foghte they in hir blood (I.1655-1660).

The lines, like the prior description of the men’s emotional reaction to physical imprisonment, draw closely on Boethius’s *Consolation*. As Lady Philosophy explains therein, habitual pursuit of vice is so marring that “evil men cease to be what they had before”; while “the very appearance of the human frame which they still possess shows that they were men,” they will “have lost their human nature” (*Cons* IV.3.15). The animalistic terms with which Arcite and Palamon are described thus point to the choices they have freely made that lead them to so violently attack one another. No matter how they or the Knight-narrator ascribe their circumstances to fortune, the gods, or any other higher power, the only force moving them here is their own violent desire, which in turn circumscribes them into remaining on such a path. Their wrath and violence are so intense that Theseus, happening across them in the woods, does not recognize them. Entering the grove where Palamon and Arcite are, Theseus “was war of Arcite and Palamon, / that foughten breme as it were bores two. / The brighte swerdes wenten to and fro / So hideously that with the leeste strook / It semed as it wolde felle an ook. / But what

they were, no thing he ne woot” (I.1698–1703). The men remain boar-like, so disfigured by jealousy as to be unrecognizable. As Shachi Shimomura argues, the intensity of their violence shows “an impetus towards self-annihilation,” the possibility of their mutually-imposed deaths superseding the imprisonment they faced from Theseus.²⁰⁵

Like the description of the men’s jealous responses to the desire the other expresses for Emelye when both are still in prison, in this scene Chaucer again deviates from Boccaccio in several ways. In the *Teseida*, the men are markedly less pugnacious. N. R. Havelly notes that in the *Teseida*, Arcita tries to convince Palemone not to fight.²⁰⁶ Further, when they do fight in the *Teseida*, they are less brutal. As DiMarco notes, their “single combat . . . is conducted quite differently Palemone falls unconscious from a blow by Arcita who, thinking that he has perhaps slain his beloved friend, manages to revive him to consciousness.”²⁰⁷ As evidenced by the gory, animalized terms with which the parallel scene is rendered in the “Knight’s Tale,” Chaucer has stripped away this care that both men retain for each other despite their love for the same woman.

Furthermore, Jodi Grimes points out that Chaucer’s treatment of the location of their fight varies from Boccaccio’s, arguing that “where Boccaccio emphasizes the relief that the grove provides the disguised Arcita, Chaucer highlights human discord and unrest in the wooded space,” setting up a contrast between “the human conflicts the Thebans bring to the ecological

205. Shimomura, “Walking Dead,” 19.

206. See Havelly’s summary of V.45–54.

207. DiMarco, *Riverside* 833, note to lines 1636–1707.

niche” and “the more predictable rhythms of nature.”²⁰⁸ Grimes furthermore makes the compelling point that the comparison of the men to fighting animals is unique to Chaucer’s text, and “what is natural behavior for normal game animals becomes an incongruous and gory spectacle in this context,” a spectacle which “ask[s] the reader to question the chivalric ordering that has previously taken place.”²⁰⁹ Similarly, the scene undercuts Arcite’s earlier claim, made to excuse his oath-breaking in the prison, that “positif [man-made] lawe . . . / Is broken al day for love in ech degree” (I.1167–68), for here, Arcite brazenly breaks both man-made oaths and natural law, and the marked unnaturalness of his actions is emphasized in every sense of the word.

Chaucer’s text indicts Palamon as well as Arcite. Further underscoring how both men deviate from any sort of benevolent natural inclination, instead violently following self-interest, Palamon betrays Arcite almost immediately. When Theseus interrupts their fight to demand their identities, Palamon “answered hastily” (I.1714), declaring that “we have the deeth disservd bothe two” (I.1716). He then solicits Theseus to “sle me first, for seinte charitee! / But sle my felawe eek as wel as me; Or sle hym first” (I.1721–23). He then discloses Arcite’s identity before his own, revealing, “This is thy mortal foo, this is Arcite, / That fro thy lond is banysshed on his heed, / For which he hath deserved to be deed” (I.1724–26). In stark contrast, in the *Teseida*, Arcite (disguised as “Pentheus”) speaks first, and reveals only his own name, allowing Palamon to later do the same, and neither man asks for the death of his fellow (V.86–90). Chaucer’s text

208. Grimes, “Arboreal Politics,” 350 and 353.

209. Grimes, “Arboreal Politics,” 354.

thus again underscores the ways that freely-chosen action, particular action steeped in vice, leads to circumscription. Even Theseus points this out, pronouncing upon hearing Palamon's revelation that "Youre owene mouth by youre confessioun / Hath dampned yow, and I wol it recorde" (I.1744-1745), though Theseus himself similarly occludes his own actions under the guise of Fortune, as I will discuss next.

Throughout the tale, then, the idealization of chivalric masculinity by the Knight-narrator and the characters' attribution of events to Fortune is constantly deconstructed. That Chaucer achieves this deconstruction particularly in the scenes where he deviates most from Boccaccio's *Teseida* indicates that the skeptical Boethianism he employs does not merely indict the past, "pagan" world. Rather, Chaucer's Boethianism in the "Knight's Tale," moderated by a fourteenth-century skepticism, works more atemporally, reaching out of the specter of the mythic, Theban and Athenian past metaliterarily to the generic, romance conventions of Chaucer's own present. In the *Teseida*, Arcita and Palemone are able to fight over Emilia in a way that somehow still preserves their honor. They mourn the loss of one another when separated; they fight physically in a way that indicates their underlying concern and compassion for one another despite their desire for the same woman. The "Knight's Tale" questions if it is ever possible for such a master narrative to play out in such heroic terms, standing as a reaction against the *Teseida's* idealism. In the face of an equivalent plot, Chaucer renders Arcite and Palamon in the same terms as the starkest of Boethian rebukes of human vice and self-circumscription, particularly so in those moments of the text when they strive to showcase a masculine, physical superiority over the other, indicating that the "Knight's Tale" functions not

merely as a “chivalric romance of a philosophical complexion”²¹⁰ but as a philosophical and theological exercise which subverts the romance genre altogether, subtly rejecting of the idealization of hyper-masculine codes of chivalry. The heroic code of chivalry that Chaucer’s Arcite and Palamon live by is proven to be untenable: they can only fight for their lady, one of the central tenets of the chivalric code, by breaking other tenets of that same code, their vows of brotherhood. The vice which so imprisons, disfigures, and animalizes the men, then, is not simply jealousy or wrath but, rather, the very social code they ascribe to as a whole, a code which leads them to a nigh-suicidal and homicidal devotion to the beloved whilst hiding behind the guise of Fortune.

Theseus

Beyond the characters of Arcite and Palamon alone, other changes Chaucer makes to his source material further emphasize the ways that is it not simply their personal vices but rather the more encompassing masculine, chivalric code itself that encourages occlusion of human action under a belief in Fortune. One of the most conspicuous omissions Chaucer makes as he revises the *Teseida* is the background of Teseo/Theseus’s invasion of the Amazonian lands before his introduction of Theseus himself, including what in the *Teseida* is “the history of the Amazons’ crimes against their husbands and men from other lands (which prompts Teseo’s invasion),” “Ipolita’s admission that the Amazons have sinned against Venus,” and “the re-emergence of

210. *Riverside* 827, DiMarco’s introductory note to the “Knight’s Tale.”

their feminine qualities.”²¹¹ Patricia Clare Ingham sees the omission as heightening the depiction of Theseus as “a virile and masculine ruler, utterly different from his female captives,” and notes that readers “are not encouraged to dwell long upon Theseus’s similarities (as warrior, as ruler) with ‘his’ Amazonian Queen.” Ingham argues that this generates a male-female binary delineated by violence: Theseus contains female action that does not comply with (masculine) standards for feminine characteristics.²¹² This, Ingham observes, draws a contrast between Theseus’s treatment of the Amazons and the widows he encounters at the beginning of the “Knight’s Tale,” for the text indicates that “the victimization and domestication of the Amazons is, apparently, a legitimate victimization of aggressive femininity; the victimization of the Argive widows is not.”²¹³ Simultaneously, Ingham argues, Theseus relies for his governance on “male warrior bodies . . . willing to suffer grievous woundings,” as indicated, for example, by the heap of the dead in which Arcite and Palamon are initially found.²¹⁴ Ingham thus presents a compelling reading of Theseus as enacting statecraft by containing certain kinds of violence (that of the Amazons, inappropriately aggressive for women) while encouraging—but controlling—others, such as the formal battle between Arcite and Palamon, which Ingham notes allows Theseus to stage a rhetorical “display of monumental Athenian wealth . . . and power.”²¹⁵

211. *Riverside* 828, DiMarco’s note to Part I of the “Knight’s Tale.”

212. Ingham, “Homosociality,” 29.

213. Ingham, “Homosociality,” 30.

214. Ingham, “Homosociality,” 25. See also Jodi Grime’s argument that “the irony, that Theseus creates a new ‘taas [hea] of bodyes dede’ (I 2005) to bury those killed in the previous wave of battle, goes unnoticed by the Knight,” in “Arboreal Politics” 361. (Grimes 361).

215. Ingham, “Homosociality,” 28.

Ingham's reading of Chaucer's omission of the Amazonian background and Theseus's differing treatment of the Amazon and Argive women fits into a long-standing scholarly exploration of Theseus's attempts to impose order throughout the "Knight's Tale," although disagreement remains as to how effective he is and whether or not self-serving, ulterior motives drive him.²¹⁶ Cameron Cross notes that both sides of these scholarly debates endeavor to "reconcile a basic paradox embodied by Theseus's character, in which warfare is the engine and guarantor of both order and disorder, and violence is both the cause of and the remedy for injustice."²¹⁷ Some see Theseus as positively learning from the effects of violence he witnesses. Jill Mann, for example, points to his reaction to the Argive widows and reads him as "the ideal of feminized masculinity" and therefore Chaucer's model for rulers.²¹⁸ In contrast, Sachi Shimomura reads Theseus's actions throughout the text as designed to reveal the fragility of masculine chivalric ideals; as she argues, "modes and conventions of chivalry are reconciled most uneasily with changing social realities" in the story.²¹⁹ Shimomura likewise points to K. A. Kolve, who argues that "Chaucer suppresses much that is courteous and gentle in Theseus's treatment of the knights, while emphasizing, and adding to, all that is savage and cruel."²²⁰

But while these interpretations have mostly been treated as political or social readings of the text, they also tie in compelling with the text's speculative projects. Intriguingly, David Aers,

216. For an overview of this scholarship through circa 1980, see DiMarco's introductory note to the tale in the *Riverside*, 828.

217. Cross, "Illicit Rage," 401.

218. Mann, *Feminizing Chaucer*, 35.

219. Shimomura, "Walking Dead," 2021.

220. Kolve, *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative*, 98–99, quoted in Shimomura, "Walking Dead," 20.

who reads Theseus as critiqued by the text itself, ties these debates to the story's larger philosophical stakes. Aers argues that readings which see Theseus as an unironically Boethian, idealized keeper of order essentially "confine [Chaucer's] imagination to fit some simple and absolutist norms attributed to the 'medieval mind' by many who write on his poetry."²²¹ Put another way, Aers cautions against potentially reductive, historicist approaches which may overlook the nuances of Chaucer's fourteenth-century intellectual landscape and of the textual clues Chaucer embeds in his own works. Aers instead sees in Theseus "traits characteristic of rulers who wish to sacralize their own government" (191), finding that Theseus's "metaphysics illustrates far more about himself and his own version of order than about the hidden structures of the world metaphysics had traditionally sought to disclose" (190).²²²

Building on this, I suggest that Theseus's characterization likewise contributes to the tale's theological exploration of free will, its efficacy, and its effects, reflecting in so doing what Utz has identified as the larger nominalist "mentality, mindset, or *Zeitgeist*" of Chaucer's fourteenth century.²²³ To return momentarily to Ingham, what her reading indicates is that in the "Knight's Tale," Theseus's power depends on the free choices men like Arcite and Palamon make to submit to the chivalric ideology which drives them all—on their willingness, as she phrases it, to "suffer grievous woundings."²²⁴ Arcite and Palamon are rather unwitting in this, as demonstrated above—they do not realize how they circumscribe themselves—but Theseus

221. Aers, *Chaucer, Langland and the Creative Imagination*, 175.

222. Aers, *Chaucer, Langland and the Creative Imagination*, 191; 190.

223. Utz, "Literary Nominalism," 208–209.

224. Ingham, "Homosociality," 25.

operates with more awareness, hiding what Ingham sees as a reliance on violence under what Aers interprets as a “sacralization” of the terms of his leadership. Cast in the terms of theological and philosophical debates on the will, universalist formalism, and nominalist materialism, an analysis of Chaucer’s unique presentation of Theseus, in which he breaks from the form offered by Boccaccio, reveals how Theseus attempts to impose his vision of order by taking contingents and particulars and forcing them into a formalist mold, his own will thwarting the will of others. His universalist approach, however, overlooks the lived, embodied effects of the masculine, chivalric ideology he exemplifies on men like Palamon and Arcite who likewise live by it—but who are encouraged to *witen nat wat thyng*e they pray for—and especially on women like Emelye.

At the beginning of the “Knight’s Tale,” as Ingham has observed, Chaucer replaces the Amazonian material found in Boccaccio’s *Teseida* with the grieving Argive widows. Ingham argues that the sudden presentation of the women “foregrounds the importance of female woe for the tale before us,” and “suggests . . . that Theseus needs wailing women to mediate his warrior masculinity.”²²⁵ Jill Mann argues that the scene demonstrates Theseus’s positive growth, insofar as “the ‘compassioun’ Theseus feels for women is itself a womanly quality implanted in him. It feminizes him without rendering him effeminate.”²²⁶ Ingham, however, counters that the text also subverts Theseus’s compassion, for “the earlier representation of Theseus as himself a

225. Ingham, “Homosexuality,” 30.

226. Mann, *Feminizing Chaucer*, 136.

conqueror of women may imply that he is not wholly unlike the tyrant Creon in his willingness to victimize females.”²²⁷

Ingham sees such slippage throughout the text as accidental, ultimately suggesting that Chaucer’s story is complicit in proposing that masculinity and particularly male rule must rely upon violence and the victimization of women; but other textual clues from the outset of the “Knight’s Tale” hint at the ways Chaucer designs his text to interrogate a generic tradition— itself often acting as a universal Form—that makes women’s justice and agency dependent on male figureheads. In introducing Theseus for the first time, Chaucer’s text gestures toward “olde stories” (l.859) about him. While Boccaccio’s *Teseida* was Chaucer’s most immediate source, one of the “olde stories” invoked here seems more likely to be that referred to in the epigraph of the “Knight’s Tale,” “*Iamque domos patrias, Scithice post aspera gentis Prelia, laurigero, &c,*” itself from Statius’s *Thebaid*.²²⁸ DiMarco notes that “Chaucer almost certainly had direct access to a glossed manuscript of Statius’s *Thebaid*,” and several places throughout the story which deviate from the *Teseida* align in tone with Statius’s text.²²⁹ Interestingly, criticism on Theseus and the Argive widows as depicted in the *Thebaid* may offer another way to read Chaucer’s own treatment of them. Jessica Dietrich argues that “the female voice in the *Thebaid* . . . is associated with lament” in order to “emphasize the human cost of war,” a counter to the actions of men like Eteocles and Polynices.²³⁰ More recently, Astrid Voigt has added that female lament in the

227. Ingham, “Homosexuality,” 30.

228. *Riverside* 37, DiMarco’s note to the epigraph.

229. *Riverside* 827, DiMarco’s introductory note to the Knight’s Tale.

230. Dietrich, “Thebaid’s Feminine Ending,” 49.

Thebaid forms within “a vacuum of male values in which women’s agency can, or perhaps must, develop,” pointing specifically to the “fratricidal war whose first episode is already characterized by the narrator as criminal and treacherous” and from which “it is clear that there is no glory to be won.”²³¹ Voight interprets this as a potentially optimistic sign; as she argues, “female lamentation re-asserts itself as a means of social protest and becomes an indicator of a functioning society,” suggesting that by the end of the *Thebaid* Statius gestures towards the hope that such masculine violence that has characterized the story may be near its end.²³²

But in the “Knight’s Tale,” although grieving women appear at the beginning of the story, by the tale’s end no closure is ever provided, for while Theseus kills Creon, the systems which necessitated his intervention never change. Female lament in the “Knight’s Tale” thus does not indicate optimism for change, as the *Thebaid* does, but instead gestures towards a circuitry of repeated, self-sustaining violence. While Ingham thus rightly points out that by expunging the Amazonian material Chaucer declines a chance to show “images of valiant, brave, and impressive fighting women,”²³³ omitting it also allows Chaucer to underscore and indict the ways Theseus’s hypermasculine system imposes passivity upon women: they are displaced, contained, and rendered physically passive, and acts of aggression and violence are aligned more firmly with men like Theseus and Creon.

231. Voight, “Female Lament,” 60; 66; 65.

232. Voight, “Female Lament,” 66; see also her discussion of this lament as “a revolutionary act” and “transgression of gender expectations” at 69.

233. Ingham, “Homosexuality,” 29.

Furthermore, while Chaucer omits “impressive fighting women,” he also omits several stanzas which in Boccaccio are dedicated to triumphant descriptions of Theseus’s homecoming. The *Teseida* spares no details on how the Athenians “had prepared magnificent celebrations to mark his return, and these were at once begun. Drawing on all their resources, which were indeed great, they adorned their whole city with cloth of gold and other hangings, together with innumerable singers and musicians,” and “people everywhere were singing and rejoicing in the highest of spirits” (II.19–20).²³⁴ Chaucer likewise omits Boccaccio’s description of Hippolyta as “the lady who possessed and ruled his heart” (II.18);²³⁵ the “Knight’s Tale” simply specifies that Theseus “wedded the queene Ypolita” (I.868) without any indication that this was a decision driven by Theseus’s heart. Indeed, where this material should appear in the “Knight’s Tale” is when the widows are introduced. That the grieving women’s introduction in the narrative then leads directly to the wounding and discovery of the cousins Arcite and Palamon, who will of course themselves embark on a near-fratricidal war over a single woman whose consent they never even consider, seems no coincidence. Chaucer’s text thus gestures towards a darker presentation of Theseus, one which sits uncomfortably with the Knight-narrator’s praise of him as the flower of chivalry, specifically, and of the masculine chivalric code throughout the text more generally. Furthermore, as David Aers notes, such a reading of Theseus in the “Knight’s Tale” concurs with Chaucer’s presentation of him in the *Legend of Good Women* as “a man who

234. “Gli Atteniesi . . . / per la sua ritornata / mirabil festa preparata avieno, / la qual fu incontanente incominciata; / secondo il lor poter, ch’assai potieno, / fu la lor terra tutta quanta ornata / di drappi ad oro e d’altri paramenti, / con infiniti canti e instrumenti”; “in ogni parte si cantava e con somma allegrezza si festava.”

235. “colei che ’l suo cuor guida e tene, / Ipolita reina”

exhibits ‘the grete untrouthe of love’ (*LGW*, l. 1890), making the expedition to Crete a story of the duke’s callous egotism, faithless manipulation and abandonment of a woman.”²³⁶

As the narrative progresses, two lines in particular belie Theseus’s egotistic role as orchestrator of events despite his statements on fortune, chance, and the power of the gods. When in the *Pars Secunda* Theseus happens across Arcite and Palamon as they fight in the grove, the Knight-narrator issues one of his strongest and most Boethian statements about divine providence, remarking,

The destinee, ministre general,
 That executeth in the world over al
 The purveiaunce that God hath seyn biforn,
 So strong it is that, though the world had sworn
 The contrarie of a thyng by ye or nay,
 Yet somtyme it shal fallen on a day
 That falleth nat eft withinne a thousand yeer.

(I.1663–1672)

The lines attempt to provoke an amazed response to Theseus’s arrival at the grove at the same time that Palamon and Arcite are fighting; such timing, the Knight-narrator assures his audience, could only be the result of divine “purveiaunce,” an inalterable, preordained event. These lines, however, are bookended by direct references to Theseus. Just before the passage begins, as the narrator ends his description of Arcite and Palamon’s fight, he remarks, “in this wise I lete hem

236. Aers, *Chaucer, Langland, and the Creative Imagination* 182.

fightyng dwelle, / And forth I wole of Theseus yow telle” (I.1661–62). He then adds, “certainly, oure appetites heer, / Be it of werre, or pees, or hate, or love, / Al is this reuled by the sighte above. / This mene I now by myghty Theseus” (I.1670–73). An emphasis on Theseus’s actions and choices puts pressure on the narrator’s claims that destiny alone drives actions, particularly in light of the belief of writers such as Boethius that the human appetite can and does stray from God as the highest good, for if it were not able to do so, humans would not really have free will. In addition, the inclusion of appetites for “war” and “hate” aligns most closely not with the Boethian ideal of God as the *summum bonum* but rather with Arcite’s earlier statement about “som wikke aspect or disposicioun / Of Saturne by som consteallacioun” (I.1087-88).

The bracketing of narrative exposition on divine purviance with the actions of Theseus begs an investigation of the interplay between alleged “destiny” and Theseus’s actions throughout the text. Furthermore, as Jodi Grimes points out, it is really quite unsurprising—almost expected—that Theseus arrives where he does. Grimes argues that “where Boccaccio emphasizes the grove’s remoteness from Theban society, Chaucer stresses its proximity to Theseus’s seat of government” (345). The grove, then, is not a neutral or wild space: it is a space essentially controlled by Theseus, the place he goes to satisfy his appetite for the hunt. That Theseus then forestalls Arcite and Palamon’s fight only to reshape it in the terms he chooses further reinforces this reading.

The ultimate slippage revealing the primacy of human, male agency, particularly Theseus’s, comes with his decision to make the men fight more formally and publicly for Emelye’s hand. As he begins to explain his plan, he couches it as an opportunity for each of the

men to have his “destynee / As hym is shape” (I.1842–43), but even this opening statement is undercut, as Theseus first says, “forthy I yow putte I this degree” or, essentially, “*I put you in this situation*” (I.1841).²³⁷ As Theseus continues, his plan is permeated by first-person pronouns which make a human—himself—the “shaper,” saying such things as “heere youre ende of that *I shal devyse. / My wyl is this*” (I.1844–45); “this *bihote* [promise] *I yow without faille*” (I.1854); “thanne shal *I yeve* Emelya to wyve / To whom that Fortune yeveth so fair a grace. / The lystes *shall I maken* in this place” (1860–62); and, finally, “as *I shal* even judge been and trewe, / Ye shul noon oother ende with *me* maken, / That oon of yow ne shal be deed or taken” (I.1864–66, emphases added).

Furthermore, Theseus still expects that either Arcite or Palamon may die, at least at this juncture (later, he will modify his plan in an apparent attempt to avoid death); one of them will win Emelye only when he has “sleen his contrarie, or out of lystes dryve” (I.1859). This attitude indicates that his plan is not a benevolent act meant to save anyone’s life or circumvent violence, but, rather, that it is an act of regulation, an attempt to glorify Arcite and Palamon’s fight on a larger and more public stage, which will also have the effect of glorifying himself as overseer of this ritualized battle. Most tellingly, Emelye has no say in this plan; Theseus declares, “I speke as for my suster Emelye” (I.1833). As Theseus has himself conquered “al the regne of Femenye” and forced Ypolita to marry him, so will he oversee Emelye’s wedding to either Arcite or Palamon after one conquers the other; Emelye’s potential marriage thus echoes Theseus’s own, which Laura Howes has noted compresses “two aspects of chivalric ideals, prowess in battle and

237. See DiMarco’s gloss of “degree” as situation,” *Riverside* 50, gloss to line I.1841.

proWess in love.”²³⁸ Both knights, furthermore, have themselves been conquered by Theseus: first in battle against Creon, second through imprisonment, and now through a forced, ritualized battle. When in closing Theseus declares, “this is youre ende and youre conclusioun,” it is an “ende” designed by man, not chance (I.1869).

The Tournament

The descriptions of the tournament preparations further underscore the primacy of Theseus’s actions. While at the beginning of the story Theseus’s first response to the Argive widows exposes his anxieties about “the intrinsic instabilities behind the construction of chivalric fame,”²³⁹ how his erection of an enormous “noble theatre” in which to showcase Arcite and Palamon’s chivalric fame—and thus his own as orchestrator of the tournament—further showcases these instabilities and his attempts to circumvent them. Theseus works “bisily / To maken up the lystes royally” which are enormous, with a “circuit a myle . . . aboute” and with stone walls “the hieghte of sixty pas [paces]” (I.1883–84; 1887; 1890). DiMarco notes that while the theater in the *Teseida* is similarly massive, in the “Knight’s Tale,” “Chaucer’s theater is constructed especially for the tournament,” whereas the *Teseida* is one which already existed.²⁴⁰ The theatre construction employs massive numbers of artists and craftsmen: “For in the lond ther was no crafty man / That geometrie or ars-metrike kan, / Ne portreyour, ne kervere of ymages, / That Theseus ne yaf him mete and wages / The theatre for to maken and devyse” (I.1897–1901).

238. Howes, *Chaucer’s Gardens*, 89.

239. Shimomura, “Walking Dead,” 6.

240. *Riverside* 834, note to line 1884.

Furthermore, Chaucer's Theseus builds temples to Venus, Mars, and Diana right into the theater itself, whereas in the *Teseida*, Palemon, Arcita, and Emilia visit similar temples elsewhere in Athens. The design and construction of the theater thus reveals not only the manmade quality of the tragedy about to unfold given the text's details about its literal creation, but likewise man's (and particularly Theseus's) occlusion of his role behind grandiose architectural gestures toward the gods.

After the theater has been constructed and Arcite and Palamon have assembled their armies, Theseus intervenes before the tournament itself can begin. The narrator describes Theseus in god-like terms as a herald draws the attention of the people: "Duc Theseus was at a window set, / Arrayed right as he were a god in trone. / The peple preeseth thiderward ful soone / Hym for to seen, and doon heigh reverence, / And eek to herkne his heste and his sentence" (I.2527–32). Adding to this visual presentation of Theseus as "a god in trone," the herald semantically describes Theseus in deific terms. He announces that Theseus no longer wishes for Arcite and Palamon to fight a potentially deadly match, stating that

The lord hath of his *heigh discrecioun*
 Considered that it were destruccioun
 To gentil blood to fighten in the gyse
 Of mortal bataille now in this emprise.
 Wherefore, to *shapen* that they shal nat dye,
 He wol his *firste purpos* modifye.

(I.2537–42)

The herald explains that Theseus has decided to ban certain weapons upon “peyne of los of lyf,” including arrows, battle axes, and so forth (I.2543–49). “The “heigh discrecioun” the herald ascribes to Theseus recalls the idea of God’s “purveiaunce” and its execution through “destinee, ministre general” which appeared earlier in the *Pars Secunda*; “shapen” likewise recalls the terms with which Theseus, Arcite, Palamon, and the narrator have described events which seem preordained, such as when the narrator declares that “whan a thing is shapen, it shal be” regarding Palamon’s escape from prison (I.1466). When he concludes his speech, the herald declares, “Gooth now youre wey; this is the lordes wille” (I.2560), with the last two words ambiguously referring both to Theseus and to a deity. The Knight-narrator likely intends for these descriptions to complement his earlier portrayals of Theseus as the flower of chivalry, but again, the text undercuts this presentation. The comparison of Theseus to God stumbles when the herald explains that Theseus is modifying his “firste purpos,” for God, as Boethius might explain, is unchanging, immutable, fixed, and the closing words of the announcement underscore again that the arena and the entire tournament are themselves enacted by Theseus, who seems in this tale able to exercise his will more than anyone else, though he himself couches it in terms of destiny.

The entire visual presentation of Theseus as well as the tone of the announcement deviates from that in the *Teseida*. As DiMarco explains, “The comparison of Theseus to a god is original with Chaucer,” and in Boccaccio’s text, “the duke remains in the theater with the visiting warriors.”²⁴¹ Furthermore, in the *Teseida*, Teseo speaks for himself and not only bans

241. *Riverside* 839, DiMarco’s note to lines 2528–29.

weapons to reduce bloodshed but focuses on the emotional tone of the battle as well, stating, “if I judge rightly, this battle should be friendly rather than malevolent. For those of a malevolent sort are waged by people seeking to cause trouble or having other ends in mind” (VII.8).²⁴² He later adds that he intends the battle to simply be “like ceremonial games in honour of Mars” (VII.13).²⁴³ In a final deviation, Boccaccio’s Teseo differentiates himself from the Thebans, descendants of Cadmus, when he explains his rationale for these changes, stating,

how could I ever bear to see Larison [Greek] blood being shed and each of us falling at the hands of the others as the seed of Cadmus chose to do? To-day there are neither the same circumstances nor the same issues, so let us leave them to men of that sort, and dwell in harmony as we ought—lightheartedly doing battle for the sake of love. (VII.9)²⁴⁴

Without directly naming the violence wrought during the siege of Thebes prior to the narrative of the *Teseid*, Teseo here intentionally differentiates his own actions from those of men such as Polynices or Eteocles. In the “Knight’s Tale,” however, Chaucer entirely eliminates Teseo’s self-spoken concern for those who fight.

Even more tellingly, Chaucer’s omission of the differentiation between Theseus and the “seeds of Cadmus” suggests just how similar they are, recursively connecting to the ways that from its opening scenes the emotional tenor of the “Knight’s Tale” has aligned more closely with

242. “Dunque amorosa dee questa battaglia / esser, s’io ben discern, e non odiosa; l’odiose sien di chi mal far travaglia, o di chi n’ha ragion per altra cosa.”

243. “Questo sarà come un giuoco a Marte.”

244. “E come poria io mai sofferire / vedere il sangue larisseo versare / e l’un pe’ colpi dell’altro morire / come al seme di Cadmo piacque fare? / Oggi non è quell tempo né quelle ire; / però con lor le lasciàn dimorare, / e noi viviam come in seme dovemo, / e leggier per amor ne combattemo” (VII.9).

that of the *Thebaid* than the *Teseida*. Cameron Cross argues that “by setting the terms of the contest and limiting the implementation of violence to levels he deems acceptable, Theseus hopes to reassert himself as the agent of order and the arbiter of justice in Athens” (Cross, “Illicit Rage” 403). Indeed, he attempts to exert order throughout the battle as well, for “some tyme dooth hem Thesus to reste, / Hem to refresshe and drynken, if hem leste” (I.2621–2). But the tournament nonetheless becomes a bloodbath, despite the change in rules and resting points: “The helmes they tohewen and toshrede; / Out brest the blood with stierne stremes rede; / with mighty maces the bones they tobreste” (I.2609–11). Men tumble and fall from their horses, perhaps foreshadowing Arcite’s demise: “Ther stomblen steeds stronge, and doun gooth al, / He rolleth under foot as dooth a bal; / He foyneth on his feet with his tronchoun, / And he hym hurtleth with his hors adoun” (I.2613–16). Despite Theseus’s efforts to limit bloodshed, many men are grievously wounded, all “soore yhurt, and namely oon, / That with a spere was thirled his brest boon” (I.2710). The narrative details the severity of the injuries, specifying that “somme hadden salves, and some hadden charmes; / Fermacies of herbes, and eek save / They drunken, for they wolde hir lymes [limbs] have” (I.2712–14).

While hitherto the text has demonstrated the ways that Theseus enacts his will upon others, here the gory outcome of the battle despite Theseus’s efforts to contain violence points to his own self-circumscription. The heroic code Theseus has followed all long, that which is chiefly concerned with masculine prowess and chivalry, repeatedly generates violence. Theseus’s obeisance to Mars—twice described as “armypotente” (I.1982; 2441), a pun on “omnipotent” that Chaucer seems to have invented himself—ensures that the bloody effects of

this Martian ideology extends throughout the text.²⁴⁵ Indeed, as David Aers notes, Theseus and Mars are joined “emblematically” from the beginning of the story.²⁴⁶ Theseus stages his ideological values and forces men like Arcite and Palamon—though they are not unwilling participants themselves—to likewise adhere to them as he hands down his decrees like a god enthroned. The gory details of the tournament thus undercut the ways in which chivalric action has been praised throughout the text; as Aers argues, “Chaucer uses art against the traditional aestheticization of violence, challenging literary traditions which celebrate aggression and militarism.”²⁴⁷ Whether in real battle on the field or simulated battle in the theater, the pursuit of masculine heroism and prowess leads to the only end it can: to injury and death, as “doun gooth al” who adhere to this ideology.

While my arguments thus far have focused on the primacy of human free will in the text and the ways it becomes dangerously occluded, Arcite’s sudden death is admittedly brought about by the actions of the gods. Venus weeps when she sees Arcite win the tournament, believing she cannot grant Palamon’s prayer. In response, Saturn tells her, “hoold thy pees!,” vowing that “thow shalt been esed soone”; he then sends the Fury which terrifies Arcite’s horse and throws him, ultimately killing him (I.2668; 2670). The design of the arena would similarly seem to lend itself to the idea that the characters are ruled by the whims of the gods. The temples to Venus, Mars, and Diana are respectively at the eastern, western, and northern gates of the

245. See the *Oxford English Dictionary* entry for “armipotent, *adj.* (and *n.*).” Chaucer’s use in the “Knight’s Tale” is the oldest citation listed.

246. Aers, *Chaucer, Language*, 175

247. Aers, *Chaucer, Language*, 183.

theater, and as J. A. Tasioulas notes, “A glance at any chart of the zodiac shows that this placing of the temples is in keeping with traditional planetary positions and so what we have in this amphitheatre is a symbolic cosmos....It looks as though all three characters are victims of forces beyond their control.”²⁴⁸ But, again, this is a design created by Theseus himself, and while the interference of Saturn and the Fury cannot be attributed to anything Theseus has willed directly, Arcite and the other men would not be present in the tournament and in such a situation if they had not chosen to live by the code of such a violent ideology. What we see here is not chance or *aventure* or determinism but literally a design *shapen* by men, thought of and agreed upon by themselves, in the guise of planetary influence. In the end, as Tasioulas notes, “Palamon and Arcite get... exactly what they themselves ask for” (Arcite/victory, Palamon/Emelye, and Emelye/the man who loves her most), and “Saturn interferes only to provide” what “they choose of their own free will.”²⁴⁹ Arcite’s death, then, becomes a particularly dark example of his own earlier observation that “we witen nat what thing we preyen heere” (I.1260). The “ende and conclusion” may have been brought about in part by Saturn’s intervening Fury, but, as Donald Howard notes, the characteristics and operations of the god themselves merely reflect the ideology of men like Theseus in the first place,²⁵⁰ and the *kairos* for this tournament lies in man’s shaping of events.

248. Tasioulas, “Science,” 180.

249. Tasioulas, “Science,” 180.

250. Howard argues that “The operation of the planets, which provides the celestial machinery creaking behind the plot and coming up with a convenient emergency, is a mirror image of the plot itself: the planets are gods, and therefore a super-race of nobles—a ruling class which rules the ruling class” (*Idea of the Canterbury Tales*, 235).

Emelye

But while Arcite and Palamon effectively become pawns in Theseus's game and slaves to their own appetites, be they appetite for prowess or for love, it is not just the men, of course, who are circumscribed by chivalric ideology. As these hyper-masculine, violent pursuits become writ large into society as a whole, women like Emelye are left even more circumscribed than Arcite and Palamon. A closer look at Emelye's character, and again the ways Chaucer deviates from Boccaccio in creating her, provides the final lynchpin for examining how the "Knight's Tale" interweaves a nominalist-leaning exploration of individual free will with an interrogation of the gender politics of the romance genre.

In some ways, Emelye feels muted in the "Knight's Tale" when compared to Emilia in the *Teseida*. Vincent J. DiMarco sees Emelye as "much diminished in vivacity from Boccaccio's more lifelike heroine."²⁵¹ DiMarco points to William Dodd's interpretation, who argues that Chaucer "has made Emilia almost characterless" in order to "concentrat[e] the reader's mind on the two cousins" in order to show that "the love passion of the two heroes was not only earnest but absolutely genuine."²⁵² While Chaucer indeed reduces Emilia's presence throughout much of the text, both these reductions and the revisions Chaucer makes to her character have the effect of reducing the vanity that characterizes Emilia in Boccaccio's text while also heightening the sense that she is circumscribed by a hyper-masculine social ideology. In the *Teseida*, when Emilia first realizes that Arcita and Palemone are watching her from within their prison cell as

251. *Riverside* 827, introductory note to the Knight's Tale.

252. William George Dodd, *Courtly Love in Chaucer*, 239; 245.

she walks in the palace garden, “she rejoiced in being found attractive and thought herself lovelier and made herself look fairer the next time she went into that garden” (III.19).²⁵³

Boccaccio emphasizes the vanity of her response by specifying that Emilia returns to the garden intentionally and habitually, explaining that “she would slowly wander across the grass and among the shrubs in a graceful yet modest way and contrive to make herself appeal more strongly to anyone who was looking on” (III.29).²⁵⁴ Boccaccio’s narrator adds an aside underscoring her motives, claiming that

It was not any thought of love that made her do this, but rather the vain desire that women are born with in their hearts, to make others gaze at their beauty. For, being more or less barren of any other virtue they are content to be praised for that one; and contriving by means of it to make themselves attractive, they ensnare others whilst retaining their own freedom. (III. 30)²⁵⁵

But though the narrator here claims that it was “not any thought of love” that motivates her, throughout Boccaccio’s text such details have the effect of portraying Emilia as ultimately welcoming the men’s competition for her hand. Although she prays to Diana to remain unwed in Boccaccio’s text as well as in Chaucer’s, in the *Teseida* Emilia’s prayer sits within a greater

253. “d’esser piaciuta seco si diletta, / e più se ne tien bella, e più sàadorna / qualora poi a quel giardin ritorna.”

254. “e su per l’erbe con li passi scarsi / fra gli albuscelli, d’umilitàà vestuta, / donnescamente giva e s’ingegnava / di più piacere a chi la riguardava.”

255. “Né la recava a chiò pensier d’amore / che ella avesse, ma la vanitate, / cheinnata han le femine nel cor, / di fare altrui veder la lor biltate; / e quasi nude d’ogni altro valore, / contente son di quella esser lodate, / e, per quel, di piacer sé ingegnando, / pigliano altrui, sé libere servando.”

depiction of her curiosity about love and her enjoyment of the ways the men flatter her, a curiosity Chaucer strips away in the “Knight’s Tale.”

This change in Emelye’s character is further evidenced during the tournament. When Arcita becomes the clear winner of the tournament in Boccaccio’s text, the narrator says of Emilia that “her heart at once inclined in his favour and she became passionately enamoured of him. And already the effects of love were making her anxiously beg for him to be acknowledged victor—and she felt no more concern of Palemone” (VIII.124).²⁵⁶ As she watches him, she “admires all Arcita’s good looks and his noble bearing; now his valour seems most excellent to her and his boldness far superior” (III.126).²⁵⁷ But in the “Knight’s Tale,” Emelye does not begin to favor Arcite until he has been declared the victor by Theseus,²⁵⁸ upon which act Emelye “hym caste a freendlich ye / (For wommen, as to speken in comune, / Thei folwen alle the favour of Fortune)” (I.2680–82). While these latter two lines seem to constitute a rather misogynist parenthetical, DiMarco notes that they “are lacking in many MSS, including Hg, El, and Gg,” and that critics have suggested that “they may have been meant to be canceled.”²⁵⁹ Even if the lines were not meant to be canceled, however, they may suggest not so much an antifeminist attitude on the narrator’s or Chaucer’s part but rather the ways Emelye, in Chaucer’s text, recognizes her circumscription and bears with it; for she has already been told by Diana in the

256. “l’animo suo senza dimoro / a lui voltò, e divenne fervente dell’armor d’esso, e già, per suo ristoro, per lui vittoria, pietosa chiedea, né più di Palemon già le calea.”

257. “Or loda Emilia seco la bellezza / d’Arcita tutta e ’l nobil portamento; / ora le par più somma la prodezza / di lui e troppo maggior l’ardimento.”

258. See DiMarco’s observation of this contrast in *Riverside* 839, note to lines 2680–83.

259. *Riverside* 839, note to lines 2680–83.

temple that “it is affirmed, / And by eterne word written and confermed” that she “shalt ben wedded unto oon of tho” (I.2349–51). Though the text, as I have argued above, has suggested the ways that such apparent “eterne word” of the gods may simply reflect the social ideology followed by men like Theseus, Arcite, and Palamon, from Emelye’s perspective it feels equally inevitable either way. When Fortune seemingly favors Arcite, she thus accepts her fate.

Before this turn of events, however, the “Knight’s Tale” depicts Emelye as more firmly against marriage than Boccaccio’s Emilia. This takes place within the aforementioned temple of Diana, also greatly enhanced in the “Knight’s Tale.” As Emelye’s visits the temple, her rites are compared to those found in the writing of “Stace of Thebes and thise bookes olde” (2294), a reminder of the *Thebaid* and its ominous indictment of masculine violence marking the beginning of the section wherein Chaucer provides the greatest moment of Emelye’s interiority. Chaucer likewise adds to the description of the temple itself. DiMarco notes that “Tes. 7.72 says merely that the temple of Diana was clean and adorned with beautiful hangings.”²⁶⁰ In contrast, Chaucer’s text includes descriptions of those Diana helps and those she takes vengeance upon, including Atthalante [Atalanta] and Melagre [Meleager], who slew Diana’s boar. DiMarco points to Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* as Chaucer’s source for these stories—in which Theseus and Pirithous are named as part of the boar-hunting party (*Metamorphoses* VIII.303).²⁶¹ Chaucer’s text thus includes a subtle indictment of Theseus within the description of Diana’s temple, enhancing an earlier statement that “after Mars he serveth now Dyane” in explanation of his love of hunting

260. *Riverside* 836, note to lines 2053–88.

261. *Riverside* 836, note to lines 2070–72.

(I.1682); any respect Theseus pays to Diana or the wishes of her followers, such as Emelye, are clearly demarcated as secondary to Theseus's continued homage to Mars and his pursuit of male, chivalric valor.

Within Emelye's prayer to Diana itself, Chaucer replaces Emilia's prayer for the men's glory with an emphasis on Emelye's desire for peace. In the *Teseida*, Emilia asks for "their strife [to be] peacefully resolved or diverted to another end that will yield their reputations more glory" (VII.84).²⁶² In contrast, Chaucer's Emelye simply asks Diana to

sende love and pees bitwixe hem two,
 And fro me turne away hir hertes so
 That al hire hote love and hir desir,
 And al hir bisy torment, and hir fir
 Be queynt, or turned in another place. (I.2317–2321)

The changes at once clarify that Emelye has no interest in male glory, while furthermore requesting that Arcite and Palamon's desires be turned away from her, a request lacking in Emilia's prayer in the *Teseida*, who simply asks for a different path towards resolution of their conflicting desires, not a thwarting of those desires themselves. Similarly, Boccaccio's Emilia laments of the two men that "they both seem so pleasant to me that I cannot choose for myself," part of her prayer that Diana ensure that "he whom I should most willingly receive and he who

262. "e facci il loro affanno / volvere in dolce pace o in altra cosa / ch'alla lor fama sia più gloriosa."

has the deep-rooted desire for me is the one to enter my arms” (VII.85).²⁶³ In contrast, Chaucer’s Emelye foreshadows the sense of predestined circumscription she expresses during the tournament, as noted above, praying, “And if my destyne be shapen so / That I shal nedes have oon of hem two, / As sende me hym that moost desireth me” (I.2323–2325). By replacing Emilia’s inability to choose between the two men with a depiction of how Emelye seems resigned to her fate, attempting to make the best of this contest for her hand even though her consent was never asked for, Chaucer’s text again heightens the sense of Emelye’s circumscription—and her awareness of it—while removing any implication of her vanity.

These moments in the temple, however, are the most lines devoted to Emelye and to her own desires. That she feels more muted in the rest of the “Knight’s Tale” further reinforces the sense that she is circumscribed by the masculine ideology around her. This is a story, the text demonstrates, in which a woman’s will is inevitably diminished by the exercise of the will of the men around her; as Laura Howes has argued, “In the poem’s exploration of free will and predestination, Emelye’s case stands out. She does not even enjoy the appearance of free will.”²⁶⁴ This is particularly showcased by the ways Emelye can verbalize her desires only in the privacy of Diana’s temple, her last refuge—though even this, in Chaucer’s story, is a temple constructed by Theseus. The text further indicates the ways she is caught in the men’s games and desires by bracketing her prayer with the prayers of Arcite (to Mars) and Palamon (to Venus), whereas in the *Teseida*, Emelye’s prayer is the third. Furthermore, her private speech in the

263. “fa che e’ venga nelle braccia mia / colui a cui più col voler m’acosto / e che con più fermezza mi disia, / ché io nol so in me stessa nomare, / tanto ciascun piacevole mi pare.”

264. Howes, *Chaucer’s Gardens*, 93.

temple is bracketed by Theseus's declarations that he speaks for her, before and after this scene. In relaying his plan for the tournament, he declares as noted above that "I speke as for my suster Emelye" (I.1833). After Arcite's death, when he announces that Emelye will now marry Palamon, he simply states, "Suster, . . . this is my fulle assent, / With al th'avys heere of my parlement" (I.3075–76) without any of the concern for her consent that he shows to Palamon when he says to him, "I trow ther nedeth litel sermonyng / To make yow assente to this thyng" (I.3090–91). While Jodi Grimes argues that at the end of the text, Theseus's "new strategy" to marry Emelye and Palamon "favors Diana, who in the tale reifies an ideal of woodland use that finds harmony between humans and the natural environment,"²⁶⁵ if we take Emelye to be a representative of Diana, as Palamon is of Venus and Arcite of Mars, her silence troubles such an optimistic conclusion, particularly given the ways Theseus himself has already been subtly implicated within the temple of Diana.

Chaucer's narrative thus consistently flips the sense of ultimate ensnarement from the men to Emelye. While Arcite and Palamon frequently express a sense of circumscription, the text shows them to be largely authors of their own entrapment, both emotionally and through their adherence to the masculine chivalric code of which Theseus stands as figurehead. In Boccaccio's *Teseida*, women "ensnare others whilst retaining their own freedom" (III. 30); in Chaucer's "Knight's Tale," men ironically and unwittingly ensnare themselves through their free choices while further circumscribing women like Emelye. For even when the narrator claims that Palamon and Arcite see Emelye "by aventure or cas" (I.1074) for the first time, the text

265. Grimes, "Arboreal Politics," 363.

demonstrates that she is present in the garden as a result of Theseus's action. As her prayer to Diana reveals, Emelye desires to roam free in the wild woods, a desire, Howes argues, that "represents a freedom from the marriage bond."²⁶⁶ Having been forcibly sent to Athens along with Ypolita, however, the closest she ever gets to this again is within the confines of the palace garden, which, tellingly, shares a wall with the palace dungeon (I.1056–1061). This architectural detail, Howes argues, is uncoincidental, illustrating that "Emelye and other women in the tale experience more constraints than do the Knight's male characters," as well as foreshadowing how "Emelye in particular cannot champion or contest her own future, as Palamon and Arcite do in battle and in the tournament."²⁶⁷ That Emelye is consistently described with "arboreal imagery," Jodi Grimes argues, further attests to her circumscription, for "Like the grove, [Emelye] is at the mercy of the fighting Palamon and Arcite," and "like the grove, she is ultimately under Theseus's total control."²⁶⁸

The First Mover

This emphasis on how Emelye's destiny is "shapen," her movements themselves circumscribed, undercuts the elaborate speech Theseus gives about the "First Mover" near the end of the tale, shortly before he announces that Emelye will now marry Palamon. Theseus philosophizes at length on "the Firste Moevere of the cause above" who "first made the faire Cheyne of love," and who "stablised in this wrecched world adoun / Certeyne days and

266. Howes, *Chaucer's Gardens*, 92.

267. Howes, *Chaucer's Gardens*, 87.

268. Grimes, "Arboreal Politics," 355 and 356.

duracioun / To al that is engendred in this place” (I.2987–88; 2994–97). He describes this Mover as “stable . . . and eterne,” ordering all natural “speces of thynges and progressiouns,” against which ordering “no creature on lyve, / Of no degree, availleth for to stryve” (I.3004; 3013; 3039–40). The “contrarie of al this”—that is, of accepting the First Mover’s ordering of all things—is what Theseus calls “wilfulnesse” (I.3057). Thus, Theseus concludes, they must accept Arcite’s death. The speech recalls the words of Lady Philosophy in Boethius’s *Consolation*, who tells the prisoner that “though you do not grasp the final end of this great dispensation, you must not doubt that all things happen as they should, because a good ruler orders the world” (IV.5.7). David Aers has noted that, accordingly, Theseus’s “speech has been much admired as a piece of profound Boethian wisdom which Chaucer himself presented uncritically to clarify the ‘principle of order’ informing the poem, society and cosmos.”²⁶⁹

Such a straightforward Boethian schema may feel concordant with the experiences of the men in the text: Arcite and Palamon are imprisoned literally and emotionally, feeling that fortune has dealt them malady upon malady, and when Arcite dies suddenly, overcoming a focus on the fickle and transitory nature of the human experience provides the means to overcome this grief as they turn away from the mortal, social world to the divine. But as Fichte has pointed out, in his speech Theseus “does not penetrate the highest reaches of Boethian philosophy. To do so would have meant to assert a cosmological order, whose existence was questioned by progressive fourteenth-century thinkers.”²⁷⁰ Instead, Theseus ultimately “believes that God’s

269. Aers, *Chaucer, Langland*, 187.

270. Fichte, *Chaucer’s ‘Art Poetical,’* 90.

omnipotence impinges on his free will and that Providence equals Predestination. He therefore resigns himself to what he considered to be unalterable fate,” much like Arcite and Palamon have too often done throughout the text.²⁷¹

Furthermore, beyond Theseus’s speech alone, it is precisely such a temptation to look away from human causation that the text constantly offers and then disrupts, drawing attention again and again to very human actions, rooted in history as found in Statius’s *Thebaid* or “thise bookes olde,” particularly when the text’s gender dynamics are considered together with its metaphysical projects. The ways that the text dramatizes the inequity of the free will of Arcite and Palamon compared to Theseus, and of Emelye compared to all the men, destabilizes such interpretations. As David Aers observes, a distinct “incoherence” marks Theseus’s “particular version of the argument from design,” for “when we look at the ‘experience’ the duke now feels is proof of the presence of divine love and its benevolent ordering of our world, the result is to strengthen our sense that he is not given to examining such matters with any scrupulousness.”²⁷²

The text thus encourages its readers from beginning to end to probe what the hidden structures driving the text may really be—and who truly is portrayed as the “Firste Moevere” in the tale. The Knight-narrator may be transferring this Christian, Boethian idea onto his non-Christian characters, as Theseus names Jupiter as the First Mover. But as Paul Strohm has noted,

271. Fichte, *Chaucer’s ‘Art Poetical,’* 91. More recently, see Cameron Cross’s similar conclusion that “in [Theseus’s] mind, such misfortune could not be the result of cruel or capricious happenstance . . . [;] it must rather be the work of the First Mover, who created the components of the world ‘in certeyn boundes, that they may nat flee’ (line 2993),” in “Illicit Rage” 404.

272. Aers, *Chaucer, Langland*, 189.

it is difficult to agree with Theseus, as the text repeatedly shows “confusion within the sphere of the gods,” which he says “must . . . frustrate any attempt by the audience of the poem to impose an orderly pattern on these divine interventions.”²⁷³ Instead, we must turn to Theseus himself, for his final speech and plan to marry off Emelye after all reveals, as Carolyn Dinshaw argues, how “courtliness” becomes “a cover for the patriarchal exchange economy.”²⁷⁴ In such an economy, Theseus capitalizes upon the conflict between Arcite and Palamon, transmuting their strife into a rhetorical display of his own power, as Ingham has suggested. In such an economy, Emelye is married off and contained, the “eterne worde” which seems to circumscribe her, as Howes has concluded, essentially one and the same as “the Knight’s narrative plan and Theseus’s plan to marry her off.”²⁷⁵ That Chaucer makes Theseus effectively the First Mover throughout the text, despite the narrator’s and characters’ beliefs, may be designed to reify how easily humans misrecognize the *summum bonum* and the First Mover, and demonstrating in turn how easy it is to choose a false path even if one’s intentions are benevolent, as theorized by the many theologians treated in my previous chapter. Theseus may truly intend to impose what he sees as proper justice and order; but the text reveals that his actions are symptomatic of his adherence to an ideology which perpetuates systemic violence and the circumscription of those who fall under its yoke, whether willing but unwittingly, like Arcite and Palamon, or more forcible, like Emelye.

273. Strohm, *Social Chaucer*, 132.

274. Dinshaw, *Chaucer’s Sexual Poetics*, 107.

275. Howes, *Chaucer’s Gardens*, 93.

To conclude, free will is a double-edged sword throughout the “Knight’s Tale.” While unforeseeable accidents may happen, such as Arcite’s fall, the text continually points to human action, implying—as Theseus himself articulates—that falling is but an adventure, or chance. Thus, on the one hand, the question for Chaucer becomes this: In light of unpredictable fortunes and misfortunes, how do we choose to respond? The “Knight’s Tale” abounds with implicit criticism of characters’ responses, demonstrating how one’s freely made choices may help one’s self—or may hurt. But, on the other hand, the most significant lesson is greater, for the text indicates that when habitual, egotistic personal decisions, such of those of Theseus, become writ large into social ideology, habituating others to make similar choices which seem innate and inexorable, the harmful effects extend beyond the individual to others, and especially to women like Emelye. Occluding free will by instead blaming events on fortune or the gods simply provides a convenient way to obscure the machinations of human ideology.

The final question remains—why does Chaucer provide these lessons by way of undercutting his Knight-narrator’s ideal society? Like the “Nun’s Priest’s Tale,” the treatment of the human will in the “Knight’s Tale” indicates an exploration of formalist metaphysics, emphasizing universals and forms, and a materialist metaphysics, emphasizing particulars and contingents and from which grew nominalist theology and philosophy. But in the “Knight’s Tale” in particular, the pendulum swings toward the latter, indicating the dangers of a formalist or universalist social ideology in what the text repeatedly demonstrates is a hyper-contingent mortal realm. Whereas Ockham considered belief in the real existence of forms to be “the worst

error in philosophy,”²⁷⁶ insisting that “no universal thing is a substance existing outside the mind,”²⁷⁷ the “Knight’s Tale” reifies the danger of such a subjective form insisting upon its ontological reality in a way that silences women in particular. By presenting this message through a subtle subversion of his own Knight-narrator’s claims, Chaucer is able to bring what might otherwise be read as merely an indictment of the pagan, classical past to bear on his own world, indicting the conventions of the romance genre itself and its support of potentially violent and circumscribing chivalric valor.

Chaucer’s narrative strategy furthermore speaks to the essential instability of Chaucer’s fourteenth century, as noted in my previous chapter in regard to the rise of nominalist thought. The “Knight’s Tale” portrays Theseus’s ideology as essentially analogical, while at the same time, and true to nominalist thinking, offering a “critique of the systemic limitations of analogy.”²⁷⁸ As Burt Kimmelman argues, across his oeuvre Chaucer’s emphasis on “firsthand experience as a conduit for arriving to truth” effectively “charts his experiments with and ultimate turn away from allegory.”²⁷⁹ For instead of allegory, as Aers points out, Chaucer’s “text resists the absorption of individual identity and the particulars of misery into those grandly abstract patterns of consolation favoured by many Christian versions of theodicy as well as in certain of their secular successors.”²⁸⁰ Theseus’s formalist, monolithic vision benefits the few at

276. McCord Adams, Marilyn. *William Ockham Volumes I–II*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987, at 13.

277. *Summa logicae* I, c. 15, (Oph I, 5), quoted in McCord Adams, 31fn63.

278. Utz, “Philosophy,” 169.

279. Kimmelman “Ockham, Chaucer,” 178.

280. Aers, *Chaucer, Langland*, 183.

the expense of the many as it overlooks the embodied experiences of those such as Emelye—even as the text itself asks its readers to scrutinize these experiences and the deployment, as Aers has argued, of “metaphysical language by those in power” and the subsequent “transformations of metaphysics into an ideology of unreflexive secular domination.”²⁸¹

The narrator of the General Prologue argues that “the wordes moote be cosyn to the dede” (I.742), but in the “Knight’s Tale,” the words of Theseus encourage us to overlook the deeds; the deeds of the cousins betray the previous words they have spoken in loyalty to one another. The words and deeds furthermore employ the terms of theological debates on free will and forces of circumscription to point to the need for social reformation, for even when Theseus, as figurehead of a chivalric ideology, attempts to forestall violence, the staged battle is indistinguishable from the real, both in the injuries and death sustained and in the ways its outcome delimits the free will of women like Emelye; these violent delights, Chaucer’s story suggests, always have violent ends.

281. Aers, *Chaucer, Langland*, 195.

CHAPTER THREE:

GENDER AND SOCIAL DETERMINISM IN *TROILUS AND CRISEYDE*

Two Sides of a Coin: The “Knight’s Tale,” and *Troilus and Criseyde*

Chaucer’s “Knight’s Tale,” as I concluded in my previous chapter, dramatizes how men like Arcite and Palamon ascribe unwittingly but willingly to a hyper-masculine social ideology that most benefits not themselves but those in power and the perpetuation of that ideology itself, as symbolized in the character of Theseus.²⁸² The “Knight’s Tale” also demonstrates how this ideology circumscribes women, as it acts as a universalist form which overlooks materialist particulars, though more narrative time is dedicated to the ways men blindly circumscribe themselves. Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*, I will demonstrate in this chapter, functions as the other side of the circumscriptive coin. Likewise nominalist in its tone, *Troilus and Criseyde* focuses particularly on the negative effects such masculine, chivalric ideologies have on women and how, like Arcite and Palamon in the “Knight’s Tale,” women like Criseyde are nevertheless

282. A version of this chapter has been previously published as a journal article in *The Chaucer Review*, “‘Tied in lusty leese’: Gender and Determinism in *Troilus and Criseyde*,” Kendra Slayton. Copyright © The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA. This article is used by permission of The Pennsylvania State University Press. Many thanks to the anonymous readers for *The Chaucer Review* who provided extensive, helpful feedback on the earlier draft of these arguments. I also extend my gratitude to Pennsylvania State University Press and *Chaucer Review* editors David Raybin and Susanna Fein for permission to include this material in my dissertation. In revising the article for the dissertation chapter, introductory and concluding material has been expanded, and footnoted material on scholarly conversations in the article have been placed in the body of the chapter itself and expanded, with added explanations of my methodology throughout.

conditioned not only to perpetuate such ideologies and their place in it but to be blind to its effects.

While the “Knight’s Tale” gestures toward this idea of social (and generic) conditioning in the figures of Arcite and Palamon particularly, in *Troilus and Criseyde* Chaucer takes this as a primary factor in his depiction of Criseyde. Essentially, while Chaucer rejects the idea of divine determinism in works such as the “Knight’s Tale” and *Troilus and Criseyde*, emphasizing individual, human free will and the ways it becomes occluded, he also demonstrates how human action and habit, when writ large into social ideology, can itself become a negatively deterministic force. The idea that this narrative strategy, in turn, has nominalist leanings has been supported by Richard Utz. Utz argues, firstly, that there is evidence that Ralph Strode, the “philosophical Strode” who Chaucer dedicates *Troilus and Criseyde* to together with “moral Gower” (V.1856–57), was himself “a follower of the nominalist *via moderna*.”²⁸³ He adds that in light of the possibility that Strode may have been a nominalist, “interpretations that see the character ‘Troilus’ as a literary exemplification of a potentially dangerous late-medieval determinism are given a higher degree of plausibility.”²⁸⁴ But while much has been written of Troilus’s contributions to *Troilus and Criseyde*’s philosophical and theological projects, Chaucer’s depiction of Criseyde, too, contributes to the poem’s nominalist leanings, particularly by demonstrating that the particulars of women’s social, material conditions (and the roots of

283. Utz, “Literary Nominalism,” 208.

284. Utz, “Literary Nominalism,” 208.

these conditions in the past) are dangerously elided by a solely universal, formalist recommendation of transcendence of the mortal world.

At the beginning of Book IV of *Troilus and Criseyde*, the seer Calkas seizes the opportunity to use a prisoner exchange to save his daughter, Criseyde, whom he had left “Slepying at hom,” from the “fire and flaumbe” that he predicts will shortly destroy Troy (IV. 93; 118). Troy, however, is set afire metaphorically even earlier, when the Trojan people demand the exchange with a collective voice “as breme as blase of straw iset on-fire” (IV.184). The trade approved, familial reunion offers little comfort to Criseyde, expelled from her home and saved from real fires of destruction only by the incineration of her Trojan personal life. Now emotionally alone in the Greek camp, she bemoans her earlier refusal to run away with Troilus, and laments:

Prudence, allas, oon of thyne eyen thre
 Me lakked alwey, er that I come here!
 On tyme ypassed wel remembred me,
 And present tyme ek koud ich wel ise,
 But future tyme, er I was in the snare,
 Koude I nat sen; that causeth now my care. (V.744–49)

Some critics have argued that these lines enable Chaucer to criticize Criseyde for a lack of foresight. Jelena Marelj, for example, contends that a larger “metaphysical and moral order” remains occluded for Criseyde, who is unable to penetrate beyond the particulars of present existence to grasp transcendent universals.” She argues that “Criseyde lacks Prudence’s third eye

. . . , which enables a conceptualization of universals that structures a comprehension of the particulars that participate in them.”²⁸⁵ Overall, Marelj sees Criseyde as criticized by Chaucer’s text and these lines in particular, reading her as “a nominalist whose misdirected agency bespeaks a self-directed and self-serving intentionality that is oblivious to the ethical correspondence between ‘words’ and ‘things,’ or particulars and universals.”²⁸⁶

Other recent criticism, however, suggests the ways the text may embrace rather than critique nominalist-leaning aesthetics and metaphysics. Jamie Fumo, like Marelj, sees Criseyde as embodying a nominalist mentality, arguing that for Criseyde, the idea of Love is “like Ockham’s God, whose world is one in which universals lack ontological reality and in which natural reason cannot bridge the mysteries of faith,” and that Criseyde understands that “the world of particulars is a ‘mooste storym lyf’ of radical contingency (2.778).”²⁸⁷ Fumo, however, unlike Marelj, does not read Criseyde’s nominalism negatively. Instead, she argues that taken together with Troilus’s more formalist belief in love, Chaucer “attribut[es] fundamentally different metaphysical outlooks to his two protagonists not in order to affirm particular theological truths but to ‘open up a space, a play world, where values are tested, new modes of thought and perception are tried out, and established ideas are transformed.’”²⁸⁸

Recent aesthetic analyses of the poem likewise suggest its positively nominalist possibilities. Kara Gaston argues that *Troilus and Criseyde* “explores the possibility of difference

285. Marelj, “Philosophical *Entente*,” 209.

286. Marelj, “Philosophical *Entente*,” 208.

287. Fumo, “The Ends of Love,” 79.

288. Fumo, “The Ends of Love,” 83.

within its own language, how instabilities of form and meaning emerge as a condition of an ever-changing vernacular poetry developed through the process of close translation.”²⁸⁹ While Gaston does not link this directly to nominalism itself, the idea that difference and polyvalence are necessary to capture the complexities of love accords with the late-medieval, nominalist contention that it is not universal forms but embodied particulars that best capture human experience in the world. Even taking the *Canticus Troili* of Book I alone, Gaston argues, “Love . . . emerges . . . as a term that resists universality, one whose meaning is embedded in the language used to describe and define its effects. The *Canticus*’s paradoxes deny a concrete definition of love.”²⁹⁰

Furthermore, the structure of Chaucer’s text provides readers with another option besides agreeing with Criseyde’s own condemnation of herself, while also suggesting the ways that she both possesses an understanding of the “radical contingency” of the world, as Fumo argues, but is also partially blinded to its effects on her personally. Criseyde’s speech demands a recursive reading, reanimating Criseyde’s previous, more positive self-assessments, such as her declaration that she stands “unteyd in lusty leese” (II, 752). Such paradoxes, as Corinne Saunders has noted, point to “the gap between imagination and reality,” the chasm between the world as Criseyde previously perceived it and the way it really was—the way she finds it to be in Book V.²⁹¹ But, reassessing the “tyme ypassed” and the now-past “present tyme” that Criseyde so poignantly

289. Gaston, “Save oure tonges difference,” 259.

290. Gaston, “Save oure tonges difference,” 281.

291. Saunders, “Affective Reading” 26.

invokes, Chaucer's text profoundly situates the origin of this gap not in a personal flaw but in the broader sociocultural situation that so encourages her to misrecognize her own agency.

This reading fits into the wealth of criticism that reads Criseyde's snare as largely man-made.²⁹² Underrecognized, however, is how Criseyde's lament in Book V also engages in philosophical and theological disputations on the nature of human free will and the forces—including social "snares"—that may circumscribe it. In Chaucerian criticism, discussions of free will have largely remained centered upon Troilus and the poem's undeniable Boethian valences, with the resulting implication, even if unintentional, being that women evidently have no place in discussions of the poem's theological themes, as discussed in the introduction to this dissertation. Recent scholarship, however, has begun to rectify these omissions of Criseyde from theological and philosophical analyses, as well as to link these analyses to Chaucer's social critiques. Sashi Nair, for example, has compellingly pointed out that "Criseyde's Boethian pragmatism," while typically overlooked, "is a foundational element of Chaucer's version of the story, and it invites the reader to consider the effect of social constraints upon actions which had been attributed by Boccaccio to a (stereo)typically feminine faithlessness."²⁹³ She furthermore adds that throughout *Troilus and Criseyde*, Chaucer "foregrounds the constraints of Criseyde's position and, by

292. See for example Aers, "Criseyde: Woman in Medieval Society" (1979); Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics* (1989); Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History* (1991), esp. at 146; Federico, "Two Troy Books" (2013), esp. 166; and Espie and Star, "Reading Chaucer's Calkas" (2016).

293. Nair, "'O brotel wele,'" 36.

implication, the position of all women who are at the mercy of men, and gestures towards the incompatibility of the romance genre and the ‘real’ lives of women.”²⁹⁴

The more specific mechanisms of Criseyde’s social constraints, however, remain largely unexplored. I thus seek to build upon these recent readings by offering an interrogation of the social circles and milieus constituting Criseyde’s larger society. While recent criticism has aptly noted the risks of overemphasizing Criseyde’s social constraints,²⁹⁵ further work remains to be done in examining how Chaucer’s depiction of these constraints not only shows him “dramatizing his sense of the writer’s responsibilities towards women as literary subjects,” as Jill Mann argues, but specifically in a way that can enrich and challenge our definitions of the text’s Boethianism and reconcile Chaucer’s sociological, gendered projects with his theological interests.²⁹⁶

A useful starting point is Lee Patterson’s belief that the narrative arc of *Troilus* showcases a “semantically similar but philosophically antithetical Boethianism,”²⁹⁷ related to the rejection of formalist theology and philosophy in the “Nun’s Priest’s Tale” and “Knight’s Tale.” Chaucer, Patterson argues, problematizes Boethius’s concept of the *summum bonum* as an end towards which “man’s *intentio naturalis* instinctively converts him,” for this “norm of judgment

294. Nair, “‘O brotel wele,’” 37

295. See Fumo, “The Ends of Love,” esp. 70–72.

296. Mann, *Feminizing Chaucer*, 11. Exemplifying such work, see Nair’s argument that Criseyde demonstrates a “misinterpretation of Boethian philosophy” by overestimating her abilities, creating “the impression that she is exercising agency within the bounds of social constraints” (“‘O brotel wele,’” 49).

297. Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History*, 115.

. . . stands outside and apart from a historical world.”²⁹⁸ This theory of such an “antithetical” approach to Boethianism complements what Sheila Delany has identified as Chaucer’s broader shift away from analogical modes of writing in order to “express his vision of a complex and contingent world,”²⁹⁹ and the “critique of the systemic limitations of analogy” Richard Utz sees in the “Knight’s Tale.”³⁰⁰

Building on this body of criticism, in this chapter I reexplore Criseyde’s social determinism within the framework of the poem’s critically acknowledged meditation on free will and forces of circumscription. I argue that like the “Knight’s Tale” in particular, *Troilus and Criseyde* leans away from formalism and toward nominalism, as a nominalist framework better captures the particulars of Criseyde’s social conditions, which make a formalist, idealized approach towards love impossible for her. Semantic analysis of Chaucer’s depictions of Criseyde’s social position and self-conception reveals how her early assertions of freedom clash with Chaucer’s use of circumscribing words such as *lustye leese* and *muwe*, becoming signs of learned misrecognition of the conditions in which she operates: of Trojan ideology’s subversion of the *summum bonum* and its delimitation of Criseyde’s agency. This wordplay builds upon Chaucer’s allusions to the violent classical past and his subversion of the romance genre’s traditional bird-of-prey imagery. The narrative slippage Chaucer creates through such strategies

298. Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History*, 115.

299. Delany, “Undoing Substantial Connection” 52. Similarly, see Eleanor Johnson’s argument that in *Troilus* the mortal world “is subject not to the infinitely good intention of God but to the infinitely scheming machinations of Pandarus” (*Practicing Literary Theory*, 101–2). See also Kellie Robertson’s argument that Boethianism alone cannot account for the full philosophical and theological complexity of Chaucer’s works, in *Nature Speaks*, esp. 226–27.

300. Utz, “Philosophy,” 169.

signifies the social weight upon Criseyde, who despite her tripartition of past, present, and future, has been circumscribed all along by Troy's anti-*summum bonum*. This signification also indicates the limitations of traditional Boethian analyses to account for Criseyde's future; not granted the valorous death that allows Troilus, in hindsight, to transcend above the mortal world, Criseyde must continue to navigate the hazardous milieu of the Trojan-Greek mythic past, now fully aware of her entrapment.

Criseyde's Agency and an Alternate Boethianism

Evaluating Criseyde's agency rightly continues to invite scholarly debate. Some have read her as a free agent, for good or ill. Fumo, as mentioned above, aptly notes the need to recognize Criseyde as an intricate, volitional, and "metaphysically defined creature."³⁰¹ Valerie Ross argues that in Criseyde's eagle-dream in particular, wherein the eagle tears out her heart and replaces it with his own, Chaucer "vividly dramatizes not her passivity, but her increasing agency," as it leaves her "with the heart, and 'corage,' of a powerful, royal, and visionary eagle of mythic proportions."³⁰² Similarly, Mary Behrman notes that while Criseyde may have constraints upon her, so, too, do the men in the text, and she argues that readings which overemphasize her victimization can render her a "mere automaton" and "unwittingly perhaps . . . diminish her significance."³⁰³ In contrast, Marlej, as noted above, reads Criseyde as a hyper-voluntarist, a free agent "whose misdirected agency bespeaks a self-directed and self-serving

301. Fumo, "The Ends of Love," 70.

302. Ross, "Believing Cassandra," 349 and 352.

303. Behrman, "Heroic Criseyde," 315.

intentionality that is oblivious to the ethical correspondence between ‘words’ and ‘things,’ or particulars and universals.”³⁰⁴

Other critics read Criseyde as constrained, her agency mostly ineffective. David Aers, for example, reads Chaucer’s emphasis on Criseyde’s social constraints as part of a larger “exploration of the ways in which individual action, consciousness and sexuality, the most intimate areas of being, are fundamentally related to the specific social and ideological structures within which an individual becomes an identifiable human being.”³⁰⁵ But among scholars who similarly read Criseyde as constrained, analyses split as to why Chaucer presents her so. Dinshaw, for example, argues that *Troilus* foreshadows what becomes for Chaucer a career-long “denaturalization of the masculine perspective,” which reveals the social construction of gender.³⁰⁶ In contrast, Elaine Tuttle Hansen argues that Chaucer’s works reveal his anxiety towards gender ambiguity and an attempt at “one-upmanship” vis-à-vis other male courtly writers to contain the unstable female.³⁰⁷

Medieval theological explications on free will provide a compelling model for reaching middle ground when analyzing Criseyde’s complexity within accounts of her social constraints. As noted in my first chapter, many writers balanced the seeming paradox posed by the coexistence of divine omniscience and human free will through complementary conceptions of

304. Marelj, “Philosophical *Entente*,” 208.

305. Aers, *Chaucer, Langland*, 118.

306. By the time Chaucer writes the *Canterbury Tales*, Dinshaw argues, gender has become for him “a set of assumptions, a catalog of postures”; see *Chaucer’s Sexual Poetics*, 29–30. Similarly, Mann argues that Chaucer’s works celebrate the positive potential of non-binary conceptions of gender (*Feminizing Chaucer*, esp. 144, 151).

307. Hansen, *Fictions of Gender*, esp. 177.

the atemporality of God's knowledge and of human natural inclination, an idea also prevalent in natural philosophy.³⁰⁸ To review Boethius's *Consolation*, for example, Lady Philosophy explains that as the *summum bonum*, God is "the helm or rudder by which the frame of the universe is held steady" (III.pr12.14).³⁰⁹ All creatures accordingly "surge by natural instinct towards the good," submitting not perforce but "willingly to guidance . . . acced[ing] to the will of him who orders them" (III.pr12.17).³¹⁰ Lady Philosophy further clarifies that humans can revolt against the natural inclinations through which God "governs all things . . . sweetly" (III.pr12.22), but that man's greatest freedom lies in cleaving to the immutable, motionless, and divine "highest Mind" (IV.pr6.15–17). This explanation finds common ground with writers like Augustine of Hippo, who writes that only those who "cleave to the eternal law" attain genuine "freedom" (I.15),³¹¹ and like Thomas Aquinas, who explains in his *Summa Theologiae* that natural inclination is "nothing but a kind of impression from the first mover,"³¹² through which "every

308. For more on natural philosophy and natural inclination in Chaucer works generally, see Robertson, *Nature Speaks*.

309. "hic est ueluti quidam clauus atque gubernaculum quo mundane machina stabilis . . . seruatur." English quotations are from *The Consolation of Philosophy*, ed. and trans. P. G. Walsh (Oxford, 1999); Latin quotations are from *Consolatio Philosophiae*, ed. James J. O'Donnell (Bryn Mawr, 1984).

310. "omnia . . . ad bonum naturali intentione festinent"; "uoluntaria regantur seque ad disponentis nutum ueluti conuenientia contemperatque rectori sponte conuertant."

311. Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will*, ed. and trans. Thomas Williams (Indianapolis, 1993).

312. "omnis inclinatio . . . nihil est aliud quam quaedam impressio a primo movente." English quotations are from Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, ed. and trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York, 1947), online at *Dominican House of Studies Priory of the Immaculate Conception*, <https://dhspriory.org/thomas/summa/>; Latin quotations are from *Summa Theologiae*, ed. Enrique Alarcón, online at *Corpus Thomisticum: Fundación Tomás de Aquino*, www.corpusthomisticum.org/iopera.html.

agent . . . attains to its divinely appointed end, as though of its own accord. For this reason, God is said ‘to order all things sweetly’” (I.q103.art8).³¹³

However, because natural inclination is not a deterministic mechanism but an impulse that humans must act upon through free choice, it cannot guarantee ethical action. Writers such as Aristotle, Augustine, Boethius, and Aquinas all emphasized the potentially negative weight of habits, an idea Chaucer likewise channels in the characters of Arcite and Palamon in the “Knight’s Tale,” as my previous chapter has shown, demonstrating how, as Boethius postulates, “they become prisoners through the exercise of their freedom” (V.2.10–11).³¹⁴ Duns Scotus’s theory of the split nature of the will again applies: the *affectio iustitiae* must regulate the *affectio commodi* for the will to be able to “escape the limits of its ‘natural’ inclinations,” which in and of themselves are not necessarily grounds for moral action.³¹⁵ The presence of this inclination in *Troilus*, bereft of *affectio iustitiae*, has been thoroughly demonstrated in recent scholarship on the destructive tendencies of male narcissism, although such readings do not always take

313. “omnia quae agunt vel naturaliter vel voluntarie, quasi propria sponte perveniunt in id ad quod divinitus ordinantur. Et ideo dicitur Deus omnia disponere suaviter.”

314. “inuexere sibi adiuuant seruitutem et sunt quodam modo propria libertate captivae.” See Aquinas’s discussion of habits in *Summa Theologiae*, II-1.q87.art8.rep1, and the will in II-1.q50–II-1.q53. Compare to Aristotle’s discussion of moral virtue and habit in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1103a16–1103b15, in *Aristotle’s Ethics: Writing from the Complete Works*, ed. and trans. Jonathan Barnes and Anthony Kenny (Princeton, 2014), 207–371, as well as to Augustine’s discussion of the “resistance of carnal habit” and the potential for self-circumscription (*On Free Choice*, ed. Williams, III.18–20).

315. Boler, “An Image for the Unity of Will in Duns Scotus,” 29.

theological approaches.³¹⁶ William Ockham, as noted, goes even further, denying that “everything has a natural inclination toward its own perfection.”³¹⁷

Blending Boethius’s ideal with the hesitation of later writers who began shifting from an emphasis on forms, universals, and allegory to particulars, contingents, and nominalism yields pressing questions for natural inclination—that is, how it inherently functions and its efficacy for leading individuals to moral rightness. While Aquinas compares such inclination to “the inclination of the arrow towards a fixed point” through “nothing but an impulse received from the archer” (I.q103.art8), what if the archer were not God but instead a hyper-masculine, secular society comprised of the collective force of individual pursuits of personal ends?³¹⁸ What becomes of the inclination of the “arrow” under such an anti-*summum bonum*, which governs not sweetly but often violently, bent on the atemporal reproduction of its own ideology? These, I propose, are the questions Chaucer ponders in *Troilus*—questions that inherently combine the theological with the exigency of the social in exploring Criseyde’s agency vis-à-vis her incendiary milieu.

Sociological practice theory, particularly Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus*, helps to unmask such atemporal power structures and dissect Criseyde’s trifurcation of her self-

316. Garrison, for example, argues that obsessive male pursuit of private interests is shown to be “socially and politically corrosive,” enacting “coercion and dominance” rather than pursuit of “social good” (“Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde* and the Danger of Masculine Interiority,” at 321, 326). See also Federico, “Two Troy Books”; and Espie and Star, “Reading Chaucer’s Calkas.”

317. See Delany’s analysis of Ockham (“Undoing Substantial Connection,” 50).

318. “sicut inclinatio sagittae ad signum determinatum, nihil aliud est quam quaedam impressio a sagittante.”

awareness into past, present, and future by offering a framework for analyzing an individual's agency and actions not simply as isolated phenomena but as socioculturally and historically contextualized. As Paul Strohm has argued, it enables "the analyst of actions and events to recognize the synchrony or atemporality of the structures within which they are conceived, and to reconnect these actions and events to the diachrony or temporality of their unfolding."³¹⁹ In *The Logic of Practice*, Bourdieu defines *habitus* as "durable, transposable dispositions" that individuals learn through observation of their social conditions.³²⁰ The *habitus*, he further explains, "ensures the active presence of past experiences, which, deposited into each organism in the form of schemes of perception, thought and action, tend to guarantee the 'correctness' of practices."³²¹

In this way, *habitus* can be potentially deterministic, for, Bourdieu theorizes, "decision, if decision there is, and the 'system of preferences' which underlies it, depend not only on all the previous choices of the decider but also on the conditions in which his 'choices' have been made, which include all the choices of those who have chosen for him" (49). One's *habitus*, he therefore concludes, "makes possible the free production of all the thoughts, perceptions and actions inherent in the particular conditions of its production—and only those."³²² However, a degree of individual agency, though delimited, is essential to the perpetuation of the socially-

319. Strohm, "Coronation as Legible Practice," 36. For examples of medieval character analysis through practice theory, see Fowler, *Literary Character*; Raby, "The Clerk's Tale and the Forces of Habit"; and Fewer, "The Second Nature."

320. Bourdieu, *Logic of Practice* 53.

321. Bourdieu, *Logic of Practice*, 54.

322. Bourdieu, *Logic of Practice*, 55.

conditioning milieu and its ideology, for the *habitus*, forged through “conditions of existence as much as through explicit encouragements or warnings,” is also “what makes it possible to inhabit institutions, to appropriate them practically, and so to keep them in activity.”³²³ The efficacy of this cycle, however, necessitates “the forgetting of acquisition, the illusion of innateness” of both the milieu itself and also of individuals’ conscious actions towards reproducing both it and their own position within it.³²⁴

Bourdieu’s *habitus* thus demonstrates how individual subjectivity and social conditions are intertwined. Social conditioning occurs in such a manner so as to ensure the perpetuation of the socially-conditioning milieu and its ideology, but also so as to ensure the erasure of any consciousness of such lifelong, inconspicuous acts of conditioning, so that the state of the milieu, and one’s conscious actions towards reproducing both it and one’s own position within it, seems only natural. As a result of this conditioning, an individual’s actions are “intelligible and coherent without springing from an intention of coherence and a deliberate decision; adjusted to the future without being the product of a project or a plan.”³²⁵ Applied to *Troilus and Criseyde*, Bourdieu’s *habitus* helps reveal how Criseyde simultaneously exercises real agency while unwittingly perpetuating a social milieu which delimits that same agency—not unlike the case of Arcite and Palamon in the “Knight’s Tale,” though arguably the limits put upon Criseyde, like those upon Emelye, are much greater than those on Arcite or Palamon. It furthermore works

323. Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 50 and 57. See also Fewer’s explanation of relationship between *habitus* and institutions in “The Second Nature,” 317.

324. Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 50.

325. Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 51

compellingly alongside comparative analyses of Chaucer's text and his source materials. Bourdieu characterizes *habitus* as a "present past that tends to perpetuate itself into the future" by producing "individual and collective practices . . . in accordance with the schemes generated by history."³²⁶ In Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, which Patterson has argued is marked by the "persistent presence of the past,"³²⁷ both the romance genre itself, as in the "Knight's Tale," and Criseyde's present and historical social circumstances function together as potentially conditioning factors. The atemporal nature of Criseyde's entrapment becomes evident through an analysis of her "schemes of perception, thought and action" throughout the three periods she herself delineates, taking the love affair as the dividing line: "tyme ypassed," comprised of both Criseyde's experiences at the beginning of *Troilus* and the classical past; "present tyme," the love affair comprising the bulk of Books II–IV; and "future tyme," when Criseyde is expelled from Troy and finally perceives her snare.

Trojan Tyme Ypassed: Calkas's Defection and Criseyde's *Estat*

Criseyde's personal past and the metaliterary past are interwoven from the outset of *Troilus*, as Chaucer almost immediately subverts his main source, Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato*, embarking on what B. A. Windeatt describes as "a 'trans-valuation' of his original, a shifting of perspectives."³²⁸ Many other critics have noted the substantial ways Chaucer not only translates

326. Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 54. For more on the potentially deterministic nature of Bourdieu's *habitus*, see Jenkins, "Pierre Bourdieu," esp. 90–93.

327. Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History*, 11.

328. Windeatt, "The 'Troilus' as Translation," 4.

but transmutes Boccaccio's story. Laura Howes argues that Chaucer's revisions of Criseyde's narrative are "potentially destabilizing for its original audience" and the "negative assessments that fill the tradition about her."³²⁹ Jill Mann likewise observes that Chaucer "abandons Boccaccio's moral on the fickleness of women."³³⁰

One of the ways Chaucer accomplishes these changes is through what Windeatt has observed is an added, "marked awareness of a society, a surrounding community" throughout the text.³³¹ The first action Criseyde undertakes results directly from *tyme ypassed*, precisely showcasing an increased sense of Criseyde's surrounding community pressing in, and her awareness of it. While Criseyde's family had previously commanded relative respect, Calkas's defection incurs such wrath that it shatters Criseyde's social network. So irate are the Trojan rumor mongers that they "seyden he and al his kyn at-ones / Ben worthi for to brennen, fel and bones" (I.90–1). Notably, Chaucer adds this particularly personal threat of violence to the tale. In *Il Filostrato*, the anger of the townsfolk focuses on property, Boccaccio writing that "many people could scarcely be restrained from rushing out to burn his house" (I.10).³³² While such a fire could in turn affect human life, this hardly holds up to the specific urge for familial vengeance the townsfolk in Chaucer's Troy express.

329. Howes, "Chaucer's Criseyde," 338.

330. Mann, *Feminizing Chaucer*, 18. See also McTaggart, "Shamed Guiltless," esp. 380, 387–92; and Boboc, "Criseyde's Descriptions," esp. 83.

331. Windeatt, "The 'Troilus' as Translation," 10.

332. "ne quasi per la piú gente rimase / di non andargli con fuoco alle case" (I.10). English quotations from Barney, ed., *Troilus and Criseyde*; Italian from Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, ed. Windeatt.

Criseyde perceives her social network as so dangerously destabilized that she appears before Prince Hector to beg for protection and to rescue her *estat*, a concept that, over the course of *Troilus*, will combine both her physical estate and her social position. Paradoxically, Criseyde must perform the role of what Christine Chism calls the “beautiful endangered lady” in order to escape it, weeping on her knees before Hector (I.110–12).³³³ Hector sympathetically invites Criseyde to “in joie / Dwelleth with us, whil yow good list, in Troie” and vows that “al th’ouour that men may don yow have, / As ferforth as youre fader dwelled here, / Ye shul have” (I.118–22).³³⁴ Chaucer’s Hector, however, makes a vow that Boccaccio’s does not, acknowledging the incendiary rage of the people by declaring, “youre body shal men save, / As fer as I may ought enquere or here” (I.122–23). Chaucer’s specific wording thus heightens the stake of Hector’s promise, undergirding the lingering threat of *tyme ypassed* in the present. But more than this, if we agree with David Aers’s assessment of Hector’s social position as symbolically “deific,”³³⁵ then Criseyde’s supplication demonstrates at the outset the gravity of the Trojan anti-*summum bonum*. Hector, of course, is the ultimate martial hero of the masculine war that constitutes Trojan ideology’s chief end, and, by the closing of the text, even he will accede to that end, which, as Louise O. Aranye Fradenburg has noted, so little values female life. In this scene, for example, Fradenburg notes that, ultimately, the very possibility of both Criseyde’s subjectivity and “a life free of the threat of violence” hinges upon the assent of a man in “possession of a

333. Chism, “Romance,” 57.

334. Similarly, see *Il Filostrato*, in Barney, ed., *Troilus and Criseyde*, at *Tr*, I, 13–14.

335. Aers, “Criseyde,” 181.

superior power of violence,” showing how “the power of death gives meaning to, makes possible, the life of the feminine chivalric subject.”³³⁶

For the time being, Hector’s promise appears to restabilize Criseyde’s social network. She returns home, and as time passes, “in hire hous she abood” and “Kepte hir estat, and both of yonge and olde / Ful wel biloved, and wel men of hir tolde” (I.127; 130–31). However, the text continually demonstrates the “active presence of past experiences” in Criseyde’s “schemes of perception, thought and action.”³³⁷ Chaucer semantically links Criseyde’s apprehension of the “gret rumour” (I.85) after her father’s defection, which drove her to seek Hector after she “alday herd at ere / Hire fadres shame, his falsnesse and tresoun” (I.106–7), to a more general, obsessive worry about her *estat* and the reputation that helps maintain it; this worry becomes a cornerstone of the entire text. The word *estat* and its adjectival counterpart *estatlich* appear twenty-one times throughout *Troilus*, with a remarkable two-thirds of the occurrences referring specifically to Criseyde.³³⁸ Chaucer similarly employs *name*. Excluding uses that refer literally to given names and examining only those that refer to reputation, the vast majority are about Criseyde, including narrative descriptions of her,³³⁹ her own perceptions of her reputation,³⁴⁰ and other characters’

336. ““Our owen wo to drynke,”” 604

337. Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 53, 54.

338. Of these, five are said about Criseyde by other characters or the narrator (I.130; I.287; I.884; II.219; and V.823). The rest are said by Criseyde about others (two occurrences, at IV.1667; and V.1025), or, in the majority, about herself (seven occurrences, at II.465; II.707; II.751; II.1133; II.1138; IV.1313; and IV.1536).

339. V.1095.

340. II.762; IV.1581; and V.1055.

discussions of her reputation.³⁴¹ As Anne McTaggart has noted, “Chaucer creates a palpable sense that Criseyde is under an almost constant surveillance,” and it is a surveillance that not just readers but Criseyde and other characters are highly aware of.³⁴²

The text crystalizes Criseyde’s concern for her reputation through her reaction to Pandarus’s news of Troilus’s love for her. When Pandarus explains Troilus’s lovesick state and threatens both Troilus’s and his own suicides, Criseyde reacts initially by articulating a sense of danger, crying, “A, Lord! What me is tid a sory chaunce! / For myn estat lith in a jupartie, / And ek myn emes lif is in balaunce” (II.464–66). She acknowledges the threat that Pandarus had most hoped would be effective—that he might die if she does not capitulate—but not without first reacting to the threat to her own *estat* as a respected, wealthy widow. This threat has two natures, as Aers notes: accepting Troilus’s love risks the freedom that she feels widowhood has granted her, whereas declining it could unravel the protection she has secured from Hector, Troilus’s brother.³⁴³ Furthermore, as Criseyde is well aware, widowhood requires certain behaviors, complying with social ideals such as chastity. As Josephine A. Koster explains, as a noble and well-known widow, Criseyde

must be seen as chaste, pious, and politically reliable; as a wealthy widow, she must have the protection of a male relative even if she is able to control her own finances. She must

341. See, for example, when Pandarus tells Troilus that he is wise to have chosen Criseyde to admire, “For of good name and wisdom and manere / She hath ynough” (I, 880–81). See also I.902; III.266; III.267; IV.564; and V.1686.

342. McTaggart, “Shamed Guiltless,” 381.

343. See Aers, “Criseyde,” 185.

manage her large household and control its behavior, while maintaining her place in the social circles to which her rank entitles her.³⁴⁴

Any public knowledge of an affair would risk damaging her social *estat*, and her prospective lover, a prince of Troy, is as public as a person can be. Although indeed Criseyde has become “ful wel biloved” again after her father’s betrayal, given how fearfully wrought this regained reputation is, it seems unsurprising that her reaction to Pandarus’s news of Troilus’s love is one of horror. Fittingly, when Pandarus persists, she rebukes him by exclaiming, “uncle deere, / To myn estat have more reward, I preye, / Than to his lust! What sholde I more seye?” (II.1132–34).

Classical *Tyme Ypassed*: “Whi she forshapen was”

Criseyde’s approach to love indicates that she indeed remembers *tyme ypassed* well, but Chaucer also interweaves the classical past into his text’s present action for his own readers to remember, undermining Criseyde’s belief in the efficacy of her own agency with an ominous, “*in-eched* sense of how things have developed up to the present.”³⁴⁵ References to the siege of Thebes throughout *Troilus* constitute one such instance, Lee Patterson suggesting that the “specular resemblance” between Thebes and Troy invokes a sense of “disastrous determinism” throughout the text.³⁴⁶ Even more specifically, Catherine Sanok notes that Pandarus interrupts Criseyde reading a “romaunce . . . of Thebes” (II, 100) when he comes to tell her of Troilus’s

344. Koster, “Privitee, Habitus, and Proximity,” 81. See also Nair, ““O brotel wele,”” 53–54.

345. Windeatt, ““Troilus’ as Translation,” 10; his emphasis.

346. Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History*, 98.

desire, suggesting that Criseyde's love story is "bracketed by the *Thebaid*," which is thought to be Chaucer's main classical source on Thebes.³⁴⁷ Such bracketing, Sanok further notes, is disturbing, for it "opens Chaucer's poem to the theme of women's vulnerability to martial violence" which Sanok reads within the *Thebaid* itself.³⁴⁸

Chaucer's connection of the violent siege of Thebes to the love story, however, comes even earlier. Critics have noted the dark tone Chaucer creates in his opening lines by invoking the Fury Tisiphone instead of a muse. Patterson, for example, argues that "the continual invocation of the Fates and the Furies . . . locates the story in a Theban-like context of fatal passion."³⁴⁹ Furthermore, Chaucer's choice of Furies sheds dire light on Criseyde's social setting. Tisiphone also appears in Statius's *Thebaid* after being invoked by Oedipus in Book I.³⁵⁰ Her horrifying visage is "suffused with venom," with skin that "stretches and swells with matter" (I.106–7).³⁵¹ Her toxic description presages her violent connection to Oedipus's sons and to Tydeus, one of Polynice's later allies: Eteocles will eventually kill his brother Polynices, and Tydeus will, in a battle-rage, descend to cannibalism, eating the brains of his opponents, provoked by Tisiphone herself (VIII.751–62). As critics have noted, however, Pandarus interrupts Criseyde's reading before she learns about the violent exploits of Tydeus—the father

347. Sanok, "Criseyde, Cassandre, and the *Thebaid*," 41. For more on Chaucer's sources on Thebes, see Benson, *The Riverside Chaucer*, at 1031 (Stephen A. Barney's note to lines 84, 100–108).

348. Sanok, "Criseyde, Cassandre, and the *Thebaid*," 44.

349. *Chaucer and the Subject of History*, 134.

350. For Tisiphone's Oedipal connection, see Wetherbee, *Chaucer and the Poets*, at 32–35, and Fish, "The Origin and Original Object of *Troilus and Criseyde*," 313.

351. "suffusa veneno / tenditur ac sanie gliscit cutis." English and Latin quotations are from Statius, *Thebaid*, ed. and trans. D. R. Shackleton Bailey, 48–49.

of Diomede.³⁵² The snare Criseyde perceives in Book V, doubly constituted by her exile to the Greek camp and by the necessity she eventually feels to accept Diomede's advances—as “she was allone and hadde nede / Of frendes help” (V.1026–27)—thus has decades-old, venomous roots, subtly snaking their way deep into the present of Criseyde's narrative from the opening invocation of Tisiphone to her final alignment with the son of Tydeus.

But the violence Tisiphone represents indicts more than just a few individuals. While Jeff Espie and Sarah Star have recently argued that the manipulations of men such as Calkas demonstrate that “the past is not really past because it can continue to accrete new meanings . . . in the present,” *Troilus* simultaneously evinces an even darker, deeper sense of history's grasp through its invocation of Tisiphone.³⁵³ Statius adds to the description that “In her black mouth is a fiery vapour, whereby comes long drought and distempers and famine and a common death upon the nations” (I.107–9), echoing Statius's earlier declaration that his tale will depict “cities emptied by mutual slaughter” (I.37).³⁵⁴ Furthermore, the Furies are often classically described as themselves being born of the blood of masculine violence: after Kronos castrates his own father, Uranus, drops of blood fall upon the ground, from which the Furies spring forth.³⁵⁵ Statius crafts Tisiphone as a harbinger of the systemic, destructive impulses of Theban society. Chaucer's own

352. Sanok argues that by interrupting Criseyde, Pandarus unintentionally panders on behalf of Diomede as well as Troilus (“Criseyde, Cassandre, and the *Thebaid*,” 49, 54). As Hansen notes, Criseyde thus “falls into her place in an already written text, without knowing it” (*Chaucer and the Fictions of Gender*, 164). On Pandarus's interruption, see also Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics*, 52.

353. Espie and Star, “Reading Chaucer's Calkas,” 400.

354. “igneus atro / ore vapor, quo longa sitis morbique famesque / et populis mors una venit” (48–49); “egestas alternis mortibus urbes” (42–43).

355. See Hesiod, *Theogony*, 178–85; and Apollodorus, *The Library*, I.4.

choice, in turn, to invoke Tisiphone specifically resurrects the Theban past within the present of *Troilus*, demonstrating the violence of the unnatural inclinations of men like Eteocles or Tydeus and warning of the ramifications of such behaviors when writ large into social ideology.

Chaucer's most ominous strategy for portraying the hazardous nature of Criseyde's present milieu through invocation of the past, however, is his repeated reference to the story of Procne and Philomela. In the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid describes the wedding of Procne to the Thracian Tereus as marked not by Juno's blessing but by the Furies—of whom Tisiphone, of course, is a member.³⁵⁶ The Furies attend “with torches stolen from a funeral” (VI.430), their presence marked also by the “uncanny screech-owl” atop the bridal chamber (VI.430–32), though the couple themselves seem unaware of the omens.³⁵⁷ After five years have passed, during which time Procne has borne a son, Itys, Procne sends Tereus to bring Philomela for a visit. On the way back, however, Tereus instead leads his sister-in-law into a cottage in the woods and rapes her. Philomela's violation is abject; Ovid describes her as trembling with fear like a lamb before slaughter, “torn and cast aside by a grey wolf,” and as a dove “with its own blood all smeared over its plumage” (VI.527–29).³⁵⁸ When Philomela condemns him and threatens to expose his crime, Tereus cuts off her tongue, after which he rapes her again (VI.562). As disturbing as Tereus's personal crimes are, Ovid's text makes it clear that Tereus is

356. Caitlin Quinn-Lang argues that the connection between Chaucer's invocation of Tisiphone and his references to Philomela supports the general, sorrowful tone of *Troilus's* story and “the dubious nature of temporal love in general” (“The augurye of thise fowles,” 46.

357. “Eumenides tenuere faces de funere raptas”; “profanus / incubuit bubo thalamicque in culmine sedit.” English and Latin quotations are from Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Miller.

358. “illa tremit velut agna pavens, quae saucia cani / ore excussa lupi nondum sibi tuta videtur, / utque columba suo madefactis sanguine plumis.”

prone to such rapacity through his very lineage.³⁵⁹ Ultimately, Philomela and her sister Procne have their gruesome revenge. Philomela, though she cannot speak, weaves a tapestry for her sister depicting Tereus's crimes, after which they kill Itys and serve him as dinner to Tereus. Discovering this, Tereus chases after the women, and all are soon transformed into birds: Procne into a swallow, Philomela into a nightingale, and Tereus into a hoopoe, his visage warlike.

When Chaucer references this story just before the love affair between Troilus and Criseyde is set in motion, the echo of the past ominously illuminates the present narrative. The morning that Pandarus plans to visit Criseyde and tell her about Troilus's love, his sleep is disrupted by "the swalowe Proigne," who "with a sorowful lay, / Whan morwen com, gan make hire waymentynge / Whi she forshapen was" (II.64–66). He is gradually roused by her song about "How Tereus gan forth hire suster take" (II.69), at last awakening and "Remembryng hym his errand was to doone / From Troilus, and ek his grete emprise" (II.72–73). Later in Book II Criseyde likewise receives an avian visitor that carries with it the voice of the "present past." As she rests in her chamber after Pandarus has completed the errand that Procne's song reminded him of, a nightingale appears and "Ful loude song ayein the moone shene, / Peraunter in his briddes wise a lay / Of love, that made hire herte fressh and gay" (II.920–22). Criseyde, lulled asleep by the song, proceeds to have a dream in which an eagle tears out her heart and replaces it with his own, "Of which she nought agroos, ne nothyng smerte" (II.930).

359. "sed et hunc innata libido / exstimulat, pronumque genus regionibus illis / in Venerem est: flagrat vitio gentisque suoque" (but in his case his own passionate nature pricked him on, and, besides, the men of his clime are quick to love: his own fire and his nation's burnt in him) (VI, 458–460).

Criticism has offered varying analyses of Chaucer's references to Philomela. Consistent with their analyses of Chaucer's portrayal of Criseyde's agency, Fradenburg and Hansen, for example, both critique Chaucer's use of this violent backstory as serving an ulterior, antifeminist motive.³⁶⁰ But while Fradenburg mistrusts the "intertextual haunting" effected through the Procne and Philomela references,³⁶¹ others, such as Patricia Clare Ingham and Jennifer Garrison, see Chaucer's references to the Philomela myth as "enabling for an ethical sensibility that seeks to register history's dangerous memory," indicting the "coercive nature" of the beginning of Criseyde's relationship with Troilus.³⁶² These latter arguments are particularly convincing in light of how the violent history of Thebes likewise echoes throughout Chaucer's text; both strategies combine to paint the present sociocultural milieu with the foreboding colors of the classical past, alienating readers, as Delany might say, from Trojan ideology as a whole.³⁶³

Especially important in the first passage is that Procne's song—not any song, but one specifically recounting a rape—not only awakens Pandarus but leads him to "remembe[r] his errand"—that he is meant to "bring" Criseyde to Troilus, just as Tereus was meant to bring Philomela to Procne. This ghost of the classical past clouds the picture of Pandarus's intentions;

360. Fradenburg critiques the references as diminishing real violence into a spectacle of trauma that is "talismanic for the masculine chivalric subject" ("Our owen wo to drynke," 601). Hansen argues that Chaucer's text strips Criseyde of the salvific power of storytelling wielded by Philomela in the Ovidian myth, part of a larger attempt on the male author's part to contain and control the feminine (*Chaucer and the Fictions of Gender*, esp. 157–59, 173–74).

361. Fradenburg, "Our owen wo to drynke," 600.

362. Ingham, "Chaucer's Haunted Aesthetics," 241; and Garrison, "Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*," 341 (see also 339). In contrast, Marvin Mudrick sees the passages as largely innocuous, "a screen against [characters'] anxieties" ("Chaucer's Nightingales," 90).

363. Delany, "Techniques of Alienation."

for just as Procne's song tells the story of how her husband Tereus's ultimate alignment was not to herself, or to her family, but to his own violent pleasure, Pandarus's devotion will be to serving Troilus, not to protecting his niece. The limits of his familial loyalty are well demonstrated in the final book: When Troilus discovers that Criseyde now favors Diomedes, Pandarus is quick to declare that he hates her and even wishes she were dead (V.1731–43).³⁶⁴

In the second avian episode, given that Criseyde's nightingale is male, not female, her subsequent eagle dream has been read by some as a "dream of empowerment,"³⁶⁵ by others as Criseyde "symbolically surrender[ing] her heart to love."³⁶⁶ Chaucer's consistent recursive strategies, however, make this second echo of the Philomela myth difficult to ignore, particularly given the deliberate pairing of the swallow and the nightingale. Considering these passages in conjunction with Chaucer's general deployment of history, Patterson hits closer to home by arguing that the nightingale's song "by its oblique allusion to Philomela images passion as a function only of the rapacious male and so simultaneously invokes and mutes the female fear of desire."³⁶⁷ Through Chaucer's "degendering" of the nightingale, as Garrison argues, the poet invites readers to "see the wider cultural situation itself as dangerous."³⁶⁸

364. For more on how Procne's song colors Pandarus's actions, see Garrison, "Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*," 337–39, 339n28. See also Johnson's analysis of the questionable nature of Pandarus's actions (*Practicing Literary Theory*, 101–2).

365. Ross, "Believing Cassandra," 348.

366. Johnson, *Practicing Literary Theory*, 97. More specifically, Johnson argues that "the songbird morphs into a bird of prey, showing how the gentle, affect-shifting music of the nightingale becomes a violent and powerful force for psychological change in the eagle" (98).

367. Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History*, 146.

368. Garrison, "Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*," 341.

Chaucer's narrative strategies thus make it difficult to ever read a nightingale simply as a nightingale; the bird becomes always ambiguous, always potentially troubling. The tapestry of the past undercuts the otherwise pleasant, innocuous scene of a bird's evening song, just as Philomela's tapestry destroys for Procne the façade of a happy marriage. Philomela's tale whispers from the backstage of Criseyde's love affair, an incessant reminder of the uneven power dynamics between men and women in love in the metaliterary traditions Chaucer has inherited. Any empowerment the eagle dream offers Criseyde can only be illusory: it empowers only by replacing the female's own desire with the male's, and readers must reckon with the constant, discomfiting presence of something other than Criseyde's own personal desire solely driving her contribution to the affair's progress—and later its end, when she accepts Diomedes's hand because she is in “nede / Of frendes help.” The peculiar painlessness of Criseyde's eagle dream concisely demonstrates that this usurpation of female desire can be accomplished only by anesthetizing the female to this intrusion on her innermost feelings.

Certainly, Chaucer could have written his version of Troilus and Criseyde's love affair without this invocation of the past. Tisiphone and her unnerving, transgenerational connection to violence through Thebes, through Tereus, and even through Diomedes by way of his father Tydeus, are all narrative moments absent from Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato*. Chaucer's is a grave narrative strategy. Much like the general technique of characterization that Elizabeth Fowler envisions, Chaucer takes “fragmentary details” from “old patterns of signification” in order to “evoke those patterns synecdochically” into new meaning, along the way “raising a dozen

ghosts.”³⁶⁹ Through such patterns, Chaucer sets at odds two remembrances of *tyme ypassed*: Criseyde’s personal, past experiences, which color her approach to social behavior and love, set against the classical past, hidden from her view but arranged before readers to insinuate Trojan ideology’s inheritance of a classical legacy of masculine, systemic violence—of the “schemes generated by history.”³⁷⁰

Present Tyme: “As faukoun comen out of muwe”

Just as the circumscribing omens of the classical past undercut Criseyde’s claims to have avoided potential snares prior to her exile to the Greek camp, as the narrative progresses to the *present tyme* of the love affair which she claims to also “wel ise” (V.747), textual clues reveal how the unnatural inclination of the Trojan anti-*summum bonum* encourages her to misrecognize the efficacy of her agency and her *estat*’s circumscribed sociocultural position. In particular, Criseyde’s monologues in Book II reveal the seductive qualities of her *estat*—what she believes she gets out of so fiercely protecting it. Shortly after Pandarus has shared his news about the nigh-suicidal, lovesick Troilus, Criseyde, at last alone, begins to contemplate the potential love affair. Remembering that “myn emes lif is in balaunce” (II.466), she assures herself that “natheles, with Goddes governaunce, / I shal so doon, myn honour shal I kepe, / And ek his lif” (II, 467–69), and ceases weeping. Here, Criseyde’s confidence in the efficacy of her own remedial actions matches her awareness of the ways her social rank is again in jeopardy.

369. Fowler, *Literary Character*, 70.

370. Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 54.

In the soliloquy that follows, however, she perceives herself as individualistically positioned apart from the greater community, proclaiming,

I am myn owene womman, wel at ese—
 I thank it God—as after myn estat,
 Right yong, and stonde unteyd in lusty leese,
 Withouten jalousie or swich debat (II.750–53)

Again, Criseyde shows concern predominantly for her *estat* and the autonomy she believes it grants. While *estat* primarily connotes “social position,” it likewise can refer to one’s wealth and property.³⁷¹ As Koster explains, Criseyde “resides in a *paleis*, a luxurious dwelling, with a *meyne*, an entourage, which helps to maintain her *honour*—her reputation—and her *estat*—her social status.”³⁷² For Criseyde, the two connotations of *estat* go hand in hand: she is a wealthy widow, her home a physical manifestation of her more figurative social *estat*, possession of which enhances her “ese.” “Myn estat” is thus a refuge imbued with a sense of private space—something she owns along with her sense of self—and which she imagines allows her to stand “unteyd in lusty leese.” Further defining the perceived benefits of this *estat*, she exclaims her belief in her independence: “Shal noon housbonde seyn to me ‘Chek mat!’ / For either they ben ful of jalousie, / Or maisterfull, or loven novelrie” (II.754–56). This lack of interest in marriage or, initially, even a love affair, becomes yet another symptom of her deep-rooted belief

371. *MED*, s.v. *estat* (n.), senses 9, 10a, and 21.

372. Koster, “Privitee, Habitus, and Proximity,” 80.

in her own agency as an independent woman. Her perceived *estat*-granted freedom, fundamental to her understanding of herself, frames her entire discussion.

Even as Criseyde warms to the idea of love, she never abandons her initial wariness. Rather, she trusts that, should she choose to return Troilus's love, her own exercise of caution will enable her to be both a respected widow and lover, proclaiming,

though that I *myn* herte sette at reste

Upon this knyght, that is the worthieste,

And kepe alwey *myn* honour and *myn* name,

By alle right, it may do me no shame. (II.760–63; my emphasis)

As Sashi Nair has argued, throughout this scene we see Criseyde as she “attempts to overcome the social constraints that prevent her from embodying the role of the ideal romance heroine.”³⁷³

In these lines specifically, we witness Criseyde's surety that this is possible: her consistent use of the possessive personal pronoun demonstrates her certainty that her *herte*, her *honour*, and her *name* are all *hers* to control. In this scene Chaucer portrays Criseyde as a woman who, when considering her potential love life, feels it essential to first distinguish herself and what is *hers* from any larger communal context, though she strives to find stability within that community. To her, the answers to her questions—“To what fyn lyve I thus? / Shal I nat love, in cas if that me leste?” (II.757–58)—lie in her sense of self-ownership, for if she can keep her honor and name by performing certain social roles publicly, she believes that she can determine her own private *fyn*.

373. “O brotel wele,” 41.

As McTaggart has pointed out, however, a “disjunction between telling and showing” characterizes Chaucer’s text—a disjunction that occurs even at the level of language and subjectivity.³⁷⁴ Scholars have long delighted in Chaucer’s comedic and serious manipulation of words throughout his oeuvre; Delany notes the “general syntactic ambiguity” of *Troilus* through which “the familiar becomes unfamiliar, . . . the inconspicuous word becomes conspicuous, and a conventional idea is made to yield unconventional associations.”³⁷⁵ More recently, Espie and Star have aptly noted that, through Calkas’s and Diomedes’s “two-face words,” Chaucer draws attention to how “language couches multiple meanings under the semblance of a single and repeatable signifier.”³⁷⁶ Similarly, through the specific phrasing of Criseyde’s thought process, Chaucer exposes how Criseyde is encouraged to overestimate the efficacy of her own performativity as she strives both to stabilize her social position and shield herself from a surrounding society that has in fact long before determined her *fyn*: to be dependent on the clemency of men, her free will unnaturally inclined towards the best interests of Trojan ideology.

Criseyde’s declaration that she stands “unteyd in lusty leese” wields particular power. The phrase has twofold potential: it is part of a private, spoken monologue for Criseyde, but it is also ontologically scripted by an author for an audience of readers. While “lusty leese” translates roughly as “pleasant pasture,” the individual words have their own associative power.³⁷⁷ “Lusty”

374. McTaggart, “Shamed Guiltless,” 381.

375. Delany, “Techniques of Alienation,” 497, 498. See also Johnson’s recent formalist argument that “Chaucer aestheticizes the semantic linkages among . . . words by highlighting them with alliteration” (*Practicing Literary Theory*, 75).

376. Espie and Star, “Reading Chaucer’s Calkas,” 396.

377. See the gloss in Barney, ed., *Troilus and Criseyde*, 99n4.

by itself most often modified either neutral objects or male characters, in the sense of “vigorous” or “gallant”—thus we have the “lusty knight” or the “lusty bachelor,” both common appellations in medieval romance.³⁷⁸ The word draws on the multiplicitous “inner storehouse that makes up the language of each speaker,” hinting at the masculinity of the world Criseyde inhabits.³⁷⁹ “Leese” is likewise nuanced. Despite whatever pleasant connotations the phrase might convey, such as roaming freely in a meadow, the circumscriptive connotations of the word must be taken into account—it is a *leese*, an enclosed pasture for domesticated animals under the proprietorship of an outside agent.³⁸⁰ Overall, Chaucer’s phrasing reveals how Criseyde’s positive assessment of her *estat* blinds her to the ways that the larger *lusty leese*, her male-controlled environment, in fact creates and then subsumes it. Her *estat* and social behaviors have an “illusion of innateness,” even though both have “limits . . . set by the historically and socially situated conditions of [their] production”—conditions that Chaucer, as demonstrated, paints throughout the narrative with the warnings of the classical past.³⁸¹

Chaucer’s repeated use of the word *muwe* in relation to Criseyde has a similar circumscribing effect. Before Criseyde is forced to leave Troy for the Greek camp, she assures Troilus that

378. *A Chaucer Glossary*, s.v. *lusty*. Sixteenth-century examples show a more “androgynous” use, but earlier examples, with some exceptions, are primarily in conjunction with males or objects, not women. For more on this etymology, see *OED*, s.v. *lusty* (adj.).

379. Saussure, “*Course in General Linguistics*,” 864.

380. *A Chaucer Glossary*, ed. Davis et al., s.v. *leese*.

381. Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 50 and 55.

I shal not so ben hid in muwe,
 That day by day . . .
 Ye shal ful wel al myn estat yheere.
 And er that trewe is doon, I shal ben heere
 (IV.1310–11; 1313–14)

While *muwe* most simply means a “pen (for a hawk)” or a “coop (for poultry),” in *Troilus*, it becomes laden with symbolic significance, for Chaucer has used it elsewhere in the story.³⁸² In Book III, we learn that Criseyde often appears to Troilus from her window as he passes by with his hunting retinue:

whan that he com ridyng into town,
 Ful ofte his lady from hire wyndow down,
 As fressh as faukoun comen out of muwe,
 Ful redy was hym goodly to saluwe.
 (III.1782–85)

Hunting metaphors permeate medieval romance, and in *Il Filostrato* Boccaccio likewise notes Troilus’s hunting pastime. There, however, the metaphor is rendered more traditionally: Troilus, the human hunter, pursues Criseyde, the figurative bird of prey.³⁸³

382. *A Chaucer Glossary*, ed. Davis et al., s.v. *mewe*.

383. “ed a’ suoi tempi Criseida vedendo, / si rifaceva grazioso e bello, / come falcon ch’uscisse di cappello” (when he saw Criseida at appointed times he made himself gracious and beautiful like a falcon who comes out from its hood) (III.91).

As with the unique phrasing of Criseyde's perceived independence, Chaucer's unusual inversion and particular choice of the word *muwe* wields twofold meaning. R. A. Shoaf has argued that the term *muwe* belongs to a so-called "mutability" group that characterizes the overall text. As he explains, a *muwe* is also a place where birds of prey molt and, thus, a place of change: Criseyde emerges from her *muwe* having molted her "widow's weeds," indicating paradoxically her partial "cooperation and consent" in the love affair, but also that "she is . . . the hunted."³⁸⁴ More than change, however, it is stasis that is particularly disturbing here, in light of the *muwe*'s connection to readers' remembrance of *tyme ypassed*. Like a *leese*, a *muwe* indicates a controlled, delimiting space. The slippage of both terms reinforces Criseyde's circumscription as almost inexorable, natural, even while the symbolic animalization of Criseyde as a *domesticated* animal indicates the man-made nature of this circumscription. This indictment gains further traction through its disquieting similarity to the fowlization of Philomela after she is violated by and then seeks vengeance upon not Fate, but man. As Ingham asserts, in terms of love, desire, and sexual violence throughout *Troilus*, "references from nature do not reassure."³⁸⁵ Through such references, the text reveals the "present past" perpetuating itself, oozing through the surface of the narrative action. Chaucer capitalizes on the multiplicitous power of a word to "always evoke everything that can be associated with it in one way or another"—in this case, the *muwe* and the *lusty leese* with domestication and circumscription; and the nightingale, otherwise innocuous, with the horrifying violence of the tale of Philomela.³⁸⁶

384. Shoaf, "*Troilus and Criseyde: The Falcon in the Mew*," 157 and 158.

385. Ingham, "Chaucer's Haunted Aesthetics," 239.

386. Saussure, "Introduction," 866.

Furthermore, it is not just domestication but also subversion of female desire that alarms in the *muwe* passage. As in Criseyde's earlier eagle dream, she again functions as a visual love object for Troilus, standing in service of her "hunter's" pleasure, even as she is ironically figured as a bird of prey like the ontological one that Troilus has taken from its real *muwe* to go "on haukyng" (III.1779). By inverting the love-as-hunting motif and figuring Criseyde in her own *muwe*, Chaucer makes apparent that her agency, like the actual hunting falcon's, is not entirely her own. While a hunting falcon's pursuit is the manifestation of a genuine desire for prey and yet is also controlled by her falconer, Criseyde-as-falcon's symbolic hunt is likewise seen as a real manifestation of desire (for Troilus), even as it also serves a purpose *beyond* that personal desire, brought forth and shaped by the masculine concerns of the genre and her milieu.

Consistently, then, Chaucer's semantic choices contribute ominously to the deepening of the concentric realms of society and agency within *Troilus*, while suggesting that metaphor, such as the love-as-hunting trope, cannot be interpreted through a singular, universal lens; Chaucer stretches it to demonstrate not only the particulars of this woman's specific love, in her specific social context, but its dangers and traps. For in trusting in her *estat* to protect her in her pursuit of her private desires, Criseyde unwittingly retreats further into the overarching masculine structure that has long ago enmuwed her. Unlike in Boethius's optimistic framework, which takes God as the "the helm or rudder" of the world (III.pr12.14), Criseyde, in a world helmed instead by the hyper-masculine sociocultural traditions of the classical past, acts by *un-naturali intentione*, submitting unwittingly "to the will of him who orders" her (III.pr12.17), both in the protection of her *estat* and in her decisions in love.

Future Tyme: Criseyde's Atemporal Snare

The final books profoundly demonstrate the extent of Criseyde's atemporal snare and the limits of the *unteyd*-ness she claims. When the Greeks propose a prisoner exchange, offering the Trojan Antenor and requesting Criseyde on Calkas's behalf, the turn of events recalls the earlier promises of Hector: that Criseyde may dwell in Troy as long as she desires and, furthermore, that men will protect her body. Hector does now attempt to hold to this, protesting to the eager parliament that "she nys no prisonere. / . . . / . . . / We usen here no wommen for to selle" (IV. 179–182). However, in another of Chaucer's revisions to *Il Filostrato*, it is the people of Troy who insist. Given that their primary interest lies in the success of the war, they quickly protest that there is no reason to refuse the offer:

‘Ector,’ quod they, ‘what goost may yow enspyre
 This womman thus to shilde and don us leese
 Daun Antenor—a wrong wey now ye chese—
 That is so wys and ek so bold baroun?’
 (IV.187–90)

As they further explain, indicating their rather desultory commitment to the truce that the trade will achieve,

we han nede to folk, as men may se.
 He is ek oon the grettest of this town.

O Ector, lat tho fantasies be!

. . . al oure vois is to forgon Criseyde.

(IV.191–93; 195)

It is thus decided by the people themselves. The very social network that Criseyde has struggled to maintain her *estat* within, comprised of those who had come to see her as “ful wel biloved,” suddenly ejects her from it. Just as Criseyde has unwittingly inclined to the desires of the anti-*summum bonum*, so do the people incline to its ends of war. Criseyde cannot save herself from this fate even by performing the accepted social roles of the lonely widow or the “beautiful endangered lady,”³⁸⁷ for her best service to the masculine master-narrative is now to be a “prisoner”—and the Trojans make her one themselves.

In the end, the “superior power of violence” that Fradenburg has attributed to Hector also belongs broadly to the Trojan people.³⁸⁸ While they do not now threaten “to brennen” Criseyde, “fel and bones,” their disposition still wields as much incendiary potential, as Chaucer fully reveals the underbelly of the Trojan milieu: the “atemporality of the structures” comprising the “historically and socially situated conditions” that have forged Criseyde’s social behaviors, *estat*, and subjectivity.³⁸⁹ Although Criseyde has earlier declared herself “unteyd in lusty leese,” what chance does she have at fully exercising this agency if even Hector, the ultimate martial hero of the story, is powerless to argue against the people? For her, the true nature of Criseyde’s “lusty

387. See Chism, “Romance,” 57.

388. See Fradenburg, ““Our owen wo to drynke,”” 604.

389. Strohm, “Coronation as Legible Practice,” 36; and Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 55. See also Federico’s observation that Chaucer reveals the acceptance of “trafficking of women” by Trojans (“Two Troy Books,” 165).

leese” reveals itself: for it is not simply Criseyde’s specific social circumstances or the actions of a few individuals around her which circumscribe her. Instead, the final books of *Troilus and Criseyde* suggest that the “lusty leese” is much the same as the hypermasculine social ideology which circumscribes Emelye and even Arcite and Palamon in the “Knight’s Tale.” Like the “Knight’s Tale,” then, *Troilus and Criseyde* stands not only as Chaucer’s reaction to generic romance traditions but as a theological and philosophical thought experiment wrought in literary terms, manifesting how the masculine master narrative, here depicted as a society interested first and foremost in male valor and war, overlooks the particular experiences of women. As Espie and Star observe, “preserving Criseyde at the loss of Antenor is inconsistent with communal necessity Antenor is a more valuable commodity than Criseyde because . . . he fulfills the communal demand for prudent warriors.”³⁹⁰ Chaucer thus indeed leaves Criseyde tied, as scholars like Hansen have justly critiqued.³⁹¹ But to have written Criseyde with more efficacious agency would have undercut the indictment of mythic Troy’s gender politics by misleadingly ameliorating its impact on women like Criseyde. Instead, Chaucer exposes the origin and nature of Criseyde’s ties. Through Criseyde’s consistent ennuement, the text problematizes the social realm’s constraint of female free will and the atemporal, unnatural inclination of citizens not towards a Boethian *summum bonum* but towards the perpetuation of a social ideology rife with masculine violence, the collective *affectio commodi* unmediated by an *affectio iustitiae*.

390. Espie and Star, “Reading Chaucer’s Calkas,” 389.

391. See Hansen, *Chaucer and the Fictions of Gender*, esp. 173–76.

On the weight of this evidence, it is difficult to agree with the conclusion that Chaucer designs his text to condemn Criseyde as merely an “unstable thing of this world,” Dinshaw’s critique of which still remains vital. Chaucer paints Criseyde as the product of a society whose circumscribing mechanisms he painstakingly exposes even before Criseyde’s story begins. This does not mean that Boethian readings have no place in sociological readings. Rather, when the narrator decries “payens corsed olde rites” (V.1849) and “thise wrecched worldes appetites” (V, 1851), the locus of the Boethian critical gaze must shift away from the transience of earthly love generally toward the specific, peripheral voices that Chaucer has rendered audible, warning of systemic, antifeminist social determinism—warning, that is, how a universal, formalist ideal dangerously occludes the embodied, material conditions of women. By offering transcendence to Troilus but not Criseyde, Chaucer’s text reifies the distance between them, measured not from Troy to the Greek camp but from heaven to earth, from the levity of a male “social context” that “remains unaltered”³⁹² to the burden of female social determinism that Tisiphone warns of from the opening lines of the text. While Criseyde, now an exile in the Greek camp, laments that “future tyme, er I was in the snare, / Koude I nat sen,” Chaucer’s narrative strategies have hinted at the atemporal presence of that snare all along through the ghost of past and present domestication, fowlization, and subversion of feminine desire, ensuring that his own readers see her in her true social context, as she herself cannot—as always already tied in *lusty leese*.

392. Mann, *Feminizing Chaucer*, 24.

CHAPTER FOUR:

ANTIFEMINIST CIRCUMSCRIPTION AND THE COMMON GOOD

The Common Good in *Troilus and Criseyde*

By the end of *Troilus and Criseyde*, the antifeminist circumscription which has so ensnared Criseyde has also wrought consequences for the entire community. While the fall of Troy lies outside the narrative action of Chaucer's text, the narrator hints at its imminent arrival, and the direct connection it will have to the people's prioritization of their war-time "nede to folk" (IV.191) over Criseyde's agency and to Hector's oppositional insistence that "We usen here no wommen for to selle" (IV.182). When the "noyse of peple" blazes like a fire in support of trading Criseyde for Antenor, the narrator remarks, "For infortune it wolde, for the nones, / They sholden hire confusioun desire" (IV.185–6). The line, like many others throughout the text, takes on two-fold potential in meaning. On the one hand, it explains the perspective of the "peple," who believe it would be nonsensical to reject a trade that will return to them one of their best warriors, without whom they may see their "confusioun," or "ruin."³⁹³ Essentially, the people believe that securing the return of Antenor is the mostly likely way to secure the overall stability of Troy itself. As Colin Fewer theorizes, "the coherence and stability of medieval society depended . . . on the self-conscious commitment of its individual constituents to the welfare of the polity—its 'commune profyte'—and to the customs and institutions of the

393. See Windeatt's translation in his note to line IV.186 in *A New Edition of 'The Book of Troilus.'*

polity.”³⁹⁴ In this particular case, despite Hector’s protest that Troy does not make a custom of “selling” women, as Espie and Star note, “Antenor is a more valuable commodity than Criseyde because . . . he fulfills the communal demand for prudent warriors.”³⁹⁵

On the other hand, the line “they sholden hire confusioun desire” may also function as the narrator’s direct commentary on the irony of the people’s insistence here, as Antenor would have been known to an audience of romance readers for his later betrayal of Troy when he “delivered to the Greeks the sacred relic, the Palladium,” as in Benoit’s version.³⁹⁶ Indeed, two stanzas later, after the people have declared that “al oure vois is to forgon Criseyde” (IV.195), the narrator remarks, “litel wyten [understand] folk what is to yerne [be desired], / That they ne fynde in hire desire offence; / For cloude of errour let hem to discerne / What best is” (IV.198–201). The lines unmistakably echo Arcite’s lament in the “Knight’s Tale,” when he declares, “Infinite harmes been in this mateere, / We witen nat what thing we preyen heere . . . We seken faste after felicitee, / But we goon wrong ful often, trewely” (I.1259–60; 1266–67). In the “Knight’s Tale,” Arcite had desired freedom from prison, but found “infinite harmes” upon achieving it, as he could no longer see Emelye. Likewise, in *Troilus and Criseyde*, the Trojan people desire to free Antenor under the belief that he will help them win the war against the Greeks, but the cloud of error which leads to this decision likewise leads to infinite harms, which have even more clearly communal effects than in the “Knight’s Tale.” As an “ensample” or “example” of this “cloude,” the narrator explains that “This folk desiren now deliveraunce / Of Antenor, that brought hem to

394. Fewer, “The Second Nature,” 315.

395. Espie and Star, “Reading Chaucer’s Calkas,” 389.

396. See Windeatt’s note to lines IV.202–3 in *A New Edition of ‘The Book of Troilus.’*

meschaunce, / For he was after traitour to the town / Of Troye” (IV.201–5). While perhaps the Trojan people could not have foreseen Antenor’s treason, the “cloude of errour” itself seems much like the unwitting self-circumscription of Arcite and Palamon in the “Knight’s Tale,” only now magnified onto a communal level.

Furthermore, as in the “Knight’s Tale,” *Troilus and Criseyde* demonstrates how this “cloude of errour” emerges from a broader adherence to an ideology with an “ende and conclusioun” (I.1869) aimed not toward the *summum bonum* of a benevolent deity but toward the perpetuation of masculine chivalric valour, a self-interested, man-made good disguising itself as necessary for communal order. Thus, while supposedly working toward a communal good—procuring Antenor in order to win the war—these actions ultimately destroy the communal good. The narrator draws attention, likewise, to the injustice the people do to Criseyde in this act, lamenting,

O nyce world, lo, thy discrecioun!
 Criseyde, which that nevere did hem scathe,
 Shal now no lenger in hire blisse bathe;
 But Antenor, he shal com hom to towne,
 And she shal out; thus seyden here and howne [one and all]
 (IV.198-210)

The lines demonstrate the connection between a warped common good—that is, one inclining toward man-made and ultimately violent ends instead of a divine *summum bonum*—and the circumscription of women. While Fewer argues that in medieval society the impetus for working

towards the common good lies in “precisely the fact that the welfare of the polity is the precondition for the advancement of the individual agent’s own interests,”³⁹⁷ here, Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde* dramatizes the limits of this arrangement in two ways. First, the text implies that the common good may not in fact be good for all. Criseyde’s own interests certainly cannot be said to have been advanced by this supposed advancement of the polity. More broadly, the general lack of concern for Criseyde’s agency demonstrates the ways that conceptions of the common good may exclude women, their experiences, and their desires altogether, particularly when conceived of within a society inclining toward a hyper-masculine anti-*summum bonum*. Second, Chaucer’s text also demonstrates how such antifeminist conceptions of the common good, resulting in the further callous circumscription of women, may have destructive potential for the community at large. After all, it is only through the Trojans’ willingness to participate in what Federico views as “practices of trafficking women,” or more specifically what Garrison sees as “Trojan men . . . us[ing] their private emotions to justify their often violent control and exchange of women,” that they bring such infinite harms upon themselves.³⁹⁸

Chaucer’s Commune Profit

Troilus and Criseyde, however, is not Chaucer’s only text indicating the ways that widespread practices of antifeminist circumscription negatively impact the broader community, as an example of self-circumscription writ large into social ideology. As I will demonstrate in

397. Fewer, “The Second Nature,” 315.

398. Federico, “Two Troy Books,” 166; Garrison, “Danger of Masculine Interiority,” 336.

this chapter, stories within the *Legend of Good Women* such as the “Legend of Ariadne,” the “Legend of Philomela,” and the “Legend of Phyllis” showcase the ways that masculine violence cuts women off from community and attempts to silence their voices. The legends also suggest the intergenerational quality of such violence, implying its systemic reach and ramifications. Stories within the *Canterbury Tales* likewise explore such connections between violent, male pursuit of private interest, female agency, and the common good, as in the “Wife of Bath’ Prologue” and “Tale” and the “Clerk’s Tale,” both of which also return to the issue of the female voice and the individual and communal effects of its silencing.

To most fully explore this in Chaucer’s works, it is beneficial to first examine his more general interest in studying the interplay between individuals and community, and in the notion of the common good. Sociality and the shapes communities take are most clearly important in Chaucer’s “General Prologue” of the *Canterbury Tales*, where he describes how an incredibly diverse set of pilgrims comes together to form a microcosmic community under the innkeeper. But while the pilgrims “by aventure yfalle in felaweshipe” (25-26), *communitas* with its utopian connotations takes much more than *aventure* to create—just as in the reverse, man-made actions, and not *aventure*, render harm and even unwitting self-harm in stories like the “Knight’s Tale” and *Troilus and Criseyde*.

The phrases *comune profit* or *comune good* occurs several times in Chaucer’s stories: twice in the “Clerk’s Tale,” which I will explore later in this chapter, twice in the *Parliament of*

Fowles, and once in the “Parson’s Tale.”³⁹⁹ Even in stories where the specific phrase does not occur, however, Chaucer’s repeated interest in the interplay between individual action and experience and social contexts is manifest. His interest in exploring issues of the common good generally may have had various inspirations, but his work in translating Boethius’s *Consolatio* into his own Middle English *Boece* may have been a primary source, as the phrase or close variations of it also appears three times there.⁴⁰⁰ The first usage occurs in Book I, as the prisoner Boece complains to Lady Philosophy that his imprisonment is particularly unjust because of the work he has done for the common good. He explains that during a time of famine, there was a *coemptio*, which P. G. Walsh explains is a “compulsory purchase . . . for feeding the troops,” in which grains were essentially taken from the people.⁴⁰¹ Boece calls this a “grievous and / unplitable coempcioun, that men sayen wel it / schulde gretly tormenten and endamagen al the / province of Campayne,” and explains that therefore “I took stryf ayens the / provost of the pretorie [Praetorian guard] for comune profit; / and, the kyng knowynge of it, Y overcome / it, so that the coempcioun ne was nat axid / ne took effect” (I.pr4.85–92).

The second occurrence is when Lady Philosophy agrees with what Boece has said about his service to the public: “certeynly of thy dessertes bystowed in / comune good thow hast seyde soth” (I.pr5.46–47). Later, however, in the third occurrence, Lady Philosophy warns Boece that though he claims he has only ever worked toward the “governauance over comunalites” in order

399. In the “Clerk’s Tale” at 431 and 1194; *Parliament of Fowles* at 47 and 75; “Parson’s Tale” at 772.

400. I.p4.155–60; I.p5.205–210; II.p7.530–5; IV.p3.1275–80.

401. See Walsh’s edition of the *Consolation*, note to I.pr4.12, page 119.

to ensure there is virtue in such governance (II.pr7.5–6), this itself can be a cover for indulging in vainglory—that is, for “covetise of / glorie and renoun to han wel adminystred / the comune thynges, or doon gode desertes / to profit of the comune” (II.pr7.18–21).

These passages in the original *Consolatio* and Chaucer’s translation indicate the slippery slope that is attributing anything to the common good, nestled interestingly into a text which, as previously explored, often has at its heart issues of individual free will and the often human, not divine, sources of its circumscription. As in the example of the *coemptio*, actions which the government (in this case, the Provost of the Praetorian guard) claims are undertaken for the benefit of the state (taking control of the grain supply to feed troops) may hurt the common people. Furthermore, those claiming to be working toward the common good not for personal gain but for the good of the state may yet, even unwittingly, be doing so in part to earn personal honor and prestige for their work.

Such caution in the *Consolatio* and *Boece* about the common good further corroborates a reading of *Troilus and Criseyde* such as I have offered in my previous chapter—that is, a view of Chaucer’s Boethianism as a specifically fourteenth-century, nominalist-moderated Boethianism, focusing less on mere transcendence of mortal foibles and more on the implications Boethius’s lessons on free will and personal choice have within the complexities and contingencies of the mortal, social world. That Chaucer may have detected this thread of thought within the *Consolatio* also helps to explain why he so emphasizes Antenor’s future treason in Book IV of *Troilus and Criseyde*, for like in the example in the *Consolatio*, an action supposedly taken for the common good—procuring the return of one of the Trojan’s best warriors—ultimately harms

the common people, and doubly so, for both Criseyde, immediately, and the Trojan people at large, later, suffer “infinite harmes” as a result of this decision. Once in heaven, like Troilus, being “outside and apart from a historical world,” as Lee Patterson might say,⁴⁰² one may be able to laugh at the struggles of the mortal world, but while still in it, both texts indicate, human action can have dire and communal effects, and must be held accountable.

Aristotle and the Common Good

Interestingly, in the theological works of many of the writers I considered in my first chapter in addition to Boethius, discussions of the common good often intersect with discussions of the pursuit of egoistic, private interests and its self-circumscribing effects upon the will. Aristotle, for example, writes at great length about the golden mean of personal virtue, and how aiming for this “mid-point between excess and deficiency relative to us” (*EE* 1222a6–10) leads to *eudaimonia*. Recent scholarship has pointed to Aristotle’s influence on Chaucer, Darragh Greene noting that “Chaucer refers specifically to Aristotle’s *Ethics* as the authority regarding virtue as a mean between vices in the Prologue to *LGW*, F 165-66.”⁴⁰³ Kellie Robertson furthermore notes that Chaucer’s interests in issues of the will and inclination may have owed as much or more to “the legacy of debates over Aristotelian naturalism that are more historically proximate than Boethius” to Chaucer,⁴⁰⁴ again suggesting the ways that Chaucer’s Boethianism may be a uniquely fourteenth-century Boethianism. Finally, and most importantly for this

402. Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History*, 115.

403. Greene, “Moral Obligations,” 93fn14.

404. Robertson, *Nature Speaks*, 226.

project, Carolyn Collette has recently argued that the prevalence of Aristotelian ideas in the late fourteenth century contributed to a literary and cultural moment in which the “notion of love is closely linked to heightened attention to what French termed *le bien commun* and English termed *comon profit*,” in which “love becomes a trope through which to examine right action, and charity becomes a template for creating a more just polity.”⁴⁰⁵

Aristotle’s theory of how the personal good of *eudaimonia*, achieved not through indulgence in private interests but through moderation, intersects with the common or public good in two interesting ways for the present conversation. First, Aristotle intertwines the process of attaining a virtuous character and thus *eudemonia* with processes of the state, musing, “perhaps one’s own good cannot exist with household management, nor without a form of government” (*EE* 1142a8–9). Later, he expands on these ideas by proclaiming that “we stated the end of political science to be the best end, and political science spends most of its care on making the citizens to be of a certain character, namely good and capable of noble acts,” a capability that itself enables each citizens’ pursuit of *eudaimonia* as the ultimate, common, and divine good (*NE* 1099b30).

Second, while Aristotle theorizes that “all who are not disabled as regards virtue may win it by a certain kind of learning and care” (*NE* 1099b20), he also stresses the individuality of this path. As noted in my first chapter, the mid-point, Aristotle explains, “is a state concerned with choice, lying in a mean relative to us” (*NE* 1107a1). Taking emotions like fear and pleasure, for example, he writes that “to feel them *when* you should, with *reference* to what you should,

405. Collette, *Rethinking Chaucer’s Legend of Good Women*, 1.

towards the people you should, with the end you should have, and how you should—this is what is both midway and best, and this is characteristic of virtue” (*NE* 1106b19–24, emphasis added). Of wisdom specifically, he writes, “Nor is wisdom concerned with universals only—it must also recognize the particulars; for it is concerned with action and action is concerned with particulars” (*EE* 1141b15). Thus, Aristotle’s discussion of voluntary actions; of the rooting of involuntary actions in ignorance; of habituated decision making aiming towards a golden mean between virtue and vice; and of *eudemonia*, or happiness, as both a divine and common good, all become intertwined, intimating complex connections between personal agency, sociocultural and political institutions, and conceptions of the common good.

Aristotle’s qualification that the golden mean is individual and particular, not solely constituted by universal concepts, has important implications for the role of the state in “making the citizens to be of a certain character,” which further corroborates my analyses in Chapters Two and Three. In the “Knight’s Tale,” for example, Theseus’s imposition of an allegedly divine order, as head of the state, is revealed to be a cover for the imposition of an ideology privileging the largely private interests of masculine valor through violence and the circumscription of others, including Emelye; essentially, Theseus’s idea of both virtue and of the common good concerns itself only with universals, overlooking particulars. Similarly, in *Troilus and Criseyde*, masculine, private interests are writ large into the social practice of the state, constituting the anti-*summum bonum* I have postulated in my previous chapter. The resulting concept of the common good is likewise corrupted, overlooking particulars and resulting in both an intentional

circumscription of a woman, and unintentional social self-circumscription, for Trojan society dooms itself through continued privileging of the masculine master-narrative of war.

Augustine and the Common Good

Neither Boethius nor Aristotle, however, was alone in linking issues of the individual will and inclination to issues of the common good. Augustine, for example, theorizes that earthly law should protect the common interest from private or individual interests that attempt to imitate divine law—a precise example of which lies in the “Knight’s Tale” and the ways Theseus’s personal interests of statecraft, particularly through war and rhetorical display of power, lie behind his monologues about the First Mover. For Augustine, the common good has a two-fold nature. It refers, on the one hand, to the highest good commonly available to all—to the “unchangeable truth” of God’s law, which Augustine describes as “present and reveal[ing] itself in common to all who discern what is unchangeably true, like a light that is public and yet strangely hidden” (*OFC* II.12). The wisdom which can be found in such truth, he believes, can be enjoyed by everyone “equally and in common . . . it welcomes all of its lovers without envy; it belongs to them all but is faithful to each . . . No part of it ever becomes private property to any one person; it is always wholly present to everyone” (*OFC* II.14). It is in embracing this wisdom and truth, available through grace, that individuals may obtain “the greatest and foremost goods for human beings,” while in contrast “when the will turns away from the unchangeable and common good towards its own private good, or towards external or inferior

things, it sins. It turns toward its own private good when it wants to be under its own control” (*OFC* II.19).

Augustine parallels this emphasis on sin as a private good versus grace and salvation as a common good with his ideas on the difference between eternal and temporal law, and on the ways temporal law can be most just. The best earthly society, he theorizes, is one in which “a people is well-ordered and serious-minded, and carefully watches over the common good, and everyone in it values private affairs less than the public interest” (*OFC* I.6). Such temporal law may be justly changed, he adds, if instead of continuing to protect the common good, the same people “becom[e] gradually depraved” and “come to prefer private interest to the public good” (*OFC* I.6).

Aquinas and the Common Good

Thomas Aquinas likewise links the self-circumscription that pursuit of sin renders with issues of the wider common good. The natural inclination towards happiness in the divine that God endows his creatures with in the first place, Aquinas writes, is like the right behavior of one who “presides over the community,” to whom “belongs the directing of his subjects to the common weal” (*ST* I.q105.art4). The metaphor is informative in two ways. On the one hand, it reinforces again how Aquinas has rendered the Aristotelian pursuit of *eudaimonia* as the ultimate common good and end into a Christian framework, in which God himself is the ultimate common good and end towards which all beings incline. On the other hand, it also reveals Aquinas’s attitude towards earthly laws. Clifford Kossel explains that in sections of the *Summa*

Theologiae where Aquinas writes specifically about earthly laws, his views on the justness of a law depend on how closely it mimics divine law. For Aquinas, he explains, “laws are just by reason of their end, serving the common good and not private gain . . . and by reason of its form, when it distributes the burdens of society on its subjects with proportional equality in relation to the common good.”⁴⁰⁶

In such an ideal society, Aquinas believes, neighbors aid one another in shunning sin and pursuing divine happiness. As he theorizes, “in order that man may do well, whether in the works of the active life, or in those of the contemplative life, he needs the fellowship of friends” (*ST II-1.q4.art8*). Thus, while sin and vice draw an individual away from God towards thinking about his or her own individual desires, cleaving to divine law and pursuing good naturally draws one towards a community of likeminded believers, whose virtues mutually enhance each other. As David Gallagher summarizes of Aquinas’s beliefs, “the will’s natural inclination to beatitude does not lock a person inside himself; rather, it draws him out of himself and into the possession of a larger good, which, through the love of friendship, has become his own.”⁴⁰⁷ Likewise, Bonnie Kent notes argues that Aquinas believes that “God Himself made human beings social (political) animals, inclined by their very nature to seek happiness in the company of others of their kind,” paralleling his conception of heaven as a community.”⁴⁰⁸

406. Kossel, “Natural Law and Human Law,” 181.

407. Gallagher, “The Will and Its Acts,” 85.

408. Kent, “Habits and Virtues,” 126.

Cicero and the Common Good

In addition to such theological and philosophical writings as sources for Chaucer's interest in the intersections of free will and the common good, Chaucer's works also attest to his interest in Cicero's "The Dream of Scipio," which he cites in the "Nun's Priest's Tale," the *Book of the Duchess*, the *Parliament of Fowls* (where an extensive summary appears), and the *House of Fame*; he also refers to "Marcus Tullius Scithero" in the "Franklin's Tale" and in *Melibee* alone, citations of Cicero (typically referred to there as "Tullius") total 18.⁴⁰⁹ William Stahl argues that in addition to *Scipio* itself, Chaucer likely knew of at least some of Macrobius's *Commentary*, whom he names in the "Nun's Priest's Tale," the *Parliament of Fowls*, and the *Book of the Duchess*.⁴¹⁰

In Cicero's dream-narrative Scipio sees his grandfather, Africanus, who explains, "all those who have saved, aided, or enlarged the commonwealth have a definite place marked off in the heavens where they may enjoy a blessed existence forever" (III.1). As he further describes, the most pleasing thing on earth to God is "the establishment of associations and federations of men bound together by principles of justice, which are called commonwealths" (III.1). Because this so pleases God, Africanus later explains, protecting the commonwealth while on earth will lead to the reward of a divine, eternal community after death. Africanus recommends that Scipio "cherish justice and your obligations to duty" particularly "in matters concerning the commonwealth" explicitly because "this sort of life is your passport into the sky, to a union with

409. NPT VII.3123–26; BoD 284–288; PoF 29–84; HoF 514; FT V.722; Mel. 1381–82 (for example).

410. Stahl, "Introduction," 53. NPT VII.3123; PoF 111; BoD 284.

those who have finished their lives on earth and who, upon being released from their bodies, inhabit that place at which you are now looking” (III.5–6). Africanus opposes this serving of the commonwealth with the pursuit of private interests, much like the other writers considered above. He cautions that “the souls of those who have surrendered themselves to bodily pleasures, becoming their slaves, and who in response to sensual passions have flouted the laws of god 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” (IX.2).

Importantly, Africanus is also careful to explain that this work is not about finding “reward in human things” (VII.5) but only about the good of the commonwealth and the securing of the most blissful afterlife, an idea similar to the warning in Boethius’s *Consolatio* that one ought to work for the commonwealth for its own sake and not in attempt to win personal glory or thanks for doing so. Also echoing Aristotelian ideas of habit, Cicero’s text clarifies that Scipio will be able to do this successfully because of the example of his ancestors. Replying to his grandfather Africanus, Scipio pledges, “though I have walked in your steps and those of my father from boyhood and have never forsaken your brilliant example, I shall now strive much more zealously, with the promise of such a reward before me” (VIII.1). In his commentary, Marcobius expands these lesson significantly to discuss “the blessedness which is reserved for the protectors of commonwealths” (VIII.2), for whom necessarily virtues include “prudence,” “temperance,” “courage,” and “justice” (VIII.4), taking “commonwealth” itself to mean “men bound together by principles of justice” (VIII.13).

The Legend of Good Women

Such concepts of a commonwealth built upon principles of “temperance” and “justice” are explored in many of Chaucer’s works with varying degrees of directness, but Chaucer’s *Legend of Good Women* intriguingly interweaves such concerns with a continued dramatization of antifeminist circumscription and its individual and communal negative effects. The *Legend of Good Women* has experienced a more mixed reception than many of Chaucer’s works. M. C. E. Shaner and A. S. G. Edwards, editors of the *Legend* in the *Riverside Chaucer*, summarize the critical debates surrounding the text as centering upon whether or not the *Legend* is largely satirical, and whether, as has often been charged, it is “in fact a bad and boring work with occasional flashes of lyric beauty,” or if it is “an important and fine example of Chaucer’s literary skills.”⁴¹¹ The individual legends have far less detail than one finds in many of Chaucer’s other works; Cathy Hume, for example, argues that the *Legend* women feel quite flat, “especially in comparison to a heroine like Criseyde whose psychological processes and scruples are represented in detail.”⁴¹² In addition, some critics see the *Legend* as incomplete, and that “the legends themselves are so boring that Chaucer wearied of his task and finally broke away from it.”⁴¹³

Shaner and Edwards note, however, that as of 1987, when the third and more recent edition of the *Riverside Chaucer* was published, the *Legend* had begun to receive more favorable

411. Shaner and Edwards, *Riverside* 1059, introductory note to the *Legend of Good Women*.

412. Hume, *Love and Marriage*, 205.

413. Shaner and Edwards, *Riverside* 1059, introductory note to the *Legend of Good Women*.

critical attention.⁴¹⁴ This critical turn has continued in recent scholarship as well. Scholars remain divided as to whether or not the *Legend* is satirical, but they have more recently tended to view it as a cohesive whole with a deliberate rhetorical purpose. Hume, for example, argues that when compared to medieval advice literature, the individual legends have an overall comedic effect, arguing that “the humour of the *Legend* lies in finding its Classical heroines conspicuously lacking in relation to late medieval behavioural norms and ideals.”⁴¹⁵ Hume concludes that “the extremes of their behavior and the repetition of their follies work to comic effect,”⁴¹⁶ but concedes that the final tale, the “Legend of Hypermnestra,” flips the emotional tone of the previous tales, for in this story the heroine’s “adherence to conventional morality, obedience and wisdom avail her nothing.”⁴¹⁷ Thus, Hume concludes, “the final Legend raises further questions about whether the ideals presented in advice literature are actually an effective guide to achieving worldly happiness, and leaves us poised between laughter, sorrow and outrage.”⁴¹⁸

Carolyn Collette in particular views the *Legend of Good Women* as a cohesive whole. In her recent monograph *Rethinking Chaucer’s Legend of Good Women*, she sees the text as written within “a moment when the world of courtly literature embraced early humanist interests in ethics and social praxis.”⁴¹⁹ She argues that repeatedly, the individual legends “celebrate

414. Shaner and Edwards, *Riverside* 1059–60, introductory note to the *Legend of Good Women*.

415. Hume, *Love and Marriage*, 181.

416. Hume, *Love and Marriage*, 205.

417. Hume, *Love and Marriage*, 206.

418. Hume, *Love and Marriage*, 207.

419. Collette, *Rethinking*, 3.

women's patience, generosity and fidelity through a contrast with male impatience, rapacity and betrayal. The seeming contrast between attitudes suggests an opposition, but in fact the stories are centered in . . . *extreme* behavior on both sides."⁴²⁰ Throughout, Collette adds, Chaucer "interweaves moments that focus on the desirability of moderation, the virtue of the mean and the idea that balance and equalization are ideals worth struggling to achieve, for in their absence lives, loves, families, kingdoms fall apart."⁴²¹

Like Hume and Collette, I likewise read the *Legend of Good Women* as working toward a unified rhetorical purpose, one which aligns with that of the other Chaucerian texts already discussed in this dissertation. In particular, the *Legend of Good Women*, like the "Knight's Tale" and *Troilus and Criseyde*, considers antifeminist circumscription and the ways women's ability to seek life in an idealized commonwealth is disrupted by male privileging of personal desire over social and communal obligations—a privileging that the legends imply is systemic, and sometimes violent. The *Legend* begins with the narrator urging his readers to trust in the authority of books to convey truths that we personally may not witness: "God wot a thyng is nevere the lesse so," he declares, "Thow every wyght ne may it nat yse" (*LGW* G, 14–15).⁴²² Books, in essence, allow readers themselves to experience the experiences of others; without them, the narrator argues, "yloren [lost] were of remembrance the keye. / Wel oughte us thane on

420. Collette, *Rethinking*, 94.

421. Collette, *Rethinking*, 95.

422. I have taken quotations primarily from the G prologue and not the F unless otherwise indicated, in accordance with Shaner and Edwards' belief that "the arguments for the priority of F . . . have prevailed," making G the revised versions (*Riverside* 1060, note to prologue).

olde bokes leve, / There as there is non other assay by preve” (*LGW G*, 26–28). The point is evidently important enough that it deserves repeating; some lines later, he states his purpose similarly:

wherefore that I spak, to yeve credence
 To bokes olde and don hem reverence,
 Is for men shulde autoritees beleve,
 There as there lyth non other assay by preve.
 For myn entent is, or I fro yow fare,
 The naked text in English to declare
 Of many a story, or elles of many a geste,
 As autours seyn; leveth hem if yow leste.
 (*LGW G*, 81–88).

The “bokes olde” to which he does “reverence” here, however, are not just any books, but classical accounts of famous women, found in works like Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. The narrator explains that he was charged with writing the *Legends* in a dream vision. One spring, he says, he dreamt that the god of Love and Alceste, mythological Queen of Thrace, appeared to him. The god of Love declares the narrator to be his foe, charging that

Of myne olde servauntes thow mysseyest [slander]
 And hynderest hem with thy translacyoun,
 And lettest folk from hire devocyoun
 To serve me, and holdest it folye

To truste on me.

(*LGW G*, 249–253)

The god of Love cites as evidence that he “hast translated the Romauns of the Rose,” and “mad in Englysh ek the bok / How that Crisseyde Troylus forsook, / In shewynge how that wemen han don mis [wrong]” (*LGW G*, 255; 264–66). Chaucer ought, the god continues, tell about the “goodnesse / Of wemen,” for “it is pite for to rede, and routhe, / The wo that they endure for here trouthe” (*LGW G*, 286–87). Lee Patterson sees in the god of Love a similarity to Richard II, arguing that the work “registers Chaucer’s desire to escape from subjection to a court, and to aristocratic values generally, that are felt as increasingly tyrannical,” a parallel between literary work and real life that Dinshaw likewise suggests.⁴²³ In his accusations, Patterson argues, the god of Love as “patron” “seeks to govern both the production and the reception of the text, insisting that it signify a monolithic, self-identical meaning, that it rehearse and celebrate but never analyze much less criticize court values.”⁴²⁴ In this sense, then, the god of Love’s monolithic—or, one might say, universal—conception of how poetry and romance *ought* to be bears similarity to the universal narrative Theseus attempts to impose in the “Knight’s Tale” in the name of earthly and divine order—a universal narrative that seems to provide closure but which occludes its dependency on the suffering and circumscription of others, particularly women. Similarly, here, the god of Love seems disturbed by the actions of Criseyde in *Troilus and Criseyde*, assuming that Chaucer has simply depicted her as a bad woman without

423. Patterson, *Subject of History*, 237; Dinshaw, *Chaucer’s Sexual Poetics*, 67.

424. Patterson, *Subject of History*, 59.

recognition of the way that *Troilus and Criseyde* depicts the social conditions constraining Criseyde's actions and the systemic sources of the alleged "badness" of her behavior, which contrasts with the "goodnesse of women" that the god wants to see.

Against the god of Love's charges, Alceste comes to the fictive-Chaucer's defense. She declares that perhaps the charges that the god of Love has heard against Chaucer are false, reminding him that "in youre court is many a losengeour [flatterer], / And many a queynte totelere accusour [crafty tatling slanderer]" (*LGW G*, 328–29). She also, in a moment of self-deprecating humor on the real Chaucer's part, suggests that perhaps the narrator is simply "nyce," or foolish, and "may translate a thyng in no malyce, / But for he useth bokes for to make, / And taketh non hed of what matere he take" (*LGW G*, 340–43), and thus wrote *Troilus and Criseyde* without the ill will that the god of Love reads in it. Alceste's defense, however, does not stop there. She in turn critiques the god of Love himself for being quick to anger, positing that a deity ought to be "rightful, and ek emercyable. / He shal nat rightfully his yre wreke / Or he have herd the tother partye speke" (*LGW G*, 323–25). Alceste goes on to explain that this applies not only to gods but to kings, arguing that

This shulde a ryghtwys lord han in his thought,
 And not ben lyk tyraunts of Lumbardye,
 That usen wilfulhed and tyrannye.
 For he that kyng or lord is naturel,
 Hym oughte nat be tyraunt and crewel
 (*LGW G*, 353–57).

Alceste goes further than to declare that a deity, or a king, should not be cruel; he should actively “shewen his peple pleyn benygnete, / And wel to heren here excusacyouns, / And here compleyntes and petyciouns,” citing that “this is the sentence of the Philosophre,” referring to Aristotle (*LGW G*, 361–63; 365). It is “right and skylful,” she asserts, that a king’s lords “be / Enhaused and honoured,” and so too, she adds, “shal he don both to pore and ryche, / Al be that her estat be nat alyche, / And han of pore folk compassioun” (*LGW G*, 371–76).

Alceste, after this seeming digression, returns to her main point, that Chaucer ought to be given a chance to defend himself, and promises that

he shal maken, as ye wol devyse,
 Of women trewe in lovyng al here lyve,
 Whereso ye wol, of mayden or of wyve,
 And fortheren yow as mucche as he mysseyde
 Or in the Rose or elles in Crisseyde

(*LGW G*, 426–431)

To this, the fictive Chaucer agrees, adding that in the *Romance of the Rose* and in *Troilus*, “God wot, it was myn entente / To forthere trouthe in love and it cheryce, / And to be war fro falsnesse and fro vice / By swich ensauple” (*LGW G*, 461–64).

The charge given to Chaucer, to tell stories of faithful women so as to further the cause of the god of Love, is thus strangely interwoven with Alceste’s directives on how a good ruler ought to behave, so as to lift up his lords and more generally show the people “benygnete” and “compassioun.” The comments on good rulership and on warning by ensample have more to do

with the content of the individual *Legends* themselves than may first appear, a continuity further enforced through a less direct echo to *Troilus* at the very beginning of the dream. His dream begins in a spring meadow, its individual parts personified and rejoicing at renewal after the end of winter. The pastoral passage celebrates the arrival of spring much like the opening lines of the *Canterbury Tales* do. The narrative then shifts, however, to an echo of *Troilus and Criseyde*, perhaps uncoincidentally so, for while Shaner and Edwards note that the dating of the entirety of the *Legends* is not certain, the prologue at least was written sometime after *Troilus*, given the narrator's direct address of the work.⁴²⁵ Within the meadow, the narrator sees "smale foules, of the seson fayn, / That from the panter [bird snare] and the net ben skaped [escaped]" (*LGW G*, 118–119). The birds, he observes,

Upon the foulere, that hem made awhaped [stunned]
 in wynter, and distroyed hadde hire brod,
 In his dispit hem thoughte it dide hem good
 To synge of hym, and in here song despise
 The foule cherl that for his coveytyse
 Hadde hem betrayed with his sophistrye [trickery].
 (*LGW G*, 120–125)

425. Shaner and Edwards, *Riverside* 1059, introductory note. Shaner and Edwards explain that "It is generally agreed that lines 496–97 in Prologue F refer to Queen Anne and that this prologue must therefore have been written sometime after her arrival in England in early 1382 and before her death on 7 June 1394" (*Riverside* 1060, note to *Legend* prologue). Stephen A. Barney notes that *Troilus* "was completed before March, 1388," and that "a date of composition 1382–85 seems likely" (*Riverside* 1020, introductory note to *Troilus and Criseyde*).

The song they sing is short and simple: “The foulere we deyfe, / And al his craft” (*LGW* G, 126–127). The odd episode appears in Prologues F and G alike. On the one hand, it is part of a larger passage in which various natural creatures are personified as coming alive after winter. Before this, for example, the narrator speaks of how

forgeten hadde the erthe his pore estat
 Of wynter, that hym naked made and mat,
 And with his swerd of cold so sore greved;
 Now hath th’atempre sonne all that releved,
 That naked was, and clad him new agayn
 (*LGW* F 125–129).

On the other hand, the passage about the “awhaped” birds uncannily looks backward to the fowlization of Criseyde, as the *Troilus* frequently depicts her circumscription in avian terms. More specifically, it semantically recalls the references in *Troilus* to the myth of Philomela. In doing so also looks forward to the “Legend of Philomela” that Chaucer will specifically tell later on in the *Legends*, as I explore more fully below, for there Philomela is described as “awhaped” in the moments before her rape, as she begins to suspect Tereus’s malicious intentions (*LGW* 2321). Here, in the Prologue, the passage about the singing, “smale foules” most specifically recalls the ways that in *Troilus*, the “swalowe Proigne” appears to Pandarus, waking him from sleep on the morning he begins to woo Criseyde on behalf of Troilus with a song about “how Tereus gan forth hire suster take” (*TC* II.64; 69). In these lines in *Troilus*, a bird sings a song just

like that which the birds sing in the *Legend* Prologue, despising the “foule cherl” who for “coveytyse / Hadde hem betrayed with his sophistrye” (*LGW* G, 124–25).

In the “Legend of Philomela” itself, however, the emphasis is on loss of female voice, and loss of community. In a moment of Boethian theodicy,⁴²⁶ the narrator opens by addressing God, “yevere of the formes,” and asks

Whi sufferest thow that Tereus was bore,
 That is in love so fals and so forswore [perjured],
 That fro this world up to the firste hevenc
 Corrempeth [corrupts] whan that folk his name nevene [name]?
 (*LGW* 2228; 2234–37)

The narrator explains that so terrible are Tereus’s crimes that his corruption persists into the present day, their emotional toll almost poisonous: “so grisely was his dede / whan that I his foule storye rede,” he bemoans,

Myne eyen wexe foule and sore also.
 Yit last the venym of so longe ago,
 That it enfecteth hym that wol beholde
 The storye of Tereus
 (*LGW* 2238–43)

426. As Smith explains, “If every form in the world is a divine gift . . . then what do we make of the existence of Tereus’s repugnant actions – are they a gifted, and predetermined, form, too?” (“Destroyer of Forms,” 143).

The narrator then suggests that Tereus's cruelty stems from his lineage, pointing out that Tereus was "kyn to Marte, / The crewel god that stant with bloody darte" (*LGW* 2244–45), an association similar to that between Theseus and Mars in the "Knight's Tale," though in this story, Tereus stands not as a figurehead of a system which enacts violence and the circumscription of women, as Theseus does there, but as the direct enactor of such violence.

The tale itself largely follows that found in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, as outlined in my previous chapter. Like Ovid, Chaucer writes that Juno and Hymen are absent from the wedding of Tereus and Progne (*LGW* 2249–50), and present instead are the ominous Furies and the shrieking owl, who "prophete is of wo and of myschaunce" (*LGW* 2254). Some years after their marriage, as in Ovid, Progne asks to see her sister, and Theseus sets off to Progne's homeland to bring Philomela back. As soon as he sees Philomela, however, Tereus privileges his private desires over any obligation as a husband to Progne. Instead, negotiating with Philomela's father Pandion over the trip, Tereus "caste his fyry herte upon hyre so / That he wol have hir, how so that it go" (*LGW* 2292–93).

Once Tereus has brought Philomela ashore back in Thrace, he utterly violates both his familial obligations and those of a just ruler, according to the terms set out in the prologue to the *Legend*. While Alceste urges there that a lord should "not ben lyk tyraunts of Lumbardye / That usen wilfulhed and tyrannye," that he "oughte nat be tyraunt and crewel" (*LGW* G, 354–57), here he embodies precisely those characteristics. He leads Progne to a cave, where "yif hir leste, / Or leste nat, he bad hire for to reste" (*LGW* 2312–13). Instantly, Philomela sees through his pretense, and "hire herte agros [trembled]" (*LGW* 2314). The description of Philomela's

emotional reaction bears close similarity to that in the *Metamorphoses*, though in Chaucer's *Legend* it forms part of her dread at what she now realizes is about to come, the rape, while in Ovid it is during the rape itself. In the *Legend*, realizing Tereus's intentions, Philomela

wepte tenderly
 And quok for fere, pale and pitously,
 Ryght as the lamb that of the wolf is biten;
 Or as the culver [dove] that of the egle is smiten,
 And is out of his clawes forth escaped,
 Yit it is afered and awhaped,
 Lest it be hent eft-sones [again]; so sat she.

(*LGW* 2316–2322)

The language parallels the Prologue's language, where the small spring fowls sing in despite of the "foulere, that hem made awhaped" (*LGW* G, 120), just a few lines after the narrator recommends that we look to "bokes olde and don hem reverence," for "men shulde autoritees beleve" when they cannot "preve" or prove a case, or experience, by any "other assay" (*LGW* G, 82–84). Here, Chaucer's resulting "naked text in English" declares Tereus to be a "traytour" who "hath reft hire of hire mayden-hede, / Mauge hire hed, / by strengthe and by his might" (*LGW* 2324–26). The narrator, echoing the condemnation of the infinite and circumscriptive harms wrought not by divine powers or predestination but by man in the Chaucerian texts previously explored, decries, "Lo! Here a dede of men, and that a ryght!" (*LGW* 2327). When Philomela

cries out to her sister and father “with ful loud a stevene [voice],” Tereus “with his swerd hire tonge of [off] kerveth” (*LGW* 2328; 2334).

In addition to the clear and brutal crimes Tereus commits against Philomela personally, Tereus also breaks his bonds as a king. While Alceste in the prologue delineates that a king should “shewen his peple pleyn benygnete” (*LGW* G, 361) and make his people “enhaused and honoured” whether “pore” or “ryche” (*LGW* G, 372; 374), Tereus instead brings Philomela to the shores of his country and immediately commits atrocities against her. Unlike Ovid’s text, Chaucer’s text does not go on to detail the bloody revenge Philomela and Progne eventually enact upon Tereus. Instead, Progne, having received from her sister a tapestry depicting Tereus’s crimes, falls speechless, much like her sister, and “no word she spak, for sorwe and ek rage, / But feynede . . . to go on pilgrimage” (*LGW* 2375–75). She meets Philomela where she is kept alone in a castle, having been imprisoned there by Tereus after her rape for “his usage and his store” (*LGW* 2337), an act which, Carolyn Collette argues, “reduce[s] her to the level of a commodity which he has appropriated and taken possession of.”⁴²⁷ Circumventing the gruesome filicide and metamorphoses in Ovid’s text, Chaucer’s *Legend* leaves the sisters alone, remarking,

Allas! The wo, the compleynt, and the mone
 That Progne upon hire doumbe syster maketh!
 In armes everych of hem other taketh,
 And thus I late hem in here sorwe dwelle.
 (*LGW* 2379–82)

427. Collette, *Rethinking*, 111.

He then declares that “the remenaunt,” presumably the revenge as found in the *Metamorphoses*, is “no charge for to telle” (*LGW* 2383–84). Instead, he concludes, “this is al and some: thus was she served, / That nevere harm agilte ne deserved / Unto this crewel man” (*LGW* 2384–86).

Elaine Tuttle Hansen argues of the Philomela myth’s appearance in *Troilus and Criseyde* that Chaucer’s text strips Criseyde of the salvific power of story-telling wielded by Philomela in the Ovidian myth, part of a larger attempt on the male author’s part to contain and control the feminine.⁴²⁸ Although Hansen does not address the change Chaucer makes to Ovid’s myth in the *Legend* specifically, one can imagine she might offer a similar charge. And yet, the elision of Progne and Philomela’s violent revenge from the story perhaps serves a similar purpose as the elision of the Amazonian background from Chaucer’s “Knight’s Tale.” The omission of female violence may be read as the elision of “images of valiant, brave, and impressive fighting women,” as Ingham argues of the “Knight’s Tale,”⁴²⁹ but in “Philomela,” as in the “Knight’s Tale,” it also allows the indictment of violence to fall more squarely on masculine shoulders.

Similarly, D. Vance Smith argues that on the one hand, in eliding the sisters’ revenge, Chaucer “silences the most eloquent assertion of feminine power in the poem: the destruction of Tereus’s dynastic legacy,” the poem’s ending appears to be an instance of “ongoing indifference of masculine violence.”⁴³⁰ But on the other hand, Smith adds, Chaucer, like Ovid, also “make[s] it a story about how stories keep going after silence. It is a story about how form is the failure of form”—that is, the form betrays the very infallible image it attempts to represent. Chaucer raises

428. Hansen, *Fictions of Gender*, esp. 157–159 and 173–174.

429. Ingham, “Homosexuality,” 29

430. Smith, “Destroyer of Forms,” 143; 144.

the issue of forms from the first line of the story in a narrative address to God as “Thow yevere of the formes” (*LGW* 2228).⁴³¹ Comparing Tereus to Jason in the “Legend of Hypsipyle and Medea,” Smith argues that Chaucer presents Jason as “a singularity that destroys the universality of an analogy that has stood for centuries.”⁴³² It is through the portrayal of the rapacious desires of men like Tereus and Jason, Smith concludes, that the *Legend of Good Women*

imagine[s] a world where it is men who betray the formal perfection of things. Not only is their betrayal romantic and familial, but also cosmological: the universe might be shaped according to a principle of formal perfection . . . , but it is men who paradoxically betray their nature as form, and who become subject to the very forms that they once represented.⁴³³

While Smith refers largely to form in the literary sense, as in a formalist approach to analysis, his arguments work compellingly with a literary-nominalist reading of Chaucer’s work, which in turn links the *Legend of Good Women* thematically to Chaucer’s larger oeuvre. Collette, also seeing this link, compares the warning at the end of “Philomela” to the sympathy in *Troilus* given to “wommen that bitraised be / Thorugh false folk” and the warning to therefore “Beth war of men” (*TC* V.1780–81; 1785). She argues that “The *Legend* follows the *Troilus* not as a contrast, but as an extension of themes, tropes and ideas laid out” in *Troilus*, particularly in examining how “exchanges are not honored, covenants broken.”⁴³⁴ In addition, the *Legend* refers

431. Smith, “Destroyer of Forms,” 145.

432. Smith, “Destroyer of Forms,” 153.

433. Smith, “Destroyer of Forms,” 154.

434. Collette, *Rethinking*, 114.

to the theological and philosophical concept of universal forms, but like the “Knight’s Tale” and *Troilus and Criseyde* in particular, it considers them skeptically at best, for Tereus, as Smith points out, poses a theodical challenge: “what do we make of the existence of Tereus’s repugnant actions—are they a gifted, a predetermined, form, too?”⁴³⁵ It must, indeed be “a dede of men, and that a ryght!” (*LGW* 2327), not solely a deed predetermined by a benevolent deity. Such deeds, the text further indicates, fracture community. Progne and Philomela escape Tereus’s clutches only at the cost of apparent exile—and only after systemic male violence, embodied by Tereus, a cruel tyrant instead of a just ruler, has rendered them speechless.

Chaucer’s “naked text in English” thus declares that it is “no charge” to tell of the sisters’ revenge because the main purpose, fitting with the larger theme of the *Legend* as a whole, is to indict male violence against women who “nevere harm agilte ne deserved” (*LGW* 2385), and the ways that this excludes women from community, and even silences them. The conclusion of “Philomela” thus warns readers to “be war of men,” any man, apparently, even if “he wol nat, for shame, / Don as Tereus,” for “Ful lytel while shal ye trewe hym have— / That wol I seyn, al were he now my brother” (*LGW* 2388–92). This didactic purpose extends to the other legends as well, suggesting the systemic nature of such circumscriptive, antifeminist behaviors. The “Legend of Ariadne,” for example, details how Theseus, “untrouthe of love” (*LGW* 1890), defeats the Minotaur in Crete through Ariadne’s help but then abandons her, eloping instead “as a traytour” with her sister (*LGW* 2174). Theseus’s actions are not figured in this particular story as rape, but the “Legend of Ariadne” nonetheless looks forward to Tereus’s betrayal of one sister

435. Smith, “Destroyer of Forms,” 143.

for another in “Philomela,” the legend which comes after it in the collection, and to a similar betrayal in the “Legend of Phyllis,” which in turn follows “Philomela”—and which concerns Theseus’s son, Demophon.

“Phyllis” begins with the declaration that “wiked fruit cometh of a wiked tre,” the narrator explaining that he will tell “of false Demophon. / In love a falser herde I nevere non, / But if it were his fader Theseus” (*LGW* 2395; 2398–2400). Sailing to Athens after the destruction of Troy, Demophon is shipwrecked and lands upon “a lond . . . whereof that Phillis lady was and queene,” and soon after goes “unto the court to seken for socour” (*LGW* 2423–24; 2440). Foreshadowing the betrayal to come, the narrator at this point pauses to describe Demophon, explaining that “of Athenes duk and lord was he, / As Theseus his fader hadde be,” and that he is “lyk his fader of face and of stature,” but also in that he is “fals of love; it com hym of nature” (*LGW* 2447). Phillis is taken with Demophon and “his port and his manere,” but the narrator warns that “Ye han wel herd of Theseus devyse / In the betraysynge of fayre Adryane” (*LGW* 2453; 2459–60). Indeed, he confirms, “ryght so Demophon / The same wey, the same path hath gone, / That dide his false fader Theseus,” for Demophon vows to marry Phillis, who believes him, and “doth with Phillis what so that hym leste,” but then betrays her (*LGW* 2462–64; 2469). Vowing to return in a month with “hire weddyng aparayle,” Demophon sails home, but never returns; “fals in love was he,” the narrator declares, “ryght as his syre” (*LGW* 2473; 2492). Phyllis, heartbroken, hangs herself, but not before writing a letter to him, in which she twice compares Demophon to his father, lamenting that “to moche trusted I, wel may I pleyne, / Upon

youre lynage and youre fayre tonge,” and that “ye ben lyk youre fader as in this, / For he begiled Adriane, ywis . . . / Thow folwest hym, certayn, and art his ayr” (*LGW* 2525–26; 2544–49).

Like all the other men in the *Legend*, then, Demophon forsakes a woman; like all the other women, Phyllis is cast as a victim. Considering these outcomes of the *Legend* stories, Dinshaw sees the text on the whole as responding to an “authoritative, monolithic tradition of ‘olde bokes.’”⁴³⁶ Dinshaw has argued that Alceste’s charge in the Prologue, like the god of Love’s, is for Chaucer to engage in “totalizing literary activity.”⁴³⁷ In an attempt to “right the balance of misogynist literary tradition,” Alceste “commissions a very long work dedicated only to positive images of women,” which results, Dinshaw argues, in “a work peopled by caricatures,” male and female alike.⁴³⁸ Dinshaw argues that Chaucer creates this framework, in which a woman, Alceste, commissions a work but is herself a character and the product of a male writer’s desires, in order to create a “masculine fantasy” and ultimately show the shortcomings of that fantasy.⁴³⁹ As she concludes, the *Legend* demonstrates that “the techniques of reading like a man—imposing a single pattern, insisting on reducing complexity to produce a whole, monolithic structure, thus constraining the feminine—are reductive of *all* human experience,” and that “constraining of the feminine . . . will eventually silence men, too.”⁴⁴⁰

And yet the *Legend of Good Women* also slyly demonstrates that “olde bokes” need not only be used in service of a monolithic, totalizing end, for it is in rearranging their stories that

436. Dinshaw, *Chaucer’s Sexual Poetics*, 68.

437. Dinshaw, *Chaucer’s Sexual Poetics*, 70.

438. Dinshaw, *Chaucer’s Sexual Poetics*, 71.

439. Dinshaw, *Chaucer’s Sexual Poetics*, 72.

440. Dinshaw, *Chaucer’s Sexual Poetics*, 87, original emphasis.

Chaucer resists the impulse toward universal narrative, just as in works like the “Knight’s Tale” Chaucer creates nominalist-leaning literary artifacts which themselves are built upon but also subvert universal narratives which simultaneously replicate and occlude female circumscription. The legends indeed bear great similarity to each other and include less detail on the inner life of their characters’ than Chaucer’s other works. However, they also return recursively back to Alceste’s two-fold charge: one, that Chaucer write “a glorious legende / Of goode women” and the “false men that hem betrayen” (G, 473–76), and two, that a “ryghtwys lord” should “not ben lyk tyraunts of Lumbardye” (G, 353–4) but ought rather to ensure that all his citizens alike are “enhaused and honoured” (G, 372). This is an obligation, the individual legends repeatedly demonstrate, that male rulers often fail at, for the “traytor” men in the legends are not just any men, but leaders and kings. Such tyranny is easily learned, the *Legend* reveals; the text not only declares that “wiked fruit cometh of a wiked tre” (2395) but proves it by repeated example. Demophon is the true heir of Theseus—a “second-generation womanizer,” as Dinshaw calls him;⁴⁴¹ and, as their stories bracket that of Tereus and Philomela, the *Legend* further suggests the ways that such behavior is not only parentally inherited or learned, but perhaps culturally systemic. In this way, the “olde bokes,” made naked, themselves can be used to break out of monolithic patterns, by demonstrating the ways that antifeminist universal narratives harm not only individual women, but are connected to larger questions of good governance and commonwealths. Thus, though never using the phrase “common profit” specifically, the *Legend of Good Women* at large offers a meditation upon how women are excluded from community,

441. Dinshaw, *Chaucer’s Sexual Poetics*, 85.

and how this in turn stands at odds with any chance of a ruler leading his people toward a shared common good.

The Wife of Bath

Many of Chaucer's *Canterbury* tales likewise join the *Legend of Good Women* in dramatizing the potential harm of monolithic, universal narratives, as already seen with the "Knight's Tale." In the "Wife of Bath's Prologue" in particular Chaucer continues to interrogate the harmful effects of antifeminist master narratives and, related, women's opportunities for speech and representation. The Wife, Alisoun, is perhaps Chaucer's most celebrated and debated character, with *Riverside* editor Christine Ryan Hilary noting that she has "attracted critical extremes," upheld as both an embodiment of antifeminist stereotypes and an almost proto-feminist character.⁴⁴² Alcuin Blamires explains that the antifeminist literature in the Middle Ages portrayed women as "inveterately jealous of rivals," as talkative and prone to "na[g] in abrasive language," and as excessively materialistic.⁴⁴³ Indeed, the Wife in the "General Prologue" is described as extremely particular about her clothing, with "hir coverchiefs ful fine" and "shoes ful moyste and newe" (I.453; 457). In her own "Prologue," she speaks at great length about her five husbands, including details of her jealousy (both feigned and real jealousy) and the ways she nags them. She advises wives, for example, that to get what they want from their husbands, they should "speke and bere hem wrong [accuse them wrongfully]" (III.226) and provides examples

442. Hilary, *Riverside* 865, introductory note to "Wife of Bath's Prologue."

443. Blamires, "Introduction," *Woman Defamed*, 1.

of things they could say at length, testifying that with her own husbands, “of wenches wolde I beren hem on honde [accuse them]” (III.393). As Patterson observes, particularly when describing her relationship with her first three husbands, the Wife “presents herself as a nightmare of the misogynist imagination, a woman who not only exemplifies every fault of which women have been accused but preempts the very language of accusation.”⁴⁴⁴

And yet, through the voice of the Wife, Chaucer contributes to the larger conversations on women’s speech and representation, and on how antifeminist traditions render harm, that he likewise touches on in other works. Beneath its often comedic surface, the Wife’s “Prologue” has more in common with somber works like the *Legend of Good Women* or, as I will explore next, the “Clerk’s Tale,” than may at first be evident. Patterson notes a deliberate parallel to the *Legend*, for example, arguing that “the female ‘tonge’ that Tereus severed . . . reappears in the vigorous ‘tonge’ of that ‘verray jangleresse’ . . . the Wife of Bath—a reappearance that measures the distance between the *Legend* and the *Canterbury Tales* precisely in terms of the recuperation of the speaking subject.”⁴⁴⁵ Similarly, Dinshaw draws a parallel between “What Phyllis prays for” in the *Legend* and “the revision of patriarchal tradition the Wife of Bath calls out for, a reversal revealing *men’s* ‘wikkednesse’ and ‘vilenye.’”⁴⁴⁶

In her “Prologue” specifically, the Wife touches on two related issues: first, that “bokes olde,” like those referenced in the *Legend* for example, can be one-sided, particularly when it comes to issues relating to gender dynamics; and second, that such books therefore often leave

444. Patterson, *Subject of History*, 309.

445. Patterson, *Subject of History*, 284.

446. Dinshaw, *Sexual Poetics*, 83.

out women's personal experiences. The opening lines of the Wife's "Prologue" neatly summarize the second issue when Alisoun declares, "Experience, though noon auctoritee / Were in this world, is right ynogh for me / To speke of wo that is in mariage" (III.1–3). The rest of her "Prologue" proceeds to scrutinize this clash between personal experience and written authority. In particular, the Wife of Bath speaks at length on what she perceives as clerical injunctions against sexuality and remarriage. She declares that these positions are arrived at through selective reading of Biblical passages, asserting that "Men may devyne [conjecture] and glosen [interpret], up and doun, / But wel I woot, expres, without lye, / God bad us for to wexe and multiplye" (III.26–28). On the issue of remarriage after the death of her husbands in particular, Alisoun argues, referring to 1 Corinthians 7.28, 7.39, and 7.9, that

th'apostle seith that I am free
 To wedde, a Goddes half [by God], where it liketh me.
 He seith that to be wedded is no synne;
 Bet [better] is to be wedded than to brynne [burn].
 (III.49–52)⁴⁴⁷

Countering the stigmatization she perceives at having herself married and remarried, the Wife carries the logic of these Biblical passages forward: if the Apostle Paul reasons that it is better to wed than to sin by engaging in sexual intercourse outside marriage, Alisoun rationalizes, then there is no reason that this would not continue to be true when she has been widowed.

447. See Hilary, *Riverside* 866, note to lines 46–51.

In addition to pointing out the ways that such injunctions against remarriage overlook these Biblical passages, Alisoun also argues that men use the concept of the marriage-debt selectively. *Riverside* editor Hilary explains that the common medieval concept of the “*debitum*” refers to the “conjugal debt, whereby sexual relations were acknowledged as legitimately due both marriage partners.”⁴⁴⁸ In the “Wife of Bath’s Prologue,” Alisoun, making the related point that God must have made “members . . . of generacioun [genitals]” for some reason (I.115–17), asks,

Why sholde men elles in hir bookes sette
 That man shal yelde to his wyf hire dette [debt]?
 Now wherewith sholde he make his paiement,
 If he ne used his sely instrument?”
 (III.129–132)

In response to such circumscription of sexuality and female sexuality in particular, the Wife makes the further point that no one has yet shown her “where commanded he [God] virginitee” (III.62). She thus further asserts that

Th’apostle [Paul], whan he speketh of maydenhede,
 He seyde that precept therof hadde he noon.
 Men may conseille a womman to been oon,
 But conseillyng is no comandement.
 He putte it in oure owene juggement”

448. Hilary, *Riverside* 867, note to line 198.

(III.62–67)

In her differentiation between “conseillyng” and “comandement,” Alisoun recalls the ways that theologians like Aquinas conceived of natural inclination as something that must nonetheless be pursued through individual free choice. Even more significantly, however, Patterson argues that Alisoun in these passages demonstrates her “mastery of masculine modes of argument,” for she relies on “the exegetical principle of intertextuality” in “explicat[ing] Paul’s text to show that it means the opposite of what a more orthodox exegete would claim it says.”⁴⁴⁹

The Wife’s rhetorical strategy is thus more complex than it may first seem and has garnered varying critical responses. Essentially, the Wife uses a mode of argument traditionally classified as masculine to show the limits of those modes of arguments when used along exclusively, rather than inclusively, gendered lines. Significantly, Theresa Tinkle, using as evidence glossed fifteenth-century Chaucer manuscripts, argues that the Wife’s rhetoric was taken seriously and as authoritative. Tinkle observes, for example, that the New College 314 (Oxford) manuscript “consistently presents the Wife as a reliable biblical authority,” noting that the manuscript’s glosses on the “Prologue” are not corrective but rather most often point to the biblical verses she bases her arguments on.⁴⁵⁰ The Wife, of course, is a female character and creation of a male author, like Alceste in the *Legend of Good Women*. Thus, as Tinkle further argues, it is “an open question” as to whether the gloss authors “are authorizing the Wife or Chaucer,” but ultimately, Tinkle concludes, “they nonetheless inscribe material pages that

449. Patterson, *Subject of History*, 309; 308.

450. Tinkle, “The Wife of Bath’s Marginal Authority,” 80; see esp. 74–80 for Tinkle’s analysis of the glosses.

support the Wife's claims to authority over scripture."⁴⁵¹ This is no small achievement, for even if we read past the character to the male poet behind her, Chaucer draws attention to the role of selective reading and argumentation behind gendered constructions of power and norms of behavior.

Of course, Alisoun herself reads selectively; Roger A. Ladd cautions that Alisoun demonstrates a "pattern of reading only the part that fits her agenda," a pattern which Ladd reads as in accordance with Alisoun's mercantile class and the way Chaucer similarly "represents male merchant characters as . . . unable or unwilling to read carefully in general."⁴⁵² However, Ladd cites and agrees with Dinshaw in noting that Alisoun's selective reading and "use of glossing 'indicts [male glossators'] motivations as similarly carnal' to her own,"⁴⁵³ concluding that "the object of satire fights back Alys uses her mercantile (mis)reading to come right out and defend herself both against and with the terms of antifeminist satire."⁴⁵⁴ The power of Alisoun's rhetorical strategy here thus lies in the way that her own reading strategy illustrates the subjectivity of reading in the first place. She reads the other side of a coin often presented as one-sided, grounding her arguments in the same body of written authorities as her opponents while applying them to her own life and experience specifically. As Mary Carruthers argues, "Alisoun has often been characterized as attempting to do away with authority altogether," but in fact she "does not deny authority when authority is true She does insist, however, that authority

451. Tinkle, "The Wife of Bath's Marginal Authority," 87.

452. Ladd, "Sellying Alys," 152.

453. Ladd, "Selling Alys," 153, original emendation; quoting Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics*, 124.

454. Ladd, "Sellying Alys," 159.

make itself accountable to the realities of experience.”⁴⁵⁵ While her opponents may disagree with her arguments, Alisoun has nonetheless drawn attention to the potential problem of selective reading: her opponents may point to her selectivity, but in doing so can no longer hide their own.

In addition, related to the nominalist-leaning tone of Chaucer’s other works explored in this dissertation, the Wife’s point about “conseillyng” and “comandement” essentially reaffirms that a commandment must nonetheless be left up to individual judgement. Alisoun continually stresses the subjectivity of choices regarding one’s own body and sexuality, her “Prologue” demonstrating the ways that caution should be taken in not simply replacing one monolithic, universal narrative with another, but rather, that particulars must be recognized. The Wife explains that

I woot wel that th’apostel was a mayde [virgin];
 But natheles, thogh that he wroot and sayde
 He wolde that every wight [person] were swich as he,
 Al nys but conseil to virginitee.
 And for to been a wyf he yaf me leve
 (III.79–83).

She furthermore clarifies that she does not begrudge virgins or those who do not desire a second marriage themselves, saying,

wel ye knowe, a lord in his household,
 He nath nat every vessel al of gold;

455 Carruthers, “Painting of Lions,” 209.

Somme been of tree, and doon hir lord servyse.

God clepeth folk to hym in sondry wyse,

And everich hath of God a proper yifte [gift]

(III.99–103).

As though to emphasize the importance of this point—that she is not recommending that everyone must behave as she desires to—Alisoun repeats it a few lines later, remarking, “But I seye noght that every wight is holde [obligated], / That hath swich harneys [equipment] as I to yow tolde, / To goon and usen hem in engendrure [reproduction]” (III.135–37). Carruthers further explains that Alisoun’s arguments accord with the socioeconomic realities of her life as “a wealthy west-country clothier endowed with the property of her deceased spouses,” for whom “marriage is the key to survival” in the case of her earlier remarriages in particular.⁴⁵⁶ As Ladd adds, “guild-glass widows” were “very attractive potential spouses,” and “there was even an ‘upswing in remarriage among urban women at the end of the fourteenth century and into the fifteenth.’”⁴⁵⁷ The Wife’s points therefore are tailored to her own particular experience, not to a universal truth. Thus, as Carruthers argues, Alisoun “is not setting up a heresy” and “does not deny the celibate ideal its due; she merely points out its lack of domestic economy.”⁴⁵⁸ Furthermore, Carruthers adds, the Wife speaks back against not only antifeminist clerical works, but also against “a body of marital lore held commonly by her own class and articulated most

456. Carruthers, “Painting of Lions,” 209; 214.

457. Ladd, “Selling Alys,” 150; quoting from Barbara A. Hanawalt, *Wealth of Wives: Women, Law, and Economy in Late Medieval London* (Oxford University Press, 2007), at 8.

458. Carruthers, “Painting of Lions,” 211.

fully in the deportment books written to foster ‘gentillesse,’ which male-authored books, Carruthers argues, “pretend . . . that social reward is unrelated to economic power, especially for women.”⁴⁵⁹ Alisoun’s passages stressing the subjectivity of sexual behavior thus demonstrate the ways that the “Wife of Bath’s Prologue” as a whole works to destabilize monolithic, circumscribing, and antifeminist narratives about sexuality, whether secular or clerical, while also taking care not to replace such universal codes of behavior with other universal codes.

Alisoun’s most obvious rejection of the exclusively male textual community, based largely in clerical experience and not wifely experience, comes with her detailed account of her marriage to Jankyn, her fifth and most recent (but now deceased) husband. Significantly, she explains that Jankyn “som tyme was a clerk of Oxenford” (III.527), making the episode she is about to narrate particularly relevant to her previous points about clerical antifeminism. Describing their “kiss-with-a-fist” relationship, she describes how one of their arguments took a particularly violent turn. She explains that Jankyn “hadde a book that gladly, nyght and day, / For his desport he wolde rede always; / He cleped it Valerie and Theofraste” (III.669–71). The book, she explains, was a “book of wikked wyves” (III.685), and Jankyn read from it so habitually that “he knew of hem mo legends and lyves / Than been of goode wyves in the Bible” (III.686–87). It contained, evidently, not tales such as those found in Chaucer’s *Legend*; instead, the Wife explains that it emphasized how “Of Eva first, that for her wikkednesse / Was al mankynde broght to wrecchednesse, / For which that Jhesu Crist hymself was slayn” (III.715–

459. Carruthers, “Painting of Lions,” 211.

17), and includes stories such as that of Delilah and Sampson (III.721–23), or of Clytemnestra’s murder of her husband (III.737–38).

Alisoun then explains her frustration with the book that eventually leads to a physical fight between them. Defensively, she points to the problematic exclusion of women from positions of textual authority from which images of women are traditionally created controlled, remarking,

Who peyntede the leon [lion], tel me who?

By God, if women hadde written stories,

As clerkes han withinne hire oratories [chapels],

They wolde han written of men moore wikkednesses

Than al the mark of Adam may redresse. (III.688-696)

The lines, as Hilary explains, allude to “the fable, originally Aesopian, of the man and the lion: a peasant shows a lion a likeness of a peasant killing a lion with an axe, and the lion asks, did a man or a lion make this likeness?”⁴⁶⁰ Carruthers argues that “the moral of the fable” the Wife references here “expresses an aspect of that general concern with relationship of ‘auctoritee’ to experience’ which she announces in the first sentence of her prologue,” as described above.⁴⁶¹

Jill Mann further explains that like the lion in fable the Wife alludes to, women “are powerless to correct...distorted images of themselves produced by clerical misogynists,”⁴⁶² and that Chaucer

460. Hilary, *Riverside* 871, note to line 692.

461. Carruthers, “Painting of Lions,” 209.

462. Mann, *Feminizing Chaucer*, 58.

here indicts “the confining nature of ‘the prison house of masculine language.’”⁴⁶³ Similarly, Carolyn Dinshaw argues that “Chaucer imagines the possibility of a masculine reading that is not antifeminist, that does acknowledge, in good faith, feminine desire”; given the fight which follows these lines, Dinshaw adds, Chaucer “further . . . represents the struggle and violence to the feminine that accompany the articulation of this fantasy.”⁴⁶⁴

The Wife’s question, “who painted the lion?” thus succinctly conveys her frustration with women’s lack of self-representation, particularly among clerical and written authorities. Thus, while in the *Legend of Good Women* Chaucer shows how *bokes olde* can be subverted and deployed strategically to reveal and indict the systemic silencing of women, in the “Wife of Bath’s Prologue,” he also shows how *bokes olde* may be antithetical to such a project—in this case they can, of course, perpetuate systemic antifeminism. Alisoun’s frustration with women’s lack of opportunity for self-representation finally erupts after she is forced to listen to Jankyn read every night from the Book of Wicked Wives. Tired of his relentless recitation, she explains, “al sodeynly thre leves have I plyght / Out of his book, . . . and eke / I with my fest [fist] . . . took hym on the cheke” (III.790–92), the strength of her blow causing him to fall back into the fire. In turn, Jankyn “up stirte as dooth a wood leoun [crazed lion], / And with his fest he smoot me on the heed” (III.794–5). As result of the blow, Alisoun explains that “myn ere wax al deaf” (III.636), thus clarifying why in the “General Prologue” of the *Canterbury Tales* she is described as “somedel deaf” (I.446). Alisoun then continues her narration, explaining that she then lay on

463. Mann, *Feminizing Chaucer*, 65; quoting Patterson, *Subject of History*, 313.

464. Dinshaw, *Chaucer’s Sexual Poetics*, 117.

the floor as though dead, telling Jankyn, “Er I be deed, yet wol I kisse thee” (III.802). When he bends down to kiss her, she “eftsoones [immediately] . . . hitte hym on the cheke,” declaring, “thus muchel am I wreke [avenged]” (III.808–9).

Anne McTaggart argues that Chaucer portrays the remarkable violence of this scene as part of a broader cultural problem. McTaggart applies René Girard’s theory of “mediated or mimetic desire” to the Wife’s story.⁴⁶⁵ Girard, McTaggart explains, theorizes that “desire is always borrowed” and that “the mimetic nature of desire and the escalating competition it produces lead to the . . . violence that underlies human societies,” violence which “results not from difference but from a chaotic sameness, from the *loss* of difference.”⁴⁶⁶ In the case of this violent scene, in McTaggart’s reading, Alisoun’s desire and Jankyn’s is essentially the same—sovereignty and mastery over another person’s body, for which mastery they compete. McTaggart’s reading thus demonstrates that while Alisoun in her “Prologue” as a whole rails against antifeminist control of women’s behavior, this intimate moment from her past perhaps demonstrates her interpellation by her circumscriptive sociocultural milieu; she lashes out at Jankyn with the same violence that she feels that antifeminist clerical attitudes—here as represented by Jankyn—have rendered against her psychologically. As Patterson similarly concludes, the episode crystalizes the ways that both Alisoun and Jankyn have been “conditioned by the ‘booke of wikked wives’ that is their common cultural inheritance.”⁴⁶⁷

465. McTaggart, “What Women Want,” 43.

466. McTaggart, “What Women Want,” 44, original emphasis.

467. Patterson, *Subject of History*, 311.

Eventually, Alisoun concludes that after their violent exchange, “with muchel care and wo, / We fille accorded by us selven two” (III.811–12). In their new agreement, she explains, “He yaf me al the bridel in myn hond, / To han the governance of hous and lond, / And of his tonge, and of his hond also,” and she thus obtained “by maistrie, al the soveraynetee” (III.811–18). This truce evidently renders in Alisoun an entire change of heart; she concludes that “after that day we hadden never debaat. / God helpe me so, I was to hym as kynde / As any wyf from Denmark unto Ynde, / And also trewe” (III.822–25).

The tale the Wife tells seems to come to a similar resolution. The story narrates how “a lusty bachelor” (III.883) of King Arthur’s court, riding home one day, sees “a mayde walkyng hym biforn” and rapes her (III.886). The knight is sentenced to die, but

the queene and other ladyes mo
 So longe preyeden the kyng of grace
 Til he his lyf hym graunted in the place,
 And yaf hym to the queene, al at hir wille,
 To chese wheither she wolde hym save or spille.
 (III.894–98)

The knight is given a year and a day to determine and report back “What thyng is it that wommen moost desiren” (III.905) or else face his original sentence. The knight fails miserably; every woman he meets tells him something different. But eventually, on the last day, he comes upon a loathly lady who promises to give him the correct answer if he will in turn “plight [plege] me thy trouthe . . . / The nexte thyng that I require thee, / Thou shalt it do” (III.1009–11).

The Queen and her ladies are satisfied by the resulting answer—that “wommen desiren to have sovereynetee / As wel over hir housbound as hir love, / And for to been in maistrie hym above” (III.1038–40). The knight’s life is thus saved by the loathly lady, a plot point through which, Blamires argues, the Wife “makes a bid to re-gender the ethic of largesse feminine,” for “it is a woman’s unrestraint that turns out to save the knight’s life in the tale.”⁴⁶⁸ Soon thereafter, however, the knight discovers that what the loathly lady requires of him is their marriage. On their wedding night, he “walweth [writhes] and he turneth to and fro,” complaining that she is “loothly,” “oold,” and “comen of so lough [low] a kynde [lineage]” (III.1085; 1100–1). In these moments, McTaggart argues, “we are presented with a picture, as Chaucer imagines it, of a *man* about to be raped by a *woman*: at this point, the knight is as close as he can be to the position of the maiden he attacked,” though she cautions that of course “there is a significant difference” between “literal violence” and “coercion of the knight by a verbal agreement.”⁴⁶⁹ The loathly lady, however, proceeds to interrogate the knight’s concept of lineage and *gentillesse*. She contends that basing superiority on one’s ancestors is pointless, positing that “of oure eldres may we no thyng clayme / But temporel thyng, that man may hurte and mayme” (III.1131–32). As she concludes, if

gentillesse were planted naturelly

Unto a certeyn lynage doun the lyne,

Pryvee and apert [in private and public] thane wolde they nevere fyne [cease]

468. Blamires, *Chaucer, Ethics, and Gender*, 145.

469. McTaggart, “What Women Want,” 56, original emphasis.

To doon gentillesse the faire office;
 They myghte do no vileynye or vice.
 (III.1134–38)

Her words interestingly reflect what Patterson sees as the larger ideological project of the *Legend of Good Women*, wherein “*gentillesse* designates not nobility of spirit but social advantage, a superiority of place that unprincipled men use to victimize grasping men.”⁴⁷⁰ Similarly, McTaggart argues that in deconstructing the concept of *gentillesse*, the loathly lady “talks about the futility of desiring what others have—that is, the futility of acquisitive mimesis,” and thereby makes possible a break in the cycle of “competitive struggle and violent retaliation.”⁴⁷¹

In McTaggart’s reading, the Knight parallels the Wife herself in her former days—he has desired mastery over another’s body, just as Alisoun attempted mastery over her earlier husbands’ bodies especially. As McTaggart explains specifically, “the knight’s education . . . parallels the Wife of Bath’s own progress from manipulative scold to victim of the male tyranny,” enacted by Jankyn, that “she had previously used to her own advantage.”⁴⁷² The lady then offers the knight a choice, whether to have her remain loathly but loyal and humble, or to have her be beautiful and young, and “take youre aventure of the repair [visitors] / That shal be to youre hous by cause of me / Or in som oother place” (III.1224–26). McTaggart reads the lady as “phrasing the knight’s choice in terms that emphasize the difference between superficial value and inner worth,” and thus as “set[ting] herself up neither as object nor as rival but as a new,

470. Patterson, *Subject of History*, 239.

471. McTaggart, “What Women Want,” 57; 59.

472. McTaggart, “What Women Want,” 56.

nonacquisitive model for the knight to imitate.”⁴⁷³ The knight, sighing, declares, “I put me in youre wise governance; / Cheseth yourself which may be moost plesance / And moost honour to yow and me also” (III.1231–33). The knight has perhaps learned his lesson, for the lady rewards him by becoming beautiful and vowing to remain “bothe fair and good,” and the tale ends with a declaration that “thus they lyve unto hir lyves ende / In parfit joye” (III.1241; 1257–8).

McTaggart explains of this ending that “in response to the knight’s newfound generosity to her, the old woman generously becomes both beautiful and true,” and that therefore “the violence of mimetic desire can be subverted—and converted—into mimetic, reciprocal love,” a model that might have prevented Alisoun and Jankyn’s own violence in the “Prologue.”⁴⁷⁴

And yet, though what seems to be a peaceful resolution is reached, the “Wife of Bath’s Prologue” and “Tale” do not provide an entirely satisfactory solution. While I agree with McTaggart that the “Wife of Bath’s Prologue” and “Tale” both dramatize the effects of systemic, learned violence, tied closely to antifeminist discourses, and a need to prevent this violence, it seems generous here to describe the Knight’s decision to let the loathly lady “cheseth yourself” as generous. He “sore siketh [sighs]” as he answers, seeming to express a sense of berated apathy (III.1228). A beautiful, loyal wife, moreover, seems exactly what a knight like himself, following an “acquisitive model” of desire, would want, just as Alisoun’s obedience to Jankyn after their violent confrontation and his return of her “governance of hous and lond” (III.814) would seem to be what *he* has wanted all along.

473. McTaggart, “What Women Want,” 57.

474. McTaggart, “What Women Want,” 59.

Viewing Alisoun's resultant kindness and truth to Jankyn as instead her reward to him for his surrender of sovereignty back to her does not yield a more satisfying end result, for in this case, her later benevolence seems dependent upon her awareness of having obtained the upper hand of power. Alisoun's truce with Jankyn is thus built on the kind of reversal of monolithic power that in her "Prologue" she otherwise argues against, revealing perhaps her deep internalization of social ideologies that she attempts to fight against. That is, while recognizing the importance of particulars over alleged universal truths, Alisoun nonetheless falls back to a pattern of gendered relations that relies to an extent on a monolithic mode of power shown to be communally destructive. Patterson concludes that in the "Prologue" and "Tale," the Wife's "accommodations and resolutions are more verbal than actual," and that "she remains confined within the prison house of masculine language; she brilliantly rearranges and deforms her authorities to enable them to disclose new areas of experience, but she remains dependent on them for her voice."⁴⁷⁵ Similarly, Hansen argues that "Despite her putative ability and eagerness to speak, . . . the Wife of Bath is not essentially more free, self-determined, or self-expressive than the good, silent woman, like Griselda or Constance, and her own words oblige us to understand the constraints upon her."⁴⁷⁶

The Wife's "Tale," however, cannot be seen as a total failure in terms of redressing inequitable gender dynamics. As demonstrated in my previous readings of the "Nun's Priest's Tale" and the "Knight's Tale," the larger rhetorical message of the *Canterbury* tales often

475. Patterson, *Subject of History*, 313.

476. Hansen, *Fictions of Gender* 29.

escapes their fictional narrators. In this case, Alisoun may indeed “remai[n] confined within the prison house of masculine language,” but the shape and quality of that prison house has nonetheless been revealed. Furthermore, Carruthers offers a different interpretation of the knight, the loathly lady, and their exchange in the “Tale,” in which the Wife aligns herself with the loathly lady, not the knight, as she paints the proverbial lion, herself. In Carruthers’ analysis, Alisoun’s clash with Jankyn in her “Prologue” stems from her sentimental and overly-generous gift to Jankyn upon their marriage of “al the lond and fee [property] / That evere was me yeven therbifoore” (III.630–31). Carruthers explains that “she gives freely, consciously, as a token of perfect love,” succumbing to romance in her fifth marriage whereas before she had always exercised an economic and skeptical wariness.⁴⁷⁷ In response, Jankyn, who Carruthers reads as “an inexperienced medieval husband” as much as a representative of clerical antifeminism, “proceeds to rob her of her independence and her will,” and thus Alisoun’s “one romantic excursion ends in a deafness symbolic of her failure to heed her own lesson.”⁴⁷⁸

In her subsequent “Tale,” Carruthers argues, Alisoun pokes fun at her own former idealism while she also “turns the ideas of the male department-book writers upside down” in fashioning the loathly lady as a lecturer on proper behavior.⁴⁷⁹ The result, Carruthers argues, is meant to be comic, in turn subverting the “solemn and hortatory” tone of the department books and revealing their biases—revealing, in essence, the subjective, man-made reality behind the

477. Carruthers, “Painting of Lions,” 215.

478. Carruthers, “Painting of Lions,” 215.

479. Carruthers, “Painting of Lions,” 217.

supposed universal truths they lay claim to.⁴⁸⁰ Alisoun, Carruthers concludes, thus “reveals her own fine comic understanding both of the delights of lion painting and of its essential untruthfulness. Her tale gives full rein to the ideals of sentiment,” just as Alisoun gave rein to sentiment in her early days of marriage to Jankyn by surrendering her economic power to him, but her tale also “never lets us forget that [ideals of sentiment] exist exclusively ‘In th’olde days of the King Arthour.’”⁴⁸¹

In Carruthers’s convincing reading, Alisoun as proverbial lion thus paints herself, but in so doing indicates the ways the self-portraiture, even self-conception, can be laden with idealism and fantasy. That is, the portrait a lion paints of itself may not inherently be any more truthful than that rendered by a man of the same lion. And yet, I think, this is not to say that the lion does not therefore need to paint herself any less; the mutual violence that results in Alisoun’s “Tale” as result of female silencing and circumscription indicates the vital importance of opportunities for women’s self-representation so as to preclude the repetition of this violence the microcosmic community of husband and wife. Alisoun’s stories simply emphasize the importance of recognizing the subjectivity of *any* narrative or act of representation. Just as the “Prologue” indicts universal recommendations for behavior through revealing their foundations upon selective readings—thus dramatizing the very subjectivity of reading—the “Tale” points to the subjectivity of narrative itself and the need to literately or figuratively read any narrative and authority, whether based on personal experience or *bokes olde*, with a healthy dose of

480. Carruthers, “Painting of Lions,” 217.

481. Carruthers, “Painting of Lions,” 216.

skepticism. After all, as Chaucer's other characters and texts so well indicate, such as Arcite and Palamon in the "Knight's Tale" or Criseyde in *Troilus and Criseyde*, our subjectivity and the narratives we tell ourselves may be as influenced as anything else by social conditioning and man-made ends which present themselves as universal truths.

The "Clerk's Tale"

If the "Wife of Bath's Prologue" and "Tale" raise the issues of the clash between universal narratives and individual, particular experiences and of female self-representation, the "Clerk's Tale" continues the discussion through the opposite extreme. It does so particularly by reconnecting issues of antifeminist circumscription with discussions of the common good, as seen in the *Legend of Good Women*, while also, like the *Legend*, critiquing the very specific behaviors of a male ruler. Like many of Chaucer's works, the basic story of the "Clerk's Tale" is not original to Chaucer. Warren Ginsberg, editor of the tale in the *Riverside Chaucer*, argues that Chaucer's main source is Petrarch's *De obedientia ac fide uxoria mythologia*, itself based on Boccaccio's *Decameron* X.10, and notes that there were many other versions of the story of Griselda in Italian, Latin, and French.⁴⁸² The story details the marriage of a marquis, named Walter in Chaucer's version, to Griselda, a poor villager, and the marquis's subsequent testing of Griselda's loyalty to him. As part of these tests, the marquis pretends to have murdered first their daughter and then their son. While in fact the marquis has the children sent away to be raised by a wealthy relative, Griselda believes they are dead and, as per the oath of loyalty she swears to

482. Ginsberg, *Riverside* 880, introductory note to the "Clerk's Tale."

him—in Chaucer’s version, that “as ye wole yourself, right so wol I,” and that “In werk ne thought, I nyl yow disobeye” (IV.361; 363)—she never questions her husband’s orders. As the third and final test, the marquis pretends that he will divorce Griselda, and marry a younger bride, and requests that Griselda act as handmaiden to the younger woman, which Griselda complies with. The marquis then reveals that all has been but a test—that their children are alive and well and the young woman is in fact their daughter.

Warren Ginsburg, considering Chaucer’s version specifically, notes that “the extravagant, not to say ‘monstrous,’ behavior of both Walter and Griselda has been the subject of much discussion.”⁴⁸³ He explains that it “has often been read as a tale in which allegorical meaning, and realistic treatment are in conflict”—allegorically, for example, Griselda can be read as a Job-like symbol of faithfulness and patience in the face of adversity. Eventually, the Clerk-narrator himself makes this point, stating,

Men speke of Job, and moost for his humblenesse,
 As clerkes, whan hem list, konne wel endite,
 Namely of men, but as in sothfastnesse,
 Though clerkes preise wommen but a lite,
 Ther kan no man in humblenesse hym acquite
 As womman kan, ne kan been half so trewe
 As wommen been
 (IV.932–38)

483. Ginsberg, *Riverside* 880, introductory note to the “Clerk’s Tale.”

David Steinmetz has offered such an allegorical reading of the tale. Interestingly, he argues that the “Clerk’s Tale” is nominalist in nature, contending that it demonstrates the nominalist principle “*facientibus quod in se est Deus non denegat gratiam*,” which he translates as “God does not deny His grace to those who do what is in them.”⁴⁸⁴ As Steinmetz explains, “In nominalist theology it means to do one’s very best, all that lies within the scope of one’s natural abilities unaided by saving grace.”⁴⁸⁵ Explaining in more detail, Steinmetz argues that Walter functions as a nominalist allegory for “the fidelity of God to His covenants *de potential ordinate*”; that is, Steinmetz argues, just as a nominalist believes that God in his will is “radically free,” God also “enters into covenants which restrict His freedom and which He regards as permanently binding.”⁴⁸⁶ Steinmetz compares this to Walter’s response to his people’s request that he marry. Emphasizing his liberty as a bachelor before accepting, Steinmetz argues, Walter “imposes on himself a limitation which could not be imposed upon him by any exterior power. As a husband, Walter is a free and self-limited sovereign who acts to establish a covenant where no covenant had previously existed.”⁴⁸⁷

While noting that “Walter is also unlike God,” insofar as in his testing of Griselda he “sins against justice,” Steinmetz nonetheless believes that the allegory carries out, and that through the example of Griselda’s patience, the story

484. Steinmetz, “Late Medieval Nominalism and the *Clerk’s Tale*,” 52n5.

485. Steinmetz, “Late Medieval Nominalism and the *Clerk’s Tale*,” 52n5.

486. Steinmetz, “Late Medieval Nominalism and the *Clerk’s Tale*,” 41; 40.

487. Steinmetz, “Late Medieval Nominalism and the *Clerk’s Tale*,” 42.

recommend[s] a mysticism which enjoins a perfect conformity of the will of the *viator* with the will of God. Griselda chooses to conform her will to the will of her husband in spite of her maternal affections. As a mortal husband Walter is not deserving of such loyalty, and one instinctively feels that he should be denied it. But God, who calls men and women to abandon the ties of filial affection for the sake of His kingdom, is worthy of all trust and affection which can be invested in Him.⁴⁸⁸

However, I would counter, such a supposedly nominalist, allegorical reading of the tale works precisely if and only if Griselda's material status as a mortal wife and Walter's as a mortal husband and leader are discounted. Notably, while Steinmetz makes important points about the role of God's will and his covenants in nominalist thought, nominalist concerns about the importance of particulars and the disavowal of universals—which, as Richard Utz points out, critiques the efficacy of analogy and allegory itself⁴⁸⁹—do not feature in Steinmetz's analysis.

In contrast, a focus not on allegory but on Griselda's status as a mortal wife and mother—the tale's "realistic" treatment, as Ginsberg phrases it—forces contemplation of how, disturbingly, the marquis orders and Griselda cooperates with what she believes to be the murdering of their children.⁴⁹⁰ Responding to mixed critical reactions to this aspect of the "Clerk's Tale," Alcuin Blamires notes, "that Griselda should tolerate her husband's nasty decisions seems bad enough to readers," adding that it "has always distressed readers because it

488. Steinmetz, "Late Medieval Nominalism and the *Clerk's Tale*," 48.

489. See again Utz's argument that medieval nominalism offered a "critique of the systemic limitations of analogy," in "Philosophy," 169.

490. Ginsberg, *Riverside* 880, introductory note to the "Clerk's Tale."

seems to validate an abuse of women in which women are required to collude.”⁴⁹¹ Blamires argues, however, that her obedience has a “strategic pro-feminist importance,” for “the fact that her willed participation in Walter’s will is completely unwavering systematically contradicts misogyny’s habitual allegation of feminine ‘instability,’” whereas Walter’s “cruel subterfuges drag him into a mass of inconsistency and lies and arbitrary behavior.”⁴⁹² Considering Chaucer’s body of works cross-textually, Griselda thus stands as another answer to the accusations levied against the fictional Chaucer in the *Legend of Good Women*, for in Blamires’s reading, Griselda counters antifeminist stereotypes of women as changeable and fickle, while it is a man, Walter, who becomes “arbitrary.”

Leah Schwebel and Emma Campbell further consider the “Clerk’s Tale” cross-textually, but look to the relationship of Chaucer’s story with his continental source material. Considering Chaucer’s version in comparison to his sources, Schwebel and Campbell share common ground in viewing Boccaccio’s tale as committed to exploring the social and ethical nuances of the tale, and Petrarch’s as serving more as a Christian exemplum, but only by making Griselda a symbolic saint and drawing attention away from her particular, lived experience. Campbell, for example, argues that while Boccaccio’s version problematizes her husband’s behavior and any moral sanctification of Griselda, in the Petrarchan version a “humanist belief in literature’s influence on the formation of the morally responsible subject” ironically detracts from the tale’s potential indictment of “brutality.”⁴⁹³ Ultimately, Campbell maintains, “Petrarch’s rewriting

491. Blamires, *Chaucer, Ethics, and Gender*, 173; 175.

492. Blamires, *Chaucer, Ethics, and Gender*, 173.

493. Campbell, *Sexual Poetics and the Politics of Translation*, 206.

deliberately downplays the material emphasis of the Boccaccian source,” and “Petrarch’s attempt to make Griselda a moral heroine” occludes the “‘reality’ of her status as a wife and mother.”⁴⁹⁴ Language plays a related issue for both critics. Schwebel contends that Petrarch precludes real women from this audience, claiming that by translating Boccaccio’s vernacular Italian tale into Latin, “Petrarch changes the language as well as the readership of the tale, removing all women, children, and unscholarly folk from its reception.”⁴⁹⁵ Similarly, Campbell believes that Petrarch’s choice of languages limits reception of his text to “a Latin-literate élite.”⁴⁹⁶

Most significantly, both Schwebel and Campbell see Chaucer as reading Petrarch in a similar vein, Schwebel arguing that “Chaucer progressively aligns Petrarch with a method of writing useless to anyone but the most elite,”⁴⁹⁷ Campbell states that in Chaucer’s text, Griselda’s “status as a wife acquires a more literal significance.”⁴⁹⁸ Schwebel and Campbell’s readings, if considered cross-textually, suggest the ways that the “Clerk’s Tale” may be seen as a further extension of the rhetorical project of the *Legend of Good Women*, for in crafting his unique story of Griselda in the “Clerk’s Tale,” Chaucer again sifts through “bokes olde.” As in the *Legend*, he does so not strictly to “yeve credence / To bokes olde and don hem reverence” (*LGW G*, 81–2), perhaps, but to access—and make accessible to his own readers—an experience which we “may . . . non other weyes witen” (*LGW G*, 7), that of yet another “good woman,”

494. Campbell, *Sexual Poetics and the Politics of Translation*,” 206.

495. Schwebel, “Redressing Griselda,” 284.

496. Campbell, *Sexual Poetics and the Politics of Translation*,” 209.

497. Schwebel, “Redressing Griselda,” 288.

498. Campbell, *Sexual Poetics and the Politics of Translation*,” 210.

Griselda, in the face of a man, now Walter the marquis, who like the men in the *Legend* privileges his own desire over all else.

Walter in Chaucer's "Clerk's Tale" is introduced in ways that subtly recall the men in the *Legend of Good Women*. He is described as a marquis with many "obeisant . . . liges" and as "biloved and drad . . . bothe of his lordes and of his commune" (IV.66–67; 69–70). The lines bring to memory Alceste's monologue on the obligations of a leader to "shewen his peple pleyne benygnete, / And wel to heren here excusacyouns, / And here compleyntes and petyciouns" (*LGW* G, 361–63), though Alceste says nothing about "drad." The Clerk-narrator goes on to further explain of Walter that

Therwith he was, to speke as of lynage,
The gentilleste yborn of Lumbardye,
A fair persone, and strong, and yong of age,
And ful of honour and of curteisye.

(IV.71–74)

Ginsberg points out that the specificity of the location, "Lumbardye," is unique to Chaucer's version of the story, arguing that "fourteenth-century Lombardy was infamous for its tyrants."⁴⁹⁹ He further believes that "while there is no indication that we should identify Walter with the proverbial tyrants of Lombardy, the association of tyranny with the area is consistent with elements of Walter's future behavior."⁵⁰⁰ A reading of "Lumbardye" as foreshadowing both

499. Ginsberg, *Riverside* 881, note to line 72.

500. Ginsberg, *Riverside* 881, note to line 72.

Walter's future treatment of Griselda and the narrative's indictment of it is further corroborated through semantic association to the *Legend of Good Women*, for there, Alceste describes ideal rulers in specific contrast to "tyraunts of Lumbardy, / That usen wilfulhed and tyrannye" (*LGW* G, 354–5). This similarity makes the Clerk's reference to Walter's "lynage" (IV.71) suspect as well, for as demonstrated above, the *Legend* depicts its infamous men's lineages in two ways: as stemming from nobility, as the narrator seems to intend here (he has previously mentioned the "worthy eldres hym before," IV.65), but also as learned patterns of behavior in which male desire is privileged over and circumscribes female well-being, with "wiked fruit" coming "of a wiked tre" (*LGW* 2395). The narrator's description of Walter as "gentilleste yborn" (IV.72) only furthers this subtle comparison of him to the men of the *Legend*, who are often described similarly. As Patterson argues, in the *Legend* Chaucer "subjects *gentillesse* itself to relentless critique," for "the promise of *gentillessee* is one of the attractions that men use to deceive their feminine victims."⁵⁰¹

Furthermore, just as the men in the *Legend of Good Women* incline toward their personal desire without thought for the future or the effects their actions have on other individuals or the broader community, the Clerk-narrator ends the description of Walter by curiously adding that Walter is "discreet ynogh his contree for to gye [govern], / Save in somme thynges that he was to blame" (IV.75–76). The narrator explains,

I blame hym thus: that he considered nought
In tyme comynge what myghte hym bityde,

501. Patterson, *Subject of History*, 238.

But on his lust present was al his thought,
 As for to hauke and hunte on every syde.
 Wel ny alle othere cures leet he slyde,
 And eek he nolde—and that was worst of alle—
 Wedde no wyf, for noght that may bifalle.
 (IV.78–84)

The Clerk-narrator himself offers a blunt condemnation of Walter's habit of letting all other cares go besides his own "lust present." Furthermore, the lines relate not only to the *Legend of Good Women* but to the larger body of writing on the common good in circulation during Chaucer's fourteenth-century. Augustine, for example, as noted above, comments that temporal law and governance becomes "gradually depraved" if it "come[s] to prefer private interest to the public good" (*OFC* I.6); Cicero in the "Dream of Scipio" similarly describes serving the commonwealth and following private interests as mutually exclusive.

Walter does modify his behavior somewhat when prompted. When, for example, Walter's people send a representative to him explaining their concern that he remains unwed and thus has produced no heir, he ultimately complies, saying that "of my free wyl I wole assente / To wedde me" (IV.150–1). Thus, as Alceste would recommend, Walter appears to listen to his people when they present their "excusacyouns, / And here compleyntes and petyciouns," (*LGW* G, 62–3).

When it comes to his relationship with Griselda, however, Walter's "lust present," particularly his attempts to affirm his lordship by testing the loyalty of others, continues to be his

main drive. When first approached about marriage by the representative of the people, the conversation proceeds in terms of “soveraynetee” (IV.114), “entente” (IV.127; 148); “assente” (IV.129; 150; 174; 176); “free wyl” (IV.150); and contrasts between “liberte” (IV.145; 171) and “servage” (IV.147). Evidently foreknowing the marquis’s concerns about marriage, the representative recommends, “Boweth youre nekke under that blissful yok / Of soveraynetee, nought of servyse, / Which that men clepe spousaille or wedlok” (IV.113–15). The marquis interestingly phrases his ambivalence against marriage in terms strikingly similar to those Criseyde uses in *Troilus and Criseyde* when first debating the news that her Uncle Pandarus has given her about Troilus’s interests. In *Troilus*, shortly after declaring herself to be “unteyd in lusty leese” Criseyde wonders, “Syn I am free, / Sholde I now love, and put in jupartie / My sikernesse, and thrallen libertee?” (II.752; 771–2). In the “Clerk’s Tale,” when the issue of marriage is raised, Walter remarks, “I nevere erst thoughte streyne me. / I me rejoysed of my liberte, / That seelde tyme is founde in marriage; / Ther I was free, I moot been in servage” (IV.144–47).

In *Troilus*, Criseyde ultimately resolves to navigate the potential pleasures and difficulties of love, planning to take measures to conduct herself in such a way that her liberty may be preserved and her *estat* likewise protected; thus she declares, “He which that nothing undertaketh, / Nothyng n’acheveth” (II.807–8). In the “Clerk’s Tale,” Walter declares to the spokesman of the people that

I se youre trewe entente,

And truste upon youre wit, and have doon ay;

Wherfore of my free wyl I wole assente
 To wedde me, as soone as evere I may
 (IV.148–151).

In his agreement, he takes pains to emphasize that he weds not because he feels constrained to do so but by this “free wyl.” His further explanation of his decision continues this emphasis, almost as though he feels anxiety as to whether he has free will or not, and thus continually attempts to perform it. Declaring that he will choose his own wife, and not let the people choose for him, he commands,

I yow preye, and charge upon youre lyf,
 What wyf that I take, ye me assure
 To worshipe hire, while that hir lyf may dure
 and fortheremoore, this shal ye swere: that ye
 Agayn my choys shul neither grucched ne stryve
 (IV.164–170)

Explaining why he commands this—that the people never complain or express disagreement with his choice of wives—the marquis continues, “For sith I shal forgoon my libertee / At youre requeste, as evere moot I thryve, / Ther as myn herte is set, ther wol I wyve” (IV.169–72). Essentially, fearing that he is forgoing his liberty, the marquis demands that his people somewhat do the same—that they remain silent even if he chooses a wife not to their liking, to which “they sworn and assenten / To al this thyng” (IV.176–77). Walter, the text demonstrates from its opening episode, is a man who has grown accustomed to being obeyed. His lords, as the text has

already noted, are “obeisant” (IV.66); when the representative of the people brings forward his marriage request, for example, before making the request itself he carefully points out to Walter that the people had “nevere yet refuseden youre heeste” (IV.128).

The remainder of the tale demonstrates the ways that the marquis’s anxiety about preserving his “libertee” intersect with this habitual expectation of *obeisance*, variants of the word and its larger concept occurring eight times in the story.⁵⁰² This is particularly the case in his engagement to Griselda. Having vowed to wed—but insisting on choosing his own wife—the marquis rides out to the country, where he sees Griselda, whom “ful ofte sithe this markys sette his ye [eye] / As he on hunting rood paraventure” (IV.233–34). He decides that “he wolde / Wedde hire oonly, if evere he wedde sholde” (IV.244–45). The association of his discovery of Griselda with his hunting foreshadows the ways that his habit of allowing his “lust present” to be “al his thought” (IV.80) will soon be transferred to Griselda, as at the beginning of the text it applies to his penchant “for to hauke and hunte on every syde” (IV.81). Griselda furthermore is famed for her “obeisaunce and diligence” to her father (IV.230), likewise an attractive quality in a woman for a man accustomed to his “obseidant . . . liges” (IV.66–7).

When the marquis approaches Griselda’s father, Janicula, he does phrase his marriage request with an acknowledgment of Janicula’s will, stating, “If that thou vouches sauf [if you agree], what so bityde, / Thy doghter wol I take, er that I wende, / As for my wyf, unto hir lyves ende” (IV.306–8). Before Janicula replies, however, the marquis follows this statement with a reminder of Janicula’s loyalty thus far, telling him, “thou lovest me, I woot it wel certeyn, / And

502. IV.66; 194; 230; 363; 502; 531; 658; 794.

art my faithful lige man ybore, / And al that liketh me, I dar wel seyne, / It liketh thee” (IV.309–12), as though to condition Janicula for the response the marquis wants. The “astonyed,” “abayst [embarrassed],” and “quakyng” Janicula then vows, “my willynge / Is as ye wole, ne ayeynes youre likyng / I wol no thyng” (IV.319–21). So reassured, Walter confirms his intention to meet Griselda and “axe if it hire wille be / To be my wyf and reule hire after me” (IV.326–27). Evidently, Walter has taken to heart the description of marriage offered to him by the presentative of the people—knowing well, perhaps, Walter’s penchant for *obeisance*—as soveraynetee, noht . . . servyse” (IV.114), at least when it comes to his own role in marriage.

But if free will, as Duns Scotus for example theorizes, is the ability to choose between previously undetermined options, in the terms to his engagement to Griselda the marquis attempts to delimit her future options. When the marquis proposes to her, he first primes her with the statement that “ye shal wel understonde / It liketh to youre fader and to me / That I yow wedde” (IV.344–46), before adding the qualification, “ye wol that it so be” (IV.347). Again, as with this exchange with Janicula, the marquis makes clear what response he expects. His proposal itself then comes in the form of a request that she conform her will to his own forevermore, as he asks,

be ye redy with good herte
 To al my lust, and that I frely may,
 As me best thynketh, do yow laughe or smerte,
 And nevere ye to grucche it, nyght ne day?
 And eek whan I sey ‘ye,’ ne sey nat ‘nay,’

Neither by word ne frowynyng contenance?

(IV.351–56).

Griselda, “wondrynge upon this word, quakyng for drede” (IV.358)—for fear, or perhaps for an awe mingled with fear, not for excitement—responds,⁵⁰³

as ye wole yourself, right so wol I.

And heere I swere that nevere willingly,

In wek ne thoght, I nyl yow disobeye,

For to be deed, though me were looth to deye

(IV.361–64)

It can thus be argued that Griselda agrees to the marquis’s terms of her own free will. He has phrased the proposal and vow of obedience in terms of it “ye wol that it so be” (IV.347), and Griselda has agreed, even elaborating on an extreme condition in which she would obey him—even if it requires her death. And yet “drede” is inserted within the terms of their engagement as well, poised between the marquis’s proposal, if it may be so called, and Griselda’s response, and the text quietly raises the question of to what degree something can be said to have been done freely when done out of fear.

Not satisfied with Griselda’s promise alone, however, the marquis tests the strength of Griselda’s vow after they marry. After the birth of their first child, a daughter, the narrator explains that Walter feels a “merveillous desir his wyf t’assaye [test]; / Nedelees, God woot, he thoghte hire for t’affraye [to frighten]” (IV.454–55). Semantically, the narrative here recalls the

503. See the entry for “drede” (n.) in *A Chaucer Glossary*, ed. Norman Davis et al.

opening description of the marquis as not “biloved” but also “drad” (IV.69). Already, the narrator implies, the marquis’s plan exceeds simply testing his wife’s loyalty—it is also apparently rooted in a desire to elicit fear as part of his strategy for reaffirming for himself his own liberty.

The route that Walter first takes in his mission “t’assaye” his wife is to pretend to have their daughter killed, under the false pretense that the people have grumbled about him being “subgetz and...in servage” to someone as lowborn as Griselda (IV.482). Walter essentially claims to be attempting to preserve peace in the commonwealth, claiming that he must heed the alleged grumblings of his people against Griselda and their child by adding,

I desire, as I have doon before,
 To lyve my lyf with hem in reste and pees.
 I may nat in this cas be recchelees;
 I moot doon with thy doghter for the beste,
 Nat as I wolde, but as my peple leste.

(IV.486–90)

Essentially, then, the marquis uses the excuse of attempting to ensure the common good—peace within his realm—as a means of authorizing his “merveillous desire” to “assaye a wyf whan that it is no nede, / And putten hire in angwyssh and in drede” (IV.461–62). He then reminds Griselda of her vow, asking “that ye to me assente as in this thyng. / Shewe now youre pacience in youre werkyng, / That ye me highte and swore in youre village” (IV.494–96). Walter, it seems, is not only accustomed to the usual obedience that a lord might unsurprisingly expect from his

liegemen, but to obedience even under the most horrible terms. Though he has shown the potential to adapt his judgments based on the voice of the people, he now twists that very voice into serving his own ends. In so doing, as Paul Strohm argues, he demonstrates “Chaucer’s most searching examination of the abuse of the hierarchal ideal.”⁵⁰⁴ Furthermore, the marquis recalls Theseus in the “Knight’s Tale,” and what David Aers sees in him as an abuse of “metaphysical language by those in power” and the subsequent “transformations of metaphysics into an ideology of unreflexive secular domination.”⁵⁰⁵ Here, Walter the marquis abuses the language of the common good in order to pursue what is in fact not a common good at all but a private end.

This deafness to any voice but his own only increases as he tests Griselda, for even when the people catch word of what he has done to their children, “nathelees, for ernest ne for game, / He of his crueel purpose nolde stente” (IV.733–35).⁵⁰⁶ But furthermore, it also showcases the processes by which an individual man’s pursuit of a private good can become writ large into systemic social ideology, a theme the text shares with the other Chaucerian works previously explored in this dissertation. For as the marquis’s tests continue, Griselda and even the people at large suffer a symbolic loss of voice in the wake of his singular, universal voice—always convincing others to “assente,” and more specifically to “wol” and “liketh” what he wills and likes, the marquis’s voice is essentially the only voice we hear, ventriloquized through those around him.

504. Strohm, *Social Chaucer*, 159.

505. Aers, *Chaucer, Langland*, 195.

506. IV.733–735.

The ventriloquism of the marquis's voice is evident in the character of the sergeant as well. The sergeant appears after the marquis tells Griselda that "I moot doon with thy doghter for the beste" (IV.489). Though the sergeant knows that the child will not be physically harmed, as the marquis has commanded him to take the child to "Boloigne to his suster deere" (IV.589), he complies with making Griselda believe otherwise. The sergeant even phrases his explanation to Griselda in terms of obedience, reaffirming his strict adherence to Walter's will as he cites the power of a lord's command:

Ye moote foryeve it me,
 though I do thyng to which I am constreyned.
 Ye been so wys that ful wel knowe ye
 That the lordes heestes [commands] mowe [may] nat been yfeyned [evaded];
 They mowe wel been biwailed or compleyned,
 But men moote nede unto hire luste obeye,
 And so wol I; there is namoore to seye. (IV.526–32)

According to the sergeant, further speech on the subject is useless; sounding almost as though he is describing a deity and not a man, the sergeant declares that there is only the lord's "heestes," and thus his "luste" must be obeyed—although even if the sergeant *were* describing God, for example, he would be overlooking the role of human free will and action, as explored in other Chaucerian texts like the "Knight's Tale" or as Troilus does in *Troilus and Criseyde*.

Initially, after the marquis's second test of Griselda in which he takes away their son (Griselda again believing him to be killed), "the sclaudre of Walter ofte and wyde spradde, /

That of a crueel herte he wikkedly . . . / Hath mordred bothe his children prively,” causing “swich murmur . . . among hem comunly” (IV.722–26). The people likewise initially protest when the marquis pretends that he will separate from Griselda and remarry. Ironically, while the marquis originally used the excuse of keeping the peace amongst his people for “killing” their first child, now, he continues testing Griselda even though it has sewn true discord amongst his people “comunly”—and even more stunningly, the marquis continues to use a fantasy of “rancor and dissencion / Bitwixe his peple and hym” to justify creating a counterfeit papal bull annulling their marriage (IV.743–49).

Eventually, however, the communal mood changes, and the people begin to reflect the marquis’s will as their own. When the marquis’s supposed new bride arrives with her brother, “the peple ran to seen the sighte / Of hire,” and “thane at erst amonges hem they seye / That Walter was no fool,” for “she is fairer, as they deemen alle, / Than is Grisilde, and moore tendre of age,” and they thus begin “commendynge now the markys governaunce” (IV.984–94). Ultimately, with the marquis inclining towards the ends of his personal and present lusts, demonstrating an *affectio commodi* without a *affectio iustitiae* to regulate it, his will becomes the will of the people; as in *Troilus and Criseyde*, they incline not towards a divine *summum bonum* but a man-made end, the whims of a single leader made to seem as though they represent a universal sort of order.

While ultimately the marquis reveals that it has all been a test—that he wishes to remain wed to Griselda, and that the “new bride” and her brother are in fact their children—the narrative has demonstrated the ways that a ruler, favoring his “lust present” above all else, can jeopardize

the common good. This is seen, for example, in the “rancor and dissencion” (IV.748) his apparent murder of his own children sows amongst the people, as noted above. But even more significantly, the text implies that the result of Griselda’s exile from the palace—had it been true and permanent—would itself have had communal consequences, regardless of the people’s reaction to it itself. As noted, the marquis so loved pursuing his “lust present,” particularly “for to hauke and hunte,” that “wel ny alle othere cures leet he slyde” (IV.80–2). After he marries Griselda, however, it turns out that she perhaps can rectify his oversights, for in addition to her virtue of “obeisaunce,” she has a talent for governance. Specifically, the narrator explains that in addition to being generally virtuous, Griselda

eek, whan that the cas required it,
 The commune profit koude she redresse.
 There nas discord, rancour, ne hevynesse
 In al that land that she ne koude apese,
 And wisely brynge hem alle in reste and ese.
 (IV.430–34).

Griselda, it seems, is quite skilled in working towards the “commune profit,” a phrase that Ginsberg in the *Riverside* glosses as meaning “the welfare of the state,” through the art of resolving conflicts specifically.⁵⁰⁷ Strohm argues that this characteristic of Griselda’s functions

507. *Riverside* 143, gloss to line 431.

as “a standard against which Walter . . . is obviously found wanting.”⁵⁰⁸ Furthermore, the narrator adds that

Though that hire housbonde absent were anon,
 If gentil men of othere of hire contree
 Were wrothe, she wolde bryngen hem aton [to agreement];
 So wise and rype words hadde she,
 And juggementz of so greet equitee,
 That she from heven sent was, as men wende,
 Peple to save and every wrong t’amende.

(IV.435–41)

Thus, Griselda’s “wise and rype words”—her speech and actions specifically, and not merely her presence or her status as the marquis’ wife—enable her to resolve conflicts. When it comes to others’ disagreements, then, Griselda is able to lend a remedial voice to otherwise static crises, a quality particularly beneficial to the state as whole for the wife of a marquis who, the narrative implies, spends more time on his “lust present” than anything else.

But while the narrative demonstrates that Griselda may be able to counter Walter’s lapses in governance, it also demonstrates that she can do so only if she remains in a position which Walter alone has the power to grant her. Instead, focusing on his personal and present desires above all else, Walter’s circumscription of women—specifically through Griselda but symbolically through his apparent belief that a wife’s loyalty must be tested—doubly harms the

508. Strohm, *Social Chaucer*, 160.

commune profit, both by stirring up “rancor and dissencion,” as noted above, but also by removing the one person, a woman, who might otherwise have the power to correct him. Essentially, the marquis’s singular will, rendered as though universal, suppresses the very plurality of particulars needed to overcome it; silenced, not literally like Philomela in the *Legend* but symbolically, Griselda is unable to work for *commune profit* or resolve the very kind of “discord and rancour” that the marquis himself causes.

As noted at the beginning of this section, critics have often been troubled that Griselda cooperates with Walter’s terrible orders—orders that she herself does not realize are pretenses. On the one hand, Griselda’s apparent lack of care for securing her own *profit* stands as a contrast to the marquis’s efforts to apparently secure only his own *profit*—as Blamires argues, Chaucer’s characterization of Griselda in this way combats antifeminist tropes by shifting the emphasis to a man’s faults and fickleness.⁵⁰⁹ On the other, it nevertheless appears that while Griselda can redress the *commune profit*, when it comes to addressing her *own* profit, she lapses into silence.

But to some extent, she does seem to resist, perhaps coming close, by the end, to violating her vow to the marquis that “as ye wole, right so wol I” (IV.361). She negotiates, for example, on the terms of her dismissal from the palace, declaring that she will return the fine clothes the marquis gave her but requesting, “Lat me nat lyk a worm go by the weye,” and asking that she may take her leave wearing “a smok as I was wont to were [wear]” (IV.880; 886). Later, she offers another subtle gesture of resistance. Interceding on behalf of the girl she believes will be the marquis’s new wife, she asks that he “ne prikke with no tormentynge / This tendre

509. See again Blamires, *Chaucer, Ethics, and Gender*, 173–75.

mayden, as ye han doon mo,” stating that such a girl, having been “fostred in hire norissyng / Moore tenderly” is unlikely to be able to “adversitee endure / As koude a povre fostred creature” like herself (IV.1038–43). However, this gesture is for the *profit* of another, not herself—in securing her own good, Griselda passes into silences.

This difficulty in assessing Griselda is further troubled by the multiple morals and interpretations presented at the end of the “Clerk’s Tale” itself. The Clerk-narrator, after ending the tale by saying that Griselda and the marquis spend the rest of their lives together “in concord and in reste,” concludes that “this world is nat so strong, . . . / As it hath been in olde tymes yore,” and therefore to “herkeneth what this auctour seith therfoore” (IV.1139–41), referring back to Petrarch, the “lauriat poete” whom he attributes the story to in his “Prologue” (IV.31).

The Clerk then explains that

This storie is seyde nat for that wyves sholde
 Folwen Grisilde as in humylitee,
 For it were inportable [intolerable], though they wolde,
 But for that every wight, in his degree,
 Sholde be constant in adversitee
 As was Grisilde
 (IV.1142–1147)

The Clerk adds that for the above reasons, “therefore Petrak writeth / This storie, which with heigh stile he enditeth,” and that “us oghte / Receyven al in gree that God us sent” (IV.1147–48; 1150–51). In this moral, then, which the Clerk attributes to Petrarch, Griselda becomes a

spiritual allegorical figure, demonstrating Job-like patience in the face of adversity. The Clerk, however, then pivots away from this moral, commenting that

It were ful hard to fynde now-a-dayes
 In al a toun Grisildis thre or two;
 For if that they were put to swiche assayes,
 The gold of hem hath now so bade alayes [alloys]
 With bras, that thogh the coyne be fair at ye,
 It wolde rather breste a-two than plye
 (IV.1164–1169)

Here, the Clerk deviates from Petrarch, implying that in his contemporary age a woman like Griselda could never be found, not because it would be “inportable,” or intolerable, for a woman to follow Griselda’s humility, even if they will to do so, but rather that the quality of women has declined, like gold alloyed with brass.

Next, the Clerk pivots again, now addressing “the Wyves love of bathe— / Whos lyf and al hire secte God maynete / In heigh maistrie, and elles were it scathe [pity],” adding, “I wol with lusty here, fresh and grene, / Seyn yow a song to glade yow” (IV.1170–74). The song itself follows in the section labelled “*Envoy de Chaucer*.” Whether the words of the Envoy are intended to be read as the Clerk’s, despite the attribution *de Chaucer*, or whether they are indeed Chaucer the writer’s own comments, remains debated. Ginsberg, however, argues that “*Envoy*

de Chaucer” is a “scribe’s heading,” and “belongs dramatically to the Clerk.”⁵¹⁰ The envoy in particular forces readers to pause and reassess the role Griselda herself has played in allowing the marquis’s private and personal aim to act as a universal narrative dictating her own behavior and the law of the land. While the previous moral implies that husbands should not bother to test their wives, the envoy applies to the wives themselves. The narrator urges wives to “Lat noon humylitee youre tonge naille” (IV.1184), recalling the ways that Griselda’s voice, while not literally silenced, becomes a reflection of Walter’s for much of the text. The narrator then recommends women to

Folweth Ekko, that holdeth no silence,
 But evere answereth at the countretaille.
 Beth nat bidaffed for youre innocence,
 But sharply taak on yow the governaille [control].
 Empreteþ wel this lessoun in youre mynde,
 For commune profit sith it may availle.
 (IV.1189–94)

This part of the envoy thus seems to call for speech and action, after a preceding story that not only dramatizes women’s silence and circumscription but has implied that this can harm the

510. Ginsberg, *Riverside* 883, note to line 1177. For an overview of this debate, see: Chickering, “Form and Interpretation.” Chickering explains that the most common interpretation is see the Envoy as part of “three successive interpretative frames,” the first allegorical, the second “as part of a meta-dialogue between the Clerk and the Wife,” and the third providing Chaucer’s own analysis (353-354).

common good; here, then, the envoy suggests that women's speech may redress it, as Griselda's own speech, before her trials began, redressed the *commune profit* within the realm.

A few lines later, however, the moral devolves into satire, the narrator speaking of women who "clappeth as a mille" and whose "arwes [arrows] of . . . crabbed eloquence / Shal perce" their husbands' "brest and eek his aventaille [chain mail]" (IV.1200; 1203–4). Campbell argues that these lines seem to point to an alternative "paradigm of female behavior" and participation "inspired by the Wife of Bath."⁵¹¹ She likewise adds, however, that the lines riff on antifeminist stereotypes, and that "this participation is invited on the understanding that women submit themselves to a textual model that confirms certain negative stereotypes of them, a submission that, while supposedly contesting male authority, in fact serves to reinforce it."⁵¹² The "Clerk's Tale," in Campbell's reading, thus "fails to stage a serious critique of the gender politics implicit in authorship itself."⁵¹³

Schwebel and Dinshaw, however, point to the ways the text and the envoy restore attention to the ethics of individual female experience. Schwebel, for example, argues that "as ironic as the Clerk's expressed solidarity with the 'noble wyves' and 'archewyves' may be, paired with his earlier address to the 'wommen' in attendance, it recalls Boccaccio's original deference to a readership comprised of aristocratic ladies."⁵¹⁴ Dinshaw sees paradox at the heart of the closing of the "Clerk's Tale," noting that "the song for the Wife of Bath" in the envoy

511. Campbell, "Sexual Poetics and the Politics of Translation," 211.

512. Campbell, "Sexual Poetics and the Politics of Translation," 212.

513. Campbell, "Sexual Poetics and the Politics of Translation," 213.

514. Schwebel, "Redressing Griselda," 296.

“suggests that [it] is *no* exemplum Griselda does not and *should not* exist now,” and that “wives . . . should not take such treatment from husbands.”⁵¹⁵ On the other hand, Dinshaw, like Campbell, recognizes that the nod to the Wife is “derived directly form the clerkly antifeminist literature he has disavowed earlier.”⁵¹⁶ Dinshaw believes that this paradox is intentional, and that Chaucer has the tale as a whole offer no definitive solution but rather food-for-thought, for “Chaucer’s sexual poetics always engages the play between what is said and what is consequently not said, what is brought into being and what is thereby eliminated.”⁵¹⁷ Thus, in Dinshaw’s reading, Griselda is not an exemplum, and the Wife likewise fails as an alternative. As with the example of Alisoun in the “Wife of Bath’s Prologue,” the “Clerk’s Tale” demonstrates the need for an alternative to the universal narrative the marquis attempts to impose, and for female behavior in response to such narratives, but as with the “Wife of Bath’s Prologue,” the model offered in the “Clerk’s Tale” may be too extreme.

515. Dinshaw, *Chaucer’s Sexual Poetics*, 152, original emphasis.

516. Dinshaw, *Chaucer’s Sexual Poetics*, 153.

517. Dinshaw, *Chaucer’s Sexual Poetics*, 155.

CONCLUSION

But let us not forget the chickens.

As explored in my second chapter, in casting theological debates on free will into the social realm through an avian beast fable, the “Nun’s Priest’s Tale,” as Manish Sharma argues, parallels positions on free will and their related, broader schools of thought with gender dynamics. In response to Chauntecleer’s dream, which he believes portends his future and inevitable death-by-fox, Pertelote’s feminine voice argues that “swevenes [dreams] engendren of replecciouns [overeating],” and that he can take steps to improve the balance of his bodily humours in order to avoid such dreams in the future (VII.2923). In contrast, Chauntecleer’s masculine voice argues that “men may in olde bookes rede / Of many a man moore of auctorite / . . . That al the revers seyne of this sentence,” that is, “dremes been significaciouns / As wel of joye as of tribulaciouns / That folk enduren in this lif present” (VII.2974–81). Over the course of its narrative, the “Nun’s Priest’s Tale” thus draws the following binaries:

Table 1: Gender, Theology, and Free Will in the “Nun’s Priest’s Tale”

Chauntecleer	Pertelote
Masculine	Feminine
Simple necessity	Free will
Determinism	Voluntarism
Formalist	Materialist
Realist	Nominalist
Universals	Particulars

In its denouement, however, the “Nun’s Priest’s Tale” suggests a middle ground. To some extent, Chauntecleer’s dream does seem to have portended the future, implying that there may be circumstances and events determined by forces outside of our control. And yet, just as the tale demonstrates the need for an Aristotelian approach to virtue and vice as it critiques how Chauntecleer’s gluttony and pride enabled his near-catastrophe, it also suggests that a golden mean can perhaps help navigate the debates on free will, and the related question of gender dynamics the tale presents alongside it. Had Chauntecleer given in to his fatalism when locked in the jaws of the fox, he would have simply become fine dining. Instead, recalling Pertelote’s beliefs in the efficacy of human action, Chauntecleer does not allow himself to become anyone else’s meat—he utilizes his free choice and wits to evade the fox, concluding that “he that wynketh, whan he sholde see, / Al wilfully, God lat him nevere thee [prosper]!” (VII.3431–32). The “Nun’s Priest’s Tale” thus dramatizes a number of interconnected points, chiefly, that one’s own vices, made habit, can unwittingly be a source of self-circumscription; that what appears to be fate can in fact be man-made (as the fox’s attack is shown to be “forncast” by his own careful premeditation—and observation of Chauntecleer’s aforesaid habits and vices); and most significantly, that a balance between hyper-determinism and hyper-fatalism is needed, a balance that in the terms of this particular text cannot be achieved without a parallel balance of masculine and feminine voices.

In my previous chapter, I explored the figures of the Wife of Bath and Griselda in considering how many of Chaucer’s works draw a connection between systemic antifeminist social determinism and issues pertaining to the common good. In particular, I considered the

extent to which, if any, the texts themselves offered these two women as role models for female behavior in response to such systems of antifeminist circumscription. Taking *Griselda*, for example, Schwebel sees Chaucer's "Clerk's Tale" as "condemning Walter's actions" and, by restoring attention to an audience of aristocratic women, as she argues, as "mov[ing] farther away from his Petrarchan source and its moral conclusion."⁵¹⁸ Ultimately, Schwebel argues, Chaucer "explicitly rejects *Griselda* as a viable model for women, insisting that both she and her author represent obsolete models of authority"; she instead entertains the possibility, somewhat jokingly, that "the Clerk goes so far as to commend us to his rival, the Wife of Bath."⁵¹⁹ In contrast, as noted in my last chapter, Campbell argues that the "Clerk's Tale" appears to offer a female audience "an alternative example to follow" in the Wife of Bath, but that the tale ultimately "fails to stage a serious critique of the gender politics implicit in authorship itself."⁵²⁰

But turning to the Wife of Bath is likewise somewhat problematic. As noted, through the character of Alison, the "Wife of Bath's Prologue" importantly critiques antifeminist literary traditions which exclude female self-representation, and demonstrates the potentially violent frustration that such systemic, gendered social determinism may beget. And yet, while Alison takes pains to clarify the subjectivity of her position on sexuality, the resolution of both her "Prologue" and "Tale" arguably demonstrates the replacement of one universal, monolithic narrative with another, female for male. In the "Clerk's Tale," in contrast, the masculine, monolithic, universal voice of Walter the marquis in effect becomes amplified by those around

518. Schwebel, "Redressing *Griselda*," 294.

519. Schwebel, "Redressing *Griselda*," 288; 296.

520. Campbell, "Sexual Poetics and the Politics of Translation," 213.

him, including Griselda, who vows to make his will her own. The narrative as a whole uncomfortably suggests that Griselda is complicit in her own oppression, although perhaps in a way resembling Alceste in the *Legend of Good Women*, who Patterson argues is portrayed as “a victim who has internalized her own subjection.”⁵²¹

But while Griselda’s passivity is certainly extreme in the “Clerk’s Tale,” as is Alison’s vocality and dominance in the “Wife of Bath’s Prologue,” the texts themselves invite their readers to contemplate what a more satisfactory alternative might look like, even though the only alternative that the Clerk-narrator can himself envision is the extreme “crabbed eloquence” of “archewyves” who “clappeth as a mille” (IV.1195; 1203; 1200). The “Clerk’s Tale,” escaping the bounds of its teller, perhaps comes closer to offering a genuine, rather than satirical, alternative than has been acknowledged. Like Ginsberg, in the preceding chapter I have read the “Lenvoy de Chaucer” as in the Clerk’s voice. But the relationship that Chaucer creates between the Clerk-narrator and his tale, I think, is much like that between the Knight or Nun’s Priest and their tales—while the pilgrim narrator makes one claim, the text as a whole complicates the claim. Thus, while the Clerk-narrator slides into satire in referencing the “crabbed eloquence” of wives, a serious moral may yet be found by considering the ways that the details of the story—the foreboding emphasis on the marquis’s “lynage” and “gentillesse,” for example—stand at odds with the Clerk’s light-hearted, satirical, and ultimately misogynist treatment of what it might look like for a woman to speak up against and resist such treatment.

521. Patterson, *Subject of History*, 284.

As Ginsberg argues, a ballad envoy “is not necessarily the logical conclusion to the poem but often is rather a means of connecting the action to actual life,” a means, perhaps through invitation of the audience themselves, of “establishing a realistic context for the abstract ideas of the poem.”⁵²² As with the “Nun’s Priest’s Tale,” once again, Chaucer’s documented interest in Aristotle and the prevalence of Aristotelian thought in the fourteenth-century may offer a way of navigating the surprisingly complex ending of the “Clerk’s Tale.” As a whole, the various morals and interpretations offered are all extremes. But we need not turn away from Griselda entirely, nor ignore the nod to the Wife of Bath, to seek an alternative model of female behavior, but rather consider what averaging them produces by recalling Aristotle’s theory of achieving *eudaimonia* through pursuit of virtue as a mean.⁵²³ Aristotle, as noted, explains that “the virtues are choices of a kind” aiming to find “a mid-point between excess and deficiency” (*NE* II.1106). Significantly, in between the extreme of Petrarch’s moral, that Griselda can only be an allegorical example, and the satirical moral that women should “clappeth as a mille,” comes the suggestion that women ought to “holdeth no silence,” for “commune profit sith it may availle” (IV.1189; 1194)—a suggestion that lies literally in the middle of two extremes in the physical text itself.

Looking for an Aristotelian mean of the morals, then, leads to an Aristotelian mean of the alternative for women to follow between passivity and crabbed eloquence. The reference to “commune profit” semantically recalls the ways that the preceding text has not only emphasized

522. Ginsberg, *Riverside* 883, note to line 1177.

523. On the influence of Aristotelian thought on Chaucer, see again Greene 93; Collette 1; 79; and Robertson, 226.

Griselda's ability to redress the "commune profit" but has also suggested that female circumscription—in which Griselda seems to be somewhat complicit through an excess, and not a mean, of *obeisaunce*—can itself render harm to the common good when women who have skills of governance and peace-weaving like Griselda are silenced. Griselda, then, holds the potential to be her own alternative, and an alternative for women, for between Griselda's overly-passive obedience to Walter and the satirical "crabbed eloquence" of the Wife is a middle-ground of refusing to hold silence when *individual* as well as common "profit" is threatened. For after all, both "profits" become conflated in the "Clerk's Tale"—Griselda, *not* speaking up for herself, is removed from the social position in which she can positively affect the "commune profit" at all.

Chaucer moves towards a model of not only such a female spokesperson but a community willing to hear her voice in works such as the *Parliament of Fowls* and the "Tale of Melibee." Intriguingly, Collette notes that

At the beginning of the *Parliament of Fowls* Chaucer links his tale of love and common profit to books, through a proverbial assertion of the power of books to generate ideas:

'for out of olde felde, as men seyth, / Cometh al this new corn from yer to yere / And out of olde bookes, in good feyth, / Cometh al this newe science that men lere.'⁵²⁴

The book that Chaucer's narrator alludes to here specifically is Cicero's "Dream of Scipio," summarized in my previous chapter. In Chaucer's summary in the *Parliament of Fowls*, he

524. Collette, *Rethinking*, 24; quoting *Parliament of Fowls* 22–25.

writes that Affrycan teaches Scipion that “what man.../ that loved commune profyt, wel ithewed, / He shulde into a blysfyl place wende” (46–48). Having so read about Scipio, the narrator then dreams himself of the avian parliament, which convenes on “Seynt Valentynes day” to choose mates (309). It seems at first that the male birds will have the final say in who the female eagle, the “formel...moste benygne and the goodlieste,” will take as a mate (373–375). As they debate, the formel is notably silent; one might wonder if women will be excluded from discussions of desire and community as the three tercels plead their cases for over sixty-eight lines (416–483), in a silencing or occlusion of the female voice such as that with which Chaucer’s Philomela in the *Legend* or the Wife in the *Canterbury Tales* are well acquainted.

However, Nature had previously added a stipulation that the formel “agree to his eleccioun.../ This is our usage alwey, fro yeer to yere” (4010–11). Despite the garrulousness of the tercels—a notable contrast to the alleged garrulousness of the Wife of Bath, and which perhaps represents the overwhelmingly masculine voice of much of written authorities that Chaucer’s works so often problematize, Nature ensures that women *will* have a “say,” eventually. At long last, hours later, she does; Nature reminds them that the formel “hireself shal han the eleccioun / Of whom hire lest” (621–22). The formel’s “say,” however, circumvents their entire process, for she asks Nature

unto this yeer be done

I aske respite for to avysen me.

And after that to have my choys al free;

This al and sum, that I wolde speke and seye

(647–50).

Nature grants her wish; and in this arrangement, the formel is thus able to give herself control over her own body and desire; she will not be battered down by male rhetoric but will rather wait and “avysen” *herself*. Nature’s closing advice to the tercelts then brings readers back full circle to Affrycan’s lesson that men who work towards *commune profyt* shall fare best, for she advises them to in the mean time “beth of good herte and serveth...and each of yow peyne him, in his degre, / For to do wel” (660–63). As Paul Strohm notes, the *Parliament of Fowls* “weighs different varieties of love for their contribution to social good (‘common profit’) or social disruption,”⁵²⁵ but in this avian parliament’s microcosmic community, this weighing must include men *and* women in another Chaucerian refinement of how best to achieve *commune profit*—a conception of community that likewise reflects the suggestion of the “Nun’s Priest’s Tale” that the golden mean can only be achieved through a balance of male and female perspectives.

But the Chaucerian character who most fully exemplifies the potential that Griselda shows, were she living within a sociocultural milieu less bent on making her “a victim who has internalized her own subjection,” to borrow Patterson’s phrasing,⁵²⁶ is Prudence in the “Tale of Melibee.” “Melibee” as a story deals with violence and its aftermath. Unlike the “Knight’s Tale,” in which Theseus attempts to impose order by responding to violence with more violence, be it by attacking Thebes or magnifying Arcite and Palamon’s private feud onto the public and epic

525. Strohm, *Social Chaucer*, 125–26.

526. Patterson, *Subject of History*, 284.

level, in “Melibee” Chaucer offers a nonviolent way to resolve conflict and restore peace. Most significantly for the present discussion, it is also a peace which can only be achieved once Melibee himself, letting go of both his impulse to have his voice be the only voice of authority, and of his antifeminist impulse against a woman giving advice, allows his wife to speak.

At the beginning of the “Tale of Melibee,” Melibee’s wife, Prudence, and their daughter, Sophie, are attacked after their home is invaded while Melibee is away. Melibee’s first instinct is to return the violence in kind. Having gathered a number of friends, family, and neighbors to seek their advice, it quickly becomes clear “by the manere of his speche” that “in herte he baar a crueel ire, ready to doon vengeance upon his foes, and sodeynly desired that the werre sholde bigynne” (VII.100). When Prudence first intervenes, Melibee dismisses her with an antifeminist saying much of the kind that Alisoun rails against in the “Wife of Bath’s Prologue,” citing Solomon in telling her, “alle wommen been wikke, and noon good of hem alle” (VII.1057). Patiently, Prudence explains that this is only the opinion of one man—a monovalent opinion—and that it is not therefore a universal truth. As she explains, “though that Salomon seith that he ne foond nevere woman good, it folweth nat therefore that alle wommen ben wikke,” pointing out that there are many other examples of good women within the Bible (VII.1076–77). It is only after this that Melibee vows that he will “govern me by thy conseil in alle thyng” (VII.1114).

Having successfully countered an antifeminist proscription against a woman’s counsel, Prudence proceeds to advise her husband against violence, methodologically employing a variety of written authorities in her support—even including those that Melibee would use to argue in favor of a violent response—in a literally polyvocal and textually polylythic countering of her

husband's universal, monolithic approach to violence. She uses a patchwork of sources, including the *Distichs* of Cato, the *Sententiae* of Publilius Syrus, Cicero, Ovid, and others, limiting herself not to one old book but to many, putting the opinions of multiple authors in conversation with each other as she advises her husband that “wikkednesse shal be warissed by goodnesse” (VII.1290).

It is not simply a plurality of voices that Prudence urges Melibee to listen to, however. She urges him also not to simply listen to the loudest opinion—many of his friends and neighbors enthusiastically agreed to his initial plan for retaliation—but rather to listen to more judiciously-chosen counselors. Her advice to exercise caution in response to the loudest voice recalls the parliamentary scene in *Troilus* where the “noyse of peple up stirte . . . / As breame as blasé of straw iset on-fire” (IV.183–4), many voices coming together to reflect one opinion, following the monolithic master narrative of war in their willingness to sacrifice Criseyde. Prudence goes on to point out that Melibee has failed to make any division “bitwixe” his “conseillours,” clarifying,

This is to seyne, bitwixen youre trewe freendes and youre feyned conseillours. Ne ye han nat knowe the wil of youre trewe freendes olde and wise, but ye han cast alle hire words in an hochept and enclyned youre herte to the moore partie and to the gretter nombre, and there been ye condescended [yielded]. (VII.1255–57)

Importantly, in a moment that recalls the Wife of Bath's point that “conseillyng is no comandement. / He putte it in oure owene juggement” (III.66–67), Prudence likewise reminds Melibee that “soothly, thilke man that asketh conseil of a purpose yet hath he *free choys* whether

he wole wekre by that conseil or noon” (VII.1083, emphasis added). Finally, recalling the words on good governece both in the *Legend of Good Women* and in the theological and philosophical texts explored in the previous chapter, Prudence encourages Melibe to consider how his actions will affect his reputation. She advises, “forbere now to do vengeance, / in swich a manere that youre goode name may be kept and conserved, / and that men mowe have cause and mateere to preyse yow of pitee and of mercy, and that ye have no cause to repente yow of thyng that ye doon” (VII.1862–65). Here, her concern for Melibee’s “goode name” recalls the “Clerk’s Tale,” in which the marquis fails to protect his good name as he relentlessly tests Griselda, becoming like the “tyraunts of Lumbardye” Alceste warns against in the *Legend* as his “sclaundre” spreads amongst the people (IV.722). As Prudence concludes, referring to Cicero, “no sorwe, ne no drede of deeth, ne no thyng that may falle unto a man, / is so muchel agayns nature as a man to encressen his owene profit to the harm of another man” (VII.1584–85).

Prudence thus works for the *commune profit* like Griselda can, avoiding the silence and monovocality that results from an excess of *obeisaunce* in the “Clerk’s Tale.” Prudence likewise works cross-textually like the Wife of Bath to demonstrate that the dominant voice is not necessarily the wisest or most correct; and like the Wife directly states, she reminds Melibee that he has free choice—counseling does not equal necessity. Her speech, moreover, not only prevents her own silencing but more largely demonstrates the need for female guidance in achieving communal salvation, just as Chauntecleer needs Pertelote’s guidance, blended with his own judgements, to achieve his personal salvation.

It is no coincidence, I think, that “Melibee” is a tale assigned to Chaucer’s own fictional, pilgrim version of himself within the *Canterbury Tales*. It stands as a rarity amongst his works, scarcely revised from his source material, perhaps because it already shared the ideological vision Chaucer gradually created in works ranging from the “Nun’s Priest’s Tale” to *Troilus and Criseyde*. It begins in the aftermath of male violence, and features the strong, steady voice of a woman explaining how to preclude further violence—how to break society’s tendency to reproduce its own pugnacious, monolithic, and self-circumscribing capacities. As Paul Strohm argues, “Hierarchy may . . . be viewed as the ultimate subject of the *Tale of Melibee*, but the narrative reveals its flawed nature and the necessity for its restoration by good counsel.”⁵²⁷ Importantly, however, this restoration is made possible only through ending the circumscription of a woman’s voice. To an extent the tale does demonstrate, as Strohm argues, “the reinstatement of a powerful system of analogy that Walter’s irrational cruelty had forced tellers of the Griselda story to disavow,”⁵²⁸ but with a crucial difference—for the analogy reinstated in “Melibee” is one which also shows analogy’s limitations. This newly crafted analogy shows that analogy is most powerful and profitable for the *commune profit* when it is flexible, no longer gendered exclusively masculine, but made possible through the recognition of plurality and particulars that Chaucer’s works on a whole have aligned with the feminine, in opposition to a masculine universal narrative.

527. Strohm, *Social Chaucer*, 161.

528. Strohm, *Social Chaucer*, 162.

While my above analysis has centered on Prudence as the golden mean for female response to monolithic, hyper-masculine systems of antifeminist circumscription, it is of course somewhat unfair and misrepresentative of Chaucer's oeuvre to put all of the onus of alternative behavior on women. After all, works like the "Clerk's Tale" also interrogate to what extent women can exercise their free will as freely as men. That Prudence can act as Griselda does before the marquis terrorizes her is itself only possible because Melibee cooperates with the stripping away of his antifeminist impulses against the female voice. In such social systems, change cannot only be asked of those who have the least power. Thus, Chaucer's texts, as I have argued throughout this dissertation, critique masculine metaliterary and social systems repeatedly.

Most broadly, Chaucer's frequent connection of the issue of antifeminist circumscription to the question of the common good indicates the potential stakes for failing to affect social change that extends beyond individual women, or even individual men. But undoing the harm wrought by systemic patterns of circumscription is, of course, no simple business. While, like the works of many medieval theologians, Chaucer's texts emphasize the power of human free will, they also warn against the abuse of "metaphysical language by those in power," as Aers observes of the "Knight's Tale" in particular.⁵²⁹ Chaucer's works consider the capacity of human beings to circumscribe themselves and others, dramatizing in particular the circumscription of women under hyper-masculine social ideologies dependent on the "transformations of metaphysics into

529. Aers, *Chaucer, Langland*, 195.

an ideology of unreflexive secular domination.”⁵³⁰ It is for such reasons, I think, that Chaucer repeatedly demonstrates what Lee Patterson has dubbed an “anti-thetical Boethianism”⁵³¹ throughout his works, an attitude towards free will and human behavior born of a fourteenth-century growth in nominalist thinking. While a Boethian hierarchy might have been Chaucer’s ideal, the world of mortal, lived experience, as Richard Utz has surmised, increasingly felt like a “contingent place,” “one in which the complex motivations of human agency replace God’s determining and eternally reliable master plan”⁵³²—one in which man-made ends and universals, not the divine *summum bonum*, unnaturally inclined citizens along monolithic and circumscribing paths, occluding the particulars of experience.

Bokes olde, Chaucer’s works further demonstrate, can be a double-edged sword in considering social stasis and social transformation. On the one hand, Chaucer’s texts point to the ways that *bokes olde* can themselves constitute monolithic traditions, reinforcing and reproducing circumscribing social ideologies—hence, the Wife of Bath rails against the *Book of Wicked Wives* and her husband Jankyn, who embodies the entire tradition of clerical antifeminism. On the other, Chaucer also demonstrates how *bokes olde* can be fruitfully subverted, rearranged, and reassessed in order to break such patterns. As Carolyn Dinshaw argues, considering the “Clerk’s Tale” in particular, Chaucer’s works are often intense ethical revisions of his sources, and “point to a critique of patriarchal conceptions of language and

530. Aers, *Chaucer, Langland*, 195.

531. Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History*, 115.

532. Utz, “Philosophy,” 169. See also Sheila Delany’s similar argument, cited by Utz in “Literary Nominalism,” 209, in “Undoing Substantial Connection: The Late Medieval Attack on Analogical Thought,” *Mosaic* 5.4 (1972): 33-52.

literary activity” while also “suggest[ing] alternatives to such misogynistic formulations.”⁵³³

Hence, while Chaucer subverts the work of some of his own sources, like Boccaccio in *Troilus and Criseyde* or the “Knight’s Tale,” he also turns to other *bokes olde*, such as Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* or Statius’s *Thebaid*, to excavate alternative ways of thinking about persistent problems. But in the final solution, even this is not enough, Chaucer suggests, if the voices in *bokes olde*—and in his books, and the books of his contemporaries—remain un-inclusive. In redressing not only individual but communal circumscription and suffering, woman must not be tied in *lusty leese* but given the opportunity that the Wife and her proverbial lion so desire—the opportunity to paint herself, and to be heard.

533. Dinshaw, *Chaucer’s Sexual Poetics*, 16.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Aers, David. *Chaucer, Langland and the Creative Imagination*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980.
- . “Criseyde: Woman in Medieval Society.” *The Chaucer Review* 13 (1979): 177–200.
- Alluntis, Felix and Allan Wolter. “Necessity of immutability.” In the “Glossary” to John Duns Scotus, *God and Creatures: The Quodlibetal Questions*. Translated and edited by Felix Alluntis and Allan B. Wolter, 493–540. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975.
- Apollodorus. *The Library, Volume I: Books 1–3.9*. Translated by James G. Frazer. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1921. *Loeb Classical Library*.
- Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologica*. Edited and translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province, Benziger Brothers, 1947. *Dominican House of Studies Priory of the Immaculate Conception*, <https://dhspriory.org/thomas/summa/>
- . *Summa Theologiae*. Edited by Enrique Alarcón, Ad Universitatis Studiorum Navarrensis, 2001. *Corpus Thomisticum: Fundación Tomás de Aquino*, www.corpusthomisticum.org/iopera.html.
- Aristotle. *De Interpretatione*. In *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation, Volume One*, edited by Jonathan Barnes, 25–38. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984.
- . *Eudemian Ethics*. In *Aristotle’s Ethics: Writing from the Complete Works*, edited by Jonathan Barnes and Anthony Kenny, 33–206. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014.

- . *Nicomachean Ethics*. In *Aristotle's Ethics: Writing from the Complete Works*, edited by Jonathan Barnes and Anthony Kenny, 207–371. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014.
- “armipotent, *adj.* (and *n.*).” In *OED Online*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, December 2018.
- Astell, Ann, “Chaucer’s ‘Literature Group’ and the Medieval Causes of Books.” *English Literary History* 59 (1992): 269–287.
- Augustine of Hippo. *Confessions*. 2nd ed. Translated by F. J. Sheed. Edited Michael P. Foley. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2006.
- . *Divine Providence and the Problem of Evil*. Translated by Robert P. Russell. In *Writings of Saint Augustine*, Vol. I. Published by *The Fathers of the Church*, New York: Cima Publishing Co., Inc., 1948.
- . *On Free Choice of the Will*. Translated and edited by Thomas Williams. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993.
- . *On Order*. Translated and edited by Silvano Borruso. South Bend, IN: St. Augustine’s Press, 2007.
- . *Reconsiderations*. In *On Free Choice of the Will*. Translated and edited by Thomas Williams, 124–129. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993.
- Baker, D. P. “A Bradwardinian Benediction: The Ending of the Nun’s Priest’s Tale Revisited,” *Medium Ævum* 82 no. 2 (2013): 236–243.
- Barney, Stephen A. Glosses and explanatory notes to *Troilus and Criseyde*. In *The Riverside Chaucer*, edited by Larry D. Benson, 3rd edn. (Boston, 1987).

- Behrman, Mary. "Heroic Criseyde." *The Chaucer Review* 38, no. 4 (2004): 314–336.
- Benson, David C. "Trust the Tale, Not the Teller." In *Drama, Narrative and Poetry in the Canterbury Tales*, edited by Wendy Harding, 21–33. Presses Universitaires Du Mirail, 2003.
- Benson, Larry D. Glosses and explanatory notes to the "General Prologue." In *The Riverside Chaucer*, edited by Larry D. Benson, 3rd edn. (Boston, 1987).
- Biard, Joël. "Nominalism in the Later Middle Ages." In *The Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy, Volume II*, revised edition, edited by Robert Pasnau and Christina Van Dyke, 661–673. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.
- Blamires, Alcuin. *Chaucer, Ethics, and Gender*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- . "Introduction." In *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended: An Anthology of Medieval Texts*, edited by Alcuin Blamires, Karen Pratt, and C. W. Marx, 1–15. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992.
- Bloomfield, Morton. "Distance and Predestination in *Troilus and Criseyde*," *PMLA* 72 (1957): 14–26.
- Boboc, Andreea. "Criseyde's Descriptions and the Ethics of Feminine Experience." *The Chaucer Review* 47 (2012): 63–83.
- Boccaccio, Giovanni. *Il Filostrato*. In *Troilus & Criseyde: A New Edition of 'The Book of Troilus,'* edited by Barry Windeatt. London: Longman, 1984.
- . *Il Filostrato*. In *Troilus and Criseyde with facing-page Il Filostrato*, edited by Stephan A. Barney. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006.

- . *Teseida*. In *Opera Minori in Volgare*, Vol. II: *Filostrato. Teseida. Chiose al Teseida*, edited by Mario Marti, 246–658. Milan: Rizzoli Editore, 1970.
- . *Teseida*. In *Chaucer's Boccaccio: Sources for Troilus and the Knight's and Franklin's Tales*, translated and edited by N.R. Havelly, 103–152. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1980.
- Boethius. *The Consolation of Philosophy*. Translated and edited by P. G. Walsh. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- . *Consolatio Philosophiae*. Edited by James J. O'Donnell. Bryn Mawr, PA: Bryn Mawr College, 1984.
- Boler, John F. "An Image for the Unity of Will in Duns Scotus," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 32 (1994): 23–44.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *The Logic of Practice*. Translated by Richard Nice, Stanford University Press, 1990.
- Boyle, Leonard E, O.P. "The Setting of the *Summa Theologiae* of St. Thomas—Revisited." In *The Ethics of Aquinas*, edited by Stephen J. Pope, 1–16. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2002.
- Brent, James, O.P. "God's Knowledge and Will." In *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, edited by Brian Davies and Eleonore Stump, 158–172. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Campbell, Emma. "Sexual Poetics and the Politics of Translation in the Tale of Griselda." *Comparative Literature* 55, no. 3 (2003): 191-216.
- Carruthers, Mary. "The Wife of Bath and the Painting of Lions." *PMLA* 94, no. 2 (1979): 209–222.

- Cavanaugh, Susan H. Glosses and explanatory notes to the “Nun’s Priest’s Tale.” In *The Riverside Chaucer*, edited by Larry D. Benson, 3rd edition. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987.
- Cervone, Cristina Maria. “(Im)materiality and Chaucer’s Temple of Mars.” *English Language Notes* 53, no. 2 (2015): 103–117.
- Chappell, T. D. J. *Aristotle and Augustine on Freedom: Two Theories of Freedom, Voluntary Action and Akrasia*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995.
- Chaucer, Geoffrey. “Clerk’s Tale.” In *The Riverside Chaucer*, edited by Larry D. Benson, 3rd edition, 137–154. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987.
- . “The General Prologue.” In *The Riverside Chaucer*, edited by Larry D. Benson, 3rd edition, 23–36. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987.
- . “Knight’s Tale.” In *The Riverside Chaucer*, edited by Larry D. Benson, 3rd edition, 37–66. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987.
- . *The Legend of Good Women*. In *The Riverside Chaucer*, edited by Larry D. Benson, 3rd edition, 587–630. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987.
- . “Nun’s Priest’s Tale.” In *The Riverside Chaucer*, edited by Larry D. Benson, 3rd edition, 253–261. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987.
- . *Troilus and Criseyde*. In *Troilus & Criseyde: A New Edition of ‘The Book of Troilus,’* edited by Barry Windeatt. London: Longman, 1984.
- . *Troilus and Criseyde*. In *The Riverside Chaucer*, edited by Larry D. Benson, 3rd edition, 473–585. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987.

- . *Troilus and Criseyde*. In *Troilus and Criseyde with facing-page Il Filostrato*, edited by Stephan A. Barney. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006.
- . The “Wife of Bath’s Prologue” and “Tale.” In *The Riverside Chaucer*, edited by Larry D. Benson, 3rd edition, 105–122. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987.
- Chickering, Howell. “Form and Interpretation in the ‘Envoy’ to the ‘Clerk’s Tale.’” *The Chaucer Review*, 29, no. 4 (1995): 352–372.
- Chism, Christine. “Romance.” In *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Literature, 1100–1500*, edited by Larry Scanlon, 57–69. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- Cicero, Marcus Tullius. *Scipio’s Dream*. In *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio by Macrobius*, translated and edited by William Harris Stahl, 69–77. Columbia University Press, 1952.
- Collette, Carolyn P. *Rethinking Chaucer’s Legend of Good Women*. York: York Medieval Press, 2014.
- Cross, Cameron. “‘If Death is Just, What is Injustice?’ Illicit Rage in ‘*Rostam and Sohrab*’ and ‘*The Knight’s Tale*.’” *Iranian Studies* 48, no. 3 (2015): 395–422.
- Cross, Richard. *Duns Scotus*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Curtis III, Carl C. “Biblical Analogy and Secondary Allegory in Chaucer’s *The Knight’s Tale*.” *Christianity and Literature* 57, no. 2 (2007): 207–222.
- Davis, Norman, review of *A Book of London English 1384–1424* reissued 1967, by eds. R. W. Chambers and Marjorie Daunt. *Medium Ævum* 40, no. 1 (1971): 75–80.

- Delany, Sheila. "Techniques of Alienation." In *Troilus and Criseyde*, edited by Stephen A. Barney, 487–503. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006. Originally published in *The Uses of Criticism*, edited by A. P. Foulkes, 77–95. Bern: Herbert Lang Verlag, 1976.
- . "Undoing Substantial Connection: The Late Medieval Attack on Analogical Thought." *Mosaic* 5 (1972): 31–52.
- Dietrich, Jessica S. "Thebaid's Feminine Ending." *Ramus: Studies in Greek and Roman Literature* 28, no. 1 (1999): 40–53.
- DiMarco, Vincent J. Glosses and explanatory notes to the "Knight's Tale." In *The Riverside Chaucer*, edited by Larry D. Benson, 3rd edition. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987.
- Dinshaw, Carolyn. *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989.
- Dodd, William George. *Courtly Love in Chaucer and Gower*. Boston: Ginn and Company, 1913.
- Doig, James, "Aquinas and Aristotle." In *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, edited by Brian Davies and Eleonore Stump, 33–44. Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Dolnikowski, Edith Wilks. *Thomas Bradwardine: A View of Time and a Vision of Eternity in Fourteenth-Century Thought*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995.
- Donaldson, E. T. *Chaucer's Poetry: An Anthology for the Modern Reader*. New York: Ronald Press Company, 1958.
- "drede." n. In *A Chaucer Glossary*, edited by Norman Davis, Douglas Gray, Patricia Ingham, and Anne Wallace Hadrill. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979.
- Duns Scotus, John. *God and Creatures: The Quoadlibetal Questions*. Translated and edited by Felix Alluntis and Allan B. Wolter. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975.

- Espie, Jeff and Sarah Star. "Reading Chaucer's Calkas: Prophecy and Authority in *Troilus and Criseyde*." *The Chaucer Review* 51, no. 3 (2016): 382–401.
- "estat." senses 9, 10a, and 21. In *Middle English Dictionary (MED)*, 2001. *The Electronic Middle English Dictionary*. <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED14519>.
- Fairchild, Hoxie Neale, "Active Arcite, Contemplative Palamon," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 26, no. 3 (1927): 285–293.
- Federico, Sylvia. "Two Troy Books: The Political Classicism of Walsingham's *Ditis ditatus* and Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*." *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 35 (2013): 137–77.
- Fewer, Colin. "The Second Nature: *Habitus* as Ideology in the *Ars amatoria* and *Troilus and Criseyde*." *Exemplaria* 20, no. 3 (Fall 2008): 314–339.
- Fidora, Alexander, "Augustine to Aquinas (Latin-Christian Authors)." In *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, edited by Brian Davies and Eleonore Stump, 45–54. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Fichte, Joerg O. *Chaucer's 'Art Poetical': A Study in Chaucerian Poetics*. Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag Tübingen, 1980.
- Fish, Varda. "The Origin and Original Object of *Troilus and Criseyde*." *The Chaucer Review* 18, no. 4 (1984): 304–15.
- Fowler, Elizabeth. *Literary Character: The Human Figure in Early English Writing*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003.

- Fradenburg, L. O. Aranye. "'Our owen wo to drynke': Loss, Gender and Chivalry in *Troilus and Criseyde*." In *Troilus and Criseyde*, edited by Stephen A. Barney, 589–606. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006. Originally published in *Troilus and Criseyde: "Subgit to alle Poesye": Essays in Criticism*, edited by R. A. Shoaf, 88–106. Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1992.
- Fumo, Jamie C. "The Ends of Love: (Meta)physical Desire in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*." In *Sacred and Profane in Chaucer and Late Medieval Literature: Essays in Honour of John V. Fleming*, edited by Robert Epstein and William Robins, 68–90. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010.
- Gallagher, David M. "The Will and Its Acts (Ia IIae, qq.6–17)." In *The Ethics of Aquinas*, edited by Stephen J. Pope, 69–89. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2002.
- Garrison, Jennifer. "Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* and the Danger of Masculine Interiority." *The Chaucer Review* 49, no. 3 (2015): 320–43.
- Gaston, Kara. "'Save oure tonges difference': Translation, Literary Histories, and *Troilus and Criseyde*," *The Chaucer Review* 48, no. 3 (2014): 258–283.
- Gelber, Hester Goodenough. "Providence." In *The Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy, Volume II*, revised edition, edited by Robert Pasnau and Christina Van Dyke, 761–772. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.
- Ginsberg, Warren. Glosses and explanatory notes to the "Clerk's Tale." In *The Riverside Chaucer*, edited by Larry D. Benson, 3rd edition, 473–585. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987.

- Goodall, Peter. *Chaucer's Monk's Tale and Nun's Priest's Tale: An Annotated Bibliography 1900 to 2000*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009.
- Greene, Darragh. "Moral Obligations, Virtue Ethics, and *Gentil* Character in Chaucer's *Franklin's Tale*." *The Chaucer Review* 50. No. 1–2 (2015): 88–107.
- Grimes, Jodi. "Arboreal Politics in the *Knight's Tale*." *The Chaucer Review* 46, no. 3 (2012): 340–364.
- Hansen, Elaine Tuttle. *Chaucer and the Fictions of Gender*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992.
- Hesiod. *Theogony, Works and Days, Testimonia*. Translated and edited by Glenn W. Most. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007. *Loeb Classical Library*.
- Hilary, Christine Ryan. Glosses and explanatory notes to the "Wife of Bath's Prologue" and "Tale." In *The Riverside Chaucer*, edited by Larry D. Benson, 3rd edition, 473–585. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987.
- Hill, T. E. "*She, This in Blak*": *Vision, Truth, and Will in Geoffrey Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde*. London: Routledge, 2006.
- Hoffmann, Tobias. "Intellectualism and Voluntarism." In *The Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy, Volume I*, edited by Robert Pasnau and Christina Van Dyke, 414–427. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.
- Howard, Donald R. *The Idea of the Canterbury Tales*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976.

- Howes, Laura. "Chaucer's Criseyde: The Betrayer Betrayed." In *Reading Medieval Culture: Essays in Honor of Robert W. Hanning*, edited by Robert M. Stein and Sandra Pierson Prior, 324–343. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005.
- . *Chaucer's Gardens and the Language of Convention*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997.
- Hume, Cathy. *Chaucer and the Cultures of Love and Marriage*. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2012.
- Ingham, Patricia Clare. "Chaucer's Haunted Aesthetics: Mimesis and Trauma in *Troilus and Criseyde*." *College English* 72, no. 3 (2010): 226–47.
- . "Homosexuality and Creative Masculinity in the *Knight's Tale*." In *Masculinities in Chaucer: Approaches to Maleness in the Canterbury Tales and Troilus and Criseyde*, edited by Peter G. Beidler, 23–35. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1998.
- Jenkins, Richard. "Pierre Bourdieu: From the Model of Reality to the Reality of the Model." In *Human Agents and Social Structures*, edited by Peter J. Martin and Alex Dennis, 86–99. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Jensen, Alexander S. *Divine Providence and Human Agency: Trinity, Creation and Freedom*. Surrey: Ashgate, 2014.
- Johnson, Eleanor. *Practicing Literary Theory in the Middle Ages: Ethics and the Mixed Form in Chaucer, Gower, Usk, and Hoccleve*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013.
- Justice, Stephen. *Writing and Rebellion*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.
- Kent, Bonnie. "Habits and Virtues (Ia IIae, qq. 49–70)." In *The Ethics of Aquinas*, edited by Stephen J. Pope, 116–130. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2002.

- Kimmelman, Burt. "Ockham, Chaucer, and the Emergence of Modern Poetics." In *The Rhetorical Poetics of the Middle Ages: Reconstructive Polyphony*, edited by John M. Mill and Deborah M. Sinnreich-Levi, 177–205. Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2000.
- Klima, Gyula. "The Medieval Problem of Universals." In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Winter 2016 Edition, edited by Edward N. Zalta.
 <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/universals-medieval/>>.
- Kolve, V. A. *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1984.
- Kordecki, Lesley. *Ecofeminist Subjectivities: Chaucer's Talking Birds*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.
- Kossel, Clifford G., S.J. "Natural Law and Human Law (Ia IIae, qq. 90–97)." In *The Ethics of Aquinas*, edited by Stephen J. Pope, 169–193. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2002.
- Koster, Josephine A. "Privitee, Habitus, and Proximity: Conduct and Domestic Space in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*," *Essays in Medieval Studies* 24 (2007): 79–91.
- Kretzmann, Norman. "Nos Ipsi Principia Sumus: Boethius and the Basis of Contingenc." In *Divine Omniscience and Omnipotence in Medieval Philosophy*, edited by T. Rudavsky, 23–50. Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1985.
- Ladd, Roger A. "Selling Alys: Reading (with) the Wife of Bath." *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 34 (2012): 141–171.
- "leese." In *A Chaucer Glossary*, edited by Norman Davis, Douglas Gray, Patricia Ingham, and Anne Wallace Hadrill. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979.

- Leff, Gordon. *Bradwardine and the Pelagians: A Study of His 'De Causa Dei' and its Opponents*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957.
- Luscombe, David. "Monks and friars." In *The Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy, Volume I*, revised edition, edited by Robert Pasnau and Christina Van Dyke, 63–75. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.
- "lusty." (adj.) In *A Chaucer Glossary*, edited by Norman Davis, Douglas Gray, Patricia Ingham, and Anne Wallace Hadrill. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979.
- "lusty." (adj). In *OED Online*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, December 2018.
<www.oed.com/view/Entry/111424>.
- Macrobius Ambrosius Theodosius. *Commentary on Scipio's Dream*. In *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio by Macrobius*, translated and edited by William Harris Stahl, 79–246. New York: Columbia University Press, 1952.
- Mann, Jill. *Feminizing Chaucer*. New Edition. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2002 (original edition 1991).
- Marelj, Jelena. "The Philosophical *Entente* of Particulars: Criseyde as a Nominalist in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*." *The Chaucer Review* 47, no. 2 (2012): 206–221.
- Marenbon, John. "Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius." In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Online Winter 2016 edition*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, at section 6.
———. *Boethius*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Matthews, Ricardo. "Arcite's Overheard Song: The *Knight's Tale* and the Prosimetrum *Tristan en prose*." *The Chaucer Review* 53, no. 2 (2018): 152–177.

- McCord Adams, Marilyn. *William Ockham Volumes I–II*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987.
- McTaggart, Anne. “Shamed Guiltless: Criseyde, Dido, and Chaucerian Ethics,” *The Chaucer Review* 46, no. 4 (2012): 371–402.
- . “What Women Want? Mimesis and Gender in Chaucer’s ‘Wife of Bath’s Prologue’ and ‘Tale.’” *Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis, and Culture* 19 (2012): 41–67.
- “mewe.” s.v. In *A Chaucer Glossary*, edited by Norman Davis, Douglas Gray, Patricia Ingham, and Anne Wallace Hadrill. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979.
- Mudrick, Marvin. “Chaucer’s Nightingales.” *Hudson Review* 10, no. 1 (1957): 88–95.
- Murphy, Mark, “Theological Voluntarism.” In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Spring 2016 Edition, ed. Edward N. Zalta.
<<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2014/entries/voluntarism-theological/>>
- Murton, Megan. “Praying with Boethius in *Troilus and Criseyde*,” *The Chaucer Review* 49, no. 3 (2015): 294–319.
- Nair, Sashi. “‘O brotel wele of mannes joie unstable!’: Gender and Philosophy in *Troilus and Criseyde*,” *Parergon* 23, no. 2 (2006): 35–56.
- Nederman, Cary J. “Individual Autonomy.” In *The Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy, Volume II*, revised edition, edited by Robert Pasnau and Christina Van Dyke, 551–564. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.
- Nieuwenhove, Rik Van. *An Introduction to Medieval Theology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

- Oberman, Heiko A. *Archbishop Thomas Bradwardine: A Fourteenth Century Augustinian*.
Utrecht: Kemink and Zoon, 1957.
- Ochkam, William. *Ordinatio*. In *Predestination, God's Foreknowledge, and Future Contingents*.
Translated and edited by Marilyn McCord Adams and Norman Kretzmann, 80–114. 2nd
ed. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1983.
- . *Tractibus de praedestinatione et de praescientia Dei et de futuris contingentibus*. In
Predestination, God's Foreknowledge, and Future Contingents. Translated and edited by
Marilyn McCord Adams and Norman Kretzmann. 2nd ed. Indianapolis: Hackett
Publishing Company, 1983.
- Ovid. *Metamorphoses, Volume I: Books 1–8*. Translated by Frank Justus Miller, revised by G. P.
Goold. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1916. *Loeb Classical Library*.
- Palmer, James M. “When *Remedia Amoris* Fails: Chaucer’s Literary-Medical Exploration of
Determinism, Materialism, and Free Will in *Troilus and Criseyde*.” In *Gender Scripts in
Medicine and Narrative*, edited by Marcelline Block and Angela Laflen, 292–319.
Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010.
- Patterson, Lee. *Chaucer and the Subject of History*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press,
1991.
- Peck, Russel. “Chaucer and the Nominalist Questions.” *Speculum* 53, no. 4 (1978): 745-760
- Pinckaers, Servais-Théodore, O.P. “The Sources of the Ethics of St. Thomas Aquinas.” In *The
Ethics of Aquinas*, edited by Stephen J. Pope, 17–29. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown
University Press, 2002.

- Pizer, Donald. "Introduction: The Study of American Literary Naturalism: A Retrospective Review." In *The Theory and Practice of American Literary Naturalism: Selected Essays and Reviews*, edited by Donald Pizer, 1–10. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1998.
- Pope, Stephen J. "Overview of the Ethics of Thomas Aquinas." In *The Ethics of Aquinas*, edited by Stephen J. Pope, 30–53. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2002.
- Pratt, Robert A. "Some Latin Sources of the Nonnes Preest on Dreams," *Speculum* 52, no. 3 (1977): 538–70.
- Quinn-Lang, Caitlin. "'The augurye of thise fowles': Treacherous Birds in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*." In *The Image of Nature in Literature, the Media, and Society*, edited by Will Wright and Steven Kaplan, 38–47. Pueblo: The Society for the Interdisciplinary Study of Social Imagery, 1993.
- Raby, Michael. "The *Clerk's Tale* and the Forces of Habit." *The Chaucer Review* 47, no. 3 (2013): 223–46.
- Robertson, Kellie. *Nature Speaks: Medieval Literature and Aristotelian Philosophy*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017.
- Ronquist, Eyvind. "Chaucer's Provisions for Future Contingencies." *Florilegium* 21 (2004): 94–118.
- Rosenfeld, Jessica. *Ethics and Enjoyment in Late Medieval Poetry*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

- Ross, Valerie A. "Believing Cassandra: Intertextual Politics and the Interpretation of Dreams in 'Troilus and Criseyde.'" *The Chaucer Review* 31, no. 4 (1997): 339–56.
- Saak, Eric. *Creating Augustine: Interpreting Augustine and Augustinianism in the Later Middle Ages*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Sanok, "Criseyde, Cassandre, and the *Thebaid*: Women and the Theban Subtext of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*." *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 20 (1998): 41–71.
- Saunders, Corinne. "Affective Reading: Chaucer, Women, and Romance." *The Chaucer Review* 51, no. 1 (2016): 11–30.
- Saussure, Ferdinand de. "*Course in General Linguistics*." Edited by Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye and translated by Wade Baskin. In *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, 2nd edn., edited by Vincent B. Leitch et al., 850–866. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010.
- Schwebel, Leah. "Redressing Griselda: Restoration through Translation in the Clerk's Tale." *The Chaucer Review* 47, no. 3 (2013): 274–299.
- Shaner, M. C. E. and A. S. G. Edwards. Glosses and explanatory notes to the *Legend of Good Women*. In *The Riverside Chaucer*, edited by Larry D. Benson, 3rd edition. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987.
- Sharma, Manish, "Hylomorphic Recursion and Non-Decisional Poetics in the *Canterbury Tales*," in *The Chaucer Review* 52, no. 3 (2017): 253–273.
- Shimomura, Sachi. "The Walking Dead in Chaucer's Knight's Tale." *The Chaucer Review* 48, no. 1 (2013): 1–37.

- Shoaf, R. A. "Troilus and Criseyde: The Falcon in the Mew." In *Typology and English Medieval Literature*, edited by Hugh T. Keenan, 149–168. New York: AMS Press, 1992: 149–68.
- Smith, D. Vance. "Destroyer of Forms: Chaucer's *Philomela*." In *Readings in Medieval Textuality: Essays in Honour of A. C. Spearing*, edited by Cristina Maria Cervone and D. Vance Smith, 135–156. Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2016.
- Stahl, William Harris. "Introduction." In *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio by Macrobius*, translated and edited by William Harris Stahl, 3–65. New York: Columbia University Press, 1952.
- Statius. *Thebaid, Volume I: Thebaid Books 1–7*. Edited and translated by D. R. Shackleton Bailey. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004. *Loeb Classical Library*.
- Steinmetz, David C. "Late Medieval Nominalism and the *Clerk's Tale*." *The Chaucer Review* 12, no. 1 (1997): 38–54.
- Strohm, Paul. "Coronation as Legible Practice." In *Theory and the Premodern Text*, edited by Paul Strohm, 33–48. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.
- . *Social Chaucer*. 1989. Paperback edition. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994.
- Tasioulas, J. A. "Science." In *Chaucer: An Oxford Guide*, edited by Steve Ellis, 174–189. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Tinkle, Theresa. "The Wife of Bath's Marginal Authority." *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 32 (2010): 67–101.

- Utz, Richard. “‘For all that comth, comth by necessitee’: Chaucer’s Critique of Fourteenth-Century Boethianism in ‘Troilus and Criseyde IV,’ 957–58.” *Arbeiten aus Anglistik und Amerikanistik* 21 (1996): 29–32.
- . “Literary Nominalism in Chaucer’s Late-Medieval England: Toward a Preliminary Paradigm.” *The European Legacy* 2, no. 2 (1997): 206–211.
- . “Philosophy.” In *Chaucer: An Oxford Guide*, edited by Steve Ellis, 158–173. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Voigt, Astrid. “The Power of the Grieving Mind: Female Lament in Statius’s *Thebaid*.” *Illinois Classical Studies* 41, no. 1 (2016): 59–84.
- Walsh, P. G. Editorial material. In *The Consolation of Philosophy*, edited and translated by P. G. Walsh. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Watts, William H. “Chaucer’s Clerks and the Value of Philosophy.” In *Nominalism and Literary Discourse: New Perspectives*, edited by Hugo Keiper, Christoph Bode, and Richard J. Utz, 145–155. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1997.
- Wetherbee, Winthrop. *Chaucer and the Poets: An Essay on Troilus and Criseyde*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984.
- Williams, Thomas. “Introduction.” In *On Free Choice of the Will*, translated and edited by Thomas Williams, xi–xix. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993.
- . “John Duns Scotus.” In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Spring 2016 Edition, ed. Edward N. Zalta. <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2016/entries/duns-scotus/>>

- Windeatt, Barry. Explanatory Footnotes. In *Troilus & Criseyde: A New Edition of 'The Book of Troilus,'* edited by Barry Windeatt. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1984.
- . "The 'Troilus' as Translation." In *Troilus and Criseyde: A New Edition of The Book of Troilus,* edited by B. A. Windeatt, 3–24. London: Longman Press, 1984.
- Wolter, Alan B. "Introduction." In *Duns Scotus on the Will and Morality,* edited by Alan B. Wolter and William A. Frank, translated by William A. Frank, 1–123. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1986.
- Wynne-Davies, Marion. "'He conquered al the regne of Femenye': feminist criticism of Chaucer." *Critical Survey* 4, no. 2 (1992): 107–113.

VITA

Kendra Slayton is the daughter of Linda and Kenneth Slayton. She was raised in Michigan and received her Bachelor of Arts in 2008 from Michigan State University, with a double major in English and Japanese. From 2008–2011, Kendra was an Assistant Language Teacher of English as a Foreign Language with the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Program in Misaka-cho, Yamanashi-ken, Japan. She then accepted a Graduate Teaching Assistantship at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, in the English Department. Kendra graduated with a Master of Arts in English in May 2013, and a Doctor of Philosophy in English in May 2019. She specializes in Middle English literature and gender studies, with additional interests in modern and postmodern women’s writings. In addition to her research, Kendra enjoys traveling and recurve archery, and is the 2018 & 2019 USA Archery Tennessee State Adult Female Champion and the 2019 NFAA Tennessee Archery Association Adult Female Champion.