

**RELATIONAL CHAUCER: INTERSUBJECTIVE IDENTITY AND
RICŒURIAN NARRATIVE HERMENEUTICS**

by

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A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of Purdue University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy



Department of English

West Lafayette, Indiana

August 2021

THE PURDUE UNIVERSITY GRADUATE SCHOOL
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To my family, who have no idea what any of this means but are proud of me anyway.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None of what follows would have been possible without the enduring support, guidance, generosity, and occasional tough love of my chair, Dr. Robyn Bartlett. I could not have dreamed up a better mentor. Thank you. Eternal thanks also go to my committee members, Dr. Dorsey Armstrong, Dr. Michael Johnston, and Dr. Shaun Hughes, for their thoughtful feedback and support. The critical intervention this project attempts to make is deeply indebted to Dr. Richard Rosengarten at the University of Chicago Divinity School, who first introduced me to the philosophy of Paul Ricœur; thank you. I am likewise grateful for the many colleagues who have offered their time and expertise in reading and commenting on my work at various stages, especially Christy McCarter, Maggie Myers, Allyn Pearson, Zaccary Haney, Hector Varela-Rios, and Shandra Lamaute. My thought and my writing (not to mention my life) would be much poorer without you—*thank you*.

I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge the greater Lafayette coffee shops where the bulk of my dissertation was written, so to the staff at Fuel, Star City, and the Creasy Lane Starbucks—thanks for keeping me endlessly caffeinated and thanks for all the memories.

To my parents Chris, Randy, and Trish; my siblings Josh, Jess, and Lauren; my dear friends Clare, Sarah, and Eliza; my colleagues at the Klondike branch library; to my fur babies Champ and Nugget; and to the many, many, many people whose friendship has made my life brighter but I don't have space to name, I extend my all gratitude for your support in its various forms. You have kept me going. You have kept me grounded. And you have kept me sane. For that, I cannot thank you enough.

It's also pretty clear to me that I never would have finished without the creators, casts, and crews of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, *Deep Space Nine*, and *Voyager*. The continual re-watch of these three franchises provided the perfect background to and distraction from writing and editing—and sparked a pretty major revelation as well.

Finally, I owe the innumerable professors and mentors who have encouraged me throughout the years a huge debt of gratitude. Your support has meant the world. And to my high school English teacher Mr. Mark Claxton, I owe you more than you will ever know. It's hard to imagine a world where I would have even considered a PhD without your inspiration. Thanks, Clack.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>Mars</i>	<i>Complaint of Mars</i>
<i>PF</i>	<i>Parliament of Fowls</i>
<i>BD</i>	<i>Book of the Duchess</i>
<i>HF</i>	<i>House of Fame</i>
<i>LGW</i>	<i>Legend of Good Women</i>
<i>Tr</i>	<i>Troilus and Criseyde</i>

ABSTRACT

This dissertation applies Paul Ricœur's theory of narrative identity to Chaucer's poetry. The idea of a narrative subjectivity addresses gaps and synthesizes key movements in Chaucer studies, engaging with key scholars such as George Lyman Kittridge, Carolyn Dinshaw, A.C. Spearing, and Mary Carruthers. Using Ricœur's hermeneutic phenomenology, the chapters articulate how narrative is necessary to the construction and expression of both individual and collective identity and experience. Each chapter focuses on a key element of Ricœur's narrative hermeneutic phenomenology and how that modality of narrative is used to construct a particular kind of identity. I argue for a self-in-relation: the self as constituted through relations to others, or intersubjectively, which is expressed in and as narrative. Ricœur's hermeneutic distills several of Chaucer's key interests: time, history, fictionality, and poetics; selfhood and alterity; the significance of language and of fidelity to one's word; and agency, passivity, and suffering. By applying that hermeneutic, we can consider the extent to which Chaucer's poetry may use narrative to represent or resolve those interests and their connection to identity.

Chapter 1 explores the identity construction of three Chaucerian women by identifying patterns of yielding discursive authority that either subvert or redirect narrative structures of masculine authority. I argue that women like Criseyde have more control over their own lives and a more positive subject-position than previously recognized. In Chapter 2, I argue that racialized narratives shared by the Canterbury pilgrims structure their community by defining what kind of identity is acceptable—in this case, a white Christian identity, shared by all the pilgrims, that reproduces a Western hegemonic whiteness. In chapter 3, I argue that in Chaucer's talking-animal poetry, the recognition and response that narrative facilitates results in an ethic of care that is invested in principles of solicitude and friendship. In Chapter 4, I argue that Chaucer's dream visions represent narratives of poetic subjectivity that are embedded in issues of memory and sociality that take shape in and as space. Finally, in conclusion I tie these arguments back to a question asked of the fictional representation of Chaucer himself: Who are you? This question animates much of Chaucer's poetry and I have endeavored to show how Chaucer answers that question with and in narrative.

INTRODUCTION: CHAUCER, RICŒUR, AND THE POSSIBILITY OF NARRATIVE IDENTITY

“The Tamarian ego structure does not seem to allow what we normally think of as self-identity. Their ability to abstract is highly unusual. They seem to communicate through narrative imagery by reference to the individuals and places which appear in their mytho-historical accounts.”

—“Darmok,” *Star Trek: The Next Generation*¹

“Telling a story, we observed, is deploying an imaginary space for thought experiments in which moral judgement operates in a hypothetical mode.”

—Paul Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*²

The 1991 *Star Trek: The Next Generation* episode “Darmok” introduces the crew of the Enterprise to a race whose language, whose personal and collective identity, whose very selves are rooted in narrative. The Tamaricans cannot be understood without the ability to situate individual linguistic elements within a larger cultural narrative framework. Without the system of referents, without a shared narrative, their speech is, from the outside, nonsense.

Shaka, when the walls fell.
Temba, his arms wide.
Darmok and Jalad at Tanagra.

In a last-ditch effort to communicate, the Tamarian captain Dathon beams himself and Captain Picard down to the surface of a neutral planet, “writing” them both into a performance or reenactment from the Tamarian’s mytho-historical accounts. The two captains become Darmok and Jalad and the planet becomes Tanagra, creating a shared narrative framework through which Picard is able to facilitate understanding of Tamarian language. Picard and Dathon participate in a moment of narrative exchange; Picard finally grasps the meaning of their identities as Darmok and Jalad and, in return, shares with Dathon the epic of *Gilgamesh*. After the encounter, which

¹ *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, season 5, episode 2, “Darmok,” directed by Winrich Kolbe, aired September 30, 1991, in broadcast syndication. A transcript of the episode can be found at “Darmok,” Chakoteya, last modified January 4, 2021, <http://www.chakoteya.net/NextGen/202.htm>.

² Paul Ricœur, *Oneself As Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (University of Chicago Press, 1992), 170.

results in Dathon's death, Picard is seen reading the *Homeric Hymns*. The episode concludes with his remark that "more familiarity with our own mythology might help us relate to theirs." This episode reveals what narrative theorists have long known: that narrative structures and gives meaning to experience, discloses something about who we are, and is, in some sense, universal.³

Though *Star Trek* is science fiction, the version of identity, community, and language that this episode presents—one rooted in narrative—is not so alien to the Middle Ages as it might seem. Mary Carruthers has suggested that the medieval self is constructed out of "bits and pieces of great authors of the past."⁴ Likewise, the line of Chaucer scholarship that sees individual *Canterbury Tales* as a lens to the subjectivity of its teller positions narrative as a key to determining and constituting identity. This approach, developed by George Lyman Kittridge and termed a "roadside drama approach," hinges on a "self that existed prior to the text" that controls, limits, and guarantees the text's meaning.⁵ From this perspective, the tales are "merely long speeches expressing, directly or indirectly, the characters of several persons."⁶ The tales' meaning must be fitted into what would, for example, be appropriate for a Knight or Man of Law, limited by the worldview and available knowledge expressed in the corresponding portrait. Instead, with regard to the *Canterbury Tales* H. Marshall Leicester suggests "the tale specifies the portrait, not the other way around"—in other words, "a narrative tells us about its narrator."⁷ Though Leicester does not use the term, what he is suggesting is representative of narrative hermeneutics, wherein narrative holds epistemological, phenomenological, and ontological significance: narrative helps us make sense of our own existence and is also constitutive of it. David Herman further argues that "the procedures used to engage with" literary depictions of subjectivity "necessarily piggyback on those used to interpret minds in other contexts (and vice

³ For example, the Walt Disney Company recently developed its "Stories Matter" initiative to better understand how stories "shape how we see ourselves and everyone around us" and develop more ethical and responsible storytelling methods. To this end, Disney recently added an advisory to content believed to include "negative depictions and/or mistreatment of people or cultures...Rather than remove this content, we want to acknowledge its harmful impact, learn from it and spark conversation to create a more inclusive future together. Disney is committed to creating stories with inspirational and aspirational themes that reflect the rich diversity of the human experience around the globe." ("Stories Matter," *Walt Disney Company*, accessed 20 July 2021, <https://storiesmatter.thewaltdisneycompany.com/>).

⁴ Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), 224.

⁵ H. Marshall Leicester, *The Disenchanted Self: Representing the Subject in the Canterbury Tales* (University of California Press, 1990), 9.

⁶ George Lyman Kittridge, *Chaucer and his Poetry* (Harvard University Press, 1946), 155.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 12.

versa)”) and cautions against the “dichotomization of fictional and actual minds.”⁸ In this way, then, it is possible to talk about how “real” a literary figure is, or the degree of realism achieved in literary representation.

To this end, Chaucer scholarship echoes a larger and on-going interest in the subject in literary studies. As broad critical interest in “the subject” arose, medievalists began to push back against the idea the Middle Ages were “subjectless”—an opinion offered by Stephen Greenblatt in favor of an Elizabethan origin of subjectivity.⁹ And while Francis Barker and others argue that in medieval culture there was no “interiorized self-recognition” and medieval “individual identity simply did not involve individual self-consciousness,” medievalists demonstrated instead the rich conceptions of selfhood and interiority present in medieval texts.¹⁰ Colin Morris was among the first to suggest a twelfth-century origin for “a real interest in man as he actually *is*” and “a fascination with individual experience” which marks the beginning of individuality.¹¹ In an important 1992 essay David Aers likewise questions a Renaissance origin for subjectivity, setting the stage for “the kind of detailed and historical cross-generic work” on subjectivity undertaken more recently by Laura Ashe, Holly A. Crocker, Katherine Little, Jessica Barr, A.C. Spearing, and others. This interest is no mere trend—as Kittredge noted in 1915, “Chaucer’s specialty was mankind”—though the focus has now shifted from character, limited by its literariness, to subject, presenting a unique, individual consciousness.¹² For example, it is no longer the popular opinion, as Kittredge suggested, that each of the *Canterbury Tales* is dependent on its teller for its meaning; rather, frame narrative as well as individual *Tale* figures mean something in and of themselves.¹³ Lee Patterson’s *Chaucer and the Subject of History*

⁸ David Herman, “Introduction,” in *The Emergence of Mind: Representations of Consciousness in Narrative Discourse in English* (University of Nebraska Press, 2011), 10.

⁹ Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (University of Chicago Press, 1980).

¹⁰ Francis Barker, qtd. in David Aers, “A Whisper in the Ear of Early Modernists; or, Reflections on Literary Critics Writing the ‘History of the Subject,’” in *Culture and History, 1350-1600: Essays on English Communities, Identities and Writing*, ed. David Aers (Harvester Press, 1992), 186. Subjectivity as an isolated phenomenon has been discussed by scholars through different genres, and different types of subjects have been identified: the mystical subject, the ethnographic and the raced subject, the romance subject, the authorial and/or narratorial subject, and the autobiographical subject. Chaucer both participates in and deviates from this typology, though not all will feature as part of this project.

¹¹ Colin Morris, *The Discovery of the Individual, 1050-1200* (Medieval Academy of America, 1972), 10.

¹² Kittredge, *Chaucer and His Poetry*, 9.

¹³ Similar arguments were made in the mid-twentieth century by E. Talbot Donaldson, whose highly influential (and highly criticized) New Critical readings of Chaucer’s works focused on persona. Donaldson’s readings are generally opposed to those of D.W. Robertson, whose exegetical readings focused on glossing Chaucer’s sources. See, for

carefully examines Chaucer's interest in individuality and the pressure of history on Chaucer's presentation of self and individuality. With the advent of other theoretical approaches to identity construction—race,¹⁴ gender,¹⁵ and queer theories,¹⁶ ecocriticism,¹⁷ space and others—scholars have interrogated the way Chaucer's texts interact with different methods of presenting identity. A.C. Spearing has identified what he calls “textual subjectivity” through analyses of texts from the Chaucerian corpus, romances, and other genres. *Textual Subjectivity* explores deixis to explain how “[s]ubjectivity...is encoded...as a text, as the writing as which it presents itself even if read aloud, and in such a variety of mutually incompatible ways as to forbid the recuperation of any single subject-consciousness.”¹⁸

Spearing's close readings, attendant to narrative form and deictics, reveal a multifaceted relationship between narrative and subjectivity. For Spearing, Chaucer's texts in particular demonstrate a “priority of narrative itself to consciousness.”¹⁹ John Ganim and Leicester have

example, Donaldson's *Speaking of Chaucer* (Athlone Press, 1970) and Robertson's *Essays in Medieval Culture* (Princeton University Press, 1980).

¹⁴ Critical race theory has featured heavily in recent scholarship, including Chaucer studies. While to my knowledge no full-scale study of Chaucer and race has yet been written, more localized studies do exist. Heather Blurton and Hannah Johnson's volume, *The Critics and the Prioress: Antisemitism, Criticism, and Chaucer's Prioress's Tale* (University of Michigan Press, 2017), is a critical account of such studies, focusing on debates surrounding the *Prioress's Tale*, namely antisemitism and gender. Chapter 2 will be another study of race in Chaucer, arguing that the exchange of narrative constructs whiteness by sacrificing the subjectivity of the Other.

¹⁵ Carolyn Dinshaw, Elaine Tuttle Hansen, and Susan Crane have offered various models of gender in Chaucerian texts: Dinshaw discusses gender in terms of its figural association with literary activity (*Chaucer's Sexual Poetics* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1989)); Hansen problematizes visions of Chaucer as protofeminist by suggesting Chaucer's women—despite apparent realism—are a platform for exploring male gender identity (*Chaucer and the Fictions of Gender* (University of California Press, 1991)); and Crane positions gender as a response to genre (*Gender and Romance in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales* (Princeton University Press, 1994)). Holly Crocker's recent work on the *Knight's Tale* argues for rethinking female subjectivity focusing on vulnerability rather than masculinist subjectivities based in power (“W(h)ither Feminism? Gender, Subjectivity, and Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*.” *The Chaucer Review* 54, no. 3 (2019)). Crocker's argument about Emelye parallels and informs those I will make about Criseyde, Dorigen, and Griselda in Chapter 1.

¹⁶ Monica McAlpine's “The Pardoner's Homosexuality and How it Matters” (*PMLA* 95, no. 1 (1980) provides an interpretation of the Pardoner that restores balance to the question of whether he is a “geldyng or a mare” (*PardT*, I.691), outlining the moral implications for the Tale if the Pardoner is indeed a “mare,” or homosexual. Tison Pugh's studies, *Sexuality and its Queer Discontents in Middle English Literature* (Palgrave, 2008) and *Chaucer's (Anti-)Eroticisms and the Queer Middle Ages* (Ohio State University Press, 2014), have demonstrated the mutual relevance of Chaucer and queer theory, applying a queer interpretation of individual and communal identity formation in the *Tales* (as well as other texts).

¹⁷ The last ten years has seen a flurry of interest in Chaucer and ecocriticism, with Lesly Kordecki (*Ecofeminist Subjectivities: Chaucer's Talking Birds* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011)) and Carolynn Van Dyke (*Rethinking Chaucerian Beasts*, ed. Carolynn Van Dyke (Palgrave, 2012)) offering readings of animals as subjects, while Jill Mann's study *From Aesop to Reynard: Beast Literature in Medieval Britain* (Oxford University Press, 2009) analyzes animal imagery as symbol or literary trope.

¹⁸ A.C. Spearing, *Textual Subjectivity: The Encoding of Subjectivity in Medieval Narratives and Lyrics* (Oxford University Press, 2005), 15.

¹⁹ Spearing, *Textual Subjectivity*, 26.

offered interpretations of Chaucer's poetry that emphasize the textuality of Chaucer's characters.²⁰ Yet, they fall short of claiming for his works a narrative self or, as I will argue, a notion of subjectivity that coheres in and as narrative. Developments in narratology encourage such readings of narrative technique and selfhood.²¹ As the field's interests move toward theories of mind, intersubjectivity, and interconnectedness, narrative approaches to identity are becoming increasingly relevant, yet overlooked. This dissertation thus seeks to address this gap by taking up the idea of a narrative subjectivity in Chaucer's texts.²²

Paul Ricœur and Narrative Hermeneutics

As reinterest in the potential for narrative to relate human experience grew—the so-called “narrative turn” beginning in the 1980s—a process of rethinking the role of subjectivity and agency in narrative interpretation followed, resulting in “theoretical approaches that foreground the narrative constitution of the subject” which have “played a pivotal role in attempts to reconceptualize subjectivity after its radical poststructuralist problematization.”²³ By foregrounding narrative's phenomenological potential, the narrative turn and narrative hermeneutics takes the position that “all narratives manifest subjecthood and subjectivity, and these interrelate with the construction of identity.”²⁴ The narrative subject “strives to give meaning to his or her experiences, while at the same time radically decentering—that is, socializing and historicizing—this subject” through narrative forms and storytelling techniques and conventions.²⁵ Literature is an integral part of this process, as “literary

²⁰ John Ganim, *Style and Consciousness in Middle English Narrative* (Princeton University Press, 1983); Leicester, *The Disenchanted Self*. As mentioned above, Leicester reverses the priorities of Kittridge's roadside drama, foregrounding what narrative reveals about its the identity of its teller rather than whatever meaning the identity of the teller confers upon the narrative.

²¹ For a discussion of medieval narrative genres and strategies, see Tony Davenport, *Medieval Narrative* (Oxford University Press, 2004).

²² While Carolyn Dinshaw's *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics* explores “the figurative association of literary activity with human bodies” (4) and the social consequences of “feminine” texts (and “textual” women) and “masculine” readers, narrators, translators, and interpreters, what I am pursuing in this dissertation is instead how individuals understand and construct themselves as and through narrative. There are certain parallels between Dinshaw's approach and the idea of a narrative identity, especially regarding the way individuals function as characters in another's story and the pressure discursive structures exert on identity.

²³ Hanna Meretoja, *The Narrative Turn in Fiction and Theory: The Crisis and Return of Storytelling from Robbe-Grillet to Tournier* (Palgrave, 2014), 1.

²⁴ Monika Fludernik, “Identity/Alterity,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, ed. David Herman (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 271.

²⁵ Jens Brockmeier and Hanna Meretoja, “Understanding Narrative Hermeneutics,” *Storyworlds: A Journal of Narrative Studies* 6, no. 2 (2014): 4.

narratives...contribute both to our understanding of our historical world and our ways of being in this world.”²⁶ As Paul Ricœur suggests, “our self-understanding presents the same features of traditionality as the understanding of a literary work. It is in this way that we learn to become the *narrator* and the hero of our own story...”²⁷ That story is an internal, ongoing evaluation of one’s self and actions that changes and evolves through relationships with others as individuals and communities and attempts to provide the self with “temporal coherence and some semblance of psychosocial unity and purpose.”²⁸ Without that pattern of encounter, response, reevaluation, and interpretation, life, Ricœur says, is “no more than a biological phenomenon.”²⁹ Narrative, then, is what gives experience meaning—both in how it is shared and in how it is interpreted.

It is not just the individual, however, that possesses a narrative identity; communities, too, are “constituted in their identity by taking up narratives that become for them their actual history.”³⁰ Variably called grand narratives, metanarratives, or master narratives, they are “cultural script[s] that [are] readily accessible to members of a particular axis of identity, whether that be a nation, an ethnic group, or a gender.”³¹ Originally introduced by Jean-François Lyotard as various ideologies, politics, and religions that attempt to explain human experience and account for all truth and knowledge, these master narratives have developed as discourses that govern, organize, and respond to other master narratives and as analyses of literature and culture, such as feminist and gender theory, postcolonialism, psychoanalysis, ecocriticism.³² Because these discourses are, to some extent, transhistorical, premodern texts also participate in these master narratives and paradigms of identity construction. While it is thus possible to ask, for example, what homosexuality might mean for the Pardoner or feminism for the Wife of Bath, it is equally possible to examine the role narrative serves in navigating the relationship between these discourses and these pilgrims’ identities.

²⁶ Ibid., 16.

²⁷ Paul Ricœur, “Life in Quest of Narrative,” in *On Paul Ricœur: Narrative and Interpretation*, ed. David Wood (Routledge, 1991), 32.

²⁸ Dan McAdams, “‘First we invented stories, then they changed us’: The Evolution of Narrative Identity,” *Evolutionary Studies in Imaginative Culture* 3, no. 1 (2019).

²⁹ Ricœur, “Life in Quest of Narrative,” 27.

³⁰ Paul Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (University of Chicago Press, 1988), 247.

³¹ Phillip Hammack, “Narrative and the Cultural Psychology of Identity,” *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 12, no. 3 (2008): 235.

³² Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (University of Minnesota Press, 1984). Lyotard is critiquing the structures of metanarratives, suggesting instead that in postmodernity they are collapsing and creating space for individuals to write their own narratives (*petite récits*) instead of subscribing to a particular master narrative.

No philosopher has approached this imbrication of narrative, phenomenology, selfhood, and hermeneutics with “more care and incisiveness” than Paul Ricœur.³³ Ricœur argues that phenomenology and hermeneutics presuppose one another, that experience demands interpretation, an inherently linguistic and hence narrative enterprise.³⁴ The “deepest wish” of hermeneutics is self-understanding, both through interpreting texts and applying hermeneutics to the self:

The purpose of all interpretation is to conquer a remoteness, a distance between the past cultural epoch to which the text belongs and the interpreter himself. By overcoming this distance, by making himself contemporary with the text, the exegete can appropriate its meaning to himself: foreign, he makes it familiar, that is, he makes it his own. It is thus the growth of his own understanding of himself that he pursues through his understanding of the other. Every hermeneutics is thus, explicitly or implicitly, self-understanding by means of understanding others.³⁵

Only narrative can account for the dynamism of coming to such an understanding of one’s self or subjectivity. Ricœur, for whom subjectivity is “neither an incoherent series of events nor an immutable substantiality, impervious to evolution,” stresses the term “narrative identity” as a way of coming to terms with and representing one’s subjective, phenomenological existence.³⁶ Ricœur returns to narrative as a mechanism of understanding different aspects of existence—intersubjectivity and relations with others, community formation, ethics, politics, justice, memory, time, history, friendship, religion—throughout his extensive corpus. Narrative identity in particular is deeply invested in notions of time, alterity, and recognition that unfolds across three key works: *Time and Narrative*, *Oneself as Another*, and *The Course of Recognition*.

Ricœur’s narrative hermeneutic phenomenology is rooted in the human experience of time. Following Augustine in Book 11 of the *Confessions*, Ricœur theorizes a threefold-present: memory, through which the past is made present; attention (or intention), the focus on the present that makes it present to itself; and expectation, by which the future is made present. The more attention one pays to the present, the more one becomes aware of time; the result is *distentio animi*, or the distention of the soul. Actions proceed from the future (from expectation)

³³ Christopher Watkin, *Phenomenology or Deconstruction?: The Question of Ontology in Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Paul Ricœur and Jean-Luc Nancy* (Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 76.

³⁴ Paul Ricœur, “Phenomenology and Hermeneutics,” in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, ed. and trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge University Press, 1981), esp. 114-128.

³⁵ Paul Ricœur, “Existence and Hermeneutics,” in *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*, ed. Don Ihde (Northwestern University Press, 1974), 16.

³⁶ Ricœur, “Life in Quest of Narrative,” 32.

through the present to the past. This movement Ricœur relates to two concepts central to Aristotle's *Poetics*: *mimesis* (imitation) and *muthos* (emplotment). Emplotment is the "organization of events," the "representation of action."³⁷ Mimesis is the process through which emplotment takes place and it, too, is threefold. Mimesis₁, or prefiguration, is the pre-understanding we have of action. This is mediated by three subsequent dimensions: the semantic (goals, agents, motives, etc.), the narrative (signs, rules, and norms), and the temporal (the passing of time, the distention of the present). All actions, then, are already governed both by *time* and by *narrative*. In mimesis₂, events or actions are configured to provide unity and intelligibility. Mimesis₃ is the process of refiguration; this is where the world of the narrative interacts with the world of the reader. The reader is opened to new possibilities through the encounter with narrative, and the text is refigured into action and becomes part of the reader.³⁸

Time, narrative, and their circular relationship are components of Ricœur's theory of narrative identity. The self is a temporal phenomenon and the only way to make sense of time is through narrative; hence the self is also inevitably narrative. The narrative of self, or one's narrative identity, is the emplotment of a dialectic between two concepts: *idem* identity, or identity as sameness, and *ipse* identity, or identity as selfhood. *Idem* identity is a relationship between uniqueness (such as through a given name), continuity (which accounts for physical change through time; a person is the same human from birth to death), and permanence in time. The last concept is an answer to the question, *what?* *Iipse* identity, however, is in relation to the question of *who?* *Iipse* identity is characterized by self-constancy which is predicated on the ability to make and keep promises: "to keep a promise is to sustain oneself within the identity of one who today speaks and tomorrow will do."³⁹ *Iipse* identity is therefore concerned with time—with the relationship between today when one says, "I promise," and the future, when one must enact that promise—and this is where it intersects with *idem*, with sameness. The result is two different senses of permanence, which overlap but are not identical. This dialectic between what and who,

³⁷ Paul Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (University of Chicago Press, 1984) 47.

³⁸ Ricœur's threefold mimesis resonates with how Gregory the Great describes the reading process: "In nobismetipsis namque debemus transformare quod legimus; ut cum per auditum se animus excitat, ad operandum quod audierit vita concurrat" (*Moralia in Job*, 1.33). "We ought to transform what we read within our very selves, so that when our mind is stirred by what it hears, our life may concur by practicing what has been heard." (See Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, 205).

³⁹ Paul Ricœur, "Approaching the Human Person," *Ethical Perspectives* (1999): 50.

sameness and selfhood, constancy and fidelity, makes up the “ontological constitution of the person,” and the instrument of this dialectic, says Ricœur, is narrative.⁴⁰

The way we understand one another, then—our actions, motivations, etc.—also takes the form of narrative. We create stories to make our interactions with others intelligible. We apply narrative models to the other making them, in effect, texts. In our encounter with these “people-qua-texts,” we undergo a version of the threefold mimesis. We have a preunderstanding of human actions (mimesis₁); our interactions with others are fitted into a narrative, and actions are articulated through signs and symbols that are based in our preunderstanding of the world (mimesis₂). This narrative gets refigured (mimesis₃) in a movement from an understanding of “text” into our own actions, a movement that gives us a higher understanding of both the other and ourselves and begins to figure our own identities in relation to others. Narrative, then, gets internalized and, through reflection upon it, comes to constitute part of our own identity. In return, this changes our preunderstanding of action in an endless cycle.⁴¹

Ricœur’s hermeneutic circle applies as well to the way in which we construct narratives about our own lives and identities. Our *own* actions become intelligible to ourselves (and, as above, to others) when narrative plots are applied to them. Narrative identity “proceeds from untold and repressed stories in the direction of actual stories that the subject can take up and hold as constitutive of his personal identity.”⁴² The narratives we create about our own lives are also explained by Ricœur-qua-Augustine’s threefold sense of time, in an attempt to find *ipseity*, or self-constancy; having had experiences in the past, and given that we will have experiences in the future, the narrative we create in the present about our life tries to account for a consistent selfhood through time and also governs both past and future in the present. But it is important to remember that these narratives are mediated by culturally and socially defined symbols and our understanding of them. Our actions, in order to be intelligible, must fit into a socially conditioned narrative. To the extent that our narrative is recognizable, the self is also recognizable, or able to be interpreted. But when nonstandard narratives organize one’s life, and are unable to be interpreted or recognized, the self also becomes nonstandard.

Ricœur’s hermeneutics of selfhood receives its fullest elaboration in *Oneself as Another*, his seminal work on a narrative conception of identity. His hermeneutics begins with the

⁴⁰ Ibid., 53.

⁴¹ Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 72-76.

⁴² Ibid., 74.

question, “who?” and what he identifies as the four objectives of being: “Who is speaking? Who is acting? Who is recounting about himself or herself? Who is the moral subject of imputation?”⁴³ Selfhood is, in Ricœur’s thinking, irreducibly linguistic, as he demonstrates through the auto-designative nature of the first-person pronoun.⁴⁴ Language functions to identify a subject as a *self*, not simply a *thing*. From the philosophy of language Ricœur moves through a semantics of action; the question “who is speaking?” naturally raises the question of “who is acting?” in two ways: first, it is through language that we give meaning to action and designate who is acting, and second, speech itself is an action and, by implication, speakers, actors. The interrelation of speech and action posit the question of personal identity, which itself is constituted by the dialectic between *idem* and *ipse*. *Speech* and *action*, *idem* and *ipse*, are recounted and *emplotted* to form a narrative attestation of selfhood. Emplotment, or narrative, provides order and structure that allows both oneself and the other to recognize, account for, relate to, interpret, and finally judge (what Ricœur calls esteem) action and experience—or, identity.

The hermeneutic of narrative identity insists on the embeddedness of subjectivity. Within our individual narrative, we are both narrator and character but, significantly, co-author, for a life-story is intimately entwined with, informs and is informed by, the life-story of an other. Individual subjectivity is thus profoundly *intersubjective*; it relies on others for its construction, intelligibility, and evaluation. The narrative constantly changes to account for our actions and the actions of others through time and works to maintain the unity of personal identity. Narrative identity is fragile, vulnerable to influence, and can always be configured differently. As an example of the demand of the other, Ricœur offers the ability to make and keep a promise which attests to self-constancy, self-sameness, or what he calls *ipse* identity: keeping a promise “sustains oneself within the identity of one who today speaks and tomorrow will do.”⁴⁵ Promise-making assumes four key faculties of the self: to speak; to make a commitment; to give life unity through narrative; and to be responsible.⁴⁶

It is within the context of constancy in action that Ricœur introduces the concept of *accountability*, the notion that one must be held accountable for his or her actions and that one is

⁴³ Paul Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (University of Chicago Press, 1992): 16.

⁴⁴ Paul Ricœur, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multidisciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language*, trans. Robert Czerny (University of Toronto Press, 1977), 75.

⁴⁵ Ricœur, “Approaching the Human Person,” 50.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

able to be *counted on*. In this respect the narrative dimension of selfhood is “at once ethical and moral,” as narrative theory mediates between and makes meaning out of action and morality.⁴⁷ The narrative concept of identity produces an ethics that reveals the self to be both active (acting) and passive (suffering) (Ricœur’s thinking regarding the self is profoundly dialectical: *idem* and *ipse*; acting and suffering/activity and passivity; self and other—all of these dialectics lead to his “little ethics” which extend over a whole life within a narrative framework).⁴⁸ Equally key to his ethical schema is sympathy, wherein he privileges the position of the suffering other. Even in the passivity of suffering, unable to act, the other is still able to *give*: that “from the suffering Other there comes a giving that is no longer drawn from the power of acting and existing, but precisely from weakness itself.”⁴⁹

His hermeneutic as developed through *Oneself as Another* culminates in the revelation that one is a self among other selves, that one’s own self is constituted by the testimony of others as well as oneself—the individual self is ontologically intersubjective. In this Ricœur diverges from philosophers like Emile Benveniste, who theorizes that the only testimony that can attest to one’s selfhood is one’s own; for Ricœur, selfhood is also dependent on the words and actions of others. It is for this reason that the narrative of identity that an individual presents must be recognizable by others. Ricœur’s teleological ethics—the self’s ethical aim—is oriented toward self-esteem: “the reflexive movement through which the evaluation of certain actions are judged to be good are carried back to the author of those actions.”⁵⁰ The metric against which actions are judged and self-esteem earned is what Ricœur calls the ethical intention: “aiming at the “good life” *with and for others*, in just institutions” [emphasis mine].⁵¹ This relationship is constructed through the exchange and recognition of narrative forms and are based on *solicitude* and *reciprocity*: solicitude introduces a sense of lack to the self, the idea that we need the other, which has the effect that “the self perceives itself as another among others.”⁵² Reciprocity underlies all productive and self-affirming relations based on the Golden Rule, an

⁴⁷ Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 169-170.

⁴⁸ Much more could be said about Ricœur’s theories of narrative and identity, especially in regard to time. The *aporia* of the dialectics Ricœur conceives in personal identity are temporal phenomena—and indeed, the self is as much temporal as it is linguistic.

⁴⁹ Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 188-189.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 172.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*, 192.

acknowledgement of mutual vulnerability and “the asymmetrical relation between doing and undergoing”:

Acting and suffering then seem to be distributed between two different protagonists: the agent and the patient, the latter appearing as the potential victim of the former. But because of the reversibility of the roles, each agent is the patient of the other. Inasmuch as one is affected by the power over one exerted by the other, the agent is invested with the responsibility of an action that is placed from the very outset under the rule of reciprocity, which the rule of justice will transform into a rule of equality.⁵³

The rules of justice and equality are part of Ricœur’s vision for just institutions which govern the relations between the self and others. Solicitude and reciprocity, the basic tenants of the Golden Rule, lie behind both close and distant others; but the further from oneself the other becomes, the more the idea of justice comes into play. Institutions such as the law are meant to ensure respect and equality.

Ricœur’s theorization of a phenomenologically intersubjective mode of identity construction and interpretation finds its conclusion in *The Course of Recognition*. The “course” Ricœur traces through this work is that from “something” to “someone,” from “someone” to “oneself,” and from “oneself” to “one another” or “each other.” This course of identity hinges on three moments of recognition.⁵⁴ The first phase of recognition is that of identification, the differentiation between “something” and “someone”: “To recognize something as the same, as identical to itself and not other than itself, implies distinguishing it from everything else.”⁵⁵ This applies equally to persons as it does to objects; it is, in many ways, the difference between “what” and “who.” The work of identifying and distinguishing applies to recognition in its active form, “to recognize.” The second transition, between “someone” and “oneself” is what Ricœur calls self-recognition, or self-attestation. It relies on our relation to others and making oneself recognized. It is here that narrative comes into play as giving an account of one’s capacity to speak, act, and be responsible. Self-recognition, like narrative identity, continuously evolves to account for our experiences and relationship to time in real-time, in what Ricœur calls the “living present.”⁵⁶ Self-recognition gives coherence to our past in the form of memory, and to the future

⁵³ Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 330.

⁵⁴ Paul Ricœur, *The Course of Recognition*, trans. David Pellauer (Harvard University Press, 2005). It is important to Ricœur that at every stage in this course of identity unfolds a parallel course of alterity. Recognition has a confrontation or conflict with alterity at its core, the recognition that an object or person is one and not another.

⁵⁵ Ricœur, *The Course of Recognition*, 21.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 109.

in the form of the promise. These, too, are capacities of identity that narrative structures and to which it imputes meaning.⁵⁷ Finally, in the exchange of these narrative identities, Ricœur arrives at recognition in its passive sense, *to be recognized*. Indeed, the passivity of mutual recognition is driven by a demand to be recognized inherent in having a narrative identity: “narrating, like saying, calls for an ear, a power to hear, a reception...”⁵⁸ Constructing one’s narrative identity is conducted, then, in this quest to be recognized. Likewise, having and sharing a narrative identity is a struggle against misrecognition. That one is recognized is demonstrated through the exchange of gifts, which are a symbol of reciprocity based in love.⁵⁹ Gift-giving, and the gratitude that attends it, preserves the “irreplaceable character of each of the partners in the exchange. The one is not the other. We exchange gifts, but not places.”⁶⁰ In maintaining a distance between oneself and another, giving and giving in return “integrates respect into intimacy.”⁶¹ This occurs, at all times, in a narrative framework—in the intermingling of life stories as plots weave together events and characters.

While, to be sure, Ricœur’s hermeneutic is not designed for literary analysis as such, he frequently turns to “fictive experience” and the “lived experience of the characters in the narrative” as a model for how narrative identity works, offering that “life can be understood only through the stories we tell about it.”⁶² Fiction is both an example of life “lived in the mode of the imaginary” and “an enormous experimental field for the endless work of identification that we carry out on ourselves.”⁶³ We recognize ourselves in fiction and understand the narrative of our identities in terms of fictional archetypes, roles, and plots because fiction has the capacity to express human experience. There is “a demand for narrative immanent in experience itself” that fictional narratives also represent.⁶⁴ So for example, when discussing the relationship between narrative and the human experience of time, Ricœur turns to fiction, including Virginia Woolf’s

⁵⁷ Ricœur defines memory and promise as “where the temporality of the self unfolds in the directions of past and future, at the same time that the lived present reveals its double valence of presence and initiative.” (*The Course of Recognition*, 250).

⁵⁸ Ricœur, *The Course of Recognition*, 253.

⁵⁹ Ricœur’s use of the term in this context is in the sense of *agape*, though mutual recognition can also occur “in friendship, or fraternity on a communal or cosmopolitan scale” (*The Course of Recognition*, 263).

⁶⁰ Ricœur, *The Course of Recognition*, 263.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Paul Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 2, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (University of Chicago Press, 1986), 101; Ricœur, “Life in Quest of Narrative,” 31.

⁶³ Ricœur, “Life in Quest of Narrative,” 27; Ricœur, “Approaching the Human Person,” 54.

⁶⁴ David Wood, “Introduction: Interpreting Narrative,” in *On Paul Ricœur: Narrative and Interpretation*, ed. David Wood (Routledge, 1991), 11.

Mrs. Dalloway.⁶⁵ As a stream-of-consciousness novel, the characters of *Mrs. Dalloway* are uniquely configured to reveal something about how time is experienced, as “[i]t is the identity of the story that makes the identity of the character.”⁶⁶ Ricœur’s hermeneutic distills several of Chaucer’s key interests: time, history, fictionality, and poetics; selfhood and alterity; the significance of language and of fidelity to one’s word; and agency, passivity, and suffering. By applying that hermeneutic, we can consider the extent to which Chaucer’s poetry may use narrative to represent or resolve those interests and their connection to identity.

Chaucer and the Potential for Narrative Identity⁶⁷

Chaucer is a poet who “invites us to accompany him in [the] highly psychological, yet highly social activity” of discovering how people think and communicate and what motivates their actions—in short, “with the state and nature of sentience as such.”⁶⁸ We can perhaps consider Chaucer a phenomenological poet, one whose work is deeply invested in individual, subjective experiences of the world. As Leicester suggests, one path to accessing the individual Chaucer presents us with is narrative. Throughout the *Canterbury Tales* and other works like *Troilus and Criseyde* or the *House of Fame*, we see characters using narrative to come to terms with or explain something about themselves or the world. The dream poems (the *Parliament of Fowls*, the *Book of the Duchess*, and the *House of Fame*) each bring books to life in the mind of the dreamer: either as physical spaces in which the action will take place and reveal something to the dreamer about the purposes of literature in the waking world, or in the form of a guide, as when, in the *Parliament*, Africanus appears to the dreamer fresh out of the pages he had just been reading to instruct him in how to get to heaven. And Chaucer’s women are frequently seen using narrative as a tool to interpret experiences, such as with Criseyde and her cousin Antigone’s song. Both *Troilus and Criseyde* and the dream poems will be discussed in later chapters; for now, let us turn to two examples from the *Canterbury Tales* to demonstrate the potential narrative hermeneutics has for interpreting Chaucer’s works.

⁶⁵ Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 2, 100-52.

⁶⁶ Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 147. I am reminded here of Leicester’s formulation that a narrative reveals something about its narrator.

⁶⁷ All references to Chaucer’s texts will be to *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd edition, ed. Larry D. Benson (Houghton Mifflin, 1987). Individual works will be cited parenthetically in the text. The *Canterbury Tales* will be cited in accordance with the fragment numbers provided by the *Riverside Chaucer*. Other works will follow the *Riverside*’s lineation. Where more than one set of line numbers is offered, I will note which set of line numbers I am following.

⁶⁸ L.O. Aranye Fradenburg, “Living Chaucer,” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 33 (2011): 50, 56.

The first example of the *Franklin's Tale* is an instance of Leicester's reversal of interpretive influence in the *Tales*. The Franklin interrupts the Squire's Oriental romance with a romance of his own that, despite its label as a Breton *lai*, has very little to do with the genre.⁶⁹ The *Tale* uses the lay genre's "literary capital in fourteenth-century England" to give legitimacy both to the *nouveau riche*, questionably gentle, *parvenu* Franklin and to the "questions of *trouthe*, fidelity, patience, and *gentillesse* tested in the tale [which] were cultural paradigms present in the minds of Chaucer's readers."⁷⁰ From the start, then, the Franklin demonstrates an awareness of the power narrative forms have not only to reflect back and reveal something about its teller (i.e., his social status), but to speak to and define a particular reality by explicitly identifying the genre best suited to "remake the world in a fashion that satisfies his sense of fitness."⁷¹ The Franklin, Susan Crane suggests, "speaks of a literature by which he has been configured," and the result is a Breton lay that is "deeply invested in enabling mobility...between social classes once demarcated by the potential (and the accessibility) of its members to perform "honorable" activities"—a world that reflects and helps to define and interpret his own experiences.⁷² In Ricœur's terms, the Franklin's deliberate generic identification for his story uses a standard narrative structure to ensure that his narrative is recognized by its audience; its reception, though not depicted in the *Tales*, has the potential to esteem the Franklin as a storyteller and the worldview he offers and in so doing, provide coherence to the Franklin's subjectivity.

Like the Franklin, the Wife of Bath has a similar awareness of how narrative can structure identity and relationships, though in the Wife's case she rejects narrative's *ensample*. Her relationship to narrative is characterized by her deference to experience over "auctoritee," which the Wife considers inadequate "To speke of wo that is in mariage" (III.3). Narrative's failure to speak to experience, she argues, is a failure of representation:

Who peyntede the leon, tel me who?

By God, if wommen hadde writen stories,

As clerkes han withinne hire oratories,

⁶⁹I will revisit *Franklin's Tale* and the role of genre as a form of affective whiteness in its interruption to the *Squire's Tale* in Chapter 4.

⁷⁰ Steele Nowlin, "Between Precedent and Possibility: Liminality, Historicity, and Narrative in Chaucer's *The Franklin's Tale*," *Studies in Philology* 103, no. 1 (2006): 47.

⁷¹ Roy J. Percy, "Chaucer's Franklin and the Literary Vavasour," *The Chaucer Review* 8, no. 1 (1973): 52.

⁷² Susan Crane, "The Franklin as Dorigen," *The Chaucer Review* 24, no. 3 (1990): 244. Joseph Parry, "Dorigen, Narration, and Coming Home in the *Franklin's Tale*," *The Chaucer Review* 30, no. 3 (1996): 262.

They wolde han writen of men moore wikkednesse

Than al the mark of Adam may redresse. (III.92-96)⁷³

In such literature—and the Wife of Bath is clearly well-versed in the “vast medieval stock of antifeminism”—the fictive experience of women has so little in common with the lived experience of actual women that it undermines their subjectivity.⁷⁴ The stories in Jankyn’s “book of wikked wyves” (III.685) whose plots suggest “That wommen kan nat kepe hir mariage” (III.710) call into question the constancy on which narrative identity is based. As Jankyn reads these stories to Alisoun, he is engaging in the kind of narrative exchange that, like the Tamaritans, writes the participants *into* the narrative; Jankyn has cast himself as the betrayed husband and Alisoun as the traitorous wife. The Wife of Bath’s rejection of narrative “auctoritee” is thus a rejection of a discourse that desubjectivizes her. Alisoun resists Jankyn’s narration by literally destroying the narrative: “Al sodeynly thre leves have I plyght / Out of his book, right as he radde” (III.790-91) and she “made hym brenne his book anon right tho” (III.816). Destroying the book and the narratives it contained allows Alisoun to wield her own discursive authority. For the *Wife of Bath’s Tale*, then, identity is constructed intersubjectively in relation both to other individual subjectivities but also to discursive “auctoritee.”

Following in the wake of the two above examples, the subsequent chapters argue for a self-in-relation: the self in relation to theorizations of identity, and how that self is constituted with narrative through relations to others. Using Ricœur’s hermeneutic phenomenology, the chapters articulate how narrative is ingrained in individual and collective identity and experience. Each chapter focuses on a key element of Ricœur’s narrative hermeneutic phenomenology and how that modality of narrative is used to construct a particular category of identity.

Chapter 1, Ipseity, is an analysis of the subjectivation of three Chaucerian women: Dorigen, Griselda, and Criseyde. As the scope of the title “from the *pacience* of Griselda to the *slydynge* of Criseyde” suggests, the chapter focuses on constancy and how these women use narrative and are able or fail to maintain a coherent self in light of promises kept or broken. The chapter’s ultimate argument reevaluates the question of Criseyde’s selfhood by exploring her

⁷³ For a more thorough discussion of how this passage relates to the Wife of Bath’s prioritization of “experience” over “auctoritee,” see Mary Carruthers, “The Wife of Bath and the Painting of Lions,” *PMLA* 94, no. 2 (1979).

⁷⁴ As Mary Carruthers has noted, medieval readers did not “observe in the same way the basic distinction we make between “what I read in a book” and “my experience.” [...] “what I read in a book” is “my experience...” (*The Book of Memory*, 211).

relationships with others as representative of particular narrative discourses. The chapter identifies patterns of yielding discursive authority that either subvert or redirect narrative structures of masculine authority; in so doing, I argue that women like Criseyde have more control over their own lives and a more positive subject-position than previously recognized.

Chapter 2, Esteem, argues that narrative exchange functions as a form of social capital in the *Canterbury Tales*. The exchange of narratives particularly concerning race and racism is a mechanism to define the racial identity of the pilgrims and by which they judge the worthiness of their own selves and accumulate self-esteem. The pilgrims' endorsement or critique of certain behaviors, ideals, and values enacted in their individual narrative performances (re)produces a set of cultural norms and paradigms that applies to the community as a whole. Narratives of otherness told by the Prioress, Man of Law, and Squire articulate an ideology of whiteness by which membership into the community to which the pilgrims belong is gauged. I argue that racialized narratives structure community by defining what kind of identity is acceptable—in this case, a white Christian identity, shared by all the pilgrims, that reproduces a Western hegemonic whiteness.

Chapter 3, Recognition, considers the possibility of nonhuman subjectivity in Chaucer's texts by engaging with a Ricœurian conception of metaphor that discloses nonhuman realities. The talking birds of the *Complaint of Mars*, *Squire's Tale*, and *Parliament of Fowls* present narratives of their identity, which allows them to be taken seriously and recognized as subjects. Confronted with a nonhuman other through the recognition and response that narrative facilitates, I argue that Chaucer's animal poetry uses narrative to build an ethic of care that is invested in principles of solicitude and friendship.

Finally Chapter 4, Memory, explores the self in relation to space in the four major dream visions, which I argue are a space representative of poetic identity. The chapter applies the tenets of Edward Soja's critical spatial theory to the dream visions as both a product of and engagement with spatialized narratives. Narrative and space perform the same social, memorial function within the visions, revealing poetic identity to be profoundly intersubjective, emphasizing the role of communal memory in creating the memory of the poet and the role of narrative in creating communal memory. I argue that Chaucer's dream visions represent narratives of poetic subjectivity that are embedded in issues of memory and sociality that take shape in and as space.

CHAPTER 1: IPSEITY: WOMEN AND DISCURSIVE AUTHORITY FROM THE 'PACIENCE' OF GRISELDA TO THE 'SLYDYNGE' OF CRISEYDE

This chapter begins in many ways with Criseyde, and with the key Ricœurian notion that subjectivity is rooted in *ipseity*—in the self-constancy through which we are held accountable to others, as seen in the ability to keep promises.¹ Indeed, in the third volume of *Time and Narrative*, Ricœur goes so far as to equate the enterprise of narrative identity with *ipseity*, suggesting “[t]he only difference between *idem* and *ipse* is nothing more than the difference between a substantial or formal identity and a narrative identity.”² In other words, personal identity or subjectivity is no more than self-constancy, the pledging of oneself in promises that constitute one’s narrative. We know, of course, that Criseyde is famous for her unkept promise; and yet, she is likewise considered “the first completely realized woman in English literature.”³ So how can we understand Criseyde—one of literature’s most inconstant women—as a self? For some, the answer is that we cannot. On Criseyde’s absence of selfhood, Gretchen Mieszkowski writes that “Criseyde is never shown making a plan and carrying it out or giving her word and honoring her commitment to it...She has no personal substance...she is not someone herself.”⁴ To frame Mieszkowski’s argument in Ricœurian terms, Criseyde lacks *ipseity* and thus lacks subjectivity.

This is not merely a Criseydean issue; across Chaucer’s corpus, women are defined by their constancy and how they break or keep promises. As Carolyn Dinshaw has previously noted, this is perhaps “the major problematic in Chaucer’s narratives, the problem of truth in love...very often focused on a woman’s truth—her honesty, her fidelity—or her significant lack of it.”⁵ Dinshaw further argues that a woman’s constancy “constitutes her function within the

¹ This includes, tellingly, the nonhuman ones: In the *Squire’s Tale*, for example, the formel pits her own constancy against her lover’s preference for “newefangelnesse.” I argue in Chapter 3 that Chaucer uses the *Parliament of Fowls* to attest to the constancy of nature through change as a way to place humans and nonhumans in a mutually caring relationship. By using constancy as a defining feature of nonhuman female identity as well as human, Chaucer redoubles the connection between gender and *ipseity*.

² Paul Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 246.

³ John Speirs, *Chaucer the Maker* (Faber and Faber, 1964), 49.

⁴ Gretchen Mieszkowski, “Chaucer’s Much Loved Criseyde,” *The Chaucer Review* 26, no. 2 (1991): 109. [109-132]

⁵ Carolyn Dinshaw, *Chaucer’s Sexual Poetics* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 7.

structure of a patriarchal society.”⁶ But Ricœur’s equation of narrative with constancy brings with it the parallel notion that the self emerges among “spheres of discourse,” which allow the self and its narrative to be continually interpreted and contextualized.⁷ I argue that Chaucer constructs narrative subjectivity through a careful negotiation of the demands of these discourses, the experience of which is conveyed through a character’s acts of narration and engagement with narratives within the text that allow them to navigate the discursive demands of the other—in other words, they have a narrative identity. By comparing Criseyde’s subjectivation to Dorigen’s—whose narrative identity fails to cohere and is thus consumed by the narratives around her—and Griselda’s—whose narrative identity accommodates shifts in power without compromising her *ipseity*—we can analyze the mechanisms by which Chaucer’s women in particular use narrative to relate to the other, respond to the power of discourse, and provide unity to their narrative identity by making and keeping promises.⁸

Chaucer’s women float in and out of multiple discourses in a pattern of self-construction that often reclaims a power commonly understood to be lost in traditional gendered power dynamics. Rather than simply being consumed by or subjected to masculine authority and narrative structures, women (to varying degrees, admittedly) retain the role of narrator of their own lives. Their narrative and discursive awareness allows them to yield or engage that power as they see fit in order to exercise control over their narratives. Reading Chaucer’s corpus through this lens of narrative awareness and discursive practice, I see several patterns of identity construction emerging. The first type has Dorigen as a model. Dorigen’s ability to move in and out of discourse is ultimately in service to a traditional model of authority: the objectification and trafficking of women. While Dorigen recognizes narrative patterns in her own life, she is unable to employ those narratives as discursive shifts because her *ipseity* is predicated on one discourse rather than movement between them. While Dorigen is constant, it is only because the narratives

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Paul Ricœur, “Philosophy and Religious Language,” in *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*, ed. Mark Wallace (Fortress Press, 1995), 35.

⁸ I borrow the terms “subjectivation” and “desubjectivation” as they are used in feminist theory, influenced by Foucault, Althusser, and Butler. As Anna Marie Smith explains, “[w]ith the critical concept of subjectivation, we denaturalize the entire process of becoming a subject who is endowed with given set of interests, preferences, and choice matrices, and we question what it means to say that a structure merely “represents,” “empowers,” or “disempowers” the subject.” These terms are particularly apt for this chapter on women, “the subject who is structurally relegated to a subordinate role and whose consciousness and practices are shaped in advance with respect to hegemonic narratives.” Subjectivation, then, is deeply concerned with issues of power, social structures or discourses, and agency—also central concerns of this chapter. (“Subjectivity and Subjectivation,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory*, ed. Lisa Disch and Mary Hawkesworth (Oxford University Press, 2016), 956, 955).

around her demand or enable her to be; she does not create any constancy for herself. She is not, in other words, *self*-constant. The second type, which includes Griselda, uses discourse code-switching to yield to a particular narrative role of their choosing and, in so doing, retain control of their own narratives.⁹ Griselda's passivity and obedience ultimately refuses to serve a larger patriarchal narrative that tests women, instead forcing that narrative to accommodate her. Unlike Dorigen, whose constancy depends on one discourse to function, Griselda's constancy exists independently of and across discursive power structures, from obedient daughter to obedient wife. Nonetheless, Griselda performs other narrative roles—such as ruler and mother—that do not impinge upon her self-constancy. Finally, much of the chapter will focus on Criseyde, who fits comfortably into no one category. While it is certainly nothing new to say that Criseyde's identity is mutable, what I hope to show is how Criseyde's mutability is a result of intentional, agential self-construction. Ultimately this chapter argues that—especially in comparison to the men with whom they have relationships (romantic or otherwise)—Chaucer's women exhibit a greater discursive flexibility and awareness of life as a narrative they can, in many ways, control. What follows is thus an analysis of the ways in which these three Chaucerian women construct their self-constancy—their narrative identities—by responding, or failing to respond, to changes in discursive power and incorporate these discourses into their own identities.

Discourse and Power

Different discourses of identity are like potential plots one could weave about one's life. By discourse, I mean “systems of thoughts composed of ideas, attitudes, courses of action, beliefs, and practices that systematically construct the subjects and the worlds of which they speak”—these master narratives that, by shaping social practice, shape personal identity.¹⁰ Narrative is a mechanism whereby one attests and interprets his or her own being. This act of interpretation is what moves one from existence to selfhood; selves appropriate the meanings

⁹ The identification of this identity pattern is enabled by Holly A. Crocker's analysis of Emelye. I leave the discussion of Emelye to Crocker, who makes these claims far better than I. Instead, building on Crocker's analysis, I will focus here on how Griselda fits in the Emelye tradition of passive femininity that confounds masculine expectation. (See Crocker, “W(h)ither Feminism? Gender, Subjectivity, and Chaucer's Knight's Tale.” *The Chaucer Review* 54, no. 3 (2019).

¹⁰ Summarizing Foucault, this definition of discourse comes from Iara Lessa, “Discursive Struggles Within Social Welfare: Restaging Teen Motherhood,” *British Journal of Social Work* 36: 2 (2006): 285. I am also guided by Peter Hulme's definition of discourse as “an ensemble of linguistically-based practices unified by their common deployment in the management of...relationships.” (*Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492-1797* (Methuen, 1986), 2).

that arise from the continual interpretation of the works, institutions, and cultural monuments (the world of culture) and apply those meanings to their own narrative lives.¹¹ For Ricœur, identity is polysemous, participating in multiple discourses with no one discourse claiming priority. This, Ricœur argues, is the great flaw of many theories' claims to possess the whole of being: privileging one discourse as encompassing all of ontology rather than recognizing the interweaving of discourses provided by narrative. Each discourse provides a partial understanding or interpretation of subjectivity, limiting and correcting one another in an uneasy tension or constellation.

Because the Ricœurian self is inherently intersubjective, reliant on the other for support, meaning, and cohesion, constructing one's personal narrative identity necessarily consists of an effort to integrate these discourses into a coherent narrative of self. Since narrative identity is unstable it is constantly in flux and prone to destabilization. But there are principles of invariability that limit the ways identity can be figured, including the place and time one lives and an inability to change the past (though we can negotiate and reinterpret its meaning). A narrative of oneself as one exists in the world, then, would account for the ways in which one participates in the social life of the world—political or religious beliefs, race and gender ideologies, socio-economic status, age, even trends in popular culture. Participation in multiple discourses is, for all of us, a fact of life. The danger lies, Ricœur warns, in assigning any one discourse priority—letting religious beliefs serve as the basis for identity to the exclusion of all other forms of social practice, for example. As a consequence, individuals exist in multiple identity categories at the same time, and often in moments where a category's social meaning is either acceptable or not. Consciously or not, we make decisions about which part of our identity takes prominence at any given moment—based on where we are, who we are with, and what we are doing. The ability to make these decisions and adjust the performance (and the narrative) of identity accordingly is not unlike the linguistic phenomenon of code-switching.¹² Code-switching as social practice demands an awareness not only of the discourses that make up one's identity, but an awareness of oneself as constructed and the ability to either yield to or wield

¹¹ Paul Ricœur, "Existence and Hermeneutics," in *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*, ed. Don Ihde (Northwestern University Press, 1974), 22; Central to the argument of this chapter is the idea that literature is one such "cultural monument" through which we structure and interpret our narrative identities. Literary tropes, genres, and figures allow us to represent narrative identity in familiar terms by figuring into our pre-understanding (mimesis₁) of the world and others' actions.

¹² For a discussion of code-switching as social practice of identity, see Anna de Fina, "Code-Switching and the Construction of Ethnic Identity in a Community of Practice," *Language in Society* 36: 3 (2007).

discursive power. This amounts, in Ricœur's language, to being the "narrator of our own story."¹³

This narratorial authority involves a delicate balance of wielding and yielding power and authority. Suppressing a regional accent when speaking in public may, for some, be tantamount to one's identity being usurped by oppressive social practices of master narratives that do not figure majorly into their own identity construction; however, by performing identity in such a way as to conform to social practice or pressure—to create a narrative that is recognized and acceptable—is just as agential as embracing a counter-narrative. Both exert control on one's narrative identity: the former by yielding, the latter by wielding discursive power and flexibility. Identity is constructed and operates in this vulnerable constellation of discourse that depends on the perception and reception of an other. We "code-switch," in other words, to respond to the demands others place on our identity. This in and of itself, I argue, is a form of power: Even in yielding to those demands, an individual retains active control of their narrative identity. This is not to say that either form of identity construction is better than the other, nor is it in any way an attempt to minimize the very real threats and dangers that make such code-switching necessary, or the violent erasure of identity that can follow from it. Rather, my hope is that by viewing code-switching as a mode of narration we are better positioned to understand the constructedness of identity, its reliance on others for that construction (which need not be, but often is, violent), and the power that lies in vulnerable categories and expressions of identity.

What I am proposing here is a reconsideration of several Chaucerian women in light of this mode of identity construction. Gender is, we know, a vulnerable identity category understood to have very clear power dynamics: men have authority and power, and women follow. These traditional gendered power dynamics are on display throughout Chaucer's texts. However, as Holly A. Crocker's recent reevaluation of Emelye has shown, women have potential to be defined "not...by domination and governance, but by forbearance and endurance...open, fluid, and frequently compromised...based on yielding rather than wielding power..."¹⁴ Crocker does not base her argument on narrative or narration, nor does she use the language of code-switching; instead, she argues that Emelye's power comes from the direct effect her powerlessness has on the world—the world responds to Emelye's inability to act directly in a

¹³Paul Ricœur, "Life in Quest of Narrative," in *On Paul Ricœur: Narrative and Interpretation*, ed. David Wood (Routledge, 1991), 32.

¹⁴ Crocker, "W(h)ither Feminism," 356-7.

world she does not control. Her (in)action does not reproduce patriarchal structures but subverts them, forcing the world to respond to her rather than merely playing the pawn in it. When Crocker identifies Emelye's passivity as subverting "the eroticized masculine authority at stake in the familiar courtly structure," Emelye does so through her "radical passivity," by leaning so far into the discursive expectations of courtly love that it becomes something else entirely.¹⁵ Emelye is, in other words, controlling the narrative by yielding to the role put upon her by social practice. This idea that one can wield power by yielding it is central to the role of discourse in feminine modes of identity construction.

Dorigen—Narration Usurped

The *Franklin's Tale* provides us a clear example of a Chaucerian woman who understands her life in narrative terms. However, Dorigen's self-narration is characterized less by yielding than usurpation of narrative; ultimately, it serves rather than disrupts a discourse that seeks to exert power over her. The terms of that power are set early in the tale as the discourses of Dorigen and Arveragus's identities—both individually and together—are set:

Ther was a knyght that loved and did his payne
 To serve a lady in his beste wise;
 And many a labour, many a greet emprise,
 He for his lady wroghte er she were wonne (V.730-33).¹⁶

The pair's identification as "knyght" and "lady" immediately calls attention not only to their estate, but to the kind of relationship expected of such an estate, bringing the discourse of courtly love to bear on their relationship (and identities). For Arveragus, this discursive influence is relatively straightforward. He manifests the contradictory notions that "a true knight must be a lover as well as a soldier."¹⁷ He performs this contradictory identity through his "many a labour"

¹⁵ Ibid, 363.

¹⁶ All references to Chaucer's texts will be to *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd edition, ed. Larry D. Benson (Houghton Mifflin, 1987). Individual works will be cited parenthetically in the text. The *Canterbury Tales* will be cited in accordance with the fragment numbers provided by the *Riverside Chaucer*. Other works will follow the *Riverside's* lineation. Where more than one set of line numbers is offered, I will note which set of line numbers I am following.

¹⁷ Craig Berry, "The King's Business: Negotiating Chivalry in Troilus and Criseyde," *The Chaucer Review* 26 (1992): 248.

(V.732) and “his wo, his peyne, and his distresse” (V.737), a combination that causes Dorigen to recognize his “worthynesse” (V.738). Dorigen here aligns Arveragus’s performance of courtly love with aristocratic virtue and in so doing, incorporates herself into his preferred discourse by “pryvely” (V.741) consenting to marriage.¹⁸ Until this point, Dorigen is a blank slate; we are given no indication of her self-understanding before Arveragus comes along. As Jennifer Wollock has noted, women participate in courtly love with their own agenda, “aimed at gaining control of their own choice in love and marriage.”¹⁹ Dorigen’s negotiation is exactly a demonstration of this type of control, which I am arguing is the control of discourse. She participates in Arveragus’s narrative of courtly love, fulfilling his expectations of what a courtly lady should do, but she does so on her own terms. The traditional understanding of marriage that Dorigen offers Arveragus is, it would seem, undermined by his courtly counter-offer; Arveragus requires only “the name of soveraynetee / That wolde he have for shame of his degree” (V.751-52). In other words, he asks Dorigen to perform her identity in service to his in order to maintain the coherence of his own. She agrees—“I wol be youre humble trewe wyf” (V.758)—a promise made within the context of Arveragus’s courtly discursive power, yet dismissive of it. The terms to which she agrees are important: “...she fil of his accord / To take hym for hir housbonde and hir lord, / Of swich lordshipe as men han over hir wyves” (V.741-43). Despite the mutual exchange of “maistrye” (V.764) that characterizes their courtly love, Dorigen’s promise is rooted in a discursive power structure that rejects Arveragus’s appearance-based offer and instead gives him a unilateral authority not in performance but in actuality. Dorigen’s choice to forfeit discursive control to Arveragus here will come back to haunt her later when her *ipseity* is threatened by Aurelius; she is unable to assert control over her narrative and shift to a discourse that prioritizes her authority instead of Arveragus’s.

This first promise that yields all authority to Arveragus is a deliberate discursive choice on Dorigen’s part. Given her deferral to Arveragus and Arveragus’s prioritization of courtly love—with a tilt toward the chivalric, honor-bound end—narrative’s fundamental intersubjectivity means that, like Arveragus, Dorigen operates within the courtly love discourse. In Arveragus’s absence, Dorigen experiences highly conventional misery: “She moorneth,

¹⁸ For a discussion on the alignment of courtly love and virtue, see Larry D. Benson, “Courtly Love and Chivalry in the Late Middle Ages,” in *Fifteenth-Century Studies: Recent Essays*, ed. Robert F. Yeager (Archon Books, 1984).

¹⁹ Jennifer Wollock, “Introduction,” in *Rethinking Chivalry and Courtly Love* (Praeger, 2011), 7. Wollock further argues that women are “full participants, beneficiaries, and co-creators of these cultural systems” of chivalry and courtly love.

waketh, wayleth, fasteth, pleyne; / Desir of his presence hire so destreyneth / That al this wyde world she sette at noght” (V.819-20). But even so, Dorigen does not perform courtliness or prioritize that discourse to the detriment of her self-constancy; she retains some semblance of narrative control even when a new source of courtly discourse is introduced. Like Arveragus, the squire Aurelius comes to Dorigen with all the trappings of a courtly lover: dancing in a garden in May, with songs of unrequited love and prayers to Venus on his lips, entreating Dorigen to “...reweth upon my peynes smerte; / For with a word ye may me sleen or save” (V.974-75). And again, like Arveragus, Aurelius’s narrative identity positions Dorigen as the powerful courtly lady with power over his life or death. This position of power allows Dorigen to demonstrate the same discursive flexibility in relation to Aurelius that she showed with Arveragus. Arveragus allowed her power, which she yielded in favor of a discourse that better served her ends. Aurelius allows Dorigen power, but instead of yielding power as a form of control she employs discursive change in service of a narrative that suits her needs. Dorigen makes her pledge to Aurelius “in pley” (V.988) and with the understanding that the conditions of her promise to love Aurelius if he can remove the black rocks “shal never bityde” (V.1001). But her discursive switch from an earnest courtly love to a jesting that would have more resonance in a fabliau or comedy fails to effect discursive change for Aurelius, and he holds her accountable to their shared discourse. She makes both men a promise in identical language: “Have heer my trouthe” (V.998; cf. V.759), but it is clear that Dorigen does not understand this promise as a threat to her identity as a “trewe wyf” or to her self-constancy.

Having accomplished the task set to him, Aurelius continues his performance of the courtly lover:

“My righte lady,” quod this woful man,
 “Whom I moost drede and love as I best kan,
 And lothest were of al this world displese,

 But certes outhere moste I dye or pleyne;
 Ye sle me gilteles for verray peyne. (V.1311-1318)

Five times over twenty lines, Aurelius recalls Dorigen’s promise (V.1320, 1323, 1327, 1328, 1335), and it is on this promise that their identities within the context of courtly love depend. He

tells Dorigen, “Dooth as yow list; have youre biheste in mynde, / ... / In yow lith al to do me lyve or deye” (V.1335-37). Dorigen’s two promises are in conflict, each threatening the coherence of her identity; in keeping one, she is breaking the other by default. When she is confronted with the choice of which promise to break—one made in earnest to be faithful to her husband or one made in play pledging her love to Aurelius if he can accomplish a seemingly impossible feat—she

...wepeth, wailleth, al a day or two,

And swowneth that it routhe was to see;

But why it was, to no wight tolde shee,

.....

But to herself she spak... (V.1348-1352)

Her “compleynt” that follows is a rather dark catalogue of classical narratives in which women privilege committing suicide over bringing dishonor to their husbands and families. Her identity as potential agent or passive object of exchange hinges on her relationship to the exempla she lists. Dorigen writes their fates onto her life; “thise stories beren witnesse” (V.1367) to her own struggle between death or dishonor and she is determined, as they were, to die. Dorigen’s “catalogue of classical women textualizes her anxiety over having to choose between fidelity to her husband and fidelity to her word.”²⁰ She objectifies her experience by situating it within a narrative context. She tries to participate in this master narrative of feminine honor, but the potential for female agency is foreclosed on through the prioritization of masculine *maistrye*: Arveragus tells Dorigen, “Ye shul youre trouthe holden, by my fay!” (V.1474). Though Dorigen’s narrative is one of her own making—by casting Arveragus as her life’s ultimate, authoritative interpreter rather than herself—she nevertheless is distressed by having to yield to his judgment. Not even the decision to die is her own now; the conditions she placed on her first promise to Arveragus—pledging her *trouthe* not just to be faithful but to uphold a traditional model of marriage that privileges his authority until she dies—prevent Dorigen from enacting any other narrative role in spite of “Purposynge evere that she wolde deye” (V.1458). Unable to escape the discursive power of that promise, Dorigen comes to Aurelius to fulfill her promise as

²⁰ Nowlin, “Between Precedent and Possibility: Liminality, Historicity, and Narrative in Chaucer’s *The Franklin’s Tale*,” *Studies in Philology*, vol. 103, no. 1, 2006, 47-67, 53.

if she stepped right out of Jerome's *Adversus Jovinianum*: "How looth hir was to been a wikked wyf, / And that she levere had lost that day hir lyf," (V.1599-1600).

Her agency and status as narrator of her own life is forfeited as she is subjected to the whims of the male characters. With her authorization, Arveragus usurps Dorigen's narrative and, rather than supporting her intentions, positions her in a narrative of his own—turning her into an object of exchange. He configures his own honor and authority at the expense of hers as she becomes a pawn in a contest between Arveragus and Aurelius to possess the most desirable woman. Dorigen's agency and subjectivity as she understands it through her relationship to narrative is subordinated to masculine values and narratives, primarily the objectification and trafficking of women. Elaine Tuttle Hansen similarly argues that the tale works hard to align masculinity with authority.²¹ Dorigen defers to Arveragus's masculine authority, which privileges keeping *trouthe* over her narratively defined experience of death and dishonor and denies Dorigen repeatable control over her own narrative. She comes to Aurelius in the garden like one of Jerome's classical women "half as she were mad" (V.1511) at the prospect of becoming a *wikked wyf* and preferring death—but she goes where she is bidden, unable to reestablish her previous agency. Cast in this new role, she is constrained by her status as an object and relies on the mercy of men to dictate her future. Only Aurelius's "greet compassioun" (V.1515), which disrupts both his competition with Arveragus and the narrative Arveragus imposed, relieves Dorigen of her narrative obligation to be traded.

In choosing a narrative that coheres in the erasure of her own power and agency, Dorigen's inability to determine what happens after Aurelius removes the black rocks is unsurprising. Dorigen's understanding of what it means to be a "trew wyf" as revealed through her experience with narrative is, in the end, irrelevant; it is only Arveragus's opinion of truth and *trouthe* that matters. Through her promise to Arveragus, Dorigen thus predicates her constancy not on her own power but on his. Dorigen, then, is not so much self-constant as she is forced into constancy. Though she first voluntarily yields control of her narrative to Arveragus in what Judith Butler terms "desubjection," or "a certain will *not* to be,"²² this does not immediately negate her selfhood. For Ricœur, "[a] non-subject is not nothing, with respect to the category of

²¹ Elaine Tuttle Hansen, *Chaucer and the Fictions of Gender*, University of California Press, 1992, 267-292.

²² Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford University Press, 1997), 130.

the subject...the non-subject [is] still a figure of the subject, even in a negative mode.”²³ It is only the second promise, which threatens her *ipseity*, that moves Dorigen from subject to object, from able to exhibit narrative control to having it exhibited upon her. Because of her discursive choices, Dorigen’s narrative is usurped and absorbed by those around her. It is the crisis of constancy, which she herself has created and is yet unable to resolve, that unravels her narrative identity. She has lost the power to assert and maintain her own selfhood, to make and keep her promises, to act and narrate her life on her own terms.

Griselda—Narration Achieved

Griselda experiences no such crisis of *ipseity*, though she too yields to a particular discursive power structure. What for Dorigen ultimately led to an (albeit voluntary) erasure of self and an *ipseity* for which she is no longer accountable but is instead accounted for—what I am identifying as the difference between self-constancy and constancy—is for Griselda a demonstration of her selfhood and the continued maintenance of her self and her self-constancy. Indeed, the *Clerk’s Tale* establishes an identity for Griselda that we can then track, whereas Dorigen seemingly came into existence as she undermined Arveragus’s courtliness. Griselda, this “povre creature” (IV.232), “in the brest of hire virginitee / Ther was enclosed rype and sad corage” (IV.219-220) such that her virtue “in chiere as dede” (IV.241) is unsurpassed. Griselda’s identity coheres in her virtue, her constancy, and her obedience. She takes care of her father without complaint, completes her chores before going to see the new *markysesse*, and—even before Walter has asked for her total obedience—“doun upon hir knes she gan to falle, / And with sad contenance kneleth stille, / Til she had herd what was the lordes wille” (IV.92-294).²⁴ While certainly a sign of respect for his station, Griselda greets Walter “with reverence, in humble cheere” (IV.298) that her father Janicula does not emulate. Janicula’s deferral to Walter’s authority is most clearly that of social inferior to superior; he tells Walter to “governeth this mateere” (IV.322), political language echoed again as their meeting is called “hire tretys” (IV.331). It is within this context of her exceptional virtue and “everich obeisaunce and diligence”

²³ Paul Ricœur, “Narrative Identity,” in *On Paul Ricœur: Narrative and Interpretation*, ed. David Wood (Routledge, 1991), 196.

²⁴ Michael Raby, “The *Clerk’s Tale* and the Forces of Habit,” *The Chaucer Review* 47, no. 3 (2013): 246. Griselda’s constancy and obedience as a habit of fortitude: “...Griselda voluntarily accepts the poverty she is born into as a condition for the development of virtue.”

(IV.230) that Griselda possesses that she swears “nevere willyngly, / In werk ne thoghte, I nyl yow disobeye” (IV.362-364).²⁵ Her decision, then, to yield to Walter’s authority is in accordance with the identity she has created for herself within the confines of her discursive awareness.²⁶ Her promise to obey is an extension of how Griselda already understands her self and her continued constancy maintains her sense of self.²⁷

That Griselda understands identity as the product of discourse is clear when, later, she compares herself to her (as yet unrecognized) daughter, telling Walter:

“O thyng biseke I yow, and warne also,
That ye ne prikke with no tormentynge
This tendre mayden, as ye han doon mo;
For she is fostred in hire norissyng
Moore tendrely, and, to my supposynge,
She koude nat adversitee endure
As koude a povre fostred creature.” (IV.1037-1043)

Though it does not take shape as literal narratives as with Dorigen, Griselda does recognize that discursive contexts produce varying identities; those brought up in comfort, she argues, are less equipped to handle and overcome adversity than those raised otherwise. In the *Clerk’s Tale*, class seems to function as one of the principles of invariability that Ricœur suggests limits the ways identity can be figured. Griselda and Walter both express that her lower social class renders her

²⁵ Laura Ashe, “Reading Like a Clerk in the Clerk’s Tale,” *The Modern Language Review* 101, no. 4 (2006): 937: “...Griselda is herself engaged in interpretation, in a powerful hermeneutic of goodness.” Ashe further argues that “Griselda’s reading of Walter reinterprets his ‘tortures’ as acceptable components of her own will, as she promised him would be the case” (938).

²⁶ Gail Ashton, “Patient Mimesis: Griselda and the *Clerk’s Tale*,” *The Chaucer Review* 32, no. 3 (1998): 232. Ashton recognizes Griselda’s power for self-articulation within a system that seeks to oppress her: “...blank silences or textual gaps, often prompted by the Clerk’s narration, enabled medieval audiences, especially female ones, to hear something different where Griselda articulates her own identity, and an identity for women, from within the very masculine-dominated world she inhabits...Her patient suffering and idealized femininity combine to resist masculine knowledge and appropriation...” See also Hansen, who argues that Griselda represents that women are a least potentially powerful,” insofar as her suffering and submission are fundamentally insubordinate and deeply threatening to men and to the concepts of power and gender identity upon which patriarchal culture is premised.” (*Chaucer and the Fictions of Gender*, 190).

²⁷ Cf. Dinshaw, *Chaucer’s Sexual Poetics*: “Griselda reads herself as allegorical image and thereby ‘authorizes’ us to read her allegorically, but at the same time she gives us a sense of what it feels like to be made into a figure of speech, what is left out” (147).

unworthy of her new role as *markysesse*.²⁸ For Griselda, this manifests itself in her ability to move from her father's house to her husband's and back again. When Walter's penultimate test forcibly displaces her, she accepts this change in a demonstration of both her narrative and self-constancy:

“My lord,” quod she, “I woot, and wiste alway,
How that bitwixen youre magnificence
And my poverty no wight kan ne may
Maken comparison; it is no nay.
I ne heeld me nevere digne in no manere
To be youre wyf, no, ne youre chamberere.

And in this hous, ther ye me lady maade—

.....

I nevere heeld me lady ne mistresse,
But humble servant to youre worthynesse,

.....

Unto my fader gladly wol I wende,
And with hym dwelle unto my lyves ende.

Ther I was fostred of a child ful smal,
Til I be deed my lyf ther wol I lede (IV.814-824, 832-835).

²⁸ For more on the role of class in the *Clerk's Tale*, see the tale's entry in *The Open Access Companion to the Canterbury Tales* (Susan Nakley, “Authority (Familial, Political, Written) in the *Clerk's Tale*,” *The Open Access Companion to the Canterbury Tales*, September 2017, accessed 11 March 2021, <https://opencanterburytales.dsl.lsu.edu/clt1/>).

Despite the discursive power structure into which Griselda had been “translated” (IV.385), she is still self-constant, nor is her *ipseity* threatened by the change.²⁹ Indeed, “Ne shewed she that hire was doon offence; / Ne of hire heighe estaat no remembraunce” (IV.922-923); the narrator makes clear that her “heighe estaat” effected no change in her identity, for “Hir goost was evere in pleyn humylitee” (IV.926) and she showed “No pompe, no semblant of roialtee, / But ful of patient benyngnytee, / Discreet and prideless, ay honorable” (IV.928-930). This coincides with Griselda’s self-interpretation, that she was never anything but herself. While Walter dressed her in fine clothes and gave her the rank of *markysesse*, her identity remained constant. The promise she made to him in a demonstration of her *ipseity* did not, as Dorigen’s did, create a new narrative but allowed Griselda to continue in faithfulness to herself as well as Walter.

But while Griselda performs her narrative identity in such a way that supports her self-constancy, she does so within a discursive context that anticipates and, moreover, tries to create, its failure. Though Walter also navigates multiple discourses in the construction of his identity—husband, father, political ruler—it is his role as “sturdy housbonde” (IV.698), tester of Griselda, that consumes him: “To tempte his wyf was set al his entente” (IV.735).³⁰ Walter repeatedly invokes their class difference in his tests, despite having chosen Griselda for his wife on account of the very virtue he is testing. Walter explains the link between Griselda’s “povere array” (IV.467) and the purpose for these trials as a demonstration of his care for his people. He confuses his role as *markys* with that of husband and, because he has taken Griselda from “povre estaat ful lowe” (IV.473) and put her “in estaat of heigh noblesse” (IV.468), she must prove that her estate does not disqualify her from either “wyf” or “markyesse.” Yet Griselda’s narrative identity—maintaining constancy in adversity, interpreted through her understanding of poverty as a discourse—allows her to participate in other discourses without compromising her *ipseity* or her promise to Walter. Whereas Dorigen’s shifts in discourse were a threat to her constancy, Griselda successfully embraces other power structures when she is placed in the role of ruler and mother.

²⁹ Dinshaw argues that this translation is “a masculine hermeneutic gesture performed on the woman” just as it is on a text (“Griselda Translated,” 133). She continues, “*translatio*—interpretation, all figuration itself—is a turning away from female experience [...] the very basis of literary activity [...] excludes woman’s experience from its purview” (“Griselda Translated,” 148).

³⁰ I will argue elsewhere in this dissertation that in Chaucer, *entente* is meant to signify the entirety of identity. So for the Clerk to say that Walter’s *entente* is set on testing his wife is to say that Walter’s whole self is invested in and encompassed by this particular discursive structure. See Ch. 3, especially 163-164.

Regarding the former, Susan Nakley has noted that Griselda “transcends the visible class structure to rule in Walter’s stead.”³¹ Their marriage grants Griselda the discursive authority to “redresse” the “commune profit” (IV.431):

Though that hire housbonde absent were anon,
If gentil men or othere of hire contree
Were wrothe, she wolde bryngen hem aton;
So wise and rype wordes hadde she,
And juggementz of so greet equitee (IV.435-39)

Griselda demonstrates the ability to separate political discourse from marital, which Walter does not. Again, his tests of Griselda’s “wyfhod” (IV.699) are offered for political reasons. But her role as *markysesse*, which she embraces without threat to her promise to obey Walter, only serves to magnify Griselda’s pre-existing virtues and, further, she is beloved by Walter’s subjects. Indeed, when she departs from his house, a weeping crowd laments the turn of Fortune’s wheel as they follow Griselda on her return to her father. The tests that Walter claimed to be for the benefit of his status and authority as a ruler have the unintended consequence of lifting Griselda in public estimation and simultaneously decreasing his own political capital; though he told Griselda that these adversities would address the people’s wants and needs, “The sclaudre of Walter ofte and wyde spradde” (IV.722). In fact, he has no care for public opinion. His people hate him and think him a murderer, but still he will not end the pointless testing of his wife. Her constancy in the face of these tests transcends discursive differences and increases her worthiness in both. Her promise to be faithful to Walter is upheld by her success as his *markysesse*, even as he fails to recognize the overlap in her identity.

More problematic, however, is Griselda’s role as a mother, at the heart of which is a fundamental contradiction between accomplice to (apparent) murder and loving mother seeking to protect her children. As far as Griselda is aware, Walter’s *sergeant* has orders to kill her children, which she lets happen: “My child and I, with hertely; obeisaunce, / Been youres al, and ye mowe save or spille / Youre owene thyng; werketh after youre wille” (IV.502-504). In this moment, her “constancy in adversity” narrative identity is threatened by her motherhood, but rather than acting in such a way that compromises her *ipseity*, Griselda prioritizes constancy over

³¹ Nakley, “Authority in the Clerk’s Tale.”

discourse. When “Wel myghte a mooder thanne han cryd “allas!” / But nathelees so sad stidefast was she / That she endured al adversitee” (IV.563-565). The only concession she makes to a motherly discourse is to implore the *sergeant* to bury her child’s body somewhere it cannot be violated by wild animals (IV.569-72).³² And yet, her *ipseity* does not seem to disrupt Griselda’s ability to be understood in a maternal discourse, for she is still described as loving her children “parfitly” (IV.690) and “best in every wyse” (IV.695). So even though Griselda’s role as a mother is impinged upon by her decision to yield to Walter’s narrative of wifely testing, she still wields that discourse in such a way that it becomes an important piece of her identity.

Only once Griselda has exhausted all of Walter’s tests and fulfilled all his narrative expectations—when she is no longer held accountable to a promise that demands the prioritization of marital discourse—that Griselda’s constancy can more openly negotiate other identities. Though we do not see Griselda working for the “commune profit” again, she does embrace her children “Ful lyk a mooder” (IV.1084).³³ This is certainly in accordance with the self-constancy she has demonstrated throughout and, moreover, is consistent with her previous performance of a motherly identity. But with her promise to Walter kept and his narrative expectations fulfilled, Griselda has created a new narrative trajectory that allows her the freedom to interpret herself in other discourses and narrative roles. Ultimately, Griselda’s use of discursive power parallels Dorigen’s in its ability to create these new narrative trajectories.³⁴ But while Dorigen’s narrative was undone by discursive switches, Griselda’s narrative reconciles them in the preservation of her self-constancy. Griselda’s *ipseity* resolves the contradictory discourses of her identity—of “low degree” (IV.425), yet capable ruler, complicit in the assumed deaths of her children, yet devoted, loving, tender mother—by yielding those other discourses to Walter’s narrative identity which, in turn, produces a narrative change that allows those discourses to be reasserted as part of Griselda’s narrative.

³² The second occurrence, when Walter kidnaps and implies he will kill their son, parallels this first one. Griselda’s discursive performance is so consistent that she uses the same language. First, she tells Walter, “Ye been oure lord; dooth with youre owene thyng / Right as yow list; axeth no reed at me” (IV.652-653), which mirrors her earlier claim that she and her daughter are Walter’s “owene thyng” (IV.504). Then, she repeats her request that the *sergeant* bury her child in such a way “Fro foweles and fro beestes for to save” (IV.683)—echoing her desire “That beestes ne no briddes it [her daughter’s body] torace” (IV.572). Across discourses, then, Griselda’s identity is defined by constancy—something that cannot be said for Dorigen.

³³ See Ashton, “Patient Mimesis,” 236-37.

³⁴ Jill Mann, *Geoffrey Chaucer* (Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), 153: “Through pity, suffering realizes itself as power. Griselda’s patience [...] constitutes an unrelenting pressure on Walter. [...] It is the pressure of Griselda’s sameness that eventually issues in Walter’s change.”

Criseyde—Narration Controlled

At the heart of many arguments concerning Criseyde's selfhood is the extent to which she is vulnerable to and controlled by "specific social and ideological structures within which an individual becomes an identifiable human being."³⁵ If she is, as Mieszkowski and others argue, dominated by these structures, then for them Criseyde is nothing—merely there to be acted upon and traded by and for those who hold power over her.³⁶ But, as I have shown with Griselda and Dorigen, a narrative identity that negotiates "social and ideological structures," or discourses, even when one is consumed by them, does not negate the possibility of selfhood. My argument about Criseyde is thus in this same vein, analyzing the way Criseyde engages discursive relationships to create a narrative identity that tries to maintain *ipseity*. While, like Dorigen, Criseyde yields to a discourse that threatens her constancy, she is nonetheless—like Griselda—remarkably self-constant. Criseyde uses discourse and her awareness of life as a story to foreground her identity in a narrative of her own making. As a result, she fails to keep her promise to Troilus, but she retains the discursive authority to interpret and construct her identity as she sees fit.

That Criseyde understands life in terms of narrative or story is evident in care she takes to craft her public image.³⁷ From her first actual appearance in the poem, she takes control of the mythohistorical influence on her life—Calkas's betrayal, stories of which she is only told—and comes

In widewes habit large of samyt broun,
On knees she fil befor Ector adown
With pitous vois, and tendrely wepynge,
His mercy bad, hirselves excusyng. (*Tr*, I, 109-112)

³⁵ David Aers, "Criseyde: Woman in Medieval Society," *The Chaucer Review* 13, no. 3 (1979): 179.

³⁶ See in particular Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics*, Mieszkowski, "Chaucer's Much Loved Criseyde," and Hansen, *Chaucer and the Fictions of Gender*, 141-87.

³⁷ Criseyde is not the only Chaucerian woman who demonstrates this performative awareness and uses it to construct her identity. Both the Prioress, Virginia, Emelye, the Wife of Bath, and others also exhibit this type of identity construction. The Prioress, for instance, "peyned hire to countrefete cheere / Of court, and to been estatlich of manere, / And to ben holden digne of reverence" (I.13-41). The care the Prioress gives to seeming a particular way and affecting a "manere" that does not correspond to her estate is, I am arguing, a sign of her ability to manipulate discourse to create a desired narrative of her identity.

Her choices, down to her dark clothing, call attention to her vulnerability.³⁸ Her status as a widow redoubles her plight, having been abandoned by Calkas. Though we do not know what Criseyde says to Hector, her suppliant position appeals to his “pitous” (*Tr*, I, 113) nature and achieves her desired outcome: Criseyde is permitted to stay in Troy, retains control of her estate, and has Hector’s protection (though ultimately his chivalry and mythohistorical role both fail her). In choosing to ally herself with the politically powerful but sexually uninterested Hector, Criseyde takes control of her situation without compromising her freedom.³⁹ Her position in Troy is secured in yet another way: she is “both of yonge and olde / Ful wel biloved, and wel men of hir tolde” (*Tr*, I, 130-131). The renown that both her performance before Hector and her successful estate management win her provide her with the surety she demonstrates in the temple. Though she stands “stille allone, / Byhynden other folk, in litel brede, / And neigh the dore, ay undre shames drede” (*Tr*, I, 178-180), she does it with “ful assured lokynge and manere.” (*Tr*, I, 182). Even the glance that ignites Troilus’s love is part of Criseyde’s measured attempt to control the way she is perceived, and it is clear she is successful. The “ful assured lokynge and manere” Criseyde wears appears to Troilus “somedel deignous” (*Tr*, I, 290). Her presence in the temple and her look that seems to say, “What, may I nat stonden here?” (*Tr*, I, 292) further reveals Criseyde’s self-constructed narrative of freedom that she desperately works to maintain: first by rebuffing Pandarus’s presentation of Troilus’s affections, then through her conditional acceptance, and finally concluding her self-determination by deciding on Diomedes.

Criseyde’s decisions are carefully calibrated to try to maintain control. She is fully cognizant of the power of public perception (*Tr*, II, 743-749). Yet her repeated concern with what others say about her demonstrates just how aware she is of the power of narrative and what control she has over it. When Pandarus threatens to kill himself if Criseyde refuses Troilus, she realizes that “What men wolde of hit deme I kan nat seye; / It nedeth me ful sleighly for to pleie” (*Tr*, II, 461-462). Her attention to how her actions affect her public persona and, in turn, her security, freedom, and control over her life (and thus her narrative) is a constant refrain throughout the poem. She is equally aware of what constitutes a threat to her control, and of her

³⁸ Laura Hodges, “Sartorial Signs in *Troilus and Criseyde*,” *The Chaucer Review* 35, no. 3 (2001).

³⁹ While Edward Condren argues that when Criseyde casts herself at Hector’s feet and pleads for mercy, she is aiming at seduction and wishes to have Hector as her lover, Angela Jane Weisl suggests that instead Hector is “one of the few uncompromised spaces” in the poem—he is always a warrior, never a lover (see Condren “The Disappointments of Criseyde,” in *Chaucer and the Challenges of Medievalism*, ed. Donka Minkova and Theresa Tinkle (Peter Lang, 2003), and Weisl, “Criseyde’s Masculinity in *Troilus and Criseyde*,” 119). Either way, Criseyde’s choice of Hector reveals publicly her disinterest or disbelief in romance as a guarantor of safety.

own vulnerability. Criseyde's freedom, she knows, is an extension of her widowhood, a role she foregrounds throughout Books I and II (and again in Book V as her narrative shifts again to Diomedes). Even Hector's protection builds on her status as a widow and her continued freedom depends on maintaining that image. For this reason, Pandarus's request that Criseyde cast off her veil and dance is met with the rejoinder, "Is that a widewes lif, so God yow save? / ... / Lat maydens gon to daunce, and yonge wyves." (*Tr*, II, 114-119). To take up dancing is to signal, perhaps, her openness to love, which Pandarus is attempting to draw out. But Criseyde's comfort in her current position—and her previous experience with marriage—disinclines Criseyde to surrender control to romance's well-worn tropes:

"I am myn owne 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:
Shal noon housbonde seyn to me 'Chek mat!'
For either they ben ful of jalousie,
Or maisterfull, or loven novelrie." (*Tr*, II, 750-756)

Criseyde is, further, aware that love in love, "we wrecched wommen nothing konne" (*Tr*, II, 782). This loss of control is equal to a loss of control of her story, since "thise wikked tonges ben so prest / to speke us harm" (*Tr*, II, 785-786). Though it is not as extensive as Dorigen's catalogue of women, her reflections on other women's experiences leads her to wonder, "[t]o what fyn is swich love I kan nat see" (*Tr*, II, 794)—"Sholde I now love, and put in jupartie / My sikernes, and thrallen libertee?" (*Tr*, II, 773-774). The conditions she places on her relationship with Troilus, emphasizing her honor and reputation, the need for secrecy, and her ability must be interpreted in light of these meditations as Criseyde's assertion of narrative control—an attempt to maintain the public-facing persona she has constructed.

Criseyde arrives at her identity through a careful consideration of the narratives presented to her by others—Pandarus, Troilus, Diomedes, even Helen—and builds her narrative identity as she responds to them, aided along the way by her response to other narratives she encounters: the stories of Troy and of Thebes, Antigone's song, her dream of the eagle, even the nightingale

singing Criseyde to sleep. She understands her relationships and her vulnerable position in Troy and in the Greek camp as a narrative that is inflected by the story of Troy in more ways than just determining its end, however. Criseyde's pronounced historical—and, I would add, narrative—consciousness uses Helen's narrative as a model for Criseyde's own identity. In the end, she yields to the narrative role of Helen as a false woman in an enemy camp while trying to maintain the coherence of her identity in her letters to Troilus, with full knowledge of how her story ends:⁴⁰

Allas, of me, unto the worldes ende,
 Shal neyther been ywriten nor ysonge
 No good word, for thise bokes wol me shende.
 O, rolled shal I ben on many a tonge!
 Thoroghout the world my belle shal be ronge!
 And wommen moost wol hate me of alle.

Allas, that swich a cas me sholde falle! (*Tr*, V, 1058-1064).

Criseyde understands her identity on a much larger scale than the other characters in the poem and even the other women I have discussed so far, reconciling her historical and narrative consciousnesses to interpret her identity. Holley comes closest to the model of narrative identity I am proposing for Criseyde when she suggests that Criseyde uses narrative as a “means of interpreting the past and present and of preparing for the future,” and that she “imagines her future in terms of narrative and sees herself defined by the ‘fyn’.”⁴¹ While Holley's observations about Criseyde and narrative are, I think, correct (and I will build upon them here), her argument lacks a foundation in narrative hermeneutics that it would seem to demand.

Criseyde's subjectivity thus feels real because it is constructed with and presented as narrative; this assertion is, in some ways, nothing new. Carolyn Dinshaw, Holly Crocker, Linda Holley, A.C. Spearing, and others have acknowledged the various ways Criseyde is narrative or

⁴⁰ Baswell and Taylor note, however, that Criseyde is a Helen either way—in the Greek camp betraying her lover, she mirrors Helen's position in Troy, *Helen infidelis*; if she ran away with Troilus, she is *Helen raptus*; if she flees the Greek camp she reenacts Helen's abandonment of the Greeks. (Christopher Baswell and Paul Beekman Taylor, “The Faire Queene Eleyne in Chaucer's Troilus,” *Speculum* 63, no. 2 (1988)).

⁴¹ Linda Holley, “The Narrative Speculum in *Troilus and Criseyde*,” *CLA Journal* 25, no. 2 (1981), 213; 220.

like a narrative, how she is imbricated in notions of reading and textuality.⁴² And as Elizabeth Archibald has noted, “[t]he plot held no surprises for the medieval reader or audience.”⁴³ We know that Criseyde fails to keep her promise. Chaucer provides us with the inner workings of Criseyde’s mind to a greater extent than his source, Boccaccio’s *Il Filostrato*, resulting in what Archibald calls a “drama of intentions,” the *how* and *why* of Criseyde’s infidelity.⁴⁴ This access to and examination of Criseyde’s inner life, I want to suggest, parallels Ricœur’s notion that “a life *examined*...is a life *narrated*.”⁴⁵ What Ricœur’s theory of narrative identity allows us to consider, then, is how Criseyde’s identity evolves to arrive at its predetermined end. She evinces the Ricœurian notion that no one discourse is constitutive of identity, but, rather, identity is actually an uneasy constellation of discourses, kept in tension through narrative. Her role as narrator confers to Criseyde an agency and control over her life while, at the same time, considering her narrative identity foregrounds her vulnerable position in Troy and Criseyde’s attempt to turn that vulnerability to her advantage.

Before moving on to how Criseyde engages with the discursive structures of others’ narrative identities, I will first show how those discourses operate for the individuals with whom Criseyde has relationships. Multiple discourses inflect *Troilus and Criseyde* that can limit or expand individual constructions of identity and within which the characters follow or disrupt norms and expectations. While Molly Martin notes that “the romance mode governs the early stages of the text,”⁴⁶ Chaucer brings the mythohistorical weight of the story of Troy to bear on the poem.⁴⁷ The opening allusion to Thesiphone (*Tr*, I, 6-10) is supplemented by other classical

⁴² See Dinshaw, *Chaucer’s Sexual Poetics*; Holly A. Crocker, “How the Woman Makes the Man: Chaucer’s Reciprocal Fictions in *Troilus and Criseyde*,” in *New Perspectives on Criseyde*, ed. Cindy L. Vitto and Marcia Smith Marzec (Asheville: Pegasus Press, 2004); Linda Holley, “The Narrative Speculum in *Troilus and Criseyde*,” *CLA Journal* 25, no. 2 (1981); A.C. Spearing, “*Troilus and Criseyde*,” in *Textual Subjectivity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁴³ Elizabeth Archibald, “Declarations of “Entente” in *Troilus and Criseyde*,” *The Chaucer Review* 25, no. 3, (1991): 190.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Paul Ricœur, “Life: A Story in Search of a Narrator,” in *Facts and Values*, ed. M.C. Doerer and J.N. Kraay (Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1986), 130. In an alternative formulation, Ricœur suggests that “a life *examined*...is a life *recounted*” (“Life in Quest of Narrative,” in *On Paul Ricœur: Narrative and Interpretation*, ed. David Wood (Taylor and Francis, 1992), 31).

⁴⁶ Molly Martin, “Troilus’s Gaze and the Collapse of Masculinity in Romance,” in *Men and Masculinities in Chaucer’s Troilus and Criseyde*, ed. Tison Pugh and Marcia Smith Marzec (D.S. Brewer, 2008), 137.

⁴⁷ I use the term “mythohistorical” to try to capture the tensional status of the story of Troy as both fictional myth and the necessarily historical origins of Britain—and, indeed, as one and the same. Though their focus is decidedly not English, for a similar argument see *Medieval Narratives between History and Fiction From the Centre to the Periphery of Europe, c. 1100-1400*, ed. Panagiotis A. Agapitos and Lars Boje Mortensen (University of Chicago Press, 2012).

references to muses Cleo (*Tr*, II, 8) and Calliope (*Tr*, III, 45), as well as the Furies (*Tr*, IV, 22) and the Fates (*Tr*, V, 3). The epic, mythohistorical discourse extends to characterization, too, as the lineages of (particularly male) characters are invoked: Troilus is “kyng Priamus sone of Troye” (*Tr*, I, 2) and “the sone of Ecuba” (*Tr*, V, 12), and Diomedes is referred to as “the sone of Tideus” throughout Book V.⁴⁸ These two lineages, Trojan, and Theban, undergird the poem’s mythohistorical consciousness, though the narrator is clear it is not his “matere” (*Tr*, I, 141-144) and redirects the reader to Homer, Dares, or Dictys (*Tr*, I, 146) or his “auctour called Lollius” (*Tr*, I, 394). This literary tradition is invoked again at the poem’s conclusion, as the narrator sends “litel myn tragedye” (*Tr*, V, 1786) into the realm of “Virgile, Ovide, Omer, Lucan, and Stace” (*Tr*, V, 1792), situating *Troilus and Criseyde* within the mythohistorical discourse they represent. This foregrounding of the mythohistorical discourse is part of a larger pattern of de-fictionalizing the Boccaccian source material.⁴⁹ Chaucer’s most radical departures from Boccaccio, in addition to the Theban references, are increased roles for Hector and Helen. Pandarus hails Troilus as “Ector the secounde”, praising Hector and Troilus both for the same strength of arms, “trouthe” and “gentilesse,” “Wisdom, honour, fredom, and worthinesse” (*Tr*, II, 158-161). Criseyde, too, recognizes the brothers as two sides of the same coin: “of Ector that is sooth. / Of Troilus the same thyng trowe I” (*Tr*, II, 183-185). But Marcia Smith Marzec has shown how Troilus fails to live up to Hector’s example. Hector, free from the strictures of courtly love, is representative of both married love and chivalric masculinity, highlighting Troilus’s courtliness by comparison.⁵⁰

The narrative of the Trojan War, including the story of Paris and Helen, looms large over *Troilus and Criseyde*, even as the narrator and the other male characters attempt to suppress the history of Troy.⁵¹ As Lee Patterson observes, the narrator mimics Troilus’s own behavior by

⁴⁸ I find Catherine Sanok’s argument about the invocation of lineage compelling. She suggests that as a woman, Criseyde possesses no fixed lineage and can thus move from “kyng Priamus sone” to the “sone of Tideus,” from the story of Troy to the story of Thebes, unimpeded. (“Criseyde, Cassandre, and the *Thebaid*: Women and the Theban Subtext of Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*,” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 20 (1998)).

⁴⁹ Alastair J. Minnis, “An Historical Approach to Chaucerian Antiquity,” *Chaucer and Pagan Antiquity* (Boydell and Brewer, 1982), 24.

⁵⁰ Marcia Smith Marzec, “What Makes a Man? Troilus, Hector, and the Masculinities of Courtly Love,” in *Men and Masculinities in Chaucer’s Troilus and Criseyde*, ed. Tison Pugh and Marcia Smith Marzec (D.S. Brewer, 2008). Marzec notes that while Chaucer’s audience would have been unfamiliar with Homer’s Hector, there was a strong literary tradition that identified Hector as the perfect knight.

⁵¹ Sanok, “Criseyde, Cassandre, and the *Thebaid*,” 68; Gayle Margherita, “Historicity, Femininity, and Chaucer’s *Troilus*,” *Exemplaria* 6, no. 2 (1994).

“subordinating the historical world of events to the inner world of erotic action.”⁵² Even as Pandarus goads Troilus, “Go ravysshe here!.... / Artow in Troie....?” (*Tr*, IV, 530-533), Troilus resists this narrative trajectory in favor of passivity and impotence rooted in the performance of courtly love:⁵³

Thus am I lost, for aught that I kan see;

For certeyn is, syn that I am hire knyght,

I moste hir honour levere han than me

In every cas, as lovere oughte of right. (*Tr*, IV, 568-571)

We see Troilus here prioritizing his identity as a courtly lover, wallowing in helplessness and suffering under the guise of protecting Criseyde. Holly Crocker and Tison Pugh suggest that Troilus’s “stasis, helplessness, and loss” represent a new model of masculinity “based on sacrifice and forbearance rather than aggression and authority.”⁵⁴ I would add to this model two things: a yielding or prioritization of a singular discourse of identity and a failure to recognize the power of narrative. While the narrative of his own history presents to him a possible way forward in the example of Paris, who represents “the agency, domination, and possession that a Trojan prince otherwise might claim,”⁵⁵ Troilus is unable to think outside the narrative boundaries imposed by courtly love. Indeed, while his first response to Pandarus’s invocation of the greater Trojan narrative (“Artow in Troie?”) is to think of the town—“It sholde not be suffred me to erre, / ... / Syn she is chaunged for the townes goode” (*Tr*, IV, 549-553), Troilus sublimates his political power and instead privileges his own interior desires: “Hir honour levere than my lyf to save!” (*Tr*, IV, 567). Troilus’s identity as the idealized courtly lover forecloses any other possibility or outcome for the “ravysshynge of wommen” (*Tr*, IV, 548) than the example of Paris and Helen, which would bring dishonor to Criseyde, which Troilus cannot abide.

⁵² Lee Patterson, “*Troilus and Criseyde* and the Subject of History,” in *Chaucer and the Subject of History* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 105.

⁵³ Jennifer Garrison, “Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde* and the Danger of Masculine Interiority,” *The Chaucer Review* 49, no. 3 (2015): 323.

⁵⁴ Holly Crocker and Tison Pugh, “Masochism, Masculinity, and the Pleasures of Troilus,” in *Men and Masculinities in Chaucer’s Troilus and Criseyde*, ed. Tison Pugh and Marcia Smith Marzec (D.S. Brewer, 2008), 83; 86-7.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 83.

This is not the only instance where Troilus rejects narratives of other discourses by prioritizing his own self-interpretation as a courtly lover. He demonstrates a similar rejection of narrative in Book I:

“Frend, though that I styлле lye,
I am nat deaf. Now pees, and cryenamore,
For I have herd thi wordes and thi lore;
But suffre me my meschief to bywaille,
For thy proverbes may me naught availle.

Nor other cure kanstow non for me;

Ek I nyl nat ben cured; I wol deye.

What knowe I of the queene Nyobe?

Lat be thye olde ensaumples, I thee preye.” (*Tr*, I, 752-760)

Though Pandarus attempts to console Troilus through narrative, and to get him to see the significance of “olde ensaumples” to his current situation, Troilus is closed off to the possibility of any other narrative than the passive, secretive, interior, courtly one he has constructed. It may well be that, as Pandarus says, wallowing and weeping will not win Troilus his love, but it is consistent with the powerless masculinity that, having been conscripted by Cupid, he is currently performing. This performance of powerlessness will be repeated in Book II, this time under the guidance of Pandarus, who conscripts Troilus in the creation of a narrative of lovesickness for Criseyde’s benefit. Troilus is aware of Pandarus’s interferences and of the “composedness” of their affair. Indeed, Troilus is complicit in it and plays his part: riding by Criseyde’s house at the appointed time; hiding in a closet in the room where Criseyde is sleeping; and so on. But even in this, Troilus is yielding control of his own narrative to Pandarus, ultimately creating his own suffering and prioritizing a singularly idealized romance narrative.

Diomede, like Troilus, participates in both the romance and mythohistorical discourses, but he prioritizes myth, history, and epic in presenting a narrative of his identity to Criseyde. Diomede’s suit of Criseyde parallels and condenses Troilus’s; what took three books for Troilus and Pandarus takes Diomede only twenty-six stanzas—he “possesses the rhetorical capabilities

of Pandarus and Troilus combined.”⁵⁶ He is, as Troilus was, more concerned with winning Criseyde than winning the war. But Diomedes deploys the war and his belief in Calcas’s prediction of Troy’s destruction as part of his appeal. The Trojans’ military failure is, he implies, a failure in love as well:

For Troie is brought in swich a jupartie

That it to save is now no remedie.

And thenketh wel, ye shal in Grekis fynde

A moore parfit love, er it be nyght,

Than any Troian is, and more kynde,

And bet to serven yow wol don his myght. (*Tr*, V, 916-921)

To justify his worthiness, Diomedes tells Criseyde of his father Tidesus and his hopes of becoming a king (*Tr*, V, 932-938), proving his “gentil” (*Tr*, V, 931) status by historicizing and contextualizing his identity. His identity is also heavily inflected by actual narrative—“this romaunce...of Thebes, that we rede” (*Tr*, II, 100), if read to its conclusion, would tell of Diomedes. Had Criseyde finished her reading in Book II, she would have known of Diomedes without his explanation. In a way, then, Diomedes completes Criseyde’s literary exercise. He fills in the gaps in her knowledge of his narrative, suggesting that his identity can be summed up in the mythohistorical discourse. But, it should be noted, that Diomedes is only telling *what has already been written*; he is not writing a new narrative. He is, like Troilus, ultimately constrained by his narrative identity and its prioritization of a singular discourse. That Criseyde takes Diomedes as her lover and protector is a product of her own narrative control, not Diomedes’s; Criseyde yields to Helen’s example and relies on the help of “frendes” to assure her safety.

This narrative relationship between Helen and Criseyde is furthered by Chaucer’s elaboration of Helen’s role from Boccaccio. In so doing, Chaucer “establishes her as an example, or a mirror, for Criseyde.”⁵⁷ Pandarus brings Criseyde into direct relation with Helen when he

⁵⁶ Christopher Stampone, “Choreographing *Fin’amor*: Dance and the Game of Love in Geoffrey Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*,” *The Chaucer Review* 50, no. 3-4 (2015). See also Martin, “Troilus’s Gaze,” and Charles Muscatine, *Chaucer and the French Tradition: A Study in Style and Meaning* (University of California Press, 1957).

⁵⁷ Baswell and Taylor, “The Faire Queene Eleyne.” The beginning and conclusion of the Trojan War—and thus most of Helen’s story—lie outside the bounds of Chaucer’s poem. We do not know, for example, whether Helen

tells Troilus that he will help him win whomever it is that he loves, “theigh that it were Eleyne / That is thi brother wif,” (*Tr*, I, 677-678). These lines are uncomfortable for several reasons, but in this context they establish a parallel between Helen and whomever Troilus desires—Criseyde, though Pandarus does not yet know it. One implication of Pandarus’s pledge is a disregard of Helen’s agency; if she can be stolen once, she can be stolen again. But he extends that logic to the object of Troilus’s longing—implicitly suggesting that, if all else fails, any woman can be “ravysshed”—disguising the suggestion of capture, of *raptus*, in the language of winning and courting. Though Pandarus’s “grete emprise” has not yet started, the discursive conflict that will characterize Troilus and Criseyde’s romance has already begun. Troilus has already established himself as the ideal courtly lover, pining in secret, willing to die for his love, and above all, a concern for Criseyde. Troilus lays plain his intentions toward Criseyde and urges Pandarus to take care:

But herke, Pandare, o word, for I nolde
 That thou in me wendest so greet folie,
 That to my lady I desiren sholde
 That toucheth harm or any vilenye;
 For dredeles me were lever dye
 Than she of me aught elles understonde
 But that that myghte sownen into goode. (*Tr*, I, 1030-1036)

Troilus believes his wishes may be incompatible with Pandarus’s methods—methods which, he has already suggested, may include force or deceit (as the comparison with Helen makes clear). The relation between the two women is made more explicit when, in Book II, Helen enters *Troilus and Criseyde* as an actual character. Helen in Troy represents what can result from associating with a Trojan prince. She provides Criseyde with a glimpse of what the life of a

willingly fled with Paris or was kidnapped (though she seems to have adjusted to life in Troy fairly well and considers Paris’s brothers her friends, so it may be a safe assumption that she arrived in Troy of her own volition), but we also do not know how her story ends or what her involvement is in Troy’s destruction. Her legend suggests two options: once the Trojan Horse enters the city, she either turns on the Trojans and guides the Greek soldiers through Troy or drives the Greek soldiers mad by mimicking the voices of their loved ones.

woman who has betrayed her lover (and her country) could be like, a role Criseyde willfully emulates in the Greek camp.⁵⁸

Pandarus's narrative identity is, in many ways, the first three books of the poem in which "Pandarus hath fully his entente" (*Tr*, III, 1582).⁵⁹ Very little of his history is known; his whole purpose—both for the narrator and, so it would seem, in his life—is to bring Troilus and Criseyde together, a role common to both romances and fabliau, as Gretchen Mieszkowski has thoroughly explored.⁶⁰ His identity fluctuates between the romance and fabliau mode as he moves between Troilus and Criseyde. Pandarus's agency is defined by this go-between role, which he himself understands and highly esteems. From the beginning, Pandarus understands his role as that of an architect or an author, orchestrating an "old romaunce" (*Tr*, III, 980) with Troilus and Criseyde as his characters. He tells Troilus he will "maken a good ende" (*Tr*, I, 973) of his desire for Criseyde and most of Pandarus's actions throughout the poem are geared toward that "grete emprise" (*Tr*, II, 73).⁶¹ He anticipates Criseyde will be pliant and receptive to love, telling Troilus

That sith thy lady vertuous is al,

So foloweth it that there is some pitee

Amonges alle thise other in general; (*Tr*, I, 898-900)

And Pandarus explains again later:

Was nevere man or womman yet bigete

That was unapt to suffren loves hete,

Celestial, or elles love of kynde;

⁵⁸ The linguistic association between Troy and Troilus links the two such that Criseyde's betrayal of Troilus (which results in his death) is also a betrayal of Troy and contributes to its destruction.

⁵⁹ What exactly this line means is still up for debate. It comes after the consummation of Troilus and Criseyde's relationship, which he had been working for, but also after Pandarus climbs into bed with Criseyde, thrusting his arms around her neck and kissing her in a parody of the romance of a few stanzas before. The narrator muddies the scene, saying, "I passe al that which chargeth nought to seye" (III, 1576). Pandarus's *entente* could very well refer to either moment. For discussions on the possibility of incest in *Troilus and Criseyde*, see Robert Levine, "Restraining Ambiguities in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 87, no. 4 (1986); Evan Carton, "Complicity and Responsibility in Pandarus' Bed and Chaucer's Art," *PMLA* 94, no. 1 (1979); T.A. Stroud, "The Palinode, the Narrator, and Pandarus's Alleged Incest," *The Chaucer Review* 27, no. 1 (1992); and Cory James Rushton, "The Awful Passion of Pandarus," in *Sexual Culture in the Literature of Medieval Britain*, ed. Amanda Hopkins, Robert Allen Rouse, and Cory James Rushton (Boydell and Brewer, 2014).

⁶⁰ Gretchen Mieszkowski, *Medieval Go-Betweens and Chaucer's Pandarus* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

⁶¹ See Michael Modarelli, "Pandarus's 'Grete Emprise': Narration and Subjectivity in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*," *English Studies* 89, no. 4 (2008).

Forthy som grace I hope in hire to fynde.” (*Tr*, I, 977-980).

And Pandarus understands (or thinks he does, at least) how to best draw out her “grace” or inclination:

Than thought he thus: “If I my tale endite

Aught harde, or make a proces any whyle,

She shal no savour have therin but lite,

And trowe I wolde hire in my wil bigyle;

For tendre wittes wenen al be wyle

Thereas thei kan nought pleyntly understonde;

Forthi hire wit to serven wol I fonde” (*Tr*, II, 267-273)

But Pandarus’s narrative efforts to create a romance ultimately fail because, while Troilus willingly surrenders control of his narrative to Cupid (“Men myght a book make of it, lik a storie / ... / Syn I am thyn [Cupid’s] and holly at thi wille” (*Tr*, V, 585-587)) and to Pandarus (“My lif, my deth, hol in thyn bond I leye; / Help now,” (*Tr*, I, 1053-1054)), Criseyde will retain control of hers.⁶²

Pandarus, meanwhile, frequently disrupts the narrative he is trying to create for Troilus and Criseyde in his tendency to inscribe his encounters with Criseyde in a context defined by “jape” and “pleye.” Corrine Saunders observes that Pandarus and Criseyde’s relationship is “characterized as an odd mixture of game and threat,” in which she sees Criseyde as a victim or a pawn.⁶³ Even Pandarus’s expectant belief that Criseyde will be open to a sexual relationship with Troilus is consistent with the fabliau’s misogynistic ideology that views women as sexually insatiable and likely to commit sexual indiscretions. Pandarus’s behavior toward Criseyde combines the “lewd and the ludic” aspects of the fabliau, which complicates the romance.⁶⁴ It is occasionally suggested, moreover, that their relationship exceeds the culturally acceptable limits of “nece” and “em,” echoing the scurrilousness and obscenity of the fabliau more than either the

⁶² In her final letter to Troilus, Criseyde refers to him as “Cupides sone” (*Tr*, V, 1590), indicating that even she recognizes love’s primacy in Troilus’s identity.

⁶³ Corinne Saunders, “Love and the Making of the Self: *Troilus and Criseyde*,” in *A Concise Companion to Chaucer*, ed. Corinne Saunders (Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 145.

⁶⁴ The distinction of “lewd and ludic” comes from Lisa Perfetti, “The Lewd and the Ludic: Female Pleasure in the Fabliaux,” in *Comic Provocations: Exposing the Corpus of Old French Fabliaux*, ed. Holly A. Crocker (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

romance *Troilus and Criseyde* claims to be (and that Pandarus aspires to create) or conventional familial attitudes and behaviors. Pandarus's manipulation of events—usually at Criseyde's expense, like the dinner at Deiphebus's house, or the trap door in her bedroom—and his frenetic running back and forth between the pair and more realistic language (“se ye nought how I swete?” (*Tr*, II, 1465)) are reminiscent of fabliau devices. Pandarus, in his role as the fabliau go-between, employs the fabliau discourse to bring about his vision for his niece and best friend, often displaying a willingness to sacrifice Criseyde in the process. He recognizes the potential harm to Criseyde his actions could create, yet he chooses to “ferther gon a pas” (*Tr*, III, 281) and write the story anyway:

And were it wist that I, thorough myn engyn,
 Hadde in my nece yput this fantasie,
 To doon thi lust and holly to ben thyn,
 Whi, al the world upon it wolde crie,
 And seyn that I the werste trecherie
 Dide in this cas, that evere was bigonne,
 And she forlost, and thow right nought ywonnne. (*Tr*, III, 274-280)

By and large, Pandarus's two modes of identity are related, one in service to the other. But Pandarus is limited both by his go-between status and self-definition as creator or author. His identity in many ways hinges on access to both Troilus and Criseyde. He serves no purpose to Troilus once Criseyde moves to the Greek camp as the two discourses of his identity no longer cohere. Troilus, defined by his courtly service to Criseyde, rejects outright Pandarus's suggestion—rooted, perhaps, in a fabliau-oriented idea concerning both the exchangeability and licentiousness of women—that he simply take another lover. The idle pleasure the two experience at Sarpedon's likewise does little to ease Troilus's melancholy. Rather than Pandarus controlling Criseyde, then, Criseyde demonstrates a greater influence on Pandarus's identity than he does hers.

Criseyde engages with these discourses as they are lived by others—Troilus and courtly love, Pandarus and the comedy common to fabliaux, the epic, mythohistorical quality represented by Helen, Hector, and Diomedes—incorporating them into her own identity but not

prioritizing any particular one. As Catherine Sanok has argued, “Criseyde...is not fixed in one story but can move between them.”⁶⁵ For Sanok, this is a gendered phenomenon exclusive to women and I agree; but it is not simply because Criseyde “is at different times part of the stories of three men.”⁶⁶ It is because, like Dorigen, Criseyde is especially receptive and responsive to narrative, both actual narratives and the narrative identity of others. This is not to say, with Gretchen Mieszkowski or Carolyn Dinshaw, that Criseyde is only what others make of her or require her to be.⁶⁷ Rather, the intersubjective nature of narrative identity balances the passive demand of the other with active narration. If Criseyde were ultimately ruled by masculine authority, her position would resemble Dorigen’s, unable to act outside the narrative chosen for her and denied the power of narrative to organize her experience. Certainly, Criseyde’s narrative is ultimately governed by the larger arc of the Trojan War; there is no story but that Criseyde forsakes Troilus. But until that moment happens, Criseyde demonstrates an awareness of the limits of her world and control of the narrative of her life. She consistently acts from a vulnerable position to preserve both her body and her sense of self: “Criseyde uses her passive situation as a source for self-sustaining action...her consideration of her circumstances suggests greater intention in taking a preemptive role in her own life, rather than passively being overcome by circumstances.”⁶⁸ While for Angela Weisl the dialectic between passivity and agency in Criseyde’s subjectivity represents a kind of female masculinity, I offer that Criseyde’s perceived masculinity is actually a model of a distinctly feminine mode of identity construction that uses narrative to contextualize identity, akin to Dinshaw’s feminine reading and Crocker’s feminism without gender.⁶⁹ With Criseyde’s agency in guiding her narrative and Troilus’s surrender of narrative control, the poem challenges and destabilizes gender normativity.

When Catherine Sanok identifies Criseyde’s crossing narrative boundaries (between Trojan and Theban stories) as providing an “ontology for the “sliding” position of women,”⁷⁰ she is identifying a very similar type of reading to what I am arguing for here. I want to suggest two

⁶⁵ Sanok, “Women and the Theban Subtext of Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*,” 58.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Gretchen Mieszkowski, “Chaucer’s Much Loved Criseyde,” *The Chaucer Review* 26, no. 2 (1991); Dinshaw, *Chaucer’s Sexual Poetics*.

⁶⁸ Angela Jane Weisl, “‘A mannes game’: Criseyde’s Masculinity in *Troilus and Criseyde*,” in *Men and Masculinities in Chaucer’s Troilus and Criseyde*, ed. Tison Pugh and Marcia Smith Marzec (D.S. Brewer, 2008), 127.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Sanok, “Women and the Theban Subtext of Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*,” 58.

ways Criseyde disrupts narrative boundaries: both by refusing to be constrained by any one narrative discourse and by demonstrating an openness to the possibility of narrative that Troilus so summarily rejects. While Sashi Nair similarly argues that Criseyde's "*apparent* agency is attributable to circulating discourses" [emphasis mine] and is "grounded in a negotiation of generic and gendered oppression," she ultimately concludes that Criseyde's personhood is unsustainable.⁷¹ Like Dinshaw, Hansen, Sanok, and many others, Nair regards Criseyde as ultimately subsumed by masculine authority—Troilus, the narrator, social structures that prioritize the masculine, the patriarchal traffic in women that expropriated Dorigen's narrative. Instead, I suggest Criseyde's position is perhaps more positive than previously acknowledged. Criseyde's early internal monologues and prayers provide access to her subjectivity as she considers the future, structuring her meditation as a narrative; her letter in Book V is a continued attempt to control that narrative. Her narrative control extends to resistance of roles in others' narrative identities: she is never fully the idealized courtly woman of Troilus's fantasies, or the one who *japes* and *pleyes* with Pandarus in the mode of a fabliau, or most importantly, someone Pandarus can force into a role in his "grete emprise." The romance and fabliau discourses that predominate in Troilus and Pandarus (as well as the authorial discourse he attempts to effect) come with fundamental misogynist premises that would limit Criseyde's agency, but she refuses to be constituted by their narratives and become a set piece within them for the benefit of men.

Criseyde's discursive awareness allows her to move among the narrative identities; her own narrative identity, thus figured through multiple discourses, gains unity and coherence through her promises. Criseyde's first promise to Troilus is twofold; first, that she will remain true, which she pledges twice:

Myn honour sauf, I wol wel trewely,
 And in swich forme as he gan now devyse,
 Receyven hym fully to my servyse,

 From hennesforth, iwis, I nyl not feyne

⁷¹ Nair, "Gender and Philosophy in *Troilus and Criseyde*," 37; 53.

And I shal trewely, with al my myght,
Youre bittre tornen al into swetenesse.
If I be she that may yow do gladnesse,
For every wo ye shal recovere a blisse (*Tr*, III, 159-181)

And again, later:

And I, emforth my connyng and my might,
Have and ay shal, how sore that me smerte,
Ben to yow trewe and hool, with al myn herte (*Tr*, III, 999-1001)

These promises, made at the beginning and at the height of her relationship with Troilus, are conditional and recognize her own limits: as long as her honor is safe and Troilus can protect her, and as long as she is able, she will be true. Criseyde it seems, is very aware that her place in Troy is vulnerable and may require her to redirect her attentions: “in thought ne dede untrewē / To Troilus was *neverē yet* Criseyde” (*Tr*, III, 1053-1054) [emphasis mine]. While I do not mean to suggest that Criseyde in any way anticipates or expects to be unfaithful, I do think Criseyde is consciously using language that reflects her vulnerability and leaves her narrative open to change.

Criseyde’s second promise to return to Troy “Er dayes ten” (*Tr*, IV, 1320) is likewise conditional, though she is “Thereof...no manere thyng in doute” (*Tr*, IV, 1277) that she “shal wel bryngen it aboute / To come ayeyn” (*Tr*, IV, 1275-1276). But Criseyde’s plans have very little to do with her at all—she will either return to Troy because the Greeks and Trojans will come to a truce and she will be exchanged again, this time for Helen, or her father will return her because Criseyde has money and powerful friends in Troy. Like Dorigen, Criseyde objectifies herself; but unlike Dorigen, Criseyde leans into her role and renders herself an object of exchange within a framework Troilus *should* understand and that Hector pushes against: “We usen here no wommen for to selle” (*Tr*, IV, 182). But the same courtly, self-interested passivity and impotence that prevents Troilus from taking up Paris’s example also prevents him from enacting Hector’s, even as Criseyde tells him, “what so ye me comaunde, / That wol I don, for that is no demaunde” (*Tr*, IV, 1294-1295). If Mary Behrman is correct and these lines represent Criseyde’s desire for Troilus to save her, the comparison between Criseyde and Dorigen is even

more revealing.⁷² When Dorigen goes to Arveragus, his chivalric masculinity shifts to Troilus's more passive courtliness even as he redirects and takes control of Dorigen's narrative and decides her fate. But Troilus is wholly unable to take control of Criseyde's despite her attempt to defer to him. But, it must be noted, even if Troilus did miraculously come up with a solution that met both of their needs, Criseyde is still in control just as she was during their consummation: "Ne hadde I er now, my swete herte deere, / Ben yolde, ywis, I were now nought heere!" (*Tr*, III, 1210-1211). Any governance Troilus has over Criseyde's narrative is given to him *by Criseyde*. Criseyde's self-conscious yielding of her story at opportune moments intentionally displaces the responsibility and obligation inherent in her promise.

Even so, Criseyde is keenly aware of her responsibility and how keeping or breaking her promise will affect Troilus: "And if so be that I my terme pace, / My Troilus shal in his herte deme / That I am fals, and so it may wel seme" (*Tr*, V, 696-698). The pressure of "tyme ypassed," "present tyme," and "future tyme" (*Tr*, V, 746-748) weighs on Criseyde as she tries to reconcile "the pleasance and the joie" (*Tr*, V, 731) she had in Troy with her current "snare" (*Tr*, V, 748); she laments her inability to rewrite the past and flee with Troilus when she had the chance (*Tr*, V, 736-743). Criseyde's consideration of Troilus's "loore" (*Tr*, V, 734) and her concern with his feelings resolve her to return to Troy:

But natheless, bityde what bityde,
I shal to-morwe at nyght, by est or west,
Out of this oost stele in some manere syde,
And gon with Troilus where as hym lest.

This purpos wol ich holde, and this is best. (*Tr*, V, 750-754)

Whether Criseyde makes her attempt we do not know, but the narrator tells us within two months she has decided to stay with the Greeks. The narrative of Troy's downfall that Diomedes presents Criseyde jeopardizes her position in the city just as much as it does her relationship with Troilus. Criseyde's decision to stay is less a clean break of her promise to Troilus than it is a fulfillment of it. In considering her situation in the Greek camp, "the perel of the town, / And that she was allone and hadde nede / Of frendes help" (*Tr*, V, 1025-1027), Criseyde recognizes the conditions she set on her fidelity to Troilus. And yet, Criseyde does not absolve herself of responsibility for

⁷² Mary Behrman, "Heroic Criseyde," *The Chaucer Review* 38, no. 4 (2004): 328.

her actions, regretting that she “falsed oon, the gentileste / That evere was, and oon the worthieste!” (*Tr*, V, 1056-1057). She further recognizes the damage she has done to her own reputation by failing to keep her promise when she anticipates how history will remember her (*Tr*, V, 1058-1064). By transferring her affection to Diomedes, Criseyde may well seem to be inconstant. But when she pledges, “To Diomedes algate I wol be trewe” (*Tr*, V, 1071), she shatters the rules of courtly love and resists once and for all that discourse’s influence on her narrative identity.⁷³ Criseyde’s choice pushes back against courtly love’s misogynistic constraints on her agency which, as Behrman notes, would expect Criseyde to die for her love—the same choice Dorigen made before Arveragus’s intervention.⁷⁴ But Criseyde never even considers suicide; the multiple discourses that influence her identity provide her with alternative plots with which she can organize her experiences.

Her narrative shifts to accommodate the threat to her ipseity, her selfhood. When Criseyde accepts Diomedes as her protector, she has fully embraced the role performed by Helen earlier in the poem. Her decision is made equally on the basis of “The wordes of this sodeyn Diomedes, / His grete estat” (*Tr*, V, 1024-1025). One can only imagine similar qualities in Paris sparking Helen’s desire. If Criseyde has crossed Trojan into Theban narrative boundaries, she has just as much crossed from romance to epic, from the potential openness of Helen *raptus* to the closure of Helen *infidelis*. Significantly, however, Criseyde still maintains her obligation to Troilus. Even as she recognizes “to late is now for me to rewe” (*Tr*, V, 1070) and yields to her new role, Criseyde’s narrative identity is not subsumed by the mythohistorical discourse represented by Diomedes and Helen. Criseyde’s final letter to Troilus (and her final direct appearance in the poem) finds her hedging, “Come I wole; but yet in swich disjoynte / I stonde as now that what yer or what day / That this shal be, that kan I naught apoynte” (*Tr*, V, 1618-1620). While it is possible Criseyde is keeping her options open in case the Trojans win the war and she is reunited with Troilus, her letter’s offer of friendship recalls her promise in Book III that she will, to the best of her ability, try to be a cause of Troilus’s happiness. While her foray back into their romance is lukewarm at best, the letter reaffirms Criseyde’s self-constancy.

Criseyde continues to exhibit control over her narrative as she participates and is changed by her relationships. Criseyde crafts her narrative, navigating, between agential narration and

⁷³ See Behrman, “Heroic Criseyde,” 317, and Fumo, “(Meta)physical Desire in Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*,” 69.

⁷⁴ Behrman, “Heroic Criseyde,” 330.

passive response, as she engages with the discourses of others' identities. Her interactions with others influence her narrative, but only to the degree that she allows. Rather than Sanok's argument that Criseyde is part of the stories of individual men, I am arguing that she participates in them willingly and organizes her own narrative as she responds to the others in her life. The narratives of Troilus, Pandarus, Diomedes—even Calkas—are intertwined with hers, but she is never subsumed by her role in them. When Pandarus and Troilus conspire to cast Criseyde in the role of Troilus's idealized beloved, Criseyde distances herself from that expectation. As she and Pandarus come to Troilus's bedside where he lay sick, the two men "position themselves as supplicants asking for a kind of assistance that they need Criseyde to believe only she can provide."⁷⁵ They align her with a saint overlaid with the power of a courtly lady: Pandarus by reminding Criseyde she has the power to determine if Troilus lives or dies, and Troilus by reminding her of his suffering and his attempt to kneel before her. Criseyde, who wishes neither to be a saint nor beloved, rebukes them both: "O, for the love of God, do ye nought so / To me" (*Tr*, III, 73-74). She continues her reluctance to fully embrace her role as the object of Troilus's courtly love and its constraints on her agency. Even as Troilus declares the "fyn of his entente" (*Tr*, III, 126) to be her servant, "verray, humble, trewe, /Secret" (*Tr*, III, 141-142) and Pandarus tells her Troilus's is an offer impossible to refuse, Criseyde conditionally accepts Troilus's suit:

"But natheless, this warne I yow," quod she,
 A kynges sone although ye be, ywys,
 Ye shal namore han sovereignete
 Of me in love, than right in that cas is;
 N'y nyl forbere, if that ye don amys,
 To wratthe yow; and while that ye me serve,
 Chericen yow right after ye disserve." (*Tr*, III, 169-175)

Whereas Dorigen was offered "so large a reyne" (V.755) in her relationship with Arveragus and rejected it, Criseyde demands sovereignty in hers with Troilus. But while Dorigen ultimately capitulates to Arveragus's control, Criseyde retains her freedom. When Troilus suggests they run away together in Book IV and Criseyde refuses despite agreeing to whatever he commands, this

⁷⁵ Timothy Arner, "For Goddess Love: Rhetorical Expression in *Troilus and Criseyde*," *The Chaucer Review* 46, no. 4 (2012): 450.

condition lurks in the background. Troilus's attempt to exert his control on Criseyde's narrative exceeds the bounds of what is acceptable within her terms, as it threatens her reputation.

Troilus's solution that "go we anon; for as in myn entente, / This is the beste, if that ye wole assente" (*Tr*, IV, 1525-1526) is a curious narrative moment. He has already turned down Pandarus's plan to "ravyssh" Criseyde. Re-invoking Paris and Helen's narrative example here as a course of action—and indeed, one on which Troilus has set his *entente*—calls into question the singularity of Troilus's identity. But a closer look at his terms reveals that, even as he looks to Paris as a guide, Troilus is still prioritizing the discourse of courtly love. He frames their flight as an act of Criseyde's mercy, asking her to "rueth on myn aspre peynes smerte" (*Tr*, IV, 1501). Troilus further stresses that the pair will "been honored while we dwelten there" (*Tr*, IV, 1524) and, crucially, seeks Criseyde's consent. But Criseyde's refusal on account of her honor is also a refusal of a particular narrative role: Helen. If Troilus is a pseudo-Paris, Criseyde is even more so Helen, for her acknowledgement of the damage that their flight would do to her reputation anticipates both her and Helen's fate:

And also thynketh on myn honestee,
That floureth yet, how foule I sholde it shende,
And with what filthe it spotted sholde be,
If in this forme I sholde with yow wende.
Ne though I lyvede unto the werlde's ende,
My name sholde I nevere ayeynward wyne;

Thus were I lost, and that were routhe and synne. (*Tr*, IV, 1576-1582)

Criseyde laments a similar future in Book V, but here it functions to remind Troilus of his obligation to her. Just as Criseyde's narrative control limits Pandarus's actions, here she similarly limits Troilus. Though in a way he is attempting to emulate Paris's mythohistorical role, he is ultimately unable to behave in any other way than as a courtly lover. Her rejection of Helen's example demonstrates both Troilus's lack of narrative control and the singularity of his narrative identity.

In many instances, however, Criseyde echoes Troilus's courtly love. She allows him to do her service, for example, and her lament in Book V contains many courtly themes (love,

longing, regret, etc.). Criseyde even curses that she was born, something that we see Troilus do as well. The catalogue of reasons that Criseyde loves Troilus is highly conventional: “His wit, his shap, and ek his gentilesse,” (*Tr*, II, 662); “his worthynesse,” (*Tr*, II, 704); Troilus’s integrity and disinclination to vice (*Tr*, II, 715-728). When Criseyde is with Troilus, her speech patterns become elegant, elevated, and aristocratic, which mimics Troilus’s own speech. As Maureen Fries observes, her half of the lovers’ aubade is Criseyde’s only lyrical utterance in the poem.⁷⁶ But her participation in courtly love discourse is measured. As, for example, Troilus and Criseyde consummate their relationship in Book III, Troilus gives an impassioned speech to Cupid and Venus and “Benigne love, thow holy bond of thyngs,” (*Tr*, III, 1261), and pledges his courtly service again and again. Criseyde, despite being cast here in the role of the courtly lover, essentially tells Troilus to shut up. She has no need of his courtliness:

But lat us falle away fro this matere,

For it suffiseth, this that seyde is heere,

And at o word, withouten repentaunce,

Welcome, my knyght, my pees, my suffisaunce! (*Tr*, III, 1306-1310)

Though on the surface her response borders on conventional, calling Troilus her “knyght” and naming him as all that she needs, her speech is undergirded by a rather uncourtly sentiment: get on with it. As she has the most sexual experience, Criseyde instructs Troilus in physical love. Criseyde’s sexuality—whether a function of courtly love’s eroticism or the fabliau’s depiction of women’s licentiousness—emboldens Troilus. But, as she reminds him, the encounter would not be occurring unless she wished it; Criseyde retains control even as she yields to Troilus. This tension will characterize much of the pair’s relationship. Criseyde slides briefly into the role she plays in Troilus’s narrative, but she ultimately resists that role for herself.

In the couple’s parallel bedroom scene in Book IV, as the lovers come together after learning they are to be separated, Troilus (ever the courtly lover) sighs and weeps and laments, and they both almost commit suicide. Criseyde, having momentarily fallen deeper into any one discourse than we have yet seen, quickly regains control and guides Troilus into bed; “But hoo, for we han right ynough of this, / And lat us rise, and streght to bedde go, / And there lat us

⁷⁶ Maureen Fries, “(Almost) Without a Song: Criseyde and Lyric in Chaucer’s *Troilus*,” *Chaucer Yearbook* 1 (1992).

speken of oure wo" (*Tr*, IV, 1242-1244). And yet it is not woe of which Criseyde speaks, but practicality:

Now herkneth this: ye han wel undersotonde

My goyng graunted is by parlement

So ferforth that it may nat be withstonde

For al this world, as by my jugement.

And syn ther helpeth non avisement

To letten it, lat it passe out of mynde,

And lat us shape a better wey to fynde. (*Tr*, IV, 1296-1302)

Confronted again with Troilus's impotence, she takes control just as she did in Book III, guiding Troilus in the ways of love. Here, however, Criseyde guides Troilus through politics, diplomacy, and her own agency. In this moment, she neither weeps nor wails but takes charge of her story in the way Troilus cannot. Their pillow talk is more business than love, almost 200 lines of Criseyde proffering different avenues to redress her impending displacement (*Tr*, IV, 1261-1414). Her dispassionate "Have here another wey, if it so be / That al this thyng ne may you nat suffice" (*Tr*, IV, 1366-1367) suggests appeasement rather than commitment. She even reminds Troilus of his own courtly service to her, drawing his attention to the fact that they often go two weeks without seeing one another to maintain the secrecy of her affair. Criseyde attempts to reframe Troilus's courtliness and recontextualize her departure so that he can understand it: "May ye naught ten dayes thanne abide, / For myn honour, in swich an aventure?" (*Tr*, IV, 1328-1329). Criseyde provides Troilus with an interpretive guide, the SparkNotes version of their relationship. By invoking Troilus's courtliness, Criseyde demonstrates her awareness of Troilus's prioritization of the courtly love discourse and also her ability to manipulate her narrative identity by employing courtly love as a hermeneutic. Whereas Dorigen turned to Arveragus and masculine authority to interpret her narrative identity, Criseyde instead provides the interpretation as she responds to her circumstances and the identities of others, incorporating them into her own narration.

Criseyde likewise engages with the discourses of Pandarus's identity. The game Pandarus inaugurates, influenced by the fabliau discourse, puts Criseyde in narrative situations where she

is expected to behave in a certain manner, and her choice often blurs that expectation. She is never fully able to participate in the frivolity of the fabliau, even as Pandarus tries to cast her in that role. Pandarus often breaches the bounds of propriety in his quest to woo Criseyde for Troilus. In Book II, Pandarus shoves Troilus's letter down the front of Criseyde's dress. In Book III, Pandarus presents himself to Criseyde once as she is sleeping and again the next morning, when he climbs into bed with her, grabs her, and kisses her, mere hours after she spent the night there with Troilus. Criseyde never complains directly about her uncle's physical behavior, though they both recognize and acknowledge the potential for accusations of at best, impropriety and at worst, incest (*Tr*, III, 750-63). So Criseyde's request for Pandarus to be less formal ("Lat be to me youre fremde manere speche, / And sey to me, youre nece, what yow liste" (*Tr*, II, 248-249)) is on the surface innocuous enough, expressing her desire to return their dynamic to its status quo. However, her preference for Pandarus's "japing" has potentially problematic implications. Criseyde's request that Pandarus be less "fremde" can make such moments appear consensual, which sets Pandarus up as Troilus's rival for Criseyde's affections. But such a love triangle—fitting for a fabliau—remains only ever a latent suggestion. Neither Criseyde nor Pandarus fully embrace the fabliau as a dominant discourse in their identities. Pandarus instead employs it in service to a greater purpose, his "grete emprise," while for Criseyde it is always contextualized by the other discourses of her narrative identity.

Pandarus's "grete emprise" represents the second and more dominant discourse of his identity—that of author, architect, creator whose plans are responsible for uniting the two lovers. In this context, Criseyde is even more responsive to his attempts to control her narrative, which she recognizes as manipulation. When Pandarus first arrives at Criseyde's house, they "jape" and "pleye," though Criseyde takes the more serious role when Pandarus suggest she lay aside her widow's veil and dance. Criseyde's defense of her status suggests that such a request is abnormal for Pandarus to make. When he does get to the heart of his visit—Troilus's infatuation—his tone is formal and distant, a change of which Criseyde makes note. Her discomfort with Pandarus's tone reveals, perhaps, that their relationship is best characterized by a levity and humor appropriate to the fabliau.⁷⁷ When Pandarus ventures outside of that discourse and presents

⁷⁷ Interestingly, when Criseyde and Pandarus discuss business or things concerning his guardianship of her, Chaucer does not provide the content of those discussions; instead, the narrator only notes that it had occurred. It is only when Pandarus comes to Criseyde with information about the false threat of Poliphete—part of Pandarus's scheme to bring Troilus and Criseyde together—that we get a glimpse of the more politic or business side of their

himself as the architect of Troilus's love affair, Criseyde demonstrates an equal control of narrative. Pandarus's series of exclamations (*Tr*, II, 344-347) are undercut by Criseyde's use of questions (*Tr*, II, 421-24).⁷⁸ Criseyde's recognition of Pandarus's "peynted process" (*Tr*, II, 424) is followed by an invocation of Pallas, whom she asks "in this dredful cas for me purveye" (*Tr*, II, 425-426). Whereas in the *Knight's Tale* Emelye prayed to Diana to protect her chastity or otherwise provide for her, Criseyde's appeal to Athena is perhaps a sign that she understands Pandarus's manipulation and is asking Athena not for physical protection but assistance in her current battle of wills and words. Suspicious of Pandarus, Criseyde proceeds "ful sleighly for to pleie" (*Tr*, II, 462). Even after she has decided to love Troilus, Criseyde is wary of Pandarus and tries to balance her familial obligation to obey him and her desire to protect herself. She excuses herself from dinner at Pandarus's house but, at his insistence, attends—only after she asks if Troilus will also be there, however. The narrator's aside that he does not know "What that she thoughte whan he sedye so, / That Troilus was out of towne yfare" (*Tr*, III, 576-577) certainly invites speculation about Criseyde's motivations—does she expect to see Troilus and thus goes, or does she believe the dinner party safe? The next lines present yet a third option:

But natheles, yet gan she hym biseche,
 Although with him to gon it was no fere,
 For to ben war of goosissh poeples speche,
 That dremen thynges whiche as nevere were,
 And wel avyse hym whom he brought there;
 And seyde hym, "Em, syn I moste on yow triste,
 Loke al be wel, and do now as yow liste." (*Tr*, III, 582-588)

relationship. Even in this, however, Criseyde remains in control, suggesting that they simply give Poliphete what he wants, for "Withouten that I have ynough for us" (*Tr*, II, 1478). It must be noted that Criseyde does not defer to masculine authority, as Dorigen does, to interpret and solve her situation for her; she is ready to enact her own solution. But Pandarus's appeal to a higher authority—Hector—and the arrival of Deiphebus forecloses on any possibility of Criseyde's plan succeeding; she "nolde nought denye, / But goodly gan to his [Deiphebus's] preier obeye" (*Tr*, II, 1489-90). Here, as she does in the Greek camp, Criseyde yields to circumstances outside of her control—though notably not to Pandarus. Though the dinner is his design, Criseyde takes on Pandarus's expectation that she will acquiesce to an affair with Troilus only conditionally.

⁷⁸ See Stampone, "Dance and the Game of Love in Geoffrey Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*," and Arner, "Rhetorical Expression in *Troilus and Criseyde*."

That Criseyde reminds Pandarus of the power of gossip and rumor and beseeches him to take care to protect her from that seems to suggest that Criseyde does indeed expect Troilus to be in attendance—or at least, that she believes Pandarus could be up to something.⁷⁹ She proves herself equal to Pandarus's control of narrative even as she foregrounds her vulnerability.

Pandarus is aware of how protective Criseyde is of her narrative and builds her concerns into his plan for their relationship. Citing that she may “dreden” (*Tr*, II, 367) that “Men wolde wondren” (*Tr*, II, 368) why she and Troilus are spending time together, he offers friendship as a solution. But Criseyde recognizes Pandarus's “paynted process” (*Tr*, II, 424) for what it is—manipulation—and agrees to entertain Troilus's affections so long as no one knows and her honor is safe. This is not the grand, sweeping declarations and soliloquies of Troilus's lovesickness; rather, Criseyde calculates and balances risk and reward, always prioritizing her reputation and her freedom. The introduction of romance into Criseyde's narrative is likewise measured and controlled. Whereas Troilus is shot through by love for Criseyde, wounded by her look, Criseyde “leet” Troilus's countenance “so softe in hire herte synk” (*Tr*, II, 650). So resolved in her narrative is she that her desire for Troilus catches her unawares; seeing him she wonders, “Who yaf me drynke?” (*Tr*, II, 651). The narrator makes it clear that Criseyde's is no “sodeyn love” (*Tr*, II, 667) but her affections develop in stages: she liked Troilus first, then through his service (his performance of courtly love) she decided to love him. Criseyde takes an active role in allowing love to become part of her life. The narrator describes Criseyde's thought process in telling terms—“She *gan* to prenten in hire herte faste” (*Tr*, II, 900), “*gan* hire herte unfettre” (*Tr*, II, 1216), “*gan* in here herte shette” (*Tr*, III, 1549) [emphasis in all quotations mine]. This process of beginning implies an awareness, an agential movement of Criseyde's feelings, culminating in the contractual negotiation of the terms of their romance in Book III. This is not to say that Criseyde's social circumstances or Pandarus's influence do not put pressure on her because certainly they do, but rather that Criseyde gives her circumstances due consideration and chooses to love Troilus in spite (or perhaps because) of them to retain control.

Criseyde's subjectivity is thus contextualized by and vulnerable to the discourses that are prominent in those with whom she has close relationships. In participating in those discourses and incorporating them into her own narrative identity, Criseyde occupies a unique, double

⁷⁹ Variations on the phrase “al was wel” occur throughout Books II and III, usually in regard to Pandarus and his machinations. Its presence here links the dinner with Pandarus's “grete emprise” and perhaps further underscores Criseyde's awareness of it.

position as both narrator of her own life and “open, fluid, and frequently compromised.”⁸⁰ She often yields to circumstances that are beyond her control, yet Criseyde forms her narrative identity out of the conditions of her vulnerability, turning those circumstances to her benefit, to “maketh vertu of necessite” (*Tr*, IV, 1586). Like Dorigen, Criseyde uses narrative as a model for understanding the world. More than simple delight or a mirror, Criseyde finds her own self in narrative.⁸¹ Through threefold mimesis Criseyde incorporates the narratives she encounters into her subjectivity and allows herself to be changed by them. She comes out on the other side of a narrative a different person than she was going in. Pandarus’s first presentation of Troilus’s suit is tailored to be more literary. Pandarus “appeals to Criseyde’s delight in narrative and her natural inclination to see a story as a mirror of her own life—that is, as a useful means of interpreting the past and present and of preparing for the future.”⁸² To this, I would add that narrative is part of Criseyde’s understanding of herself when viewed through Ricœur’s threefold mimesis. Such moments typically occur when Criseyde is by herself or with a small group of women. Because she is alone, Criseyde’s inherent reliance on narrative to understand the world and herself is on display.

A particularly significant moment of narrative-induced self-reflexivity is her reception of Antigone’s song in Book II. After observing Troilus through her window, Criseyde weighs the pros and cons of accepting Troilus’s suit but comes to no conclusion. Even here, Criseyde is projecting herself in terms of narrative. She thinks in terms of potential scenarios, hypothetical outcomes, and what people would say. She is stuck in her own indeterminacy: “Now hoot, now cold; but thus bitwixen tweye,” (*Tr*, II, 810-811). It is not until she overhears Antigone singing a song about love that Criseyde moves toward any decision. She wonders, “is ther swych blisse amonge / thise lovers, as they konne faire endite?” (*Tr*, II, 885-886). Criseyde internalizes this narrative:

But every word which that she of hire herde,
 She gan to prenten in hire herte faste
 And ay gan love hire lasse for t’agaste
 Than it dide erst and synken in hire herte,

⁸⁰ Crocker, “W(h)ither Feminism?”, 356.

⁸¹ For the former argument see Holley, “The Narrative Speculum.”

⁸² Holley, “The Narrative Speculum,” 212-3.

That she wex somewhat able to converte. (*Tr*, II, 899-903)

Here we see the threefold mimesis in action. Criseyde has a preconception (and, having been married before, a preconception founded in experience) of what love is and how people behave in it. Through the encounter with the text, the configuration (or emplotment), Criseyde begins to be refigured. Her preconceptions are changing in a way that inspires action—her conversion.

That conversion is turned into narrative by Criseyde in the form of a dream. Later in Book II, Criseyde dreams that an eagle tears out her heart and replaces it with his. Criseyde's new receptivity to Troilus in turn serves as a prefiguration for their next encounter at Deiphebus's house. While it seems that Criseyde's willingness to accept Troilus comes out of nowhere, we have seen how Criseyde has gradually come to that position through narrative. The narrator too remarks on the time that it takes Criseyde to come to Troilus. Hers is no "sodeyn love" (*Tr*, II, 667), "but that she gan enclyne / to lik hym first," (*Tr*, II, 674-675). She has a similar reaction to reading Troilus's letters, going off on her own to read them in private "word by word in every lyne" (*Tr*, II, 1177). Despite having a prefigured understanding of herself as being disinclined to pursue a relationship, Criseyde begins to warm through Troilus's words. Criseyde's openness to narrative and the change it can inspire, with an emphasis on taking in every word, is as Dinshaw has noted, a very feminine version of reading—and corresponds to a feminine mode of identity construction. Troilus, remember, frequently rejects narrative "ensaumples" and cannot see the benefit of narrative interpretation or the bearing it could have on his life. When narrative interpretation provides an alternative to the singular discourse within which he prioritizes his identity, Troilus's rejection of it is an attempt to resolve contradiction; whereas Criseyde is open to the possibility of change, Troilus maintains a single, univalent meaning that prioritizes his desires and fails to accommodate the other.

Troilus's individualist subjectivity is put in crisis by his dream (a form of narrative) in Book V. Having seen Criseyde kissing a boar, Troilus believes himself betrayed. Troilus, whose narrative has already been surrendered to Pandarus's control, is unable to trust his own interpretation and turns to Pandarus for guidance. Pandarus offers Troilus an interpretation of his dream that suits both men's purpose:

Peraunter, ther thow dremest of this boor,

It may so be that it may signifie

Hire fader, which that old is and ek hoor,
 Ayeyn the sonne lith o poynt to dye,
 And she for sorwe gynneth wepe and crie,
 And kisseth hym, ther he lith on the grounde:

Thus sholdestow thi drem aright expounde! (*Tr*, V, 1282-1288)

Despite Pandarus's assurances and Criseyde's letter that says "She wolde come, ye, but she nyste whenne" (*Tr*, V, 1428), Troilus is haunted by his dream and—in an inversion of Dorigen's quest for an authoritative narrative interpretation—Troilus turns to a "Sibille" (*Tr*, V, 1450), his sister Cassandra, "And hire bisougte assoilen hym the doute / Of the stronge boor with tuskes stoute" (*Tr*, V, 1453-1454). Cassandra's explanation that "This ilke boor bitokneth Diomedé" (*Tr*, V, 1513) is rooted in a mythohistorical awareness "as olde bokes tellen us" (*Tr*, V, 1478). Cassandra, in other words, interprets narrative with narrative—perhaps even the same narrative, "this romaunce...of Thebes" (*Tr*, II, 100) that Criseyde began in Book II.⁸³ Troilus rejects Cassandra's interpretation outright, on the exact grounds he sought her advice: "'Thow seyst nat soth,' quod he, 'thow sorceresse, / With al thy false goost of prophecie! / Thow wenest ben a gret devyneresse!'" (*Tr*, V, 1520-1522). Telling, however, is Troilus's reference to the story of Alceste "as us the bokes telle" (*Tr*, V, 1533). In appealing to Alceste—who, we know, from the *Legend of Good Women* is the ideal courtly woman—Troilus answers Cassandra's mythohistorical discourse with that of courtly love. Alceste's choice to die for her husband is what Criseyde should do for him, and what Troilus seems to expect Criseyde to do. Once again inscribing his own identity and his perception of his relationship with Criseyde within the discourse of courtly love, Troilus reveals his understanding of the world as designed for his gratification.

This, at last, is the fundamental difference between Troilus and Criseyde: Troilus's elite masculinity (whatever form it may take) leaves him free to pursue and construct his own self-interest and correlates to an individualist subjectivity, whereas Criseyde reacts in her own self-interest from a position of vulnerability which is a consequence of an intersubjective narrative identity. Troilus's vulnerability is of his own making; Criseyde's is a product of circumstance

⁸³ For Gayle Margherita, Cassandra's role in the poem amounts to a feminization of history; Troilus (along with the narrator and Pandarus) represent a disavowal of historical reality. See Margherita, "Historicity, Femininity, and Chaucer's *Troilus*."

and ideology. Troilus's narrative identity is defined by courtly love, which "encourages men to believe that they can and should relentlessly pursue women in order to fulfill their elite masculine identities, regardless of the consequences."⁸⁴ His passivity and impotence are part of the elite masculinist fantasy that Troilus and Pandarus conspire to create. But Criseyde's less conventional subjectivity uses vulnerability as "a generative ground for selfhood."⁸⁵ Her understanding of life as narrative enables Criseyde to relate to others and react while still retaining control; from this perspective, Criseyde's vulnerability is an asset, not an imposition. The narrative composition of identity, of which Criseyde herself is the narrator, changes and flows as she does—never seeking to prioritize a singular meaning but instead contextualizing her identity through multiple discourses and keeping them all in tension.

Narrating Like a Woman: Conclusions

At this pattern of identity construction—the combination of an ability to control narrative by yielding discursive authority and to reconcile multiple discourses into a coherent, self-constant narrative identity—Dorigen is the least successful, as the narrative identity that arises from her negotiation of discourse threatens rather than maintains her *ipseity*. Griselda's yielding to a particular discourse to create narrative change; her self-constancy allows her to participate in multiple discourses and, ultimately, results in a narrative that accommodates all of her discursive roles. Criseyde, like Dorigen, resists the roles into which she is cast, but like Griselda, maintains her constancy across those discursive shifts. For each of these women, their awareness of discourse and the power they wield, yield, or wield by yielding, undermines or changes the larger narrative instituted and governed by a masculine authority. This is a particularly feminine form of identity construction, similar to Carolyn Dinshaw's idea of reading like a woman—"potentially disruptive of orderly, logical, linear narratives that have well-delimited boundaries."⁸⁶ "Reading like a man," however, is "to impose a structure that resolves or occludes contradictions and disorder...It is to constrain, control, or eliminate outright the feminine...in order to provide a single, solid, univalent meaning firmly fixed in a hierarchical moral structure."⁸⁷ Masculine narratives of identity are then defined by the prioritization one, singular

⁸⁴ Garrison, "Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* and the Dangers of Masculine Interiority," 336.

⁸⁵ Crocker, "W(h)ither Feminism?," 358.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁸⁷ Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics*, 51.

discourse and subsume all contradictions and difficulties to it and to masculine authority and interpretation. For Troilus, his masculinity and his narrative identity are bound by the discourse of romance and courtly love, which is crafted—through his own choice, though he does not acknowledge it—by yielding to the masculine authority of Cupid and Pandarus. Arveragus and Walter likewise prioritize a singular narrative, which is changed by the discursive power of Dorigen and Griselda, respectively. Arveragus’s identity, while within the courtly love discourse, leans more toward a male-driven conception of honor and chivalry. Similarly, Walter’s identity is limited by the narrative focus of testing his wife. These narratives attempt to constrain the women in their lives in particular roles. Dorigen reworks Arveragus’s offer and confers to Arveragus a much more authoritative narrative role than he had previously, which nonetheless works in tandem with his own prioritization of discourse. Griselda fulfills Walter’s narrative expectations. And whereas Troilus’s identity is an “immutable substantiality,” Criseyde’s is dynamic and fluid. This narrative fluidity and control is also seen in other Chaucerian women, such as Custance and Emelye.⁸⁸ When constancy—what is, for Ricoeur, the very point of narrative—is at issue, then, Chaucer’s women often use one or both of these narrative and discursive techniques to construct their identity and try to uphold their constancy.

⁸⁸ Crocker has previously discussed Emelye as an example of this kind of subjectivity. (See Crocker, “W(h)ither feminism”). Custance moves between discursive power structures with relative ease, from her Roman emperor father, to her Syrian Muslim betrothed and, finally, her eventually Christian English husband. Custance’s self-constancy maintains her identity across all of these discourses—racial and religious otherness, narratively figuring herself as Mary and her child as Christ, the political and racial co-opting of her motherhood. By yielding to discursive influences in some situations, such as agreeing to marry the Sowdan, and by wielding discursive authority in others, like invoking her Marian connection when threatened, Custance’s discursive flexibility creates narrative shifts that accommodate her identity. For more on Custance, see Chapter 2. See n. 28 for a discussion of the Prioress and narrative control. Virginia’s identity, like Dorigen’s, grapples with the same feminine master narrative of honor: death or shame. While Virginius decides that Virginia should die (“Take thou thy deeth, for this is my sentence” (VI.224)), that narrative future is in accordance with her own self-interpretation (“Yif me my deeth, er that I have a shame (VI.249)). In accepting her death, Virginia determines her own narrative identity, maintains the self-constant identity she cultivated through her performance of “maydens shamefastnesse” (VI.55; see also 43-66), and disrupts Appius’s narrative expectations and control.

CHAPTER 2: ESTEEM: COLLECTIVE IDENTITY AND AFFECTIVE WHITENESS IN THE *CANTERBURY TALES*

Whiteness, it has been said, “never has to speak its name.”¹ It thus comes as no surprise that race, unlike other social constructions such as gender or class, goes unmentioned in the descriptions of the Canterbury pilgrims. We assume and take for granted that these individuals embarking on a Christian pilgrimage in England are all white. Lynn Ramey notes, however, that it is dangerously normative to assume that the absence of color in character description implies whiteness.² This chapter seeks to go beyond mere assumption and explore how the *Canterbury Tales* constructs the pilgrims’ whiteness. I will show that the pilgrims are white, understand themselves as white, and perform that whiteness through their storytelling competition. To thus speak about the pilgrims’ race, I turn to the three tales that explicitly identify non-Western locations, races, and religions, the *Man of Law’s*, *Prioress’s*, and *Squire’s Tales*; these stories construct identity inter-racially, that is, by differentiating the pilgrims from the other. The *Franklin’s Tale*, however, constructs the pilgrims’ whiteness intra-racially in its relationship to the Squire and the other pilgrims.³ These categories hinge on narrative reception; where the Prioress and Man of Law tell narratives that the pilgrims agree represent them, the Squire’s tale is poorly received and thus requires correction from the Franklin. These tales, shared in the context of institutionalized Christian practice, form a network of racialized narratives out of which the pilgrims define their own religio-racial identity. As each of these tales brings the pilgrims’ collective identity into contact with racial others, that otherness is erased, marginalized, or met with violence. Such narratives define the pilgrims’ identity by defining what they are not, and they affirm the superiority of that identity by sitting in judgment of the other presented in the tales. I argue here that racial identity is constructed in four overlapping ways: first, by associating narrative with the maintenance of identity through the alignment of storytelling and pilgrimage; second, by sharing stories that mark the non-Christian as an other that is violently

¹ George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Temple University Press, 1998), 1. Full quote: “Whiteness never has to speak its name, never has to acknowledge its role as an organizing principle in social and cultural relations.”

² Lynn Ramey, *Black Legacies: Race and the European Middle Ages* (University Press of Florida, 2014), 74.

³ All references to Chaucer’s texts will be to *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd edition, ed. Larry D. Benson (Houghton Mifflin, 1987). Individual works will be cited parenthetically in the text.. The *Canterbury Tales* will be cited in accordance with the fragment numbers provided by the *Riverside Chaucer*. Other works will follow the *Riverside’s* lineation. Where more than one set of line numbers is offered, I will note which set of line numbers I am following.

suppressed and erased, subsumed by familiar narrative structures, or both; third, by capitalizing on what I am terming the affectivity of whiteness, or the geographic, social, and religious concepts that are understood as white or in terms of whiteness; and finally, by evaluating (and rejecting) the oneself-as-anotherness that narrative encounter enables. I aim to demonstrate that the tales' conceptualizations of race are revealed only through their relationship with other narrative presentations of race within the *Tales* and the frame narrative.

When speaking of race, I do so in terms of Geraldine Heng's argument that race is a means of separating and hierarchizing human differences to justify differential treatment and allocate social power.⁴ Like Heng, I argue that religion is a necessary condition of race-making.⁵ The *Canterbury Tales*' understanding of race, including whiteness as a racial identity, relies on the relationship between religious and racial difference. The result is a compound category of identity Heng terms race-religion, which "defines the medieval community in its cohesiveness, its quintessential group identity and meaning."⁶ For the pilgrims, race-making begins with the religious basis for their group identity: Christian pilgrimage. By going on pilgrimage, these "sondry folk" (I.25) (re)assert and maintain their identity as Christians. The storytelling competition the Host institutes for his "flok" (I.824) to pass the time aligns narrative with their spiritual journey and, in turn, with the maintenance of their identity.⁷ The extant tales'

⁴ Heng's definition is worth quoting in full: "...a repeating tendency...to demarcate human beings through differences among humans that are selectively essentialized as absolute and fundamental, in order to distribute positions and powers differently to human groups. Race-making thus operates as specific historical occasions in which strategic essentialisms are posited and assigned through a variety of practices and pressures, so as to construct a hierarchy of peoples for differential treatment...race is a structural relationship for the articulation and management of human differences, rather than a substantive content" (*The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), 3).

⁵ In a recent response to a review of her book *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages*, a work to which this chapter is largely indebted, Geraldine Heng defends religion "as a matrix of race-making." I will repeat Heng's suggestion and direct interested readers to cogent, thoughtful studies of the issue written by scholars of color: Terence Keel, *Divine Variations: How Christian Thought Became Racial Science* (Stanford University Press, 2018) and Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (Yale University Press, 2011). (Heng, "Why the Hate? *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages*, and Race, Racism, and Premodern Critical Race Studies Today," In the Medieval Middle, accessed 11 March 2021, <https://www.inthemedievalmiddle.com/2020/12/why-hate-invention-of-race-in-european.html>). M. Lindsay Kaplan's recent study of racism as authorized by theological discourse in the Middle Ages, *Figuring Racism in Medieval Christianity* (Oxford University Press, 2018), takes up this question of "religion as a matrix of race-making" in a specifically medieval context. Kaplan argues that medieval Christianity's typological thinking and its discourse of enslavement leads to a "concept of cursed inferiority" which "produces a racial status that functions like and anticipates modern racism" (1).

⁶ Geraldine Heng, *Empire of Magic: Medieval Romance and the Politics of Cultural Fantasy* (Columbia University Press, 2003), 234.

⁷ This label for the pilgrims is very telling; while, certainly, "flok" refers to groups of animals or people, it also carries a distinctly religious connotation. Though its use in the *General Prologue* lacks the qualifiers of "Cristes,"

culmination with the Parson seems to bear this out. The Parson decries “fables and switch wrecchednesse” (X.34), preferring instead to tell a tale that will “shewe yow the wey, in this viage, / Of thilke parfit glorious pilgrimage / That highte Jerusalem celestial” (X.49-51). The Parson here explicitly aligns narrative with pilgrimage and, moreover, with the work of maintaining one’s Christian identity: penance. By reiterating this connection between the pilgrims’ tales and their spiritual journey, he likewise reiterates the tales’ importance to their collective identity. This shared Christian fellowship is the basis for their normative white identity.

When I speak of whiteness, I do so in terms of Matthew Hughey’s concept of “hegemonic whiteness”:

...meaningful racial identity for whites is produced vis-à-vis the reproduction of, and appeal to, racist, essentialist, and reactionary inter- and intra-racial distinctions: (1) through positioning those marked as ‘white’ as essentially different from and superior to those marked as ‘non-white’, and (2) through marginalizing practices of being white that fail to exemplify dominant ideals...these hegemonic ideals are collectively shared by members, and function as seemingly neutral yardsticks against which cultural behavior, norms, and values are measured.⁸

While Hughey refers specifically to twenty-first century America, the idea that whiteness was a system of “invisible privileges and norms” existed even in the Middle Ages.⁹ Heng makes a similar argument for “the *normativity of whiteness*, and of *the white racial body*, as the guarantor of normalcy, aesthetic and moral virtue, European Christian identity, and full membership into the human community.” Hughey’s framework is helpful for analyzing how I am suggesting this normativity of whiteness is produced in the *Canterbury Tales*. First, inter-racial distinction relates to narratives that conflate whiteness with Christianity and position the non-white, non-Christian other as inferior through a violence that supports and maintains white identity. This connection, mutually constitutive of a normative medieval identity, marks the pilgrims as white

“Cristene,” or “Godes” that the *Middle English Dictionary* uses to mark the difference between people generally and Christians specifically, within the context of the religious pilgrimage to Canterbury with the Host as their guide, the *General Prologue* casts the Host in the role of shepherd and the pilgrims as the sheep, religious imagery that should not be ignored when talking about the pilgrims collectively and the identity of the community they have created. (*Middle English Dictionary*, s.v. “flok,” 1(a) a group of beasts; a flock (of sheep, a drove (of swine), a herd (of elephants), etc.; 2(a) A group of people; Cristes~, Cristene~, Godes~, Christians collectively, the Church (accessed 11 March 2021, https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED16376/track?counter=1&search_id=5977316).

⁸ Matthew Hughey, “The (dis)similarities of white racial identities: the conceptual framework of ‘hegemonic whiteness,’” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 33, no. 8 (2010): 1292.

⁹ Hughey, “The (dis)similarities of white racial identities,” 1290.

as they evaluate and esteem these narratives.¹⁰ Second, as the Franklin's interruption of the Squire will demonstrate, the *Franklin's Tale* articulates an ideology of whiteness by disrupting the Squire's narrative of apparent Eastern sympathy with a narrative that reinforces the assemblage's dominant ideals—including themes of nobility, freedom, and *gentillesse*—by presenting them as affects of whiteness. Just as the *Man of Law's* and *Prioress's Tales* use Christianity as an affect of whiteness, the relationship between the Franklin's and Squire's stories realigns fourteenth-century English social norms with a more appropriate geographic setting by turning from East to West. This correction is a form of intra-racial distinction, a response to the Squire's presentation of otherness in a way that threatens hegemonic ideals.

The competition framework requires that in order to win, the narratives the pilgrims deem worthwhile must necessarily reflect the cultural norms and ideologies with which the pilgrims themselves identify. Evaluating these narratives for “sentence and solaas” (I.798) hinges upon the Ricoeurian concepts of recognition and self-esteem. Remember that for Ricoeur, narratives contain subjectivity, contain selfhood, such that to engage with a narrative is to engage with the selfhood presented in the narrative. This, Ricoeur says, is fundamentally about recognition: the ability both to recognize oneself in a particular narrative, and to recognize the otherness of a narrative's subjectivity. The pilgrims' endorsement or critique of certain behaviors, ideals, and values as depicted in individual narratives thus (re)produces a set of cultural norms and paradigms that applies to the community as a whole. By imposing familiar Western or Christian narrative features on narratives of otherness, the pilgrims erase and dismiss that otherness in service of narratives that support their own identity. In evaluating these narratives for “sentence” or “solaas,” the pilgrims are likewise evaluating the extent to which they can identify with or recognize themselves in them; when they cannot, alterity is subsumed by the dominant ideologies that pre-constitute their identity.¹¹

An example: Custance, the *litel clergeon*, and the pilgrims all share the same Christian identity. The tales, however, take care to align that Christian identity with particular affects of

¹⁰ This is not to say that whiteness, in all cases, is accompanied by Christianity and vice versa. In his analysis of the King of Tars, Cord Whitaker cautions against assuming a clear-cut relationship between Christianity and a normative whiteness. Cord J. Whitaker, “Black Metaphors in the *King of Tars*,” *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 112, no. 2 (2013): 169.

¹¹ In other words, what is at issue are the levels of the threefold mimesis—the pilgrims' preunderstanding of an acceptable identity, which, when confronted with otherness, fails to be reconfigured to account for anything other than itself. Instead, narrative configuration (mimesis₂) reproduces that preunderstanding so that alterity can continue to be rejected and the pre-existing narrative identity, unchanging, is marked as superior.

whiteness. Color associations that align whiteness with purity, spiritual perfection, virtue, etc., and blackness with lechery, evil, and wickedness run deep in Latin Christianity. When I say that Christianity is affectively white, or that individuals are connected to Christianity's spiritual, affective whiteness, I am referring to this association. To be white is to be pure, unblemished, perfect—like “The white Lamb, that hurt was with a spere” (II.459) or the “white lylle flour” (VII.461), that is, like Christ and Mary. As Christianity is associated with whiteness, and as the pilgrims identify with the version of Christian identity they find in the tales, the pilgrims incorporate this identity into theirs through their own moral judgments: declaring the stories “thrifty” (II.46; 1165) and being so moved that “sobre was that wonder was to se” (VII.692). These narratives are metrics of intelligibility and inclusion in the pilgrims' community, for “in order to be intelligible as a subject, the subject must comply and conform with conventions for that racial subject.”¹² In other words, the tales' affective whiteness is an affect of the pilgrims' own. The Canterbury pilgrims' whiteness coheres in and around the approval of stories that privilege white Christian identity at the violent expense of racial others. Recognition of oneself only in an other that is similar to oneself and, moreover, in an other that so strongly opposes otherness, the pilgrims are a lesson in what Ricoeur calls self-esteem: “an evaluation process indirectly applied to ourselves as selves.” Through shared narratives, the pilgrims esteem their own identity by esteeming stories that maintain and reproduce their social power.¹³ Inter-racial distinction thus fails the most basic test of Ricoeurian ethics by failing to recognize the other as both self and oneself.

Racial distinction operates on two levels in the tales. Within each individual tale discussed here, race is constructed extradiegetically (by the tale teller and the audience) through a network of narrative relations, expectations, stereotypes, and genres, a testament to narrative's ability to “reveal the intersubjectivity of legal and social constructions.”¹⁴ Individual characters, too, understand their identity through their relationship to certain narratives, genres, and narrative structures (Custance and hagiography, for instance, or the *litel clergeon* and his Marian hymn). These individual narratives become part of the tale's narrative of race, as they are used to define an individual character's racial identity. While I will lay out the finer points below, one

¹² Charlotte Chadderton, “Making Whiteness and Acting White: The Performativity of Race and Race as Performative,” in *Judith Butler, Race, and Education* (Palgrave, 2018), 115.

¹³ Carolyn Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics* (University of Wisconsin, 1989), 92.

¹⁴ Charles Lawrence III, “Listening for Stories in All the Right Places: Narrative and Racial Formation Theory,” *Law & Society Review* 46, no. 2 (2012): 251.

example is how the *clergeon*'s devotion to Mary, manifested through his repeated singing, allows the *clergeon* to lay claim to Mary's spiritual whiteness. Though the *clergeon* himself is not physiologically white, his religious connection to the Virgin enables him to stand as a proxy for something the pilgrims would recognize: the story of "yonge Hugh of Lyncoln" (VII.684). In response, the narrative demands "feelings of commonality, connectedness, and empathy among tellers, listeners, and the subjects of our stories,"¹⁵ a response, Ricœur says, which is "rich in anticipations of an ethical nature."¹⁶ That response is in fact a moral failure. In failing to see oneself as another, as the pilgrims embrace or reject the narrative forms of the three tales which either reproduce or threaten the coherence of their identities, the pilgrims reject the selfhood that exists in alterity. Because they reject identities that are not their own, that is, non-white identities, they reiterate the hegemony of their own identity. Because whiteness is "a constantly morphing identity refracted by context," in the pilgrims' narrative of race the individual tales are in some ways less important than the pattern of racist thinking they produce in relation to one another.¹⁷ Ultimately, that pattern reveals the key affects of the Canterbury pilgrims' whiteness: England, Christianity, *gentillesse*, and the supersession of otherness. While the Man of Law and Prioress comply and conform with the expectations of whiteness, the Squire's Oriental romance fails to meet the community's standard and is corrected by the Franklin.¹⁸ The discursive nature of the *Tales* creates a community in which the sharing of narrative is a distinctly ethical act, and "the dialogical structure of individuals is incomplete without reference to the structures of society."¹⁹ Foregrounding race and racism in the tale-telling contest allows us as scholars to consider yet another way the pilgrims and, indeed, Chaucer's fourteenth-century audience, gauged membership into their own community and understood themselves as hegemonically powerful, raced subjects.

Beginning with the Man of Law and the Prioress, I will first show how the pilgrims construct narratives that perform their own identity through geographic and Christian affects of whiteness. These narratives privilege a shared whiteness by aligning that identity with the

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Paul Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (University of Chicago Press, 1992), 170.

¹⁷ Amanda Lewis, "What group? Studying whites and whiteness in the era of colorblindness," *Sociological Theory* 22, no. 4 (2004): 624.

¹⁸ Similar modern arguments: Robin DiAngelo, *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism* (Beacon Press, 2018); Frank Wilderson, *Afropessimism* (Liveright Press, 2020).

¹⁹ Helena Lopes and Teresa Calapez, "The Relational Dimension of Identity—Theoretical and Empirical Exploration," *Review of Social Economy* 70, no. 1 (2012): 86.

suppression of otherness. In turn, the pilgrims' collective acceptance of these tales signals that distinguishing themselves as different from and superior to an other is central to how the pilgrims understand their identity. I will then show how the Squire tries--and fails—to emulate this model of identity construction. Instead of erasing otherness, the *Squire's Tale* is dangerously sympathetic to the Orient, which threatens the basis for the pilgrims' racial identity. For this reason the tale is interrupted by the Franklin with a narrative that redirects the Squire's ideology from East to West. With this understanding that the storytelling competition is a performance of whiteness, the Franklin's correction of the Squire is a demonstration of how whiteness maintains itself by marginalizing individuals who fail to exemplify whiteness's dominant ideals. The result is a network of narratives that allow the pilgrims to recognize, define, and esteem their religio-racial identity as white Christians.

Inter-racial Distinction: Christian Violence, the Man of Law, and the Prioress

This section argues that the pilgrims' response to the *Man of Law's Tale* and the *Prioress's Tale* predicates the superiority of the pilgrims' collective religio-racial identity on the suppression and erasure of racial otherness, which is done in support of whiteness. The *Man of Law's Tale* depicts whiteness as superior, hegemonic, and triumphant through its use of genre and the double structure of Custance's narrative. The *Prioress's Tale* gives whiteness intelligibility and integrity by foregrounding Christianity's affective connection to whiteness through Christ and Mary. Both of these narratives provide touchstones, Custance and the *litel clergeon*, that refract the pilgrims' own whiteness and support the hegemony of it. In the *Canterbury Tales*, the exchange of narrative is thus complicit in the production of race and racism by using narrative to construct whiteness. "Constructing whiteness" is not inherently racist; however, the *Man of Law's* and *Prioress's Tales* construct a white identity at the expense of and in violence against racial others. This, I argue, is a form of inter-racial distinction. These two tales mark their protagonists as white by aligning them with places and structures that the pilgrims also understand as white; namely, England and Christianity. In so doing, these identities encourage narrative recognition for the pilgrims, and seeing themselves in stories that center on the erasure of otherness, the pilgrims respond positively and judge the stories particularly worthwhile. The narrative "victory" of Anglo-Christian whiteness over the religio-racial other (Syrian Muslims and Arab Jews) celebrated by the pilgrims perpetuates the tales' racist ideology

in a series of moral judgments. In selecting these tales to begin with, both the Man of Law and Prioress indicate their approval of their tales' message. By lauding the ideology they contain and accepting the narratives' ability to express and maintain the pilgrims' identity as white, English Christians, the pilgrims mirror both the tales' racism and the teller's questionable moral judgment.

In his prologue, the Man of Law inserts himself and his tale into a history of storytelling whose narratives have been thoroughly expended. The potential for story is so limited that the Man of Law knows of no tale that Chaucer himself "have nought seyde hem, leve brother, / In o book, he hath seyde hem in another" (II.51-52). It would seem that for the Man of Law, there are no new tales under the sun—at least as it shines on England. He suggests that merchants, through their contact with foreign lands, provide an influx of new "tidynges and tales" (II.129); his own "thrifty tale" (II.46) was taught to him by just such a merchant, associating economic exchange with narrative exchange (II.131-133).²⁰ Jonathan Stavsky reads this "teaching" as an invitation to "consider tales of the kind that would have circulated orally in late medieval England."²¹ By extension, we can understand the Man of Law's—as well as the other pilgrims'—tales as reflections of the values and ideologies of late medieval English people. The merchants within the *Tale* itself, who also bring "tidynges" (II.181) and stories back to their Sowdan, reiterating the connection between narrative and economic exchange:

...wyde-where senten hir spicerye,

Clothes of gold, and satyns riche of hewe.

²⁰ Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics*, especially 90-95. In conjunction with the frame narrative, where the exchange of narrative is offered in the stead of monetary exchange, this emphasis on the commodification of narratives—particularly narratives of otherness—further serves to marginalize, delegitimize, desubjectivize, and dehumanize racial others.

²¹ Jonathan Stavsky, "Translating the Near East in the *Man of Law's Tale* and its Analogues," *The Chaucer Review* 55, no. 1 (2020): 34-5. The *Man of Law's Tale* is one of only three tales that is introduced as the product of narrative exchange or encounter. The *Clerk's Tale* was "lerned at Padowe of a worthy clerk" (Prologue to the *Clerk's Tale*, 27), though it is unclear if the Clerk learned the tale from Petrarch himself or if he read it. The *Tale of Sir Thopas* was likewise "lerned longe agoon" (VII.709), but again, it is unclear how. The remaining twenty-one tales are either recalled from books or maintain the fiction of being invented at the time of telling. The *Man of Law's Tale* is unique, then, in presenting narratives as a good to be exchanged. Gania Barlow also uses the language of currency, capital, and economy to describe the storytelling, especially as it regards the *Man of Law's Tale*. Barlow argues that the Man of Law recognizes the "symbolic capital" of his tale and uses the "proper currency of narrative as a means of accessing a spiritual currency not otherwise available" (Barlow, "A Thrifty Tale: Narrative Authority and the Competing Values of the *Man of Law's Tale*," *The Chaucer Review* 44, no. 4 (2010): 398-399). In the context this chapter, the "spiritual currency" of the Man of Law's tale buys religio-racial identity and acceptance of its inter-racial definition.

Hir chaffare was so thrifty and so newe
That every wight hath deyntee to chaffare
With hem, and eek to sellen hem hire ware. (II.136-140)

The merchant's job is not limited to the buying and selling of goods; merchants are key instruments in the exchange of "Tidynges of sondry regnes, for to leere/ The wondres that they myghte seen or heere" (II.181-82). Narratives, tales, and tidings are points of cultural contact, offering stories of alterity, "of regnes" (II.129) and "tales, both of pees and of debaat" (II.130). The Syrian merchants likewise trade in stories of the other by relating tales from their travels, including of Custance who—from their perspective—is the other, because of her Western Christian identity. This triumvirate of alterity, narrative, and exchange forms the basis of the *Tale's* presentation of race and ultimately serves the project of hegemonic whiteness by positioning England itself as superior.

The *Tale's* first line, "In Surrye *whilom* dwelte a compaignye" (II.134) [emphasis mine], suggests that narrativity is central to its meaning. The use of "whilom," which has a general meaning of "once" or "formerly" but in narrative contexts can take on the valence of "once upon a time," encourages recognition of narrative tools and frameworks at play within the tale.²² The tale is structured by a series of binaries, which are traversed by Custance: East and West, "hethenesse" (both pagan and Islamic) and Christianity. These binaries set up a comparison between Syria and Britain, between the Sowdan and Alla, which plays out through a doubled narrative structure, as Custance's travel to and time in England mirrors her stay in Syria.²³ The *Man of Law's Tale's* binaries are part of a rigid division between Christianity and its other (Islam and other non-Christians), constructing a "religio-political geography" that locates "peripheries of difference and otherness outside the borders of Christian power."²⁴ The tale opens with Syrian merchants selling their wares in Rome, returning to the Sowdan with stories of "sondry regnes"

²² *Middle English Dictionary*, s.v. "whilom," 1(a) At one time, formerly, once; also, in narrative contexts: once upon a time, (accessed 11 March 2021, https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED52564/track?counter=1&search_id=5977316).

²³ Kathryn Lynch attributes this structure to the Man of Law as a storyteller: "...Chaucer wanted to emphasize the conflict of opposing religious 'laws' in the lawyer's tale, and in so doing to stress the binary quality of the Man of Law's thinking, which appears in sharp relief against the more polymorphous fluidity his readers might have expected to associate with the East taken broadly as a symbolic location" ("Storytelling, Exchange, and Constancy: East and West in Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale*," *The Chaucer Review* 33, no. 4 (1999): 410).

²⁴ Brenda Deen Schildgen, *Pagans, Tartars, Moslems, and Jews in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales* (University Press of Florida, 2001), 49.

and “othere things, specially...Custance” (II.181-184), inspiring such a love and desire in the Sowdan that he pledges he and his entire court will convert to Christianity in order to have Custance as his wife, for

...ther was swich diversitee

Bitwene hir bothe lawes, that they sayn

They trowe that no “Cristen prince would fayn

Wedden his child under oure lawe sweete

That us was taught by Mahoun, oure prophete.” (II.220-224)

But while tales of Custance, a paragon of Western Christian femininity (II.157-168), are easily traded, she herself is not. Though her father, the Roman Emperor, agrees to the marriage for the “destruccion of mawmettrie, / And in encrees of Cristes lawe deere” (II.236-37), the marriage and conversion never actually happen. Despite this fantasy of territorial conquest through religious conversion, Custance’s stay in Syria is brief. The Sowdan’s mother, rather than convert to Christianity, slaughters the entire Christian delegation, the Syrians who had agreed to convert, and her own son, preempting the conversion and marriage alike.²⁵ The Sowdanesse sets Custance adrift and she eventually lands in Northumberland, where her story begins again. Through a series of miraculous events, Custance is married to the Northumbrian king Alla, who successfully converts to Christianity along with many others. The marriage results in a son and another mother-in-law who is threatened by Custance’s presence, scheming to have Custance and the newborn Maurice (again) set adrift. This time her journey brings her back to Rome, where she is eventually reunited both with her husband, and then her father, who names Maurice as his heir.

Custance’s travels span continents in the attempt to establish strategic links with Rome through conversion. This “religio-political geography” is, as Geraldine Heng has demonstrated, inherently racial: “Where the characterization of Syria is concerned...religion, race, and nation are categories that intimately overlap, vanish into one another, and are ultimately inseparable.”²⁶ The *Tale’s* double structure would suggest that likewise Northumbrian identity is an

²⁵ The Emperor, however, does get his crusading victory; upon learning of the Sowdanesse’s treachery, he “hath sent anon / His senator, with roial ordianance, / And othere lordes, God woot, many oon, / On Surryens to taken heigh vengeance. / They Brennen, sleen, and brynge hem to meschance / Ful many a day;” (II.960-965).

²⁶ Heng, *Empire of Magic*, 234.

amalgamation of religion, race, and nation. The two countries are, in theory, similarly different from Rome, the very seat of Western Christianity. Both nations are identified with the predominant religion: far-off Syria on the periphery of Christianity is ruled by “mawmettrie;” the geographically closer Northumbrians are “payens.” With seemingly little difference between the two in terms of identity construction, Heng proposes that what is at issue between the Syrians and the Northumbrians is race.²⁷ And indeed, the *Tale’s* use of narrative, both in terms of genre and its double structure, bears this out. If religion is a matrix for race-making, then certain religions are more productive matrices than others; assimilable religions are most conducive to producing whiteness. Where the Sowdanesse’s “mawmettrie” fights back under the guise of false conversion, Alla’s true conversion from “payen” to Christian underscores the importance of religion to race and vice versa; the compound “race-religion” confers the principles of one to the other—unassimilable religion, unassimilable race; assimilable religion, assimilable race.

The narrative failure and subsequent erasure of the Syrian Muslims is aided by the multiple generic influences in the *Tale*. The tale exists in relation to other tales of the Constance group, narratives that feature a heroine who either flees her father’s sexual advances or is exiled on account of them, resulting in an exchange of power between her father and eventual husband. These narratives span genres, but the exchange of power that concludes tales in the Constance group has led to the stories being classified as a foundation myth. This feature is represented in the *Man of Law’s Tale* by Maurice being named his grandfather’s heir as the Emperor of Rome.²⁸ The pressure Chaucer puts on the basic plot of the Constance group tale is thus a “fantasized retroactive projection...of an imperial genealogy and legacy for the kings of Northumberland.”²⁹ Northumberland—not Syria—because such a fantasy is untenable if the inheritor is unincorporable into the community of white Christianity represented by Rome. The *Tale’s* narrative presentation of race is built to support the connection between Britain and Rome and undermine Islam as a political and religious threat.

²⁷ Ibid., 227.

²⁸ For the idea that the Constance group is a foundation myth, see Thomas Leek, “The 13th-Century “Constance” Tales” (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 2009), accessed 11 March 2021, https://conservancy.umn.edu/bitstream/handle/11299/58516/leek_umn_0130e_10791.pdf?sequence=1.

²⁹ Heng, *Empire of Magic*, 197.

In Custance, the tale finds its articulation of white Christianity; both her physical whiteness and her spiritual purity are marked by her paleness.³⁰ Unlike the *Prioress's Tale*, however, in which the race of the *litel clergeon* and his mother is up for potential debate and whiteness is assumed because they are Christian, Custance's whiteness is not the product of the audience's projected expectation. If her openly European heritage were not enough, the Sowdanesse marks Custance's whiteness in an explicit contrast to her own people—though the *Tale* makes no mention of stereotypical Muslim blackness. The Sowdanesse connects the spiritual and physical whiteness of his son's new bride:³¹

For thogh his wyf be cristned never so white,
She shal have nede to wasshe away the rede,
Thogh she a font-ful of water with hire lede. (II.355-357)

The “rede” she mentions, foreshadowing the bloodshed and slaughter to come, is just as surely a physical marker as the whiteness it will mar—Custance's skin which, it is understood, is *already* white. The Sowdanesse's claim regarding baptism and its creation or revelation of whiteness is reminiscent of the *King of Tars*, another romance bearing similarities to the Constance group, in which a Muslim Sultan converts to Christianity, and his skin miraculously turns white through baptism.³² The Sowdanesse seems to make a similar connection, suggesting that Christianity is experienced as especially bodily:

What sholde us tyden of this newe lawe
But thraldom to oure bodies and penance,
And afterward in helle to be drawe,

³⁰ Carolyn Dinshaw suggests a further valence to paleness within the tale: it is affective, a side effect of physical stress or emotional duress (see “Pale Faces: Race, Religion, and Affect in Chaucer's Texts and Their Readers,” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 23 (2001). Likewise, Kathy Cawsey cautions against taking Custance's paleness as a maker of racial distinction, given the absence of blackness as a marker of Syrian racial distinction (“Disorienting Orientalism: Finding Saracens in Strange Places in Late Medieval English Manuscripts,” *Exemplaria* 21, no. 4 (2009).

³¹ See Cord Whitaker, *Black Metaphors: How Modern Racism Emerged from Medieval Race-Thinking* and “Black Metaphors in the *King of Tars*,” and Lynn Ramey, *Black Legacies: Race and the European Middle Ages*. Moreover, Cord Whitaker has suggested that—based on the *King of Tars*, “in which the sultan's blackness does not appear until line 928 of some 1240”—medieval readers would have assumed the Sowdan's blackness, whether or not it was mentioned (“Race and Racism in the *Man of Law's Tale*,” *The Open Access Companion to the Canterbury Tales*, September 2017, accessed 11 March 2011, <https://opencanterburytales.dsl.lsu.edu/mlt1/>).

³² See Friedman, “Making Whiteness Matter,” Sierra Lomuto, “The Mongol Princess of Tars: Global Relations and Racial Formation in *The King of Tars* (c. 1330),” *Exemplaria* 31, no. 3 (2019), Heng, “Beauty and the East,” especially 408-09.

For we reneyed Mahoun oure creance? (II.337-340)

Renouncing Islam and converting to Christianity effects a physical change that comes through baptism. The Sowdanesse says her followers should “feyne us cristendom to take” (II.351) and rejects the efficacy of baptism, claiming “Coold water shal nat greve us but a lite!” (II.352). Baptismal waters are, for the Sowdanesse, a minor annoyance that effects no spiritual or physical transformation. For Custance, on the other hand, those same waters reveal her own whiteness. By uniting the spiritual and the physical in her understanding of baptism and then denying its power, the Sowdanesse reminds us that the Syrians are as physically different from Custance as they are religiously.

The narrative arc common to the Constance group leads us to expect a marriage to a foreign king and a redistribution of political power, but the anticipated conclusion is deferred until it reaches a suitable addition to Christianity’s attendant—and necessary—whiteness. Christian conversion and marriage to Custance remain an unfulfilled promise for the Sowdan. The racial politics of the genres at play in the *Man of Law’s Tale* confound the narrative expectation of the Constance group’s romance plot, which would dictate that the Sowdan and Custance be married. But because genre in the *Man of Law’s Tale* is not a monolith but rather a composite, a layering of hagiographic, romance, and historiographical narrative conventions, the *Tale* puts race to different uses and exerts different pressures on Islam and the individual Syrian Muslim body as a result.³³ Custance’s time in Syria directly engages with crusading narratives but undermines a crusading ethos by reflecting a “lack of interest in missionary efforts demonstrated by most fourteenth-century crusade treatises.”³⁴ Much of this uninterest is reflected in changes Chaucer made from his source, as there is only “about 200 lines, or a little less than 20 percent of the tale, in which he followed Trevet fairly closely.”³⁵ Key among these

³³ Christine Cooper uses this network of genres as a way to read the *Tale’s* interest in translation and communication: “Chaucer is exposing the narrative conventions of different genres that allow foreigners to speak and be understood through different means. Indeed, the references to translation that occur throughout the tale...mean that we must also puzzle over the fact that no interpreters are mentioned when Custance attends the banquet in Syria or Alla travels to Rome, despite the fact that the merchants are such conspicuous translators at the opening of the tale. In these moments we are forced to wonder if communication occurs through the conventions of historical narrative, romance, or saint’s life: is there an invisible interpreter (historical narrative), a gift of xenoglossia (saint’s life), or an ignored linguistic barrier (romance)?” (“‘But algates thereby was she understonde’: Translating Custance in Chaucer’s *Man of Law’s Tale*,” *The Yearbook of English Studies* 36, no. 1 (2006): 36).

³⁴ Siobhan Bly Calkin, “The *Man of Law’s Tale* and Crusade,” in *Medieval Latin and Middle English Literature: Essays in Honour of Jill Mann*, ed. Christopher Cannon and Maura Nolan (D.S. Brewer, 2011), 9.

³⁵ Robert Correale, “Chaucer’s Manuscript of Nicholas Trevet’s “Les Cronicles,” *The Chaucer Review* 25, no. 3 (1991): 239.

differences is, for example, that Christian repossession of Jerusalem is not part of the marriage negotiations. The *Tale* upsets the crusading impulse expressed by the Knight. The failure and slaughter of the Christians in Syria reveals that “neither through violence nor through more peaceful means of invasion will Islam be conquered.”³⁶ Despite the Sowdan’s willingness to convert to Christianity, marriage to Custance would fail to produce a satisfying outcome—there will be no “destruccion of mawmettrie” (II.236), as his potential conversion is what sparks the Sowdanesse’s own crusading slaughter of the Christians. Moreover, the Sowdan’s conversion is borne out of romance interests rather than genuine faith—the Muslims’ conversion would fail to exemplify the dominant Christian ideology that corresponds to “being white” and are thus denied white Christianity’s privileges and norms.

While romance, as in the *King of Tars*, suggests that a marriage between a white Christian princess and a Muslim Sultan is tenable, albeit through conversion and bodily metamorphosis, it must not be overlooked that though the princess is “white as fether of swan,”³⁷ as a Mongol she is as racially other from Custance as the Sowdanesse.³⁸ The *King of Tars* is thus not a suitable analogue for how race functions in the *Tale*; while the Sultan’s conversion in the *King of Tars* “ushers in a global world under Christian rule,” the coherence of a white, specifically Western (and especially English) Christian identity is not at stake as it is with Custance.³⁹ The landscape of *Tars* is entirely eastern; the alliance between the Mongol king and the Syrian sultan brings most of the known East under Christian rule. But while the *King of Tars* shows how Eastern Christian identity coheres through racial alterity, the *Man of Law’s Tale* and other Constance stories demonstrate the need for racial sameness to overcome religious difference. In the West, the race-religion category only has capital so long as it reproduces the shared, normative, hegemonic whiteness supported by Christianity. A far more likely marriage plot finds Muslim princesses secretly helping and marrying Christian knights. Though it is a crusading fantasy, this model reflects a deeper truth about Christianity’s relationship with Islam: assimilation into the Christian community is most possible for the converting Muslim woman

³⁶ Celia M. Lewis, “History, Mission, and Crusade in the *Canterbury Tales*,” *The Chaucer Review* 42, no. 4 (2008): 354.

³⁷ *King of Tars*, l. 12 (ed. John H. Chandler (Medieval Institute Publications, 2015).

³⁸ See Lomuto, “The Mongol Princess of Tars.”

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 179.

and only to a more limited extent for Muslim men.⁴⁰ Suzanne Conklin Akbari argues that medieval theories of miscegenation drive the belief that Muslim men are unable to be incorporated into the Christian community because they reproduce Muslim bodily diversity in their offspring, whereas a Muslim woman who converts reproduces her white husband's substance.⁴¹ Conversion is insufficient to overcome the difference between the Sowdan and Custance, which suggests that there must be something other than religion that dooms their union. The pair's religious difference is an indicator of their racial difference which, rather than being incorporated into the folds of white Christianity through Custance, needs instead to be defeated as a threat to white Christianity's hegemony.

The *Man of Law's Tale*, however, depicts even Muslim women as unassimilable, to the effect that Islam itself is a threat to Christian unity. We have already seen how the Sowdanesse pits herself against Custance's whiteness by disrupting it with bloodshed and violence, but the Sowdanesse's racial alterity is supported and made even more distinct through her religious alterity. Racial identity is a compound category of race-religion, wherein what is marked as white is also Christian and what is non-white is non-Christian. The Sowdanesse's race and religion mutually inform her position as other and work together to position her and the Syrians as inferior. Though the *Tale* "exhibits a relatively informed understanding" of Islam, it frames her perspective through "traditional expressions of xenophobia and misogyny."⁴² The Sowdanesse's Muslim identity is a threat not only to whiteness and Christianity, but also to femininity and patriarchal control:

O Sowdanesse, roote of iniquitee!

Virago, thow Semyrame the secounde!

O serpent under femynynytee,

Lik to the serpent depe in helle ybounde!

O feyned womman, al that may confounde

⁴⁰ Suzanne Conklin Akbari, *Idols in the East: European Representations of Islam and the Orient, 1100-1450* (Cornell University Press, 2009), 173; where Muslim men are converted, it is accompanied by bodily transformation—though it is not always as extreme as the *King of Tars* example.

⁴¹ Ibid., 192: "While medieval physicians and scientific writers usually invoked Galenic theory in their accounts of conception, the Aristotelian theory—where the father's seed imposes form on the shapeless matter provided by the mother—was more commonly drawn upon in literary texts."

⁴² Stavsky, "Translating the Near East in the *Man of Law's Tale*," 48.

Vertu and innocence, thurgh thy malice,

Is bred in thee, as nest of every vice! (II.358-364)

Here, Islam described in terms of the great Christian enemy; the Syrians' potential to be saved and converted is no greater than Satan's. Defined and defended by the Sowdanesse's lack of humanity and the wholesale slaughter of Christians, the Islam of the tale is, as Schildgen says, one of "unregenerate barbarity," untempered by the Sowdan's own receptivity to Christian belief. The Sowdanesse's short-lived victory over her son and Custance, and thus over white Western Christianity, suggests the impossibility of building and incorporating a Christian community in the Islamic East is tied to race.⁴³ Moments such as this, where "shared religion is insufficient and the narrative is unable to overcome the difference between the characters, point to something insurmountable and ineradicable: a largely unspoken sense of racial consciousness."⁴⁴ Instead of doing the logical thing and murdering Custance along with the others, the Sowdanesse sets Custance in a ship to sail "Out of Surrye agayenward to Ytaille" (II.441). Racial and political interests which prohibit success in Syria precipitate Custance's arrival not in Italy but "forth into *oure occian*" (II.505, emphasis mine), to Northumberland. The Man of Law's reminder that he and his audience are from the same land Custance will convert directly connects the *Tale* to the production both of British identity and to the community of Canterbury pilgrims. The doubled narrative structure begins again, this time turning to Britain as the successful site of Christian conversion and dynastic inheritance.

While Custance's experiences in Syria rely on a construction of race mostly through its uses in romance and historical or chronicle narratives, her second stop—in England this time—renders race a non-issue. Back within the context of western European whiteness, Custance is—at least racially—among equals. The narrative influence shifts from crusader romance—where the chief conflict is between white Christianity and non-white Islam—to hagiography, where the conflict loses its racial overtones and is a simpler issue of belief versus non-belief, a difference that can be overcome through conversion and incorporation into a Christian community. This is why Alla, the Northumbrian king, is successfully converted and the Sowdan is not, and why we are provided with a child-bearing marriage: the two share the same physical whiteness, underscoring the idea that "conversion to Christianity is insufficient *in and of itself* to cancel out

⁴³ Schildgen, *Pagans, Tartars, Moslems, and Jews*, cf. Heng, *Empire of Magic*.

⁴⁴ Ramey, *Black Legacies: Race and the European Middle Ages*, 87.

the differences of race and color.”⁴⁵ This generic shift—and the success and narrative closure it enables—prioritizes hagiographic romance over crusading or chronicle romances as the particular context through which whiteness is best interpreted. As Siobhan Bly Calkin has noted, the *Tale* deemphasizes converting the Syrians—no one, including Custance, engages in any proselytizing or preaching.⁴⁶ This is a significant deviation from both Trevet and Gower’s versions of the Constance story, in which Custance preaches to the merchants and converts them before they return to Syria. In making no attempt to convert the Syrians, the *Tale* demonstrates the shallowness of their acceptance of Christianity and displaces true faith onto England, where the Western European setting safely assumes a normative physical whiteness. Marking English identity has white extends to the Canterbury pilgrims which allows them to see themselves both as the inheritors of white Christianity and the violent suppressors of Islam.

The only difference between the white Christian Custance and the white pagan Alla is religion, which Custance erases through her words and miracles. In England, Custance displays her Christian devotion through prayer and evangelizing efforts, which were not part of her stay in Syria. Her affective display is rewarded through the conversion first of Hermengyld, then of Alla and many others, effectively turning her into a missionary. For her service,

...Jhesus, of his mercy,

Made Alla wedden ful solempnely,

This hooly mayden, that is so bright and sheene,

And thus hath Crist ymaad Custance a queene. (II.691-693)

Their union, divinely orchestrated and approved, produces a child, Maurice, which establishes a typological relationship between Custance and Mary—a relationship we shall see in the *Prioress’s Tale* as well. Dinshaw argues that Custance “has a sense of herself as a saint, as participant in a community whose exemplar is Christ.”⁴⁷ When she is forced out of England through Donegild’s interference, Custance makes her Marian role explicit, equating the suffering Maurice is about to endure with that of Christ on the Cross, using that to emphasize further her connection to Mary. “Thow saw thy child yslayn bifore thyne yen,” she says to Mary, “And yet now lyveth my litel child, parfay!” (II.848-849). Through these Marian allusions, Custance and

⁴⁵ Heng, *Empire of Magic*, 232.

⁴⁶ Calkin, “The *Man of Law’s Tale* and Crusade.”

⁴⁷ Dinshaw, *Chaucer’s Sexual Poetics*, 111.

Maurice lay claim to the affective whiteness of Christianity, which finds its completion in their mock-pilgrimage as they return to Rome.

Maurice is “as lyk unto Custance / As possible is a creature to be” (II.1030-1031) that it would seem “a mooder he hath, but fader hath he noon” (II.1020), perfectly replicating Custance’s own whiteness and further establishing Alla’s by eliminating the barriers of miscegenation discussed above. Examples of mixed-race children in medieval literature (the *King of Tars*, *Parzival*) are occasionally marked in some physical way (an unformed lump or spotted like a magpie). Donegild tries to claim that the child is “so hoorible a feendly creature” (II.751) and Custance herself is “so strange a creature” (II.700), perhaps even racially other: “The mooder was an elf, by aventure Ycomen, by charmes or by sorcerie” (II.754-755). If race is an articulation of difference, then by calling Custance “strange” and claiming she might be some sort of evil spirit, Donegild is implicitly suggesting that Custance is of a different *kynde* than the Northumbrians. Her accusation bears no weight, however; Maurice is a “faire child” (II.1018).⁴⁸ Indeed, though Donegild does succeed in having Custance and Maurice exiled, their journey returns Custance home to Rome at last, to the center of Western Christian whiteness. Custance’s reunion with her father, her request that he send her “namoore unto noon hethenesse” (II.1112), and her subsequent return to England lift England into a position of civility and suitability. By incorporating England into Rome’s white Christian fold and enabling a line of dynastic succession, the tale retroactively confirms Maurice’s status as a white subject. The *Tale* finally cements the hegemony of whiteness in Western Christian identity with Maurice’s ascension as Emperor of Rome: “In the olde Romain geestes may men fynde / Maurices lyf;” (II.1126-1127). By establishing this dynastic link between the seat of western Christianity and the newly Christianized Britain rather than Syria, the *Tale* presents whiteness as part and parcel of a true Christian community.

Though Susan Schibanoff reads the *Tale*’s purpose as the Man of Law’s attempt to unite the pilgrims against the threat of Islam, its circulation among the Canterbury pilgrims reinforces their own whiteness.⁴⁹ As an English foundation myth, Custance’s story functions as a cultural

⁴⁸ The word “faire” in Middle English has the same connotation as in modern English, meaning “light of complexion or color of hair and eyes.” (*Middle English Dictionary*, s.v. “fair,” accessed 11 March 2021, https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED15158/track?counter=1&search_id=5977316).

⁴⁹ Susan Schibanoff, “Worlds Apart: Orientalism, Antifeminism, and Heresy in Chaucer’s *Man of Law’s Tale*,” *Exemplaria* 8, no. 1 (1996).

memory of whiteness that contextualizes and gives meaning to the pilgrims' own journey to Canterbury. Their pilgrimage becomes a ritualized choreography of race and place, reconstructing Custance's own performance of whiteness in England.⁵⁰ Pilgrimage is thus, like the *litel clergeon*'s singing or Custance's travels, a performance of white Christian identity, one of its invisible privileges and norms. By going on pilgrimage and sharing this story, the pilgrims assert themselves as white Christians. Pilgrimage is an implicit value judgment concerning their own worthiness as individuals, increasing their self-esteem by performing whiteness's dominant ideals. The *Tale* works alongside the pilgrimage itself to valorize whiteness and maintain its coherence.

Just as we assume the pilgrims' whiteness because of their narrative context, the pilgrims assume a shared racial identity with the protagonists of the *Prioress's Tale*. The tale's construction of whiteness uses Christian spiritual whiteness as its starting point. Two separate genealogies of the tale have been identified: It is a version of the Chorister class of Marian miracle stories and boy-crucifixion or blood libel stories. The *Tale* combines elements of the two, which Roger Dahood argues is a particularly English narrative type: "boy-crucifixion stories, whose origins scholars have traced to twelfth-century England, partially merged with the Chorister tradition in England in response to distinctive historical stimuli."⁵¹ The Prioress concludes her tale by invoking the memory of "yonge Hugh of Lyncoln" as a parallel to her tale, asking the child martyr for his intercession. Her conclusion, linking Hugh—who was "slayn also / With cursed Jewes, as it is notable" (VII.684-685)—with reverence of the Virgin, combines the two narrative threads that inform the tale's presentation of race, as "Marian miracle tales and antisemitism were often connected."⁵² By the fifteenth-century, the *Prioress's Tale* was circulating independently of the Canterbury framework alongside works of Marian devotion. Heather Blurton and Hannah Johnson take this to mean that readers were more interested in the tale's "orthodox prayer and devotion...than in the sensationalism of the Jewish villain."⁵³ The pilgrims' response to the tale seems to bear this interpretation: "Whan seyde was al this miracle,

⁵⁰ For this articulation of the connection between whiteness and pilgrimage, I am indebted to Steven Hoelscher's article, "Making Place, Making Race: Performances of Whiteness in the Jim Crow South" (*Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 93, no. 3 (2003)).

⁵¹ Roger Dahood, "English Historical Narratives of Jewish Child-Murder, Chaucer's *Prioress's Tale*, and the Date of Chaucer's Unknown Source," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 31 (200): 126.

⁵² Heather Blurton and Hannah Johnson, "Reading the *Prioress's Tale* in the Fifteenth Century: Lydgate, Hoccleve, and Marian Devotion," *The Chaucer Review* 50, no. 1&2 (2015): 138.

⁵³ Blurton and Johnson, "Reading the *Prioress's Tale* in the Fifteenth Century," 139.

every man / As sobre was that wonder was to se” (VII.691-692). That the pilgrims are “sobered” by the tale does seem to connote a positive affective reaction, an implicit approval of the religious example of the “litel clergeon.” The more forgiving interpretation is that the pilgrims’ positive response is to the theology of martyrdom that the tale represents. But that example comes at the expense of violence done both in martyrdom and in punishment, such that implicit in the pilgrims’ approval of the tale is an approval of that violence and the tale’s racism.

The *Prioress’s Tale*’s representation of white Christian identity is embodied in the *litel clergeon*. The characters in the tale are never physically described, and we must recall Lynn Ramey’s warning that the absence of color description does not necessitate whiteness—in medieval literature or otherwise. Moreover, Sheila Delaney has noted, “though we may imagine the little Christian boy and his mother as European in appearance, they would far more likely be Christian Arabs” since the “Ayse” of the fourteenth century was under Islamic rule.⁵⁴ I will return to this erasure of Islam and Arab identity later; for now, I want to suggest that the Prioress herself has encouraged the whitewashing of the *clergeon* by aligning him with a historical referent: Hugh of Lincoln, an undoubtedly white English child. The only way the *litel clergeon* can function as a building block both of Englishness and of Christian identity is if he is white (or understood as white). By calling attention to little Hugh of Lincoln, the Prioress reaffirms the historical context of her tale. Though it is presented as specifically Asian, the *Tale* in fact is deeply informed by historical events in England in the thirteenth century and recalls the expulsion of the Jews in 1290.⁵⁵ The slaughter at the end of the *Tale* performs this same work of excision of and preservation from a perceived threat.

The connection between the *litel clergeon* and whiteness is made explicit through his connection to the Virgin Mary, the “white lylle flour” (VII.461), and Christ, “the white Lamb celestial” (VII.581).⁵⁶ The *clergeon* as Christ is reliant largely on the audience’s ability to position the boy in connection to narratives external to the tale, including blood libel narratives and Scripture. Blood libel narratives—including that of Hugh of Lincoln, named at the end of the tale—depict Jews committing anti-Christian acts such as desecrating the Eucharistic host,

⁵⁴ Sheila Delany, “Chaucer’s Prioress, the Jews, and the Muslims,” in *Chaucer and the Jews: Sources, Contexts, Meanings*, ed. Sheila Delaney (Routledge, 2002), 47.

⁵⁵ Dahood, “English Historical Narratives,” 140. Though the 1290 Edict of Expulsion was certainly politically and economically motivated, it was animated by the antisemitism reflected in the *Tale*.

⁵⁶ These references to whiteness, it is important to note, are the only color references in the entire poem. An emerald (VII.609) and a ruby (VII.610) are mentioned, but not for their color; rather, they are referenced to describe the value of the child’s martyrdom.

crucifixes, or statues of Mary or, most extremely, murdering Christian boys in mockery of the Crucifixion. These narratives are “part of a theological discourse of Jewish alterity.”⁵⁷ The *litel clergeon*’s murder immediately invokes the context both of the Passion and of fundamental Jewish difference by also recalling blood libel narratives and “the scientific, “naturalistic” discourse of Jewish alterity [which] also made reference to the practice of the Jews consuming blood in order to cure the flux caused by melancholy.”⁵⁸ Typologically, his murder is a reenactment of the Crucifixion, his reanimation a form of Resurrection. His body is lain “Biforn the chief auter, whil the masse laste” (VII.636), a recollection of the eucharistic Christ. These connections are the audience’s responsibility: “For the medieval reader-viewer, the ugly violence of the Jews holds beauty within it, of Christ’s sacrifice and [human]kind’s redemption. The image would have stimulated the viewer’s pathos—an emotional, affective, penitential reaction.”⁵⁹ The pilgrims’ sobriety at the Prioress’s tale is exactly this type of affective reaction—one that works to maintain Christian identity in the face of Jewish alterity.

Their response duplicates the silence and stasis produced within the *Tale* itself. The tale offers no “pious admonition or promise of conversion,” as Shannon Gayk argues, insisting on returning to the same conditions that produced the miracle.⁶⁰ Those conditions, I am suggesting, are designed to build a white Christian identity on the marginalization and supersession of Jewish identity. Both the *Tale* and the pilgrims’ reaction uphold what Akbari terms the “double place” of the Jew and deny the potential for Jewish incorporation into the Christian community: both interior and exterior, at the center and on the margins, of Christian identity.⁶¹ In their silent sobriety or wonder, the pilgrims occupy the position of the Christians observing the *clergeon*’s miraculous singing and the Jews’ punishment for his murder. The *clergeon*’s assumption of Christ’s (affective, in this case) whiteness, upon which his use as a community-defining figure is based, demonstrates white Christianity’s need for regular rearticulation to cohere by overcoming challenges that attempt to undermine it. The pilgrims participate in this maintenance and rearticulation through sharing these narratives. The Prioress’s success as a storyteller depends on her narrative’s ability to “coincide with the [audience’s] disposition as it derives from his or her

⁵⁷ Akbari, *Idols in the East*, 151.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Anthony Bale, “He Who is in Pain is Alive, in *Feeling Persecuted: Christians, Jews, and Images of Violence in the Middle Ages* (Reaktion Books), 14.

⁶⁰ Shannon Gayk, “‘To wonder upon this thyng’: Chaucer’s *Prioress’s Tale*,” *Exemplaria* 22, no. 2 (2010): 148.

⁶¹ Akbari, *Idols in the East*, 139.

cultural embeddedness.”⁶² The Prioress positions both herself and her companions within a particular Christian framework:

O Lord, oure Lord, thy name how marveillous

Is in this large world ysprad—quod she—

For noght oonly thy laude precious

Parfourned is by men of dignitee,

But by the mouth of children thy bountee

Parfourned is... (VII.453-459)

The Prioress emphasizes the pilgrims’ shared Christian faith (a factor of identity taken for granted by their participation in a Christian pilgrimage), the performance of which she correlates with “dignitee.” The Prioress’s own performance—“To telle a storie I wol do my labour” (VII.463)—establishes her narrative as a metric against which the other pilgrims’ performance of Christianity is measured. Her tale offers an affective, white, Christian identity constructed through Jewish supersessionism and antisemitism. Mirroring the affect of the Christians within the *Tale* itself, the pilgrims maintain their own racial cohesion by engaging with the *Tale* as a form of marginalization and suppression of Jewish identity.

Just as the boy assumes Christ’s whiteness as his own spiritual-qua-physical whiteness, Mary—the “white lylie flour”—is articulated as part of the *clergeon*’s identity through narrative.⁶³ His wholesale identification with the *Alma redemptoris* and the Virgin intimately and inextricably links the *clergeon* with whiteness and with Christianity. The *litel clergeon*’s affinity for the narrative of the hymn is innate, an extension of his devotion to Mary taught to him by his mother:

And eek also, where as he saugh th’ymage

Of Cristes mooder, hadde he in usage,

As hym was taught, to knele adoun and seye

⁶² Luc Herman and Bart Vervaeck, “Narrative Interest as Cultural Negotiation,” *Narrative* 17, no. 1 (2009): 112.

⁶³ There is a tradition extending back to Gertrude the Great that refers to Mary as the “White Lily of the Trinity;” Mary would appear to anyone who uses that epithet at the hour of their death, console them, and lead them to Heaven. (Sharon Elkins, “Gertrude the Great and the Virgin Mary,” *Church History* vol. 66: 4 (1997), 731, esp. n. 24).

His Ave Marie, as he goth by the weye.
Thus hath this wydwe hir litel sone ytaught
Oure blisful Lady, Cristes mooder deere,
To worshiþe ay, and he forgat it naught (VII.505-511).

His devotion has already taken shape as narrative. That a hymn such as the *Alma redemptoris mater* is a form of narrative is, like most things, dependent on context. While it may not seem to meet the basic criterion of a narrative in recounting a story, “[m]ost narratologists agree that narrative consists of material signs...which convey a certain meaning (or content) ...and fulfill a certain social function.”⁶⁴ In this way, then, hymns function as narratives. The *Alma redemptoris* distills what is fundamental to Ricœur’s definition of narrative: the human experience of time and the aporia of the *distentio animi*, the tension between past, present, and future. By invoking the aid of the Virgin, the hymn brings the weight of the past and future on the present condition of the sinner. Like the *Prioress’s Tale*’s reliance on external blood libel narratives for its completion, the *Alma redemptoris* is also contextualized through the names and titles it declares, giving rise to thought in the affective tradition of prayer. When the *clergeon* overhears his older classmates learning the hymn, he is instinctively drawn to it, though he does not know what is being sung; “he drough hym ner and ner” (VII.520) until he has memorized the first verse simply by listening to it. His desire for the hymn transcends the limits of his age (“Noght wiste he what this Latyn was to seye / For he so yong and tendre was of age” (VII.523-524)) and the threat of physical violence (“Though that I for my prymer shal be shent / And shal be beten thries in an houre, / I wol it konne...” (VII.541-543)). His narrative identity is reconfigured by this narrative encounter to place an affectively white, Christian discourse at the center of his identity.

The result is a near complete coincidence of the *clergeon*, the hymn, and through it, the Virgin: “On Cristes mooder set was his entente” (VII.540). I have suggested in earlier chapters that in Chaucer’s texts, the polysemy of *entente* can carry the extra connotation of one’s entire self.⁶⁵ A similar identification is at play in the *Prioress’s Tale*, between the *litel clergeon* and the Marian hymn:

This litel child, as he cam to and fro,

⁶⁴ Marie-Laure Ryan, “Toward a Definition of Narrative,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, ed. David Herman (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 24.

⁶⁵ See Chapter 3, specifically 163-64.

Ful murily than wolde he synge and crie
 O Alma redemptoris everemo.
 The swetnesse his herte perced so
 Of Cristes mooder that, to hire to preye,
 He kan nat stynte of syngyng by the weye. (VII.552-557)

The *Alma redemptoris* becomes part of who he is, restructuring the *clergeon*'s experience of the world so that all things lead him to Mary. His singing provides his life with a narrative unity that brings together "the discordant aspects of human experience."⁶⁶ The *clergeon*, in other words, organizes his subjectivity in relation to a Marian schema that is represented by the narrative of the hymn. His actions—singing Mary's praises "thurghout the Juerie" (VII.551)—are only meaningful in relation to the narrative identity he has constructed from his Marian devotion. Indeed, when Satan incites the Jews to violence against the child, it is not because of the boy alone, but because of his *singing*:

Is this to yow a thyng that is honest,
 That swich a boy shal walken as hym lest
 In youre despit, and synge of swich sentence,
 Which is agayn youre lawes reverence? (VII.561-564)

The charge is simple: stop the boy's singing, stop the offense. Neither the boy nor the song is at issue in and of itself, but the combination of a young boy openly singing a Marian hymn is incongruent with the environment. Within the Jewish ghetto, the *litel clergeon* represents a non-standard form of narrative identity, unaccepted and unrecognized by the community standard. If, as narrative hermeneutics suggests, "[o]thers know what to expect of us as they refer to the narrative forms our actions and characters suggest to them," then the *clergeon*'s Marian identity is intersubjectively problematic. Because the *litel clergeon* prioritizes his affectively white, Christian discourse in his identity and the Jews prioritize their own religious identity, he is as unincorporable into the surrounding Jewish discourse as he is unable to participate in it. The signifying network of narratives that work to "promote large-scale cooperation among group

⁶⁶ Pamela Anderson, "Having it Both Ways: Ricœur's Hermeneutics of the Self," *Oxford Literary Review* 15, no. ½ (1993): 237.

members” and facilitate “group identification and a sense among members of a strong bond of belonging to the group” breaks down; Marian hymns are not a universal master narrative and the Jews reject the *clergeon*’s individual subjective performance. His selfhood, articulated as it is through his recitation of the *Alma redemptoris*, is against the law. Not even his death can end the boy’s singing. When his body is discovered by his mother, his first teacher in Marian devotion, “Ther he with throte ykorven lay upright, / He *Alma redemptoris* gan to synge” (VII.612-613). In this case, the Virgin is the literal cause of his singing, having laid a “greyn” (VII.662) on his tongue. By uniting his identity to Mary through narrative, the *litel clergeon* becomes a participant in both her Christian importance and her own whiteness, spiritual or otherwise.

Christianity is opposed, as it is in other blood libel narratives, to Jewish alterity. In Chaucer’s England, the figure of the Jew had come to represent “a range of ideas, concerns, and qualities, including spiritual blindness, depravity, materialism, evil, and sinfulness.”⁶⁷ The *Prioress’s Tale* relies on well-known Jewish stereotypes in service to Christian self-definition. One of the primary modes by which Jewish identity defined Christian identity was through its typological figuration. We have already seen how the *litel clergeon* functions typologically as Christ; as then, the Jews of the *Tale* continue to be the Christ figure’s enemy. However, typological relation goes further. The Prioress creates a sense of Christian community first by identifying the Jewish people of the tale as “hateful to Crist and to his compaignye” (VII.492), then by aligning the Jews with Satan, “oure firste foo” who has his nest “in Jues herte” (VII.558, 559); as Satan is the enemy of humanity, so too are Jews. Not only does such an association render the Jews inherently evil, but it also dehumanizes them, thereby excluding them from identity markers of whiteness and potentially Christian—the conditions of personhood and normativity upon which the identity cohesion of the Canterbury pilgrims depends. Referencing “the serpent Sathanas” (VII.558) also recalls the story of the Fall which, given the *clergeon*’s connection to Mary, positions the Jews as Eve, superseded by Mary through her obedience. The typological role of Jews as enemy to *Christ* further positions them as enemies to *Christianity*, which “emerged as a religion whose very coherence hinged on its supposed suppression of a materialism that it stigmatized as Jewish.”⁶⁸ Kathy Lavezzo argues that materialism, “foule usure

⁶⁷ Lisa Lampert-Weissig, “Chaucer’s Pardoner and the Jews,” *Exemplaria* 28, no. 4 (2016): 339.

⁶⁸ Kathy Lavezzo, *The Accommodated Jew: English Antisemitism from Bede to Milton* (Cornell University Press, 2016), 20.

and lucre of vileynye,” (VII.491) forms part of the *Prioress’s Tale’s* antisemitic “triad or cluster—in which Jews, filth, and lending all share in a demonized carnality.”⁶⁹

The Christians in the tale respond to the Jews’ “demonized carnality” with violence. The Jews’ murder of the *litel clergeon* and hiding his body in a latrine is a double threat to the coherence of Christian identity as Christlike and pure (or white). Jewish anti-Christian polemics stressed the filth of Mary, and Christian antisemitic libels frequently depict Jews defiling Christian objects in their own filth.⁷⁰ The double offense of martyring a child whose identity is shaped by Marian devotion is countered by an equally heinous act:

With torment and with shameful deeth echon,
This provost dooth thise Jewes for to sterve
That of this mordre wiste, and that anon.
He nolde no swich cursednesse observe.
“Yvele shal have that yvele wol deserve”;
Therefore with wilde hors he dide hem drawe,
And after that he heng hem by the lawe. (VII.628-634)

The provost acts in a way that corresponds to the elimination of a Jewish threat to Christianity: by dismembering the Jewish body. By contrast, though the *clergeon’s* throat is cut “unto my nekke boon” (VII.649), his body is otherwise whole. Akbari suggests that this contrast between wholeness and dismemberment reflects an anxiety regarding the integrity of the Christian community: “From a medieval Christian perspective, wholeness and bodily integrity were seen as fundamental attributes of the body of the Church, mystically unified by the sacrifice of the Eucharist; fragmentation and incompleteness, by contrast, were thought to be the hallmarks of Christianity’s precursor, now superseded.”⁷¹ By presenting the *clergeon’s* body on the altar, the *Tale* upholds Christian unity represented in the Mass—Christian wholeness is built on Jewish fragmentation.⁷² The *clergeon’s* entombment and veneration as a martyr unites the Christians and positions the *clergeon’s* body—marked as white—as essentially different from and superior to the Jewish body. By participating in that veneration both within the tale and again in the tale’s

⁶⁹ Ibid., 119.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 116.

⁷¹ Akbari, *Idols in the East*, 123.

⁷² Ibid., 134.

circulation, the Christian community adopts the *clergeon*'s whiteness and the whiteness of the tale itself. The entombment "promises both narrative and symbolic closure, offering a tidy end to a messy tale."⁷³

But what "lawe" promotes the indiscriminate torture and execution of individuals who merely possess knowledge of a crime? The provost's ruling does not even guarantee that the guilty parties are punished. This disconnect, which supports the violent maintenance of white Christian identity at the expense of a Jewish other, is—even more concerningly—put into place by the non-Christian, non-white provost. That the provost is not Christian is evidenced early in the text: The *Prioress's Tale* is set, as we know, in "Asye" (VII.488), placing what is, in effect, a fundamentally English narrative in a far off, Eastern—and more specifically, Muslim—location; as Kathy Lavezzo puts it, "the *Prioress's Tale* journeys all the way to the East only to return to English territory."⁷⁴ English territory, English narratives, English identity. Indeed, the *Tale* makes no sense set in Asia. Delaney argues that, in fact, the narrative would be impossible in a great Asian city.⁷⁵ But what the Eastern setting provides for the Tale is *distance*.⁷⁶ This narrative distance displaces the violence of the *Tale* from Western Christianity to an Eastern (probably Muslim, if we accept Delaney's reminder that Chaucer's Asia was under Islamic rule—which Chaucer would well have known) provost, dirtying others' hands with the blood used to uphold Christian unity and purity (and whiteness). The provost even praises Christ and Mary before he has the surrounding Jews arrested, rendering Islam even more conspicuously absent given we know he is not a Christian. This praise has led some, including Delaney, to conclude that the provost is imagined as a Christian.⁷⁷ Under Islamic law, non-Muslim communities known as *dhimmīs* "had the right to enforce their own legal systems by establishing communal courts which had jurisdiction over all intra-communal civil (as opposed to criminal) affairs."⁷⁸ But crucially, "Islamic courts had jurisdiction over any case involving a Muslim, capital cases, cases

⁷³ Gayk, "To wonder upon this thyng," 148; cf. Anthony Bale, "Miracle: Shifting Definitions in 'The miracle of the boy singer,'" in *The Jew in the Medieval Book: English Antisemitisms 1350-1500* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 85.

⁷⁴ Lavezzo, *The Accommodated Jew*, 111.

⁷⁵ Delaney, "Chaucer's Prioress, the Jews, and the Muslims," 48.

⁷⁶ Cf. Heng, *Empire of Magic*, 193.

⁷⁷ Delaney, "Chaucer's Prioress, the Jews, and the Muslims," 54, note 7.

⁷⁸ Jessica M. Marglin, "Jews in *Sharī'a* Courts: A Family Dispute from the Caria Genzia," in *Jews, Christians, and Muslims in Medieval and Early Modern Times: A Festschrift in Honor of Mark R. Cohen*, ed. Arnold E. Franklin, et. al. (Brill, 2014), 210.

threatening the “public order,” and cases between *dhimmīs* of different faiths.”⁷⁹ When the Christians send for the provost, then, they are appealing to Muslim authorities. While the provost’s words and actions are part of a larger project of Christian defense, they come at the expense of the violent erasure of the provost’s *own* identity. He is made to be different enough as an authority in an Asian city to commit violence in Christianity’s defense, but not so different that he cannot also “herieth Crist that is of hevene kyng, / And eek his mooder, honour of mankynde” (VII.618-619).⁸⁰ The Asian setting is part of a double erasure of non-Christian alterity—narrative, in the case of Islam, and literal dismemberment in the case of the Jews.⁸¹

By circulating this *Tale*, the pilgrims participate in that violent erasure and, indeed, make it constitutive of their community.⁸² By responding positively to the *Prioress’s Tale*, the pilgrims validate the moral judgments offered in the tale’s hypothetical mode which, Ricœur’s hermeneutic tells us, refigures the pilgrims’ self-understanding and is incorporated into their own narrative identities. The pilgrims trade in the *Tale*’s systems of power, difference, and violence that mark Jewish bodies as a necessary other—their religio-racial identity coheres only in Christian supersession of Judaism. The *Prioress’s Tale* is a narrative marginalization of Judaism that signals Christian whiteness and marks those who participate in that identity as superior. The Prioress’s narrative performance reproduces race and racism such that the act of storytelling defines not only their whiteness; it provides the pilgrims with a mechanism to esteem themselves as good and worthy: not Jewish and thus white and Christian. Whiteness is an identity marker refracted by its context, and in the context of the Canterbury pilgrims, whiteness is one of the intersubjective criteria that determines inclusion into the community and individual worthiness of a good life or self-esteem, especially given, as Heng asserts, whiteness is seen as a guarantor

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ The provost’s actions are all the more puzzling, given the Jews’ place in Islamic society: “...Jews were not usually distinctive in Islamic society. Like others, they were governed by *dhimma* law, which offered a range of protections, as well as some financial obligations and social restrictions. Though not entirely free of insecurity, harassment, or symbolic humiliation, Jews in Islamic lands had civil status” (Delaney, “Chaucer’s Prioress, the Jews, and the Muslims,” 46).

⁸¹ For an historical perspective on mixed Muslim, Jew, and Christian communities, see David Nirenberg, *Neighboring Faiths: Christianity, Islam, and Judaism in the Middle Ages and Today* (University of Chicago Press, 2016).

⁸² Communities that define their identity through persecution against and violence toward their minority populations are common in the Middle Ages. See David Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages* (Princeton University Press, 2015) and R.I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society: Authority and Deviance in Western Europe 950-1250* (2nd ed., Blackwell Publishing, 2007).

of moral virtue—one of its “invisible privileges and norms.”⁸³ The *Tale* becomes a model of racial behaviors and attitudes by sustaining, rather than subverting, hegemonic ideals that are marked as white.

Intra-racial Distinction: The Franklin’s Interruption of the Squire

Whereas the *Man of Law’s* and *Prioress’s Tales* presented an inter-racial construction of race—that is, positioning the pilgrims’ shared white Christian identity as dominant and hegemonic in relation to racial others—the interaction between the Franklin and Squire constructs race intra-racially. Unlike the other two tales, the plot of the *Squire’s Tale* is not driven by cultural conflict between Christians and non-Christians. There are no Christians in the *Tale* at all. The Squire ventures into the non-Christian East, but his portrait of Cambyuskan’s court is seemingly free from the violent intervention of maintaining Christian whiteness present in the *Man of Law’s* and *Prioress’s* tales. We are left to consider how, or indeed if, the *Squire’s Tale* participates in the discourse of racialized tale-telling that positions whiteness as a marker of superiority. The *Squire’s Tale’s* relation to the other two narratives of race shows us that while there is no racial conflict within the tale, that conflict occurs through the act of tale-telling itself.

The Squire’s sympathetic openness to Eastern narrative forms is itself a threat to the whiteness of the Canterbury pilgrims. Both the Prioress and Man of Law tell hagiographic tales that take care to link whiteness with Christianity and closed narratives, but the *Squire’s Tale* discloses race’s narrative potential by confounding the established formal or generic expectation that acceptable narratives that concern race are necessarily ideologically Christian. Moreover, the Squire overlays his Eastern characters and setting with distinctly Western courtly and Arthurian themes and motifs. The *Squire’s Tale* aligns the East with paradigms of Western affective whiteness: courtly love, *gentillesse*, and pre-Christian England. His tale—whether an attempt to domesticate the East by rendering it familiar or a naïve story born out of inexperience—allows the East to participate in markers of whiteness without subjecting the East as inferior.

The *Squire’s Tale’s* two extant parts take place at Cambyuskan’s court in “Sarray, in the land of Tartarye” (V.11). In the *prima pars* a strange knight arrives at the court celebration of Cambyuskan’s twentieth year as king, bearing gifts from the “kyng of Arabe and of Inde” (V.110): a flying horse; a mirror that can predict adversity and a ring that allows its wearer to

⁸³ Hughey, “The (dis)similarities of white racial identities,” 1290.

understand birdsong, both intended for Cambyuskan's daughter Canacee; and a sword that can heal the wounds inflicted by it (V.115-165).⁸⁴ The gifts inspire wonder, awe, and much discussion among the Tartars, and the feasting begins again. The *pars secunda* follows Canacee, having put on the ring, as she walks through a park. She encounters a wounded falcon, who embarks on a lengthy narrative exposition of her troubles in love (which occupies the near entirety of the *pars secunda*). The second part—and the Tale—ends with the Squire's promise "To speken of adventures and of batailles / That never yet was herd so grete mervailles" (V.659-660). The Squire's choice in tales is curious, given the Host's request that he "sey somewhat of love, for certes ye / Konnen theron as muche as any man." (V.2-3). The only love story in the *Tale* is a failed one. Moreover, the Squire's portrait in the *General Prologue* would suggest that he is well familiar with the literary canon of courtly love narratives and touts his storytelling ability (I.79-100). The Squire capitalizes on late medieval romance's fascination with the exotic and participates in the protocolonial domestication of the East through narrative, just as his father the Knight did in the Crusades. The Squire's military exploits have taken him no further than Flanders; his experiences of the Orient are limited to stories and what he may have learned secondhand from his father. But for the Franklin and the Canterbury pilgrims, not even naivete excuses the Squire's blatant violation of their racial code. Rather than allowing the Squire to finish, the Host turns to the Franklin for a tale, confirming the unacceptability of the Squire's tale.

Despite the fact that "very little specific information about Mongol characteristics or cultural practices" make it into the *Tale*, the Squire is nevertheless prohibited from continuing his narrative. His inexperience—both in terms of the literal East and in storytelling—corresponds to a narrative that, on the surface at least, is sympathetic to the East. The *Tale*'s episodic and open-ended structure mimics the organization of Eastern stories.⁸⁵ His tale represents the Orient in relatively positive (if incomplete) terms and innocuous stereotypes that depict the East as strange and seductive, but harmless: The Squire's Orient is a "site of novelties, intrigue, enchantment, [and] strangeness."⁸⁶ But as Kathryn Lynch, John M. Fyler, and Alan Ambrisco

⁸⁴ Patricia Ingham and Michelle Karnes have offered insightful analyses of the gifts and the Tartars' reactions to them. See Patricia Clare Ingham, "Little Nothings: *The Squire's Tale* and the Ambition of Gadgets," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 31 (2009), and Michelle Karnes, "Wonder, Marvels, and Metaphor in the *Squire's Tale*," *ELH* 82, no. 2 (2015).

⁸⁵ Lynch, "East Meets West in Chaucer's *Squire's* and *Franklin's Tales*," 538.

⁸⁶ Reena Thomas and Ethan K. Smilie, "*Vitium Curiositatis* and Stereotypes in Chaucer's *Squire's Tale*," *Mosaic* 52, no. 2 (2019).

have demonstrated, the Squire is “unquestionably attempting to domesticate the East,”⁸⁷ representing it as “comfortably familiar and convincingly exotic.”⁸⁸ This domestication is the result not of conflict within the *Tale* but of narrative technique. Ambrisco has convincingly argued that “the Squire’s egregiously bad use of *occupatio* and his self-conscious admissions of rhetorical inadequacy...serve to contain the foreign, acknowledging Mongol difference but failing to present the concrete terms on which such difference rests.” Instead, the Squire arthurianizes the narrative, coding Oriental excesses in familiar narrative tropes; he represents Cambyuskan’s court almost as an extension of the Arthurian court, something fit for the adventures of “Gawayn” (V.95) or “Launcelot” (V.287). Lynch has likewise argued that the *Squire’s Tale* “blunts the foreignness” of Cambyuskan’s court “by substituting highly courtly and Western motifs,”⁸⁹ whether out of ignorance and inexperience or a malicious attempt to undermine the Orient’s narrative identity and subordinate it to Western interests. Such a practice imposes Western whiteness on the Eastern court while failing to make the East inferior; instead, it renders Cambyuskan and the Mongols nearly equal with the West. Cambyuskan, who “lakked noght that longeth to a kyng” (V.16), is just as accomplished, honorable, and worthy as any Western knight, if not more—“ther was nowher swich another man” (V.27). By raising the Mongols to equal status with the West, the Squire fails to comply and conform with the conventions of whiteness, which would dictate that the Mongols be othered and violently subjected in order for whiteness to cohere. While the use of *occupatio* to defer disclosure of Mongol identity and replacing it with Western motifs *could* be seen as an attempt to marginalize them as non-white, it is not a sufficient performance of whiteness to allow the Squire to continue.

Westernizing his narrative, moreover, is not enough to eliminate the threat posed by the Orient. The suggestion of incest and an Eastern narrative logic still loom over the *Tale*, as they did in the *Man of Law’s Tale*. Dinshaw describes the *Man of Law’s Tale* as “bewildering, disorienting, and seemingly endless.”⁹⁰ The same can be said of the *Squire’s Tale*, by which it is

⁸⁷ Alan Ambrisco, “‘It Lyth Nat in My Tonge’: *Occupatio* and Otherness in the *Squire’s Tale*,” *The Chaucer Review* 38, no. 3 (2004): 224.

⁸⁸ Fyler, “Domesticating the Exotic in the *Squire’s Tale*,” 13.

⁸⁹ Lynch, “East Meets West in Chaucer’s *Squire’s* and *Franklin’s Tales*,” 541. One notable example she provides is the falcon, who is “comically indistinguishable from any swooning courtly maiden” (542). Though Lynch positions Canacee in comparison with female characters in Eastern legend—who “tend to be more headstrong, resourceful, and libidinous” (542)—the falcon arguably occupies the same position, rendering the falcon’s Western courtliness even more absurd.

⁹⁰ Dinshaw, “The Law of Man and its ‘Abhomynacions,’” 88.

occasionally followed.⁹¹ But where the Man of Law imposes Christian ideology to structure encounters with the East, the Squire embraces what Lynch calls the “polymorphous fluidity” of the Orient. And just as the East’s potential for incorporation into the Christian community is violently excised in the *Man of Law’s Tale*, the *Squire’s Tale’s* apparent sympathy for the East is interrupted, prevented from concluding, and answered by the *Franklin’s Tale*. This response, shutting down a non-threatening Eastern narrative, demonstrates the centrality of certain narrative structures to the construction and maintenance of Western identity. With the *Squire’s Tale*, narrative itself becomes the unassimilable non-Western, non-Christian, non-white other. The Squire’s attempt to gain renown from the pilgrims by circulating the narrative—despite the Franklin’s social-climbing flattery—fails; his narrative has no capital. Because Cambyuskan and Canacee are paragons of courtliness and equal to the West, it fails to provide the pilgrims with a mechanism to judge themselves as superior and for the pilgrims, in turn, to reward its *sentence* and *solaas*. Whether the Squire intended it to be so or not, the pilgrims perceive the Squire’s narrative as contrary to the identity politics established by the Man of Law and upheld by the Prioress. The Squire’s performance of whiteness by sharing a racialized narrative fails to comply and conform with the conventions established for that performance. Though the *Man of Law’s* and *Squire’s Tales* share narrative similarities, their fundamental difference—the *Man of Law’s Tale’s* insistent foregrounding of whiteness through Christianity—means the *Squire’s Tale* unsuccessfully participates in the Canterbury pilgrims’ quest for self-esteem.

The Franklin’s interruption and answering tale brings the pilgrims firmly back to the white (albeit pre-Christian) West in content and in structure by relating a closed narrative that exemplifies fourteenth-century ideals. The *Franklin’s Tale*, in other words, “brings the wonders of the Orient”—represented by the *Squire’s Tale*—“firmly under Occidental control.”⁹² The Franklin checks the Squire’s participation in hegemonic whiteness which, I am suggesting, is produced by marking non-white as inferior through violence and, as the Franklin and Squire demonstrate, by “marginalizing practices of ‘being white’ that fail to exemplify dominant ideals.”⁹³ The Franklin’s marginalization of the Squire works in two ways: by marginalizing both his tale and his status as a storyteller as, at least ideologically, non-white. The Host asks the

⁹¹ Lynch suggests that the *Squire’s Tale* “balances the Man of Law in its narrative excesses, its multiplication of plot lines, and its resistance to closure” (Lynch, “Storytelling, Exchange, and Constancy,” 419).

⁹² See Lynch, “East Meets West in Chaucer’s *Squire’s* and *Franklin’s Tales*.”

⁹³ Hughey, “The (dis)similarities of white racial identities,” 1290.

Squire to “sey somewhat of love, for certes ye / Konnen theron as muche as any man.” (V.2-3) and he chooses to tell a tale of racial alterity. But the Man of Law has, by this point in the pilgrims’ journey, laid the groundwork for narratives that detail encounters with the East and the Host and pilgrims have declared it acceptable. The *Man of Law’s Tale* suggests romance is not the genre best suited to configuring whiteness and racial cohesion in its engagement with the non-white, and the *Squire’s Tale* bears this out. The Franklin, however, and his Breton *lai* demonstrate how romance as a genre can work to support whiteness. By praising the Squire’s *gentillesse* the Franklin draws attention to its improper orientation in the Squire’s tale. If the Franklin recommends “living in accordance with the value system of *gentillesse* in order to develop a *gentil* character, which leads to such happiness of the kind that he himself enjoys,” as Darragh Green suggests, then the possibility of such a life is limited to the confines of his tale’s specifically Western setting, foreclosing on its Eastern potentiality in the *Squire’s Tale*.⁹⁴

The Franklin centers his intervention into the Squire’s tale on *gentillesse*: “In feith, Squier, thow hast thee wel yquit / And gentilly. I preise wel thy wit,” (V.673-4), which suggests the concept is central to both tales. Charles Duncan, Jr., has suggested that the Franklin’s interruption of the Squire’s romance by praising the Squire’s *gentillesse* is in fact a gentle rebuke of the Squire’s storytelling abilities. The Squire represents a “subverted ideal” in subjecting his audience to boredom.⁹⁵ But given the content of the Squire’s story and the tale with which the Franklin follows, the Franklin’s interruption serves a larger purpose beyond saving the pilgrims from a few hours’ boredom. The two romances—a genre especially conducive “to the creation of races, and the production of a prioritizing discourse of essential differences among peoples”⁹⁶—link *gentillesse* to racial identity. The ideal subverted by the *Squire’s Tale*—intentionally or not—is in fact the hegemonic superiority of the white West. The tale elides Eastern and Western narrative technique in what, from the perspective of the pilgrims, is a dangerously sympathetic portrait of Cambyuskan’s court. While the Squire is marked as white through his participation in both the pilgrimage and the tale-telling competition that accompanies it, but his performance of whiteness in his own tale is problematic. Intra-racially, then, the Franklin shuts down the

⁹⁴ Darragh Greene, “Moral Obligations, Virtue Ethics, and Gentil Character in Chaucer’s *Franklin’s Tale*,” *The Chaucer Review* 50, no. 1-2 (2015): 105-6.

⁹⁵ Charles Duncan, Jr., “Straw for Your Gentillesse: The Gentle Franklin’s Interruption of the Squire,” *The Chaucer Review* 5, no. 2 (1970): 163.

⁹⁶ Heng, *Empire of Magic*, 7.

Squire's narrative not because it is a boring, non-courtly tale, but because it fails to repeat the overtly violent suppression of otherness upon which the pilgrims' collective whiteness depends.

Linked to the pilgrims' concern for *gentillesse*, the threat of incest that looms over the *Squire's Tale* means the tale is unsustainable in the network of narratives that establish and maintain the pilgrims' identity. As the Man of Law tells us, "thilke wikke ensample of Canacee, / That loved hir owene brother synfully" (II.78-79) belongs to a category of "cursed stories" (II.80) that he—and by extension, the other pilgrims—deem unworthy of narration.⁹⁷ That the Squire then chose to tell Canacee's story in spite of the Man of Law's condemnation may have raised a few pilgrims' eyebrows. The Squire himself invokes the tale's association with incest in the slippage between the names of Canacee's brother and her lover, both potentially named Cambalo. Cambyuskan's two sons are identified as Algarsyf and Cambalo (V.30-31), though later the Squire reidentifies the latter as "Cambalus, / The kynges sone" (V.656-657). Crucially, however, the *Squire's Tale* ends as the Squire announces that he will "speke of Cambalo, / That fought in lystes with the bretheren two / For Canacee er that he myghte hire wyne" (V.667-669). John Fyler suggests this slippage is a symbol for "the thrill of the forbidden exotic" that preoccupies the tale.⁹⁸ The Canacee story's Eastern (non-Christian, non-white) setting renders the incest motif seemingly unproblematic, a symptom of Eastern licentiousness and excess—unlike its invocation in the *Man of Law's Tale*, where the specter of incest is raised only to be contained by the hegemony of Western white Christianity.⁹⁹ The implications of the incest motif appearing in a Westernized narrative—Westernized, but not Western (or white, or Christian)—are too dangerous for the Squire to be allowed to continue. "Of swiche cursed stories" (II.80) both the Man of Law, the Franklin, and the other pilgrims all "sey fy!" (II.80). No one objects to the Squire being interrupted or seek the conclusion of his story. The Squire and his narrative of the East are marginalized as "non-white" and the *Franklin's Tale* course corrects with a romance more in tune with the behaviors and norms valued by the pilgrims.

⁹⁷ Despite his aversion to the subject, the Man of Law's invocation of incest in the introduction to his tale renders it a specter that haunts the narrative. As Carolyn Dinshaw asks, "Why does he mention incest, in particular, and not adultery or sodomy? At the very least, his comments introduce the subject of incest, and perhaps set his listeners thinking about it..." (*Chaucer's Sexual Poetics*, 94-95). Incest is already common feature of Constance group narratives and, while consciously refusing to discuss it, the Man of Law unconsciously foregrounds incest's importance to the tale.

⁹⁸ Fyler, "Domesticating the Exotic," 1.

⁹⁹ Elizabeth Scala discusses the relationship between the two tales, and specifically how both use narrative absence to position incest as a central element of the stories. See Scala, "Canacee and the Chaucer Canon: Incest and Other Unnarratables," *The Chaucer Review* 30, no. 1 (1995).

The Franklin's attempt to reestablish racial cohesion begins first by invoking genre and second by evoking place:

IThise olde gentil Britouns in hir dayes
Of diverse adventures maden layes,
Rymeyed in hir firste Briton tonge;
Whiche layes with hir instrumentz they songe,
Or elles reddeden hem, for hir plesaunce.
And oon of hem have I in remembraunce,
Whiche I shal seyn, with good-wyl, as I kan. (V.709-715)

In Armorik, that called is Britayne, (V.729)

In response to the Squire's narrative and locative exoticism, which threatens to problematize the cohesion of the pilgrims' community, the Franklin's story takes place in a tradition that is not only "securely, even aggressively, native and Western" but necessarily British.¹⁰⁰ Shannon Godlove has argued that the tale hinges on a slippage "between the history and identities of the British and the Bretons...reflected in the ambiguity of the designations used to refer to both peoples in the Middle Ages."¹⁰¹ The two lands are "hardly differentiated;" the Tale begins in "Britayne," but Arveragus travels to "Engelond, that cleped was eek Briteyne" (V.810).¹⁰² Even though, as Kathryn Hume suggests, Breton lays as a genre reflect an "a-Christian ethic," the Tale's setting establishes a continuity with the same pre-Christian England that we see in the *Man of Law's Tale*, where England assumes Custance's own Roman whiteness. Like Custance Christianizes England, the Franklin litters his tale with Christian themes without compromising the Breton lay genre's insistence on "the standards of gentillesse" over "those of Christian morality."¹⁰³ Dorigen, Michael Wright argues, is "as close to the Christian position as possible

¹⁰⁰ Lynch, "East Meets West in Chaucer's *Squire's* and *Franklin's Tales*," 545.

¹⁰¹ Shannon Godlove, "'Engelond' and 'Armorik Britenye': Reading Brittany in Chaucer's *Franklin's Tale*," *The Chaucer Review* 51, no. 3 (2016): 284.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 272; Godlove further suggests that Chaucer, like his predecessors and contemporaries, would have understood Brittany as an extension of Britain— "however problematically from a modern perspective."

¹⁰³ Kathryn Hume, "Why Chaucer Calls the *Franklin's Tale* a Breton Lai," *Philological Quarterly* 51 (1972): 371.

for the good pagan.”¹⁰⁴ Her proto-Christian belief in a single, omnipotent “Eterne God” (V.865), when considered within the larger frame of the *Tales* both as a response to the Squire and as a contribution to the marriage debate, means that “the story may perhaps be weighed and judged by Christian standards”—including whiteness.¹⁰⁵

By associating the tale with a British past, the pilgrims should see something of their own British identity in the *Tale*. The Franklin employs the Breton lai’s literary capital to address “questions of *trouthe*, fidelity, patience, and *gentillesse*,” cultural paradigms of immediate relevance to the pilgrims.¹⁰⁶ The *Tale* marks these paradigms, moreover, as white, by associating them with an “aggressively native and Western” genre and setting in direct response to the Squire’s attempt to impose Western ideals and narrative structures on the East—an operation that “fails to exemplify dominant ideals.” Like Christianity then, *gentillesse*, the pre-Christian setting, and even the *lai* genre are all forms of affective whiteness—places and concepts structured by white feelings and norms. The Franklin’s job is to close the door on the East: his “entire narrative method...is as far from Eastern openness as imaginable; every topic raised is addressed, every problem by the end resolved”—including those caused by the *Squire’s Tale*.¹⁰⁷ The Franklin constructs a narrative of whiteness by linking narrative closure with the West and effectively marginalizing the Squire’s openness to and sympathy for the non-white. The whiteness of the Canterbury pilgrims is, in a sense, narrated by the *Franklin’s Tale* “by taking up narratives that become for them their actual history.”¹⁰⁸

Without anything linking the *Franklin’s Tale* to that of the Physician that follows it, we have no way to know if, as the Franklin wishes, that his tale “may plesen yow; / Thanne woot I wel that it is good ynow” (V.707-8). Chaucer also elected not to include the lively debate that follows the story in his Boccaccian source regarding who is the “mooste fre” (V.1622), so the pilgrims’ response likewise goes unrecorded. While it is impossible to know for certain how the pilgrims received the Franklin’s tale, it stands as a corrective to the Squire and successfully redirects the pilgrims’ focus back to the West and narratives that “contribute to hegemony by

¹⁰⁴ Michael J. Wright, “Isolation and Individuality in the *Franklin’s Tale*,” *Studia Neophilologica* 70, no. 2 (1998): 182.

¹⁰⁵ Hume, “Why Chaucer Calls the *Franklin’s Tale* a Breton Lai,” 379.

¹⁰⁶ Steele Nowlin, “Between Precedent and Possibility: Liminality, Historicity, and Narrative in Chaucer’s *The Franklin’s Tale*,” *Studies in Philology* 103, no. 1 (2006): 47.

¹⁰⁷ Lynch, “East Meets West in Chaucer’s *Squire’s* and *Franklin’s Tales*,” 549-50.

¹⁰⁸ Paul Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (University of Chicago Press, 1988), 247.

functioning as a means of social control instructing about what is expected and warning about the consequences of nonconformity [and] operating to sustain, rather than subvert, inequality and injustice.”¹⁰⁹ The remaining tales operate under a rubric of normative whiteness that reinforces whiteness as a marker of goodness, worth, and inclusion in the community.

Narrative Whiteness and Self-Esteem: Conclusions

The triumvirate of narrative, race, and social capital laid out above, I am arguing, functions as a metric against which membership and acceptance into the community of the Canterbury pilgrims is measured and serves also to define the pilgrims’ racial politics. The *Tales* that depict race do so through stereotype, presented under the guise of “objective knowledge”—the secretive, greedy, boy-sacrificing Jew; the unreasonable, barbarous, inhuman Muslim; and the strange, luxurious, and sexually and economically excessive Orient—translate racial others as “always subordinate.”¹¹⁰ The narratives circulated by the pilgrims are an attempt to define who they are by caricaturing who they are *not*. Recall that for Ricœur, “[t]elling a story...is deploying an imaginary space for thought experiments in which moral judgment operates in a hypothetical mode.” Both the use of racial stereotypes and the narrative positioning of racial alterity subordinate otherness to whiteness and its attendant Christianity. This subordination allows the pilgrims to sit in judgment of the other in and through narrative representation; it is the “intersubjective character of a moral evaluation of our lives.”¹¹¹ Narratives of race “ground and inform the ethical judgments” the pilgrims make in response to them and that response itself is an ethical action.¹¹² For Ricœur, all ethical action is aimed toward self-esteem: the evaluative

¹⁰⁹ Patricia Ewick and Susan Silbey, “Subversive Stories and Hegemonic Tales: Toward a Sociology of Narrative,” *Law & Society Review* 29, no. 2 (1995): 217.

¹¹⁰ Thomas and Smilie, “*Vitium Curiositatis* and Stereotypes in Chaucer’s *Squire’s Tale*,” 134. Thomas and Smilie further define the use of stereotypes in a way that influences the rest of this essay: “Through stereotypical representations, an individual can claim knowledge about the Other without direct experience, cloaked in an air of neutrality, rationalism, and objectivity. Of course, the stereotype is a type of fragmented, partial, and false knowledge. In actuality, the stereotype presents a gross generalization, a dangerous shortcut to knowledge of the Other that devalues personal experience, complexity, and individuality in favour of subjective assumptions framed as doxa. In other words, the stereotype is an expression of *vitium curiositatis*: the subject assumes that complete (and neutral) knowledge can be known and in doing so develops a false sense of pride” (134).

¹¹¹ Malgorzata Holda, “The Demand of the Other in Paul Ricœur’s Philosophical Hermeneutics,” *Logos i ethos* 44 (2017): 73.

¹¹² Judith Butler, “Against Ethical Violence,” in *Giving an Account of Oneself* (Fordham University Press, 2005), 45; cf. Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 170.

judgment of one's worth as a self.¹¹³ Importantly, this judgment is not based on accomplishments, but on *ability*: "I am that being who can evaluate his actions and, in assessing the goals of some of them to be good, is capable of evaluating himself and of judging himself to be good."¹¹⁴ Self-esteem requires the mediation of the other in relation to whom actions are judged to be good. Within the context of the tales, the other is represented in and as narrative. The exchange of narrative and the response they generate recalls Ricœur's conception of self-esteem as "the reflexive movement through which the evaluation of certain actions are judged to be good are carried back to the author of those actions."¹¹⁵ A pilgrim's individual racist narrative is judged as good, and that judgment is reflected back upon the tale teller and the larger assembly. The pilgrims' responses to the Prioress's, Man of Law's, and Squire's tales participate in their racism and are effectively acts of self-definition and self-interpretation. The moral judgment of the racial other as subordinate leads to an act of self-esteem: we are worthy because they are not.¹¹⁶ The pilgrims create narrative identities for other races on the basis of stereotype and with the intention not of ethical representation but of maintaining and rearticulating their own whiteness.

¹¹³ Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 171.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 181.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 172.

¹¹⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, 179.

CHAPTER 3: RECOGNITION: TALKING ANIMALS, NONHUMAN OTHERS, AND THE NATURALNESS OF CARE

In the *Squire's Tale*, Canacee's "routhe" (V.438), "compassion" (V.463), and "sorwe" (V.632) for the falcon's physical and emotional injury inspires Canacee to bring the falcon home where she builds a "mewe" (V.643)—a cage or a pen, imagery that recurs throughout Chaucer's poetry.¹ In the *Miller's* and *Monk's Tales*, Alisoun and Ugolino's children are described as being kept in cages (I.3224, VII.2413-2414); Criseyde is imagined "As fressh as faukoun comen out of muwe" (*Tr*, III, 1784) and refuses to "ben hid in muwe" (*Tr*, IV, 1310) in the Greek camp; the *Squire's* and *Manciple's Tales* include the Boethian-inspired metaphor of the caged bird (V.610-620, IX.163-174):

And the janglynge brid that syngeth on the heghe braunches (that is to seyn, in the wode), and after is enclosed in a streyte cage, althoughe that the pleyinge bysynes of men yeveth [hym] honyed drynkes and large metes with swete studye, yit natheles yif thilke bryd skippynge out of hir streyte cage seith the agreables schadwes of the wodes, sche defouleth with hir feet hir metes ischad, and seketh mornynge oonly the wode, and twytereth desyrynge the wode with hir swete voys. (Boece 3, metrum 2, 21-31)²

This, Lady Philosophy says, is simply the law of nature: A bird—no matter how gilt its cage, no matter how carefully it is tended—will always seek to return to the woods, where it belongs. To thus cage a bird is to violate nature; certainly, Chaucer's use of caging, which he often associates with entrapment, bears this out—particularly as it relates to human beings (Alisoun, Ugolino's children, and Criseyde). The extended use of Boethius's metaphor in texts that depict the human and nonhuman in relation necessarily colors the way we understand the relationship between the caged animal and the human cager. However, in poems where birds not only "twytereth...with hir swete voys" but also speak, the self-attestation that language provides posits a unique relationship between the human and the nonhuman and invites us to reconsider the power

¹ *Middle English Dictionary*, s.v. "meu(e)," 1(a) a place where hawks are put to molt; a cage or coop; 3(a) a place of security or confinement; hiding place, shelter; cage, prison (accessed 11 March 2021, http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MD27618/track?counter=4&search_id=5975442). All references to Chaucer's texts will be to *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd edition, ed. Larry D. Benson (Houghton Mifflin, 1987). Individual works will be cited parenthetically in the text.. The *Canterbury Tales* will be cited in accordance with the fragment numbers provided by the *Riverside Chaucer*. Other works will follow the *Riverside's* lineation. Where more than one set of line numbers is offered, I will note which set of line numbers I am following.

² Cf. Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*, Book III, Meter 2 (trans. Joel C. Relihan (Hackett Publishing Company, 2001)).

dynamic inherent in the caged bird metaphor. So as the Squire leaves “Canacee hir hauk kepyng” (V.651), what exactly is she doing? Is she “keeping” the bird in an albeit cushy, fabric-covered prison, or directing her attention to nurturing the falcon and looking after its well-being?³ Instead of a demonstration of power that cages animals with no regard for the animal itself, its needs, and desires, this chapter argues that Chaucer’s poetry reframes what is “natural”: mutually vulnerable, caring relationships that respond to, rather than deny, the needs of the other.

Chaucer’s talking animal poetry represents a genuine attempt to represent the subjectivity of a nonhuman other. This subjectivity, I will argue, is, like human subjectivity, constructed through narrative. But rather than mere anthropomorphism, when Chaucer represents animals as talking with human speech, his poetry becomes an attempt to understand what the animal other does, feels, thinks, and is making available to us. What we discover is not an “asymmetric relation...framed by power relations biased in favor of human access to the bodies of animal others,” but instead an “ethic of care [that] regards animals as individuals...to whom therefore we have moral obligations.”⁴ As Ricœur would suggest, the narrative positioning of these selves-in-relation is wrought through an acknowledgment of shared suffering, of fellow-feeling, solicitude, and friendship. This relationship positions care as an essential element of nature and the place of humans within it. Caring, which involves the understanding of and response to the other’s needs and the context of them, is facilitated by language use—it is dependent on “the willingness and ability to facilitate, mirror, interpret and understand the words and narratives of the other.”⁵ Thus when Canacee responds to the falcon’s plight with the “mewe,” it is not an entrapment, but instead a carefully-designed gesture of hospitality and friendship. Likewise, the *Parliament of Fowls* is a narrativization of care in nature; the goddess Nature’s extended timetable for the formel’s selection of a mate is a decision based in care. Even the birds who relay Mars’s story in the *Complaint of Mars* do so in solidarity and to express care for others in nature. Each of these texts show human and nonhuman animals acting “in connection with others and...careful rather than careless about [others’] feelings and thoughts, empathetic and attentive

³ *Middle English Dictionary*, s.v. “keping(e),” 3, the guarding of a prisoner or confined animal; confinement, imprisonment; or 7(a), the taking care of somebody by direct personal attention; child care, nurture; medical treatment or nursing of a patient (accessed 11 March 2021, http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED24175/track&counter=1&search_id=5975478).

⁴ Rosi Braidotti, “Animals, Anomalies, and Inorganic Others,” *PMLA* 124, no. 2 (2009): 526. Josephine Donovan and Carol Adams, “Introduction,” in *The Feminist Care Tradition in Animal Ethics: A Reader*, ed. Josephine Donovan and Carol Adams (Columbia University Press, 2007), 2-3.

⁵ Jens Erik Paulsen, “A Narrative Ethics of Care,” *Health Care Analysis* 19 (2011): 39-40.

to their lives.”⁶ Narrative structures this relationship as both a form of identity and as an expression of care.

Metaphor and the Possibility of Nonhuman Subjectivity

Across Chaucer’s talking animal poetry, the *Squire’s*, *Manciple’s*, and *Nun’s Priest’s Tales*, the *Parliament of Fowls*, the *House of Fame*, and the *Complaint of Mars*, the human and nonhuman exist in three forms of relationality: *interspecies* (human and nonhuman animal); *intraspecies* (nonhuman and nonhuman); and what I’m calling *monospecies* (an individual animal subject). By imbuing avian characters with human English language, Chaucer amplifies the possibility of an avian subjectivity and forces us to confront what Jacques Derrida, in his highly influential exploration of animal subjectivity *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, calls the “abyssal limit of the human.”⁷ It is at this limit that the intersubjectivity of humans and nonhumans reveals itself. Although the birds often act in ways that are impossible for their species, their responses disclose a subjectivity that demands to be taken seriously by the human other. In the words of Lesley Kordecki, “[w]e have for centuries traced how animals represent humans in texts...What we are now probing is how the alterity of the animal is not entirely suppressed.”⁸ Rather than an imposition of human realities onto the natural world, avian narrative identity forces us to ask *who* this animal other is, and in what kinds of relationships do they exist? I am suggesting that Chaucer’s talking birds—birds who talk, dream, tell stories, quack, argue, sing, laugh, cry, and wear hats—are an honest attempt at representing the animal other, an attempt to “think with animals” in an “act of complete empathy.”⁹

Remember that for Ricœur, the ability to say “I”—which immediately supposes a “you”—imbricates the self and the other in a mutually affirming, defining, and esteeming role, in which both parties are aiming at a good life with and for others. But what kind of selfhood can a talking animal possess? The answer would seem to be none. Philosophy has long denied animals

⁶ Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women’s Development* (Harvard University Press, 1993), xiii.

⁷ Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, ed. Marie-Luise Mallet (Fordham University Press, 2008), 12.

⁸ Lesley Kordecki, “Introduction: Avian Subjectivity, Genre, and Feminism,” in *Ecofeminist Subjectivities: Chaucer’s Talking Birds* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 1.

⁹ Lorraine Datson and Gregg Mitman, “Introduction: The How and Why of Thinking with Animals,” in *Thinking with Animals: New Perspectives on Anthropomorphism*, ed. Lorraine Datson and Gregg Mitman (Columbia University Press, 2006), 7; cf. Michael Warren, “‘Kek kek’: Translating Birds in Chaucer’s *Parliament of Fowls*,” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 38 (2016): 112.

a subject-position, insisting that they lack the capacity for recognition, to differentiate between “I” and “you,” a faculty provided by reason.¹⁰ In the *Summa Theologiae*, Thomas Aquinas writes, “irrational creatures can have no share in human life, which of its nature is rational” and thus concludes “no friendship is possible” except through metaphor.¹¹ Even Ricœur suggests that it is humanity’s ability to reason using language that distinguishes us from animal existence: humans “understand what action and passion are through our competence to use in a meaningful way the entire network of expressions and concepts that are offered to us by natural languages...”¹² Nonhuman animals lack this competence just as they lack recognition; to represent animals in such a way that allows them to speak or otherwise use human reason is necessarily to metaphorize the nonhuman and human/nonhuman relationships.

This metaphor, anthropomorphism, is an innate tendency of the human mind.¹³ And while anthropomorphism may promote animal welfare, it also has an altogether more pernicious side effect: anthropocentrism.¹⁴ Like the caged bird metaphor, anthropomorphism constrains nonhuman representation by erasing its own perspective, desires, and agency. Just as Aquinas emphasized the *utilitatem hominum* of animals, anthropocentrism regards anthropomorphism as about humans—“not as creatures themselves but as types illustrative of humanity.”¹⁵ In this mode of thinking, the Squire’s falcon is a swooning maiden whose lament parodies courtly love and the “newefangelnesse” of men (V.610); the bird parliament is a commentary on free will and the public good, or a political allegory, or a similarly anthropocentric concern; the Manciple’s crow is a lesson to “Kepe wel thy tonge” (IX.362); and so on, throughout Chaucer’s animal poetry (and animals in medieval poetry more broadly). In each case, what animals mean is more important than the animals themselves. But the talking-animal trope is potentially subversive in an equally anthropocentric way. David Scott-Macnab suggests that imaginative depictions of

¹⁰ Martin Heidegger, for example, says that a “mere animal can never confront anything to its face; to do so, the animal would have to recognize *itself*” (*What is Called Thinking*, trans. J. Glenn Gray (Harper and Row, 1968), 61).

¹¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 2-2ae, q. 25, a. 3 co.; *Creaturae autem irrationales non possunt communicationem habere in vita humana, quae est secundum rationem. Unde nulla amicitia potest haberi ad creaturas irrationales, nisi forte secundum metaphoram*. Aquinas further states that the relationship between humans and nonhumans limited to their conservation *ad honorem dei et utilitatem hominum*—for God’s honor and human use. (Corpus Thomisticum, accessed 11 March 2021, <https://www.corpusthomisticum.org/sth3025.html>).

¹² Paul Ricœur, “Life in Quest of Narrative,” in *On Paul Ricœur: Narrative and Interpretation*, ed. David Wood (Routledge, 1991), 28.

¹³ See Cary Wolfe, “Language, Representation, and Species: Cognitive Science versus Deconstruction,” in *What is Posthumanism?* (University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

¹⁴ See, for example, Max Butterfield, Sarah Hill, and Charles Lord, “Mangy mutt or furry friend? Anthropomorphism promotes animal welfare,” *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 48, no. 4 (2014).

¹⁵ Beryl Rowland, *Blind Beasts: Chaucer’s Animal World* (Kent State University Press, 1971), 17.

animals of the hunt—such as talking rabbits or deer—would question and upend the medieval ideological framework of human-animal relations as rooted in the use of and violence toward animals.¹⁶ To depict animals traditionally regarded as something to be used, as they are in the hunt, with faculties that resemble the human either inspires a paradoxical sympathy for the nonhuman or comes dangerously close to aligning the human with irrationality and use.

Such anthropomorphic metaphors and allegories subordinate the vehicle to the tenor in order to address anthropocentric concerns, but the goal of ecocriticism is ultimately to “decenter human frames of reference.”¹⁷ Ecocritical readings of animal literature thus require a different approach to metaphor that resists the easy tendency toward anthropocentrism and has the power to decenter the human. Ricœur’s view of metaphor offers one such approach. For Ricœur, metaphor is that which adds to the way we perceive the world by opening up potential realities that do not coincide with what is defined by ordinary (non-metaphoric) language as natural. Metaphoric statements form a network of metaphors; this network does not attempt to reproduce reality but instead create what Ricœur calls “the world of the work”, “a proposed world” that “redefines reality.”¹⁸ “Is it not the function of poetry,” asks Ricœur, “to establish another world—another world that corresponds to other possibilities of existence...?”¹⁹ As Peter Travis has demonstrated, Chaucer’s poetics of metaphor argues for metaphor as the “absolute category within which we construct reality, poetry, and ourselves.”²⁰ Moreover, in his discussion of Chauntecleer in the *Nun’s Priest’s Tale*, Travis suggests that Chaucer’s metaphors expose “the friction and dissonance among ontological models”—in this case, human and non-human animal.²¹ With this Ricœur would agree, as metaphor in Ricœur’s thought is disclosive of the tension between reality and imagination (Ricœur describes his as a “tension theory” of metaphor). Because the final referent of a metaphor is the impact it has on the reader, and because all metaphor must be interpreted (as a context-dependent event), Ricœur requires that readers of

¹⁶ David Scott-Macnab, “The Animals of the Hunt and the Limits of Chaucer’s Sympathies,” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 34 (2012). For the significance of violence in human/animal relationships, see Karl Steel, *How to Make a Human: Animals and Violence in the Middle Ages* (Ohio State University Press, 2011).

¹⁷ Markku Lehtimäki, “Natural Environments in Narrative Contexts: Cross-Pollinating Ecocriticism and Narrative Theory,” *Storyworlds: A Journal of Narrative Studies* 5 (2013): 120.

¹⁸ Paul Ricœur, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multidisciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language*, trans. Robert Czerny (University of Toronto Press, 1977), 243-47.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 229.

²⁰ Peter Travis, “Chaucer’s Heliotropes and the Poetics of Metaphor,” in *Disseminal Chaucer: Rereading the Nun’s Priest’s Tale* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2009) 199.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 182.

poetry suspend reality and approach a text with an “active openness.” The tension lies not in reality’s suspension, but in the fact that what is disclosed through the metaphor may not coincide with natural reality.²² With regard to Chaucer’s animal texts, the “world of the text” is one in which animals can talk; if we suspend all notions and expectations of “natural reality” and approach with “active openness” we allow the animals to speak for and as themselves. In such a mode of reading, the metaphor does not take precedence over the representation of actual nonhuman animals.

With a wider view of metaphor, when an animal says “I,” it designates itself, attests to its possession of self; the personal pronoun is what Ricœur calls “auto-designative,” only possessing meaning insofar as it refers to the subject speaking it.²³ This capacity for self-definition through language has been understood historically as a fundamentally *human* characteristic. In regard to the subjective status of the animal, Descartes, Kant, Heidegger, Levinas, and Lacan all maintain that the animal is deprived of language, “the single being that remains without a response, and without a word with which to respond” except, says Lacan, “by means of a projection or anthropomorphic transference.”²⁴ But, says Derrida:

if one defines language in such a way that it is reserved for man, what is there to say? But if one reinscribes language in a network of possibilities that do not merely encompass it but mark it irreducibly from the inside, everything changes. I am thinking in particular of the mark in general, of the trace, of iterability, of *différance*. These possibilities or necessities, without which there would be no language, are themselves not only human.²⁵

If there is no one thing that can be called language, then we are forced to take into account what biologists consider “animal languages”—and as a consequence, there would be no one thing of which animals are deprived, no one thing that separates human from nonhuman animals. By regarding humans and nonhumans not as discrete categories but rather “aspects of an enmeshed existence...we are bound to take into account the perspectives, priorities, needs, and damages of the nonhuman world, and to acknowledge them as our own.”²⁶ In a similar fashion, Michael

²² Ricœur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 210.

²³ Ricœur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 75.

²⁴ Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, trans. Alan Sheridan (Norton, 1977), 305, quoted in Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 129. This echoes Aquinas’s argument that the human/non-human relationship is governed by metaphor.

²⁵ Jacques Derrida, “‘Eating Well,’ or the Calculation of the Subject: An Interview with Jacques Derrida,” in *Who Comes After the Subject?*, ed. Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor, and Jean-Luc Nancy (Routledge, 1991), 116.

²⁶ Miranda Griffin, “‘Unusual Greeness’: Approaching Medievalist Ecomaterialism,” *Exemplaria* 30, no. 2 (2018): 176.

Warren introduces the concept of biotranslation for thinking about the relationship between allegory or metaphor and authentic representation of the nonhuman in Chaucer's texts, calling allegory a potentially positive form of "speaking otherwise" that allows us to "imagine, to 'translate' other ways of seeing...a speculative 'biotranslation.'"²⁷ Just as biotranslation acknowledges nonhuman subjectivity by embracing allegory's potential, the theory of metaphor I have been outlining is a similarly disclosive way of seeing and representing the nonhuman.

Recognition, Care, and Narrative Identity

When we accept, as Derrida does and as I am suggesting Chaucer does, that an animal "can look at me [and have] a point of view regarding me," we are confronted with a form of mutual recognition.²⁸ That "look" is encoded in texts through the ability to speak and present a narrative of oneself which is then heard, interpreted, and to which others respond. Language use erases one of the primary bases upon which the human tries to distinguish itself from the animal and facilitates recognition which, for Ricœur, is rooted in language and narrative, and has a distinct ethical imperative.²⁹ Recognition binds two subjects together in a reciprocal relationship that esteems the worth of the other; central to this concept of recognition is to be able to identify and identify with the other, which narrative facilitates. Ricœur's philosophy and ethics of recognition intersects with care ethics because of the importance both place on relationality, responsibility, and response. Though care ethics, developed by Carol Gilligan within the context of feminist theory, is broadly conceived as an alternative to an ethics of justice—a concept of great import to Ricœur—the tradition shares with Ricœur's thought the idea that the self "becomes a 'self' through relations with others."³⁰ Moreover, "the relational ontology of care ethics claims that relations of interdependence and dependence are a fundamental feature of our existence."³¹ We are reminded here of Ricœur's ethical perspective that all life aims at "living a

²⁷ Warren, "Translating Birds in Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls*," 132. Warren adopts the term from the work of Kalevi Kull and Peter Torop ("Biotranslation: Translation between *Umwelten*," in *Translation Translation*, ed. Susan Petrilli (Rodopi, 2003).

²⁸ Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 11.

²⁹ Steel, *How to Make a Human*, 21.

³⁰ Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*; Susan Hekman, *Moral Voices, Moral Selves: Carol Gilligan and Feminist Moral Theory* (Polity Press, 1995), 73.

³¹ Fiona Robinson, "Introduction," in *The Ethics of Care: A Feminist Approach to Human Society* (Temple University Press, 2011), 4. Care, as mentioned, grew out of feminist theory and is in many ways loaded with gendered expectations. Though I am not making any explicitly gendered arguments here, it is worth noting that two

good life, *with and for others*, in just institutions” [emphasis mine].³² In Ricœur’s formulation, individuals are wholly reliant on one another both to maintain a sense of self and to evaluate the relative “goodness” of our selves, actions, and lives.³³ This theory of ethics as mutually vulnerable, rooted in an indebtedness to one another, has its roots in the Golden Rule and gives rise to the possibility of friendship and justice. Central to Ricœur’s ethic is how individuals relate to one another in a way that is inclusive of and defined by key concepts such as solicitude, friendship, and reciprocity. The way to enact Ricœur’s ethical principle, one could say, is to care about one another.

So in Chaucer, when animals speak, they are heard, they are listened to, and their language use enables a mutual understanding and establishes a relationship. This, of course, takes place on a metaphorical level that results from the kind of metaphor described by Ricœur in *The Rule of Metaphor*—one that demands we approach it with a suspension of reality that is then redefined by the metaphor, and that we are open to the possibility that what is disclosed does not coincide with our “natural reality.”³⁴ This suspension and disclosure of reality is crucial to how we read Chaucer’s talking animals because it allows us to ask and answer the question, “who?” This is a question that Derrida failed to ask in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*. Derrida acknowledges that animals can look back at and possess a point of view regarding the human.³⁵ But he fails to interrogate what that look back actually entails. Donna Haraway levels this criticism at Derrida, suggesting that “he missed a possible invitation, a possible introduction to other-worlding.”³⁶ While Derrida does not dive into the perspective of his cat, Chaucer embraces the look back of the animal other and represents it through poetry in a way that does not erase the animal. This look back is articulated through narrative in a variety of forms: either as a narrative

of the examples I have chosen strongly feature female characters: Canacee and the formel in the *Squire’s Tale* and Nature and the formel in the *Parliament of Fowls* (the narrator of the *Complaint of Mars* is ungendered). In critical animal studies’ adoption of an ethics of care, there is a strong indebtedness to feminist theory and its subjectification of the object. While feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray asks, “But what if the ‘object’ started to speak?” (*Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian Gill (Cornell University Press, 1985), 135), this chapter is asking what happens when the animal starts to speak.

³² Paul Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (University of Chicago Press, 1995), 172.

³³ Ricœur calls this evaluation self-esteem, “the interpretation of ourselves mediated by the ethical evaluation of our actions.” (Paul Ricœur, “Humans as the Subject Matter of Philosophy, in *The Narrative Path: The Later Works of Paul Ricœur*, ed. Peter Kemp and David M. Rasmussen (MIT Press, 1989), 99).

³⁴ Kordecki approaches this idea when she suggests that “tales with talking birds leave realism behind and embrace fantasy, a mode that opens the world up to conjecture” (“Introduction,” 12). What distinguishes metaphor is its power, quite literally for Ricœur, to *redefine* reality through its ultimate end referent—the reader.

³⁵ Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 11.

³⁶ Donna Haraway, “When Species Meet: Introductions,” in *When Species Meet* (University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 20.

told by individual animals through which they constitute and understand their own narrative identity, or as a narrativized intersubjective relationship between humans and nonhumans. The ideological framework that Ricœur's theory of narrative identity supports shares with Derrida an interest in the suffering of the other; however, the end is not "the finitude we share with animals" but a life lived "with and for others"—shifting the commonality between humans and nonhumans from death to compassion, from the morbidity of suffering to solidarity and friendship through it.³⁷

Even so, one of the major concerns of ecocriticism is whether human language can do anything but anthropomorphize nature. It would seem, on the surface, that a narrative identity of a nonhuman animal would feed into an anthropomorphic understanding of nature. After all, ecocriticism works to "decenter human frames of reference" and narrative is profoundly human.³⁸ But Meir Sternberg argues for the naturalness of narrativity "grounded in the ongoing survival value of observing, plotting, telling, foretelling, inferring event lines."³⁹ Narrative has the potential to open up a new relationship between the natural world and ways of being in it. In particular, the narratives used by nonhumans to represent themselves and foster identification and recognition provide a touchstone for thinking about the reality of nonhuman lives. To present the nonhuman using narrative and possessing a narrative identity, narrative itself becomes an ecocritical meditation on the relationship between the human and the nonhuman. Likewise, in her essay in *The Politics of Ecology*, Kathleen Coyne Kelly suggests that narrative "is a process that can contribute to attaining an ethical and enmeshed understanding of the natural world and our place within it."⁴⁰ Ricœur also argues that "[t]elling a story...is deploying an imaginary space for thought experiments in which judgment operates in a hypothetical mode."⁴¹ Narrative is a technique, then, for attempting an honest representation of nonhuman others. By attributing to the nonhuman a form of narrative identity, narrative situates the human and nonhuman in a relationship "rich in anticipations of an ethical nature." It is on this basis (in combination with the theory of metaphor already discussed) that Ricœur lets us consider animals in terms of *who* instead of *what* and reclassifies the status of animals from use to relationship.

³⁷ Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 28; cf. Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 172.

³⁸ Lehtimäki, "Natural Environments in Narrative Contexts," 120.

³⁹ Meir Sternberg, "Narrativity: From Objectivist to Functional Paradigm," *Poetics Today* 31, no. 3 (2010): 646.

⁴⁰ Kathleen Coyne Kelly, "Lost Geographies, Remembrance, and The Awntyers off Arthure," in *The Politics of Ecology: Land, Life, and Law in Medieval Britain*, ed. Randy Schiff and Joseph Taylor (Ohio State University Press, 2016), 237.

⁴¹ Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 170.

This relationship, articulated through narratives of acting and suffering, incorporates care as the ethical response to the suffering of the other.

The Goddess Nature and the Law of Care in the *Parliament of Fowls*

The relationship between the dream framework of the *Parliament of Fowls* and the dream proper is rife with contradictions. The narrator equates Cicero's *Dreme of Scipioun* with "olde bokes" (PF, 24) out of which "cometh al this newe science that men lere" (PF, 25). But the narrator self-identifies as seeking stories of Love's "myrakles and his crewel yre" (PF, 11) and Cicero's *De re publica* is, at best, a curious choice for such information.⁴² It is no wonder that his reading leaves the narrator frustrated, "For bothe I hadde thyng which that I nolde, / And ek I ne hadde that thyng that I wolde" (PF, 90-91). Rather than anything concerning Love, the narrator's "bok" (PF, 29) tells of love of country and family and the common good. In the *Dreme*, "commune profyt" is how one gets to heaven; it defines the place of humanity on "the lytel erthe that here is" (PF, 57). For Cicero, this meant civil service, political participation, and justice: Scipio the Elder tells Africanus to "cultivate justice and a sense of duty, which while great toward parents and neighbors, is especially best toward your country."⁴³ And while there does seem to be some consensus that an interest in "commune profyt" is part of the thread that ties the dream and its frame together, the bird parliament has seemingly little to do with Roman politics.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, when the dreamer falls asleep "Fulfyld of thought" (PF, 89), the same

⁴² *De re publica* was almost entirely lost to the Middle Ages except the *Somnium Scipionis*, which was preserved alongside a commentary by Macrobius. It must be noted that while the *Somnium* was only available through Macrobius, here Chaucer does not reference Macrobius or his commentary. Rather, the *Dreme of Scipioun* is present in the poem only as Cicero's work. As such, I will follow the narrator and refer to the *Dreme of Scipioun* in terms of its explicitly identified Ciceronian authorship. The *Somnium*, we know, concludes Book VI of Cicero's work, which is a political history and dialogue about forms of government and the role of citizens in it, emphasizing love of country and civic duty. How extensive Chaucer's knowledge of Cicero was is unclear, but he or the *Somnium* are mentioned overtly in three of Chaucer's poems, including the *Parliament* (the other two are the *Book of the Duchess*, where Chaucer seems to confuse Macrobius for the author of the *Somnium*, and the *House of Fame*). This tangle of authorship and influence will return in the next chapter. For more on the relationship between Cicero, the *Somnium*, and Chaucer, see Timothy Shonk, "'For I Hadde Red of Affrycan Byforn': Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis* and Chaucer's Early Dream Visions," in *Cicero Refused to Die: Ciceronian Influence through the Centuries*, ed. Nancy van Deusen (Brill, 2014).

⁴³ *iustitiam cole et pietatem, quae cum magna in parentibus et propinquis, tum in patria maxima est* (translation mine) (Cicero, *De Re Publica, Liber Sextus*, The Latin Library, accessed 11 March 2021, <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/cicero/repub6.shtml>).

⁴⁴ See, for example, Sarah Powrie, "Knowing and Willing in Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls*," *The Chaucer Review* 50, no. 3-4 (2015); Ken Hanssen, "'Kek kek! kokkow! quek quek!': The Glorious Cacophony of Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls*," *The Chaucer Review* 55, no. 1 (2020); David Aers, "The *Parliament of Fowls*: Authority, the

Africanus he was reading about before appears to him in a dream and promises “That sumdel of thy labour wolde I quyte” (*PF*, 112). The bird parliament that follows is a reward for or response to the narrator’s earlier reading. But rather than looking down from the eighth sphere, Africanus guides the dreamer on the “lytel erthe” into nature’s midst, where “commune profyt” is governed not by justice or patriotism but by Nature herself.

The dream uses the idea of the goddess Nature presiding over material creation in the bird parliament as a narrative representation of nature and the natural. In many ways, Chaucer’s depiction of the personified goddess relies on the literary tradition associated with *Natura*.⁴⁵ Chaucer’s indebtedness to this tradition manifests itself in his representation of *Natura* both as the purveyor of sexual desire and an instrument of divine love.⁴⁶ The idea that Nature is the *vicaria Dei*, maintaining the order of creation by directing sexual reproduction, empowers Nature as a moral force setting the norms for human behavior.⁴⁷ This role of Nature receives its fullest treatment from the twelfth century on, most notably in Alan de Lille’s *De planctu Naturae*—one of only two texts mentioned by name in the *Parliament of Fowls* (the other being Cicero’s *Dreme of Scipioun*). As Rebecca Davis notes, however, the *Parliament of Fowls* is a “self-consciously intertextual composite” that “allusively gestures toward a number of additional sources that give shape to the narrator’s vision of the garden and its inhabitants.”⁴⁸ One such source is Jean de Meun’s *Roman de la Rose*, whose Nature marks a transition from a divinized partner in creation toward a more secular figure more closely aligned with Venus. Chaucer manages and participates in this secularization of Nature by foregrounding Nature’s concern for relationships between creatures. This, Davis argues, aligns Chaucer with de Meun and the position that sees Nature and Venus coincide. Moreover, Davis understands the Ciceronian frame as working to support an earthly, secularized Nature by situating “commoun profyt” within the

Knower, and the Known,” *The Chaucer Review* 16, no. 1 (1981). For more on the role of parliament in Chaucer, see Matthew Giancarlo, “‘Oure is the voys’: Chaucer’s parliaments and the mediation of community,” in *Parliament and Literature in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge University Press, 2007).

⁴⁵ For a more complete discussion of the *Natura* tradition, I direct readers to Rebecca Davis’s *Piers Plowman and the Books of Nature* (Oxford University Press, 2016). Davis offers a thorough diachronic overview of the development of this tradition from its classical antecedents in Macrobius, Statius, and Boethius through the twelfth-century *Cosmographia* and *De planctu Naturae*, and into *Natura*’s thirteenth and fourteenth-century depictions in Jean de Meun and Chaucer. While Davis’s ultimate argument is pointed toward *Piers Plowman*, she argues for a textual through-line that sees the development of the *Natura* tradition as inherently textual.

⁴⁶ Davis ascribes these developments in the tradition to Macrobius and Boethius, respectively. (*Piers Plowman and the Book of Nature*, 41, 43).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 76, 80.

bounds of the sensual pleasures of the “litel erthe.” I am arguing, however, for the inverse: by placing “commoun profyt” firmly on the ground of our “litel erthe” overseen by Nature models her behavior as part of “commoun profyt.”

Throughout the *Parliament of Fowls*, nature and Nature are both associated with literary production.⁴⁹ Africanus promises to “shewe mater of to wryte” (PF, 168) and brings the dreamer into a garden where he observes Cupid in all his array and Venus in her temple decorated with great and tragic love stories. He does not linger; the dreamer is well read on the subject of love. With nothing new to learn, he returns instead to the garden and continues his tour. The dreamer abandons the comfort of familiar human narratives and turns to nature for “newe science.” Away from the hedonistic extravagance of Venus, the dreamer finds solace in *nature* and is startled by the appearance of *Nature*:

Forth welk I tho myselven to solace.

Tho was I war wher that ther sat a queene

.....

Was set this noble goddesse Nature. (PF, 297-303)

With the appearance of the goddess, the human falls away almost entirely; Africanus has disappeared, and the dreamer will soon take a back seat as a passive observer, all but forgotten except for the occasional exposition (“With hed enclyned and with humble cheere” (PF, 414) or “The laughter aros of gentil foules alle,” (PF, 575) for example). What remains, however, is the idea that literature has the ability to attest to truth about nature and the place of humans within it. The dreamer situates the goddess within a literary tradition: “And right as Aleyn, in the Pleynt of Kynde, / Devyseth Nature of aray and face, / In swich aray men myghte hire there fynde” (PF,

⁴⁹ The *Natura* tradition is underwritten with themes of literature, textuality, and hermeneutics in its use of Nature’s garments, which contain metaphorical images and signs that need to be interpreted (much like texts). According to Jon Whitman, “By correlating the trappings of literary works with the trappings of the natural world...[the *Natura* tradition] associates the nature of textuality with the texture of nature itself.” (Jon Whitman, “Twelfth-Century Allegory: Philosophy and Imagination,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Allegory*, ed. Rita Copeland and Peter Struck (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 105). While this typically manifests itself in the use of “textual metaphors to describe the creation of the universe and the perpetuation of its order” (Davis, Piers Plowman and the Book of Nature, 42), in the case of the *Parliament of Fowls* Nature herself becomes a narrative. Indeed, as Rebecca Davis presents Maureen Quilligan’s argument, “Natura’s ekphrastic robe becomes a ‘three-dimensional’ scene, a textual image...becomes a literalized text.” (Quilligan, “Allegory, Allegoresis, and the De-allegorization of Language: The Roman de la Rose, the De planctu naturae, and the Parlement of Foules,” in *Allegory, Symbol, and Myth*, ed. Morton Bloomfield (Harvard University Press, 1981), 176, qtd. in Davis, Piers Plowman and the Book of Nature, 78).

316-317). The “mater of to wryte” that Africanus promises to show the dreamer is not one of romantic love; the dreamer does not linger over Venus’s temple and the great love stories contained within it, nor is he Love’s servant—he “of love has lost thy tast” (*PF*, 160). Instead, the dreamer observes an act of Nature’s loving care both in the governance of the parliament as a whole and in honoring the formel’s request. The dream returns man to nature and redefines the human position within it.⁵⁰ The dreamer experiences the nonhuman animals he encounters as individuals with “particular identities and personal experiences,” with Nature as a guide for how to behave toward them—with care.

The selection of mates at the bird parliament is convened by Nature according to her “statut and thorgh my governaunce” (*PF*, 387). As the “ryghtful” (*PF*, 390) overseer of natural processes, Nature’s responsibility as “the vicaire of the almyghty Lord” (*PF*, 379) is to take care of creation. She reminds the assembled birds that “for youre ese in fortheryng of youre nede, / As faste as I may speke, I wol yow speede” (*PF*, 384-85). Nature equates her ordering of the natural world with the “ese” and “nede” of the birds before her and sets boundaries for own involvement in their right to choose: first, the selection process begins with “he that most is worthi” (*PF*, 392), and second, “that she agre to his eleccioun, / Whoso he be that shulde be hire feere” (*PF*, 409-410). Nature’s oversight ensures that a natural hierarchy is maintained and that the female consents to the match. While the former condition mirrors natural behaviors that would have been observable by the dreamer in his waking state and reflects medieval ideology concerning birds and the practice of falconry, the alignment of nature and consent is seemingly the dreamer’s own interpretation of nature.⁵¹ Nature’s concern for consent imputes to nature a concern for potential imbalances of power, vulnerability, and equality that undergird the natural hierarchy of gender and rank or status with which Nature’s speech begins. Nature acknowledges her responsibility to those she oversees and anticipates their potential harm by empowering the

⁵⁰ Hanssen, “The Glorious Cacophony of Chaucer’s Parliament of Fowls,” 82.

⁵¹ In particular, the *Book of St. Albans* (Harley MS 2340) includes an imaginative hierarchy of birds and owners (f. 50r). For more on medieval falconry and hawking, see Rachel Hands, *English Hawking and Hunting in ‘The Boke of St. Albans’: A Facsimile Edition of Sigs A2-f8 of ‘The Boke of St Albans’* (1486) (Oxford University Press, 1975) and Robin Oggins, *The Kings and Their Hawks: Falconry in Medieval England* (Yale University Press, 2004). George Economou argues that the connection between consent and nature is an extension of Alan de Lille’s Nature, who limits sexuality and procreation to the confines of heterosexual marriage; in this context, the bird parliament’s mating process is an allegory for the institution of marriage within which Nature’s function is that of *Natura pronuba*, arranger of weddings (*The Goddess Natura in Medieval Literature* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), 143).

female birds under her care. In so doing, Nature is not an impartial upholder of justice but rather responsive to the individual needs of creation.

Each tercel presents their suit, creating and presenting a narrative of their life and their devotion to be chosen by the formel. Invoking a distinct political ethos, Sarah Powrie argues that the parliament convened to hear the formel's choice steeps her decision in notions of justice and the common good, working to claim that both—and, incidentally, narrative—proceed from nature as a form of natural law.⁵² The formel's ultimate non-choice reveals, for Powrie, the poem's interest in voluntarism: "By resisting Nature's coaxing and Reason's counsel, the formel demonstrates her freedom to will any course of action independently of these forces [i.e., nature and reason]." ⁵³ But while the formel's choice is certainly her own, it would not abide without Nature's support. In what I am suggesting is an act of care, Nature respects the formel's request for an extension and, instead of forcing her to choose, declares "heere is no more to seye" (*PF*, 655).⁵⁴ The formel's decision inaugurates Nature's own rule that the chosen female must agree to the match. Since the formel does not agree, Nature makes the most loving decision she can, for "To non estat I have non other yë" (*PF*, 630): She gives the formel a year, comforts the frustrated tercel ("A yer is nat so longe to endure" (*PF*, 661)), and gives the other birds what they want, their mates. In supporting the formel's desires, Nature demonstrates the fundamentals of care ethics: relationality, responsibility, and response. Nature has a relationship with and is responsible for all of creation as its governess, but it is her response to the formel as an individual with a particular situation and desire that suggests care. Whereas a natural ethic rooted in justice would maintain that the principles of (N)ature that apply to everyone else would also apply to the formel—so she should just choose a mate and get on with it like the rest of them—an ethic rooted in care allows Nature to provide the formel with a compromise tailored to her needs.

Nature's approval of the formel's delay will hopefully avoid the plight of the formel in the *Squire's Tale* as it preempts the Squire's caged bird metaphor. Canacee's falcon compares her experience of love and betrayal to the bird who flees its cage at the first opportunity, spurning "sugre, hony, breed and milk" (V.614) in favor of eating worms, "So newefangel been

⁵² See, for example, Powrie, "Knowing and Willing in Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls*."

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 391.

⁵⁴ Elaine Tuttle Hansen argues, however, that the *Parliament of Fowls* uses the formel's indecision as an attempt to deny and control female sexuality. See *Chaucer and the Fictions of Gender* (University of California Press, 1992), 108-140, esp. 112-113.

they of hire mete” (V.618). This comparison, problematically, aligns the falcon herself with the cager and love with the cage. Phebus’s wife in the *Manciple’s Tale* is similarly trapped by love and her affair is, the Manciple says, part of her nature—for “Flessh is so newefangel” (IX.193). The formel in the *Parliament of Fowls* is spared this fate.⁵⁵ She resists the entrapment of love, insisting she “wol nat serve Venus ne Cupide, / Forsothe as yit,” (PF, 653-54) and Nature supports her decision. Nature responds to the formel’s individual, unique situation (being unready to choose a life-long mate) and, understanding that the other birds are affected by the formel’s hesitation, compromises and provides the formel with her stay and the others with their mates. This is, of course, Nature’s responsibility by all rights; however, the decision to respect the formel’s wishes is a loving act that reaches outside the normal bounds of simple justice.

But the formel and Nature’s deferral take for granted the tercels’ continued affections. The formel’s deferral creates a liminality as all four are caught in anticipation of what might happen next year. If she will not love one of them now, by the time she is ready to choose they may love another, or they may have new rivals. The other birds’ impatience to be done and have their mates devolves into chaos: the *Parliament of Fowls*’s famous moment of what, to us, is *vox inarticulata*. The eruption of avian voices and sounds, “Kek kek! kokkow! quek quek!” (PF, 499) parallels the “haukes ledene” of the *Squire’s Tale*; “kek kek,” “kokkow,” and “quek quek” are, while obscure to humans, functional speech for birds. But unlike Canacee’s magical fluency in hawk Latin, not even the dream framework provides access to the meaning of the birds’ speech. Only Nature’s “facound voys” (PF, 521) brings harmony to their “noyse” (PF, 523). Here, as at the end of the dream, the birds are brought into agreement by Nature and are once again articulate. The goose, representing the waterfowl, suggests “But she wol love hym, lat hym love another!” (PF, 567), an assessment that provides no consolation to the two tercelet the formel would potentially rebuff and applies equally as well at the end of the poem, for nothing has changed. They will be in the same position again next year. But the turtledove’s poorly received opinion that “God forbede a lovere shulde chaunge!” (PF, 582) suggests a second option for the parliament’s reconvening, a background against which the tercelet’s continued affection can find purchase. The two fowls represent two narrative romance trajectories, manifesting a tension between past and present that only the tercelet themselves can solve.

⁵⁵ Kordecki suggests that the *Tale*’s deceived formel “parodies what happens after the formel eagle of the *Parliament of Fowls* is forced to choose at the end of another year.” (“The *Squire’s Tale*: Romancing Animal Magic,” in *Ecofeminist Subjectivities: Chaucer’s Talking Birds* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 80).

By allowing each eagle to attest to themselves by presenting their own narrative pledge to the formel, the terceletts implicitly address what is, in essence, an aspect of the *idem/ipse* dialectic. The terceletts' narrative identities either attest to a unity of selfhood that will work to maintain a constancy in affections or will fail to cohere and, perhaps, succumb to "newefangelnesse." In this way, then, we can read the dream in the *Parliament of Fowls* as nature's narrative identity and its cycle of change and constancy. The roundel that the birds sing "To don Nature honour and plesaunce" attests to this dialectic: "Now welcome, somer, with thy sonne softe, / That hast thes wintres wedres overshake, / And driven away the longe nyghtes blake!" (*PF*, 680-682). Just as the terceletts and all the other birds will come again to seek their mates, so will winter in an endless cycle. The birds honor Nature by attesting to her constancy, in which is rooted her care. They sing because they have been cared for: "Wel han they cause for to gladden ofte, / Sith ech of hem recovered hath hys make" (*PF*, 687-688). This will happen year after year, for though Nature changes she continues to take care of creation. Her care, commensurate with "commune profyt," aligns willing, choice, desire, and agency with the natural and with nature. Nature's approval of the formel's request is a consequence of Nature's own narrative identity, as all four birds are part of nature. Nature anticipates the "newefangelnesse" that leads lovers (and caged birds) astray. Such malleability is part of her own nature. To permit the delay is thus to anticipate change. But even in allowing the formel and the three terceletts to determine their own narratives, they still must make sense within the larger narrative of Nature. Their options, as the goose and turtledove noted, are either to change or to stay constant.

It is with the roundel, an earthly counterpart to the harmony of planetary movement Scipio hears in his own dream, that the dreamer wakes, connecting the constancy and care found in the roundel with the poem's final takeaway: not to define the human by contrast with a pseudohuman animal, but to establish a position from which the human is bound to consider the perspective of the nonhuman and acknowledge it as its own; care is this position. Having passively observed Nature's parliament, the poem references the human perspective without allowing it to dominate. With the disappearance of Africanus and the dreamer, the dream's most human actor is actually the goddess Nature. The dreamer directs us to Alain de Lille's *Complaint of Nature* to "Deveyseth Nature of aray and face," (*PF*, 317), where Alain crucially describes her

as a *mulier*, or a woman.⁵⁶ If we take Nature as a representative of an ethics of care, presiding over the bird assembly with love and care for creation, we can then extend that ethic to humanity proper, defining the human-nonhuman relationship through care ethics. Though we can only speculate what “certeyn thing” (*PF*, 20) the narrator hoped to learn and how the dream functions as a response, whether it concerns nature as I have suggested—that the dream encourages a turn away from civic duty and toward natural responsibility for the “lytel erthe that here is”—or something else entirely, the dreamer nevertheless finds his dream experience edifying, perhaps even more edifying than the text that inspired it. It is certainly possible to understand the narrator’s immediate response to take up other books as a failure of the *Dreme of Scipioun*, and of his own dream, to be meaningful, either for “lust” or for “lore” (*PF*, 15). But even though he plans to “rede alwey” (*PF*, 696) and “nyl nat spare” (*PF*, 699), the narrator hopes to “mete” (*PF*, 698) “som thyng for to fare / The bet” (*PF*, 698-699): To read, perchance to dream, of what will lead to a better life.⁵⁷ In the case of the *Parliament*, that means an understanding of humanity as enmeshed in nature, of duty and responsibility to creation, and of the nonhuman as having lives, experiences, and perspectives that we are obligated to respect just as Nature does.

Interspecies Care and Recognition in the *Squire’s Tale*

From the start, the *Squire’s Tale* suggests that animal language is inaccessible except by artificial or unnatural means. Among the gifts brought to Cambyuskan’s court is a magic ring intended for his daughter Canacee:

The vertu of the ryng, if ye wol heere,
 Is this: that if hire lust it for to were
 Upon hire thombe, or in hir purs it bere,
 Ther is no fowel that fleeth under the hevene
 That she ne shal wel understonde his stevene,
 And knowe his menyng openly and pleyn,

⁵⁶ Alan of Lille, “The Plaint of Nature (*De planctu Naturae*),” in *Alan of Lille: Literary Works*, ed. and trans. Winthrop Wetherbee (Harvard University Press, 2013), 26.

⁵⁷ Cf. *Hamlet*, Act 3, Scene 1, l. 67 (William Shakespeare, *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt et. al., 2nd ed. (Norton, 2008)).

And answer hym in his langage ageyn (V.146-152).

Implicit in the idea that birds have a “stevene,” a voice, and a “langage,” a language, is the idea that birds have “complex existences...particular identities and personal experiences” that are articulated in a uniquely avian language.⁵⁸ The ring allows Canacee to respond to a bird “in his langage ageyn,” (V.152), not in her own language that is understood by the falcon. One can imagine Canacee echoing the avian vocalizations in the *Parliament of Fowls* or the *Manciple’s Tale*: “kek kek” (PF, 499), “cokkow” (IX.243). But the ring does more than enable Canacee to understand and speak to birds; “Right by hir song” Canacee knows not only “what they mente” but “*al hire entente*” [emphasis mine] (V.399-400). *Entente* is a polysemous term, meaning anything from purpose or intention, to plan or design, to desire or will, to mind or heart.⁵⁹ But especially in Chaucer’s texts, *entente* also carries the valence of one’s entire self. To have or possess intention is a faculty of the mind or an indication of mental processes that refer to one’s subjective experience and interpretation of the world; to explain one’s intention is thus to reveal something of one’s subjective state. When Criseyde inquires after the “fyn” of Troilus’s “entente” (Tr, III, 125), for example, she is asking him in no small way to explain who he is, how he views the world, and how he will act in accordance. Likewise in the *Squire’s Tale*, understanding linguistic “meaning” facilitates an understanding of “entente,” or the birds’ entire subjective viewpoint, including their wishes, beliefs, desires, and agency.⁶⁰ When the narrator asserts that the ring makes available to Canacee “al hire [the birds’] entente” by allowing her to understand their speech, Chaucer is setting up a conception of selfhood that is rooted in language.

The majority of the second part of the *Squire’s Tale* describes an encounter between Canacee and a female falcon she finds in the woods. At first, the falcon’s vocalizations are, to the

⁵⁸ Stacy Rule, “Indexical Humans, Iconic Animals,” *JAC* 30, no. 3/4 (2010): 543. *Middle English Dictionary*, s.v. “steven(e),” 1(a), the voice of a human being; a voice; also, a vocal sound (accessed March 11, 2021, https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED42889/track?counter=3&search_id=5976502); “langage,” (a), a language, tongue; the system of oral communication shared by a nation or linguistic community, or the written equivalent of this (accessed 11 March 2021, https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED24625/track?counter=1&search_id=5976502).

⁵⁹ *Middle English Dictionary*, “entente,” 1(a), purpose or intention; aim or object; reason; 2, a plan or design; 3(a) will, wish, desire; 4, mind, heart, spirit; frame of mind, mental or spiritual attitude (accessed 11 March 2021, https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED14048/track?counter=1&search_id=5976502).

⁶⁰ The rhyme of “mente” and “entente” shows up twice more in Chaucer’s animal poetry: in the *Parliament of Fowls*, attributing to a bird (this time the turtledove) both linguistic meaning and subjective intention (PF, 580-81), and again in the *Nun’s Priest’s Tale* (VII.3423-24)—here, the fox is likewise comparing the meaning of his words with his actions only this time, the two do not coincide.

reader, extralinguistic; she “with a pitous voys so gan to crye / That all the wode resounded of hire cry” (V.412-413) and “she shrighthe alwey so loude” (V.422). But Canacee “Hath understonde what this faucon seyde, / And wel neigh for the routhe almoost she deyde” (V.437-438) despite its linguistic formlessness. Canacee’s ring engendered her understanding of the falcon’s shrieks and cries and rendered them in “ledene,” or language. Susan Crane provides a further gloss on the word “ledene,” which can also mean Latin.⁶¹ “Haukes ledene” (V.478) functions as a kind of vernacular language; it “gets its plausibility from the differences among human languages: why not an animal language that is similarly obscure to humans, but similarly functional for its own speakers?”⁶² The ring temporarily brings Canacee to the “abyssal limit of the human” by rendering her fluent in “hawk Latin.”⁶³ Though it is rendered in English, the conversation between Canacee and the falcon has more in common with the *Parliament of Fowls*’s “Kek kek! kokkow! quek quek!” (PF, 499) than it does with this very sentence. In these moments, language as a limit between human and nonhuman degrades and instead becomes a fertile common ground that enables the two to identify with one another. Rather than defining subjective experience, “haukes ledene” is the grounds for intersubjectivity.

This shared language effectively turns the *Squire’s Tale* into a lesson on Ricœurian sympathy, and this is the poem’s ultimate message: “the importance of communication and the necessity for sympathy”—and that one is attendant upon the other.⁶⁴ Canacee inquires into the cause of the falcon’s pain, even though she has already understood the meaning of her cries, which pushes Canacee again to the “abyssal limit of the human.” Just as language erodes the distance between human and nonhuman, so too does a shared emotional state. She identifies so strongly with the falcon and her plight that she tells the falcon, “Ye sle me with youre sorwe verrailly, / I have of yow so greet compassioun” (V.462-463). Canacee recognizes the suffering other, identifies with and feels sympathy for the falcon as if the falcon’s sorrows were her own. Indeed, Canacee posits a shared experience from which her feelings spring: “Is this sorwe of deeth or los of love? / For, as I trowe, thise been causes two / That causen moost a gentil herte wo” (V.450-452). Despite being “Of fremde land” (V.429), Canacee recognizes the falcon as a

⁶¹ Susan Crane, “For the Birds,” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 29 (2007): 25.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 12.

⁶⁴ Sara Deutch Schotland, “Avian Hybridity in *The Squire’s Tale*: Uses of Anthropomorphism,” in *Rethinking Chaucerian Beasts*, ed. Carolyn Van Dyke (Palgrave, 2012): 118.

kindred spirit and responds to her with “greet compassioun” (V.463). The exchange is mutual, and the falcon asserts a position of mutual vulnerability:

That pitee renneth soone in gentil herte,
Feelynge his similitude in peynes smerte,
Is preved alday, as men may it see,
As wel by werk as by auctoritee;
For gentil herte kitheth gentillesse.
I se wel that ye han of my distresse
Compassion, my faire Canacee,
Of verray wommanly benignytee
That Nature in youre principles hath set. (V.479-487)

The falcon directly relates her own self to that of Canacee on the basis of “pitee” (V.479) and the possession of a “gentil herte” (V.479). The two are each other’s counterpart (“similitude”) and feel one another’s “peynes smerte” (V.480). More importantly, however, as two sides of the same coin they both possess the same caring nature: “verray wommanly benignytee” (V.486) which, as the *Parliament of Fowls* demonstrated, Nature herself also possessed.

After the falcon has revealed the depth of her sorrows, she begins to cry and faints in Canacee’s lap. It is suggested that Canacee and the women who accompany her undergo similar expressions of sorrow (“Greet was the sorwe... / That Canacee and alle hir wommen made” (V.632-633)), a sign of solidarity that, like language, deconstructs the distance between the human and the nonhuman. If the falcon is “indistinguishable from any swooning courtly maiden,”⁶⁵ then Canacee and her women likewise become indistinguishable from the falcon who “shrighte / And with hir beek hirselve so she prighte” (V.417-418). Yet even in their own sorrow the human women’s attention is directed toward the other, focused on how they “myghte the faucon glade” (V.634). The desire to help echoes Canacee’s earlier pledge that,

And as I am a kynges doghter trewe,
If that I verraily the cause knewe

⁶⁵ Kathryn Lynch, “East Meets West in Chaucer’s *Squire’s* and *Franklin’s Tales*,” *Speculum* 70, no. 3 (1995): 542.

Of youre disese, if it lay in my myght,

I wolde amenden it er that it were nyght. (V.465-469)

Canacee pledges to redress the wrong done to the falcon, a form of reciprocity. Canacee is staking her promise, her *ipseity*, on a condition of her *idem* identity. Her pledge is rooted in her ability and status as “kynges doghter trewe” (V.465). By pledging her selfhood to the falcon, Canacee is making herself vulnerable to the falcon’s evaluation. If the falcon’s estimation of Canacee were negative, it would threaten the stability of Canacee’s own identity. But the falcon responds to Canacee with trust and positions herself equally vulnerable by agreeing “to obeye unto youre [Canacee’s] herte free” (V.489). In so doing, the two become obligated to and responsible for one another and support each other’s claims to selfhood by affirming the other’s goodness.

The second part of the *Squire’s Tale* ends with Canacee “hir hauk kepyng” (V.651) in an elaborately painted, velvet-covered “mewe” (V.643-50). Crane reads the mews Canacee constructs as a contradictory attempt at “cross-species compassion” that ultimately fails: “the mews expresses the opposition inherent in ‘kynde’ between differentiation [of species] and lovingkindness.”⁶⁶ Canacee’s gesture, as sincere an expression of compassion it may be, is doomed because it is directed at a different species. Interspecies care, which brings together both meanings of “kynde,” is only ever a gesture. What seems to Canacee to be kind (the mewe) is, for the falcon, potentially harmful. But the relationship established between Canacee and the falcon blurs the boundaries between their two species; they possess the same “wommanly benignytee” (V.486) by nature. To judge the “mewe” as a failure of compassion is to disregard the falcon’s feelings and her decision “to obeye unto” Canacee’s “herte free / And for to maken othere be war by me” (V.489-490). The falcon trusts Canacee, and Canacee has pledged her selfhood to help the falcon. The “mewe” fulfills this condition once we understand it as a gesture toward “an authentic reciprocity in exchange, which, in the hour of agony, finds refuge in the shared whisper of voices or the feeble embrace of clasped hands.”⁶⁷ Canacee’s ekphrastic vision for the “mewe” demonstrates a genuinely feminine language of sympathy, which finds its articulation through narrative. Deutch Schotland likens the ekphrasis to that of Philomena’s

⁶⁶ Crane, “For the Birds,” 41.

⁶⁷ Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 191.

tapestry, an attempt to communicate and share narrative through image after being abused by men.⁶⁸ By decorating the formel's mews with images of deceit from the *Romance of the Rose*, Canacee is demonstrating her solidarity with the formel's plight; it is the equivalent of Ricœur's "shared whisper" and "clasped hands."

Canacee's "mewe" is thus less a cage than a demonstration of mutual care and recognition. As Canacee invokes the "grete God of kynde" (V.469) to assist in her attempt to "amenden" (V.468) the falcon's hurts, she links nature with care. The falcon recognizes Canacee's intentions:

I se wel that ye han of my distresse

Compassion, my faire Canacee,

Of verray wommanly benignytee

That Nature in youre principles hath set. (V.484-487)

The falcon's response again aligns care with nature. That she feels comforted is evinced as she decides "Myn harm I wol confessen" (V.494). In relaying her heartache to Canacee, the falcon presents a part of her narrative identity, which facilitates a second phase of recognition. As Jeff Rider has noted, narrative is one of the most significant ways "people become emotionally aware and learn the cognitive and social uses of emotions."⁶⁹ The falcon and Canacee exist together in a relationship that is governed by narrative's emotive and recognitive potential. As the falcon cries and faints at the conclusion of her story,

But Canacee hom bereth hire in hir lappe,

And softly in plastres gan hire wrappe,

Ther as she with hire beek hadde hurt hirselve. (V.632-637)

While Canacee attends to the falcon's physical injuries, she has yet to address the falcon's "harm." The "mewe" is Canacee's attempt to "glade" the falcon by responding to her emotional harm. The choices Canacee makes—such as the blue fabric "in signe of trouthe that is in wommen sene" (V.645)—are also a sign of their mutual vulnerability and a shared emotional state. Likewise, the paintings of "thise false fowles" on the outside of the "mewe" are depicted

⁶⁸ Deutch Schotland, "Avian Hybridity in *The Squire's Tale*," 123.

⁶⁹ Jeff Rider, "The Inner Life of Women in Medieval Romance Literature," in *Inner Life of Women in Medieval Romance Literature: Grief, Guilt, and Hypocrisy*, ed. Jeff Rider and Jamie Friedman (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 3.

alongside magpies “Right for despit” (V.649) so that their falseness is both known and not forgotten (“on hem for to crie and chyd” (V.650)). Though we do not know what becomes of the falcon and Canacee, we do know that Canacee keeps her promise to “amenden” the falcon’s “disese.” The falcon is reunited with her “repentant” (V.655) lover and the falcon’s distress is (we assume) resolved. Just as Nature in the *Parliament of Fowls* caringly works to bring together mates—even if it takes until next year—Canacee responds to the particularities of the falcon’s situation and, like Nature, addresses the falcon’s concerns. For the formel, who does not yet wish to serve Venus or Cupid, Nature provides a stay; for the falcon, who desires both “to maken othere be war” (V.490) and, it is implied, “remedie” (V.629) from her heartache, Canacee provides a “mewe” that speaks to the falcon’s situational anguish and reunites the falcon with her mate.

The Connaturality of Care and Narrative in the *Complaint of Mars*

In the *Parliament of Fowls*, Chaucer narrativizes Nature and demonstrates how care for creation is the grounds for nature’s constancy through change as Nature herself arbitrates the bird parliament and enacts her own law. The *Squire’s Tale* reveals how this law informs human and nonhuman relationships by depicting Canacee and the falcon in a mutually vulnerable relationship rooted in a shared language that fosters interspecies recognition and care. In both of these poems, the exchange of narrative plays a key role—the attesting to Nature’s caring identity and as the basis for Canacee’s compassion for the falcon. Like these two texts, the *Complaint of Mars* similarly demonstrates how care functions horizontally across creation. Through its use of direct discourse, the *Complaint* presents a single nonhuman subjectivity that, like the *Squire’s Tale*, uses narrative as the grounds of recognition. The narrative—the story of Mars and Venus’s love affair—and Mars’ accompanying complaint both reiterate Nature’s narrative identity and the idea of constancy through change. In repeating this narrative, in the same Valentine’s Day context as it appeared in the *Parliament of Fowls* no less, the *Complaint of Mars*’s avian narrator uses Mars’ narrative example as the basis for the bird assembly’s natural narrative identity: in the selection of mates, the goal is to be as constant as Mars, even as circumstances change. The *Complaint* and the *Parliament* both work to preempt the falcon’s caged bird/love metaphor by establishing constancy over “newefangelnesse” as natural.

Because the characters stand at once for mythological figures and at the same time for planets in their “hevenysh revolucioun” (*Mars*, 30), the *Story* is, like the *Parliament of Fowls* and the tercels’ pledges, representative of nature’s own narrative identity. Mars, whether god or planet, is in pain on account of his constancy to Venus:

Therefore my herte forever I to her hette,

Ne truly, for my deth, I shal not lette

To ben her truest servaunt and her knight.

I flater noght, that may wete every wyght;

For this day in her servise shal I dye.

But grace be, I se her never wyth ye. (*Mars*, 185-190)

Mars’s declaration of love echoes the tercels’ efforts to court the formel in the *Parliament of Fowls*. The first tercel’s offer that “Ne nevere for no wo ne shal I lette / To serven hire, how fer so that she wende” (*PF*, 439-440) resonates with Mars’s own commitment to Venus even though he will never see her again, while the third tercel pledges, “At shorte wordes, tel that deth me sese / I wol ben heres, whether I wake or wynke, / And trewe in al that herte may bethynke” (*PF*, 481-483), paralleling Mars’s willingness to die in service to Venus. Constancy is likewise at issue in the *Squire’s Tale*. Despite the fact that he “swoor he yaf his herte” to the falcon, the tercel succumbs to “newefangelnesse” (V.610)—though he returns “repentant” (V.655) to the falcon and the two are reunited. These pledges of constancy that stem from nature, be it birds or planets, position constancy as an essential characteristic of nature. And just as the *Parliament of Fowls*’s roundel emphasizes nature’s constancy through change, the tercel’s brief fall into “newefangelnesse” and eventual return similarly maintain nature’s fundamental constancy.

The *Complaint of Mars* presents a series of three tellings of Mars’s story and participation in his call for empathy and compassion. Modern editorial convention divides the poem into three parts: *Proem*, *Story*, and *Complaint* in an attempt to organize the layered narration. The first layer is in Mars’s own voice as he proclaims his “ground of hevynesse” (*Mars*, 163). The specific occasion of Mars’s speech is not given; however, other examples of

intercalary complaints in Chaucer's works may shed light on the circumstances.⁷⁰ In the *Book of the Duchess*, for example, the narrator overhears the Black Knight's "compleynt to himselfe" (*BD*, 464) which the narrator can "reherce" (*BD*, 474) in its entirety. Given that Mars "dwelleth forth in his adversyte, / Compleynyng ever" (*Mars*, 148-149), a similar pattern of an unintended audience may be at work. Mars is overheard by a bird who, like the narrator in the *Book of the Duchess*, "remembreth" (*Mars*, 150) the lament and can "hit seyn and synge" (*Mars*, 152). Mars voices his complaint (*Mars*, 155-298) about being separated from Venus, which is then overheard by a bird.

In the *Proem*, a speaker—we do not know who—says: "Seynt Valentyne, a foul thus herde I synge / Upon thy day er sonne gan up-sprynge" (*Mars*, 13-14). The *bird* then says:

Yet wol I, in my briddes wise, synge

The sentence of the compleynt, at the leste,

That woful Mars made... (*Mars*, 23-25)

That bird, on the occasion of Valentine's Day, relays Mars' complaint supplemented by the *Story*—a retelling of the mythological affair between the two deities that equally allegorizes planetary movements, blurring the line between anthropomorphic deity and anthropomorphic planet: "the line between persons and astrology is so thin that it is not clear whether planets are being described in human terms, or characters described in astrological terms."⁷¹ The *Story* is the motivation for Mars' complaint, but the narrative seems to be the invention of the avian narrator. The bird takes care to distinguish the *Story* from the *Complaint* proper:

Mars dwelleth forth in his adversyte,

Compleynyng ever on her departynge,

And what his compleynt was, remembreth me;

And therefore, in this lusty morwenynge

As I best can, I wol hit seyn and synge; (*Mars*, 148-152)

⁷⁰ By "intercalary," I mean complaints that are inserted into longer works. For more on this usage, see Mary Moore Hatfield, "Chaucer's Concept of the Complaint: A Study of the Intercalated Complaint" (MA thesis, Texas Tech University, 1975).

⁷¹ Nancy Dean, "Chaucer's *Complaint*, a Genre Descended from the *Heroides*," *Comparative Literature* 19 (1967): 23.

The avian narrator indicates that he has not yet begun to address Mars' complaint, but he remembers it and "wol hit seyn." The words of the complaint may be Mars's, but the words of the story belong to the bird. This act of narrative creation establishes a link between nonhuman subjectivity and narrative; the avian narrator attests both an "I" and an unseen relationship with the other birds to whom he sings, as well as to Mars, the poem's "distant I" "refracted from across the universe."⁷² The speaker functions as a bridge between Mars and the audience; the narrative fosters a relationship with Mars and a connection with Mars's subjective plea for "kyndeness," for kindness and compassion that is grounded in a shared "kynde" or nature.

The final line of the poem puns on this double meaning of "kynde" and aligns compassion with nature, and the two again with narrative. Mars's anaphoric call to "Compleyneth" on his and, moreover, Venus's, behalf is contextualized and given meaning through the *Story*. As in the *Squire's Tale*, shared narrative facilitates recognition which, in turn, demands care. The conclusion of Mars' complaint finds Mars addressing "hardy knyghtes of renoun" (*Mars*, 272) and "ladyes, that ben true and stable" (*Mars*, 281) and implores that both groups have "compassioun / of my disese" (*Mars*, 276-277). For men, this compassion is a duty or an obligation to Mars because he is their patron. But for women, this compassion is part of their "kynde" (*Mars*, 282), their nature. Mars' request for "compassioun" and for "pite of folk that be in peyne" (*Mars*, 283) hinges on identifying both with him and with his pain which are presented in his complaint. While the complaint as a genre is not strictly narrative, Mars's complaint is "no feyned mater that I telle" (*Mars*, 173); part of Mars' complaint tells the story of how his current emotional state came to be. He explains his purpose in complaining:

Wherfore the ground and cause of al my peyne,
 So as my troubled wit may hit atteyne,
 I wol reherse; not for to have redresse,
 But to declare my ground of hevynesse. (*Mars*, 160-163)

Mars intends his complaint to be less about his feelings than the how and why of them—in other words, Mars's complaint will relate the story (or narrative) behind his distress, though he does so in less detail than the *Story* that precedes it. The narrativity of Mars's complaint contextualizes

⁷² Carolyn Van Dyke, "The Lyric Planet: Chaucer's Construction of Subjectivity in the *Complaint of Mars*," *The Chaucer Review* 31, no. 2 (1996): 170.

his request for compassion and, by displacing the blame for his situation onto “he that wroghte” Mars, provides the grounds for recognition that encourages an audience to identify with and respond to the complaint.

Recognition and response are, according to Mars, the very purpose of a complaint. In order to arouse compassion or pity, there must be a reason for it:

The ordre of compleynt requireth skylfully
That yf a wight shal pleyne pitously,
Ther mot be cause wherfore that men pleyne;
Or men may deme he pleyneth folily
And causeles; alas, that am not I. (*Mars*, 155-159)⁷³

Throughout his complaint, Mars associates his plight with that of lovers more broadly in an effort to establish a position of a shared, mutual vulnerability. In the second section of his complaint, Mars broadens his despair: “For thogh so be that lovers be as trewe / As any metal that is forged newe, / In many a cas hem tydeth ofte sorowe” (*Mars*, 200-203). Again in the fourth section, Mars declares, “So fareth hyt by lovers and by me” (*Mars*, 263), aligning himself with a contingent of all lovers who are subject to the same “aventures of love up and down” (*Mars*, 210). The final stanza of the poem reinvokes all lovers as Mars calls on them to “Compleyneth” for Venus as he himself does: “For your disese wel oughte I swowne and swelte, / Though I non other harm ne drede felte” (*Mars*, 216-217). Mars’s response to Venus’s perceived distress and fear models the response he expects from those upon whom he calls for compassion and pity—for care.

Mars’s anaphoric invitation to “compleyneth” implicates all who hear the poem in its shared suffering:

Compleyneth eke, ye lovers, al in-fere,
For her that with unfeyned humble chere
Was evere redy to do yow socour;
Compleyneth her that evere hath had yow dere;

⁷³ *Middle English Dictionary*, “pitously,” 1(b), in a manner arousing or deserving of pity (accessed 11 March 2021, https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED33536/track?counter=1&search_id=5976502).

Compleyneth Beaute, Freedom, and Manere;
 Compleyneth her that endeth your labour;
 Compleyneth thilke ensample of al honour,
 That never dide but al gentillesse;
 Kytheth therfore on her sum kyndenesse (*Mars*, 290-298).

This stanza reaches beyond the knights under his patronage or that of the ladies' "emperise" (*Mars*, 285), Venus. Mars demonstrates the universality of his complaint by calling directly on whomever has benefitted from love to take up Venus's cause just as he himself has done. Mars extends his own empathy and demand for care from nature and the astrological universe, to the birds who are gathered on Valentine's Day to choose their mates. "Lovers" is a term that encompasses the human world as well; presumably, if the avian narrator heard and understood Mars's complaint, so too could a human being. The interaction between audience and complainer creates an empathy loop, implicating all in a fellow-feeling that reverberates across the entire natural world, including the planets and stars. Mars's care for Venus motivates his plea for care for the two of them; his plea is answered as his story and complaint are continually repeated. Repeating Mars's narrative enacts his request for care as the teller complains with him. To "compleyne" is a response not only to his immediate vocalization of suffering but as the story and Mars's complaint are told and retold, Mars becomes increasingly distant from the subjectivity that feels sympathy for him. Mars's own subjectivity created by the story and complaint is a "distant *I*" that enters into a relationship with the narrative's hearer.⁷⁴ The poem's localized and extended empathy is rooted in the shared vulnerability and experience, a reciprocal gift that speaks to a mutual recognition of selfhood and need. In complaining with Mars (Van Dyke emphasizes that the poem is a *complaint*), the speaker and audience are imbricated in living "with and for others," as Ricœur's ethic advises us they indeed should. Empathy and compassion are key constituents of the relationship, the well-being and, indeed, selfhood of each participant.⁷⁵

The bird relates Mars's complaint to his own circumstances as birds assemble to choose their mates, which marks the second telling of Mars's story. The bird aligns the "sentence"

⁷⁴ Van Dyke, "The Lyric Planet," 170.

⁷⁵ Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 188-89.

(*Mars*, 24) of Mars's complaint, a twofold narrative of constancy and care, with the birds' current circumstances:

Without repentyng cheseth yow your make,
And ye that han ful chosen as I devise,
Yet at the leste renoveleth your servyse.
Confermeth hyt perpetuely to dure,
And patiently taketh your aventure (*Mars*, 17-21).

Mars's constant affection for Venus, even after she is lost to him, serves as a model for the birds' own mate selection. In retelling the story, the birds respond to Mars's needs and complain with him about his loss. The narrative of his constancy, like the roundel in the *Parliament of Fowls*, is a universal recognition of nature's constancy through change. And just as Nature perpetuated that constancy by caring for creation, nature itself proves its constancy as care for Mars and Venus rebounds across the created world—from Mars himself, to the birds. The birds gathering to hear the song on Saint Valentine's Day replaces, as the *Parliament of Fowls* does, romantic love and the possibility of "newefangelnesse" with a natural fellow-feeling, care, and constancy.

For the community of birds that the narrator represents, Mars's narrative functions as the basis for their own narrative identity. Just as the tercels' constancy was a sign of Nature's in the *Parliament of Fowls*, the birds in the *Complaint of Mars* uphold Mars within their community as emblematic of their values. When the bird tells his companions to "Confermeth hyt perpetuely to dure, / And patiently taketh your aventure" (*Mars*, 20-21) and offers Mars's complaint "for the worship of this highe feste" (*Mars*, 22), the bird establishes a connection between selecting a mate and constancy through change. Mars's example of steadfastness and constancy of affection becomes applicable to each mating pair, and to the community of birds at large. The bird's choice of a complaint has a further community-defining effect: through repeating Mars's complaint, the bird establishes sympathy for the suffering other as constitutive of nature and natural relationships. Mars demonstrates to the bird community both how to care for one's mate—to stay constant despite the turning of fortune's wheel—and how to care for one's fellow—identification with and response to their needs and circumstances. Because the *Story* and *Complaint* are not addressed to an individual but to an audience of fowls sung in a "briddes wise," what the *Complaint of Mars* effects is a societal rather than a strictly interpersonal fellow-feeling.

In this way, then, the *Complaint of Mars* operates in a similar way to the *Parliament of Fowls* in that it moves not vertically from nonhuman to human in terms of reference but horizontally across creation—but in reverse. Whereas the *Parliament of Fowls* uses birds to explain nonhuman identity to humans and depict the kind of caring relationship all of creation should be in, the *Complaint of Mars* uses the anthropomorphized planet deities to demonstrate how nonhumans should relate to one another and then to all of nature.

The third, outermost layer of participation in Mars's complaint is indicated by the two and a half lines spoken by an unidentified narrator. That narrator is responsible for relaying the bird's song and interrupts its retelling by reminding the reader that they were present on Valentine's Day for the bird's song (*Mars*, 13-15). The status of this third voice, human or nonhuman, is unclear. For Carolyn Van Dyke and Megan Murton, who have both considered the construction of subjectivity in the poem, the *Complaint of Mars* has an ultimately human narrator, addressing ultimately human concerns.⁷⁶ If the third narrator is human, the poem begs the question of how that person had access to avian language. Birds, we have seen, speak in "haukes ledene" (V.478) or they "kokkow" (*PF*, 499; cf. IX.243). The *Squire's Tale* and the *Parliament of Fowls* present distinctly animal speech as intelligible only under certain conditions: a magical ring or a dream framework. Chaucer's other animal poems likewise feature an element of narrative distance: The *House of Fame* is also a dream vision; the *Manciple's Tale* depicts a bird who is taught human speech yet also retains his natural language; and the *Nun's Priest's Tale* is set "whilom" (VII.2822), "For thilke tyme, as I have understonde, / Beestes and briddes koude speke and synge" (VII.2880-2881). Yet no such conditions exist in the *Complaint of Mars*. The epistemological status of language is central to sharing narrative upon which the poem centers. One possible solution is a natural language such as that shared between Nature and the bird parliament. While Nature understands the birds as they cry in their "briddes wise" ("Nature, which that alwey hadde an ere / To murmur of the lewednesse behynde" (*PF*, 519-520)), it is only "noyse" (*PF*, 500) to the human dreamer. Such a natural language, which recalls Macrobius's cosmic harmony of planetary movements, would explain how the bird understands Mars's complaint and, by extension, how a human could comprehend the meaning of birdsong

⁷⁶ Van Dyke, "The Lyric Planet," and Megan Murton, "Secular Consolation in Chaucer's *Complaint of Mars*," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 38 (2016).

without artificial assistance. The human would become imbricated in a reciprocal relationship of empathy and compassion for a nonhuman other.

But if a bird is singing in his “briddes wise,” who else can understand it but a bird? Indeed, the third voice situates itself as part of the second narrator’s audience, present at the Valentine’s Day mate selection. Because no information is provided about the narrator, it is possible we are presented with an unmediated subject within a chain of bird-speak: a bird sings his song to a group of birds on Valentine’s Day, which is heard and then related by a different bird. If this is the case, the *Complaint of Mars* represents a form of direct access to the nonhuman, a representation without mediation. While it may seem like a small point, if we accept the latter formulation then we are confronted with an avian social network of shared narrative, which extends fellow feeling based in Mars’s narrative to another remove. To consider an outermost avian narrator for the *Complaint of Mars* is to consider the possibility of a discrete nonhuman world that exists without human intervention. Such a reading completely decenters narrative’s human frames of reference and acknowledges language, narrative, empathy, compassion, and suffering as elements that apply equally to the natural nonhuman world as they do to the human.

When Animals Speak: Conclusions

Each of these three texts demonstrates a concerted effort to “think with the animal” by presenting narratives both of nonhuman identity and of human/nonhuman relations. Chaucer’s poems, then, speak to “an ethical and enmeshed understanding of the natural world and our place in it.”⁷⁷ By allowing animals to speak—a move which, when taken seriously in conjunction with a reconsideration of metaphor and allegory in the representation of nonhumans, is productive and discloses nonhuman subjectivity—Chaucer allows nonhumans to speak for themselves instead of speaking for them or using them to speak for humanity. Nonhumans attesting an *I* demand a sense of personal responsibility to oneself and to others by assuming a *you*: “self-recognition,” Ricœur observes, “refers to others.”⁷⁸ The relationship established between a nonhuman *I* and its assumed *you*, whether human or nonhuman, creates a state of mutual vulnerability by positioning the two in relation; the coherence of each self is necessarily supported by the other. We have a duty or a responsibility, then, to care for one another predicated upon the ability to respond to the

⁷⁷ Kelly, “Lost Geographies, Remembrance, and The Awntyers off Arthure,” 237.

⁷⁸ Paul Ricœur, *The Course of Recognition*, trans. David Pellauer (Harvard University Press, 2005), 255.

other. In order to maintain the coherence and goodness of selfhood, and because the self is judged as good on the basis of its actions toward others, Ricœur's ethic is fundamentally about care. Chaucer's texts illustrate the shared principles of response, reciprocity, solicitude, and care across his narrative ecology.

By approaching Chaucer's poems from the position of "active openness" demanded by Ricœur's tensional theory of metaphor, then, the texts themselves become living metaphors—a network of metaphors organized by narrative, which in Ricœur's hermeneutic would have the potential to change the world. The nonhuman is not caged by narrative, trapped inside anthropomorphism and made to serve human motives. Rather, narrative discloses nonhuman realities and positions the human as the receiver rather than controller of the nonhuman world. We are left with the injunction to treat these animal others with care, as we ourselves would wish to be treated, with the knowledge that the non-human must be included in our "moral horizons" not because they bear any likeness to the human, but precisely because they are other.

CHAPTER 4: MEMORY: THE SPACE OF POETIC IDENTITY IN THE DREAM VISIONS

There is little question that Chaucer's dream visions are concerned to some degree with the purpose and production of poetry, and with how it and its creator will be remembered.¹ Each of the dream visions are deeply invested in composition, both within and outside of the dream.² And because his dream visions offer the illusion of access to the individual subjectivity of a poet, it is altogether too tempting to name that poet *Chaucer* and regard the dream visions as a statement about a single, historical man.³ But as I aim to demonstrate in this chapter, the dream visions are less concerned with *a* poet than they are *the* poet, that is, with the vocation of poetry. In the *Book of the Duchess*, for example, the narrator describes his book as one in which

...were written fables

That clerkes had in olde tyme,

And other poetes, put in rime

To rede, and for to be in minde,

While men loved the lawe of kinde (*BD*, 52-56).

¹ The "Go, litel book" prayer in *Troilus and Criseyde* and the *Canterbury Tales*' retraction also demonstrate a concerted interest in how Chaucer will be remembered and are an effort to control that remembrance akin to what happens in *Legend of Good Women*.

² Scholarship on the dream visions is vast, though Kathryn Lynch's two foundational studies *The High Medieval Dream Vision: Poetry, Philosophy, and Literary Form* (Stanford University Press, 1988) and *Chaucer's Philosophical Visions* (D.S. Brewer, 2000) are, in my mind, required reading. Deanne Williams calls the dream visions "an allegory of the processes of reading and writing [...]. Raising questions concerning the inspiration and transmission as well as interpretation and authority..." ("The Dream Visions," in *The Yale Companion to Chaucer*, ed. Seth Lerer (Yale University Press, 2006), 149). Regarding the *House of Fame*, Rebecca Davis argues that the poem is "a complex claim about the methods and materials of authorship, a claim upon which Chaucer stakes out a theory of literary form that anticipates the composite and open-ended shapes of his later works..." ("Fugitive Poetics in Chaucer's *House of Fame*, *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 37 (2015): 103). For Elizabeth Scala, the *Book of the Duchess* is a narrative of Chaucerian self-invention (Scala, *Absent Narratives, Manuscript Textuality, and Literary Structure in Late Medieval England* (Palgrave, 2002). On the *Parliament of Fowls*, T.S. Miller writes, the dream is "a picture of various authorities, texts, interpretations, and problems in literature and in life" ("Writing Dreams to Good: Reading as Writing and Writing as Reading in Chaucer's Dream Visions," *Style* 45, no. 3 (2011): 537; Michelle Wright, "Time, Consciousness and Narrative Play in Late Medieval Secular Dream Poetry and Framed Narratives" (PhD diss., University of South Wales, 2007).

³ It is not my intention here to discuss Chaucer as an historical man; rather, when referring to Chaucer, I am speaking of an aggregate of narratorial personae. See E. Talbot Donaldson, *Speaking of Chaucer* (Althone Press, 1970); David Lawton, *Chaucer's Narrators* (D.S. Brewer, 1985); A.C. Spearing, *Medieval Dream-Poetry* (Cambridge University Press, 1976); Michael Foster, *Chaucer's Narrators and the Rhetoric of Self-Representation* (Peter Lang, 2008).

Here, the narrator aligns the purpose of narrative with the preservation of particular stories and assigns this as an act of social remembering.⁴ The narrator of the *Legend of Good Women* makes a similar argument:

And yf that olde bokes were aweye,
Yloren were of remembraunce the keye.
Wel ought us thanne honouren and beleve
These bokes, there we han noon other preve (*LGW F 25-28*).

Poetry and narrative, these narrators suggest, are key elements of both individual and community formation and memory.⁵ By serving as a testament to the past, poetry keeps alive the “lawe of kinde” (*BD*, 56) in which, according to the narrators, those in the present ought to continue to find meaning. Such “...appreved stories / Of holynesse, of regnes, of victories, / Of love, of hate, of other sondry thynges” (*LGW F 21-23*) serve, as the narrator of the *Parliament of Fowls* tells us, to entertain and educate (for “luste” and “lore” (*PF*, 15)), but, moreover, they serve as fertile ground for the creation of “newe science” (*PF*, 25), for the creation of new knowledge, stories, and ideas.⁶ Undergirding the dream visions’ illusory individual subjectivity is instead a profound intersubjectivity: poet and community are imbricated in an intimate cycle of memory, reliant on one another both for permanence and meaning.

In this chapter, I will argue that the dream visions’ creation of space—the space of the dream—serves as a metaphor for how poetry works.⁷ It is often noted that dreams provide authors with a distancing framework through which they are free to critique or discuss the world in ways they could not normally. In Chaucer’s poetry, the dream vision structure performs a different function: to recreate the poetic process and the installment of both poet and narrative in

⁴ All references to Chaucer’s texts will be to *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd edition, ed. Larry D. Benson (Houghton Mifflin, 1987). Individual works will be cited parenthetically in the text. The *Canterbury Tales* will be cited in accordance with the fragment numbers provided by the *Riverside Chaucer*. Other works will follow the *Riverside*’s lineation. Where more than one set of line numbers is offered, I will note which set of line numbers I am following.

⁵ As Mary Carruthers has thoroughly demonstrated, “medieval culture was fundamentally memorial, to the same profound degree that modern culture in the West is documentary.” (*The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, 2nd edition (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 9.

⁶ Alastair J. Minnis has called Chaucer a *compiler*, “a compiler who weaves new text by collecting and rearranging the statements of others.” (*Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages* (2nd ed., University of Pennsylvania Press (2010), 193-210).

⁷ See Rebecca Davis, “‘Noon other werke’: The Work of Sleep in Chaucer’s *Book of the Duchess*,” in *Chaucer’s Book of the Duchess: Contexts and Interpretations*, ed. Jamie Fumo (D.S. Brewer, 2018), 57-58: “...sleep is a condition of embodiment. But it is also a suspension of sense-perception that propels the sleeping person if not fully ‘out’ of the body nevertheless into an interiorized space of consciousness where dreams occur.”

collective memory. Through a careful nestling of different types of space—the dream space, the space of memory, and the space of the page—the visions negotiate the demands of public and private—as well as social and individual—narratives, memories, and identities. In other words, the dream visions necessitate the creation of a new, private space (the dream) that seems to provide an illusory access to the individual subjective mind of a poet. Within that dream space, dreamers engage with what I am calling spatialized narratives: narratives that appear within the dreamer’s unconscious as a space, whether temple, house, or bedroom. The private dream space is then filtered through the space of memory as it is recollected by the narrator, who interprets and contextualizes the dream. The narrator’s memory is then made public on the space of the page, where it takes the form of a narrative that has the opportunity to become part of the larger memorial network of shared narratives.⁸ The private space of the narrator’s dream is built out of such culturally remembered narratives, particularly the narratives with which the narrator engages before falling asleep and dreaming. Because the texts the dreamers read persist in social memory and continue to have meaning, they are able both to shape and to occupy space in the narrator’s own unconscious mind as a function of individual memory. In other words, the dream is only possible because the initiating narratives exist in both social and individual memory, and the dream is a space that allows these two existences to converse. The space of the dream similarly inspires the creation of new narrative. That narrative then becomes spatialized on the page, making public what once was a private space.

Much analysis of the dream visions hinges on their individuality: individual subjectivities, individual narratives, individual dreams.⁹ To be sure, within the dreams themselves the narratives in the dreamer’s memory take shape as space as a function of individual memory: more specifically, the concept of the memory palace, which encodes memory as a physical space. With regard to the *House of Fame* in particular, scholars have noted the similarities of the poem’s three spaces to various medieval memory conceits. But the *Parliament of Fowls* and *Book of the Duchess* both also contain physical spaces that are literally built out of narratives. Much like the *House of Fame*’s retelling of the *Aeneid* in Venus’s glass

⁸ This argument reflects what Mary Carruthers has already observed about medieval authors, textual authority, and memory: “...two distinct stages involved in the making of an authority—the first is the individual process of authoring or composing, and the second is the matter of authorizing, which is a social and communal activity” (*The Book of Memory*, 234).

⁹ Cf. Davis, “The Work of Sleep,” 51: “Dream-visions are perhaps the most self-reflexive of medieval literary genres. They purport to open a window into the minds, indeed, to bare the very souls of their narrators, if not those of the authors themselves...dream-visions are an intensely metafictional genre.”

temple, the *Book of the Duchess*'s bedchamber is decorated with "text and glose" (*BD*, 333) of the *Romance of the Rose*, and the windows are "ful wel depeynted" (*BD*, 322) with "hooly al the story of Troye" (*BD*, 326), and the temple in the *Parliament* is "peynted overal / Ful many a story" (*PF*, 284-285). These spatialized narratives are not obviously related to the idea of the individual memory palace, and yet their recurrence throughout the dream visions links space, narrative, and memory as concepts that govern poetic identity. By treating these spaces *as spaces*, what is revealed is not an individualist concept of memory or narrative, but rather the inherent interrelatedness and intersubjectivity of poetry/composition.¹⁰ The relationship between narrative and space emphasizes the role of communal memory in creating the memory of the poet and the role of narrative in creating communal memory and reveals the subjectivity of the individual poet as profoundly intersubjective. In what follows, I will explore the spatial layers that make up the dream visions: the creation of the dream space and the spatialized narratives it contains; the space of memory and narration, where the narrator recalls and interprets the dream experience; and the space of the page's dependence on individual and communal memory.

Space and Narrative

For Ricœur, narrative is "a mediation between man and the world, between man and man, between man and himself" that relies on emplotment to create a sense of permanence in time that maintains our identity. In other words, our lives (both individual and collective) are organized into plots; we make sense of our lives in reference to the plots of others' lives, to literature, and to the emplotment of the life of the world, or history. This, I am arguing, is the work of the poet: taking the human experience of time which, Ricœur tells us, is best related through narrative, and turning it into something that takes up space—a physical, enduring reminder of the past with which others can engage.¹¹ Both history and literature have the same ultimate referent: the

¹⁰ Matthew Boyd Goldie's recent work on space in medieval literature and science includes a chapter on the House of Fame in this direction, though he is less concerned with poetry and narrative than I am here. (*Scribes of Space: Place in Middle English Literature and Late Medieval Science* (Cornell University Press, 2019), esp. 141-67. Though they do not discuss Chaucer or much literature in general, Barbara A. Hanawalt and Michael Kobialka's *Medieval Practices of Space* (University of Minnesota Press, 2000) is an invaluable resource for discussions on how medieval people understood and used space. While I am developing a spatial poetics for the dream visions, William F. Woods's *Chaucerian Spaces: Spatial Poetics in Chaucer's Opening Tales* (SUNY Press, 2009) is engaged in a similar project for the *Canterbury Tales*.

¹¹ Ricœur calls this both the "fictionalization of history" and the "historicization of fiction" (*Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (University of Chicago Press, 1988), 181, 189).

human experience of time. Through these forms of narrative discourse, “humanity becomes intelligible to itself, gives itself a history, and has history as a central determinant of that intelligibility” – narratives are, effectively, the “institution of society.”¹² Narrative, then, is inherently social. We construct narratives about our identities that position ourselves in relation to others and to social norms that must be intelligible to and within those norms in order to be accepted as part of them. And so, too, narratives define those social norms: “the stories that shape and even instill in us needs, obligations, desires, hopes, and ambitions are shared across a community, recounted and transmitted from one generation to another.”¹³ In this way, narrative becomes a constitutive element of both personal and collective identity by enabling not only the remembering of past events, but also the orientation of oneself toward others and the social frameworks that influence how and what an individual remembers.

Memory—like narrative—operates in the construction of personal and communal identity; it serves as a metric against which we judge the relative success or failure of our selves and our communities. To do so, memory most often depends on its expression in and as narrative to make the past accessible and integrable, and thus also depends on those who use narrative to attest to memory—including poets. Memory allows “one to constitute a sense of oneself as sharing a common life”¹⁴ with a more distant, historical other that provides “categories of common action” that make “specific relations between contemporaries, predecessors, and successors possible.”¹⁵ In other words, “the crossing of memories and the exchange of narratives”¹⁶ (which are two sides of the same subjectivity coin) is what makes community possible and in this, authors and poets are essential: through narrative, authors engage in the practice of “telling otherwise, and also in letting others tell their own history,” and, through the preservation of story, are responsible for “transmitting the meaning of the past to the next generation.”¹⁷ The decision of preservation, of what gets remembered, is part of what Ricœur

¹² See J.M. Bernstein’s discussion of Ricœur’s use of discourse, “Grand Narratives,” in *On Paul Ricœur: Narrative and Interpretation*, ed. David Wood (Routledge, 1992), 108.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 111.

¹⁴ David J. Leichter, “Collective Identity and Collective Memory in the Philosophy of Paul Ricœur,” *Ricœur Studies* 3, no. 1 (2012): 114.

¹⁵ Paul Ricœur, *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics II*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson (Northwestern University Press, 1991), 179.

¹⁶ Paul Ricœur, “Reflections on a New Ethos for Europe,” *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 21, no. 5/6 (1995): 8.

¹⁷ Paul Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. David Pellauer and Kathleen Blamey (University of Chicago Press, 2003), 9.

calls “the structure of *living together*”—institutions that perpetuate social practices with which individuals continue to identify.¹⁸

Memory and narrative are, in addition to being obviously social, are also spatial. Just as the individual *ars memoriae* uses the concept of “memory places,” or “memory palaces,” as a strategy for remembering, collective or social memory is likewise linked to physical spaces and places.¹⁹ Memory becomes materialized as inscriptions, monuments and documents, “whereas memories transmitted only along the oral path fly away as do the words themselves.”²⁰ In the *House of Fame*, this is exactly what happens: Fame’s house is the space where oral memory flies before it becomes linked to a place. The past—specifically *narratives* of the past—is spatialized, for as T.S. Miller observes, Chaucer conceives of “poetics and indeed literary history as necessarily spatialized”.²¹ And though Ricœur does not offer a complete phenomenology of space, he does detail what makes space memorable: its sociality. In *Memory, History, Forgetting*, he writes:

Places inhabited are memorable par excellence. Declarative memory enjoys evoking them and recounting them, so attached to them is memory. As for our movements, the successive places we have passed through serve as reminders of the episodes that have taken place there. They appear to us after the fact as hospitable or inhospitable, in a word, as habitable.²²

Social spaces are memorable and thus demand narration. This entwining of sociality, space, narrative, and memory is central to how the dream visions define poetic identity.

Ricœur’s accounting of “memory places” is supplemented by the so-called “spatial turn” of the last several decades—“an attempt...to investigate how history literally *takes place* – how space and time are inextricably linked.”²³ As I have suggested, this is Ricœur’s point of narrative: to turn human experience into something that takes up space. Edward Soja’s

¹⁸ Paul Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (University of Chicago Press, 1992), 194.

¹⁹ Mary Carruthers’ *The Book of Memory* explores these concepts as they relate to medieval practices of memory. Carruthers’ study takes an historical approach to memory, which is both important and influential on my thinking on memory in this chapter. I have forgone such historical contextualizing here and throughout my dissertation in favor of highlighting the ways in which the application of Ricœur’s hermeneutic contributes to a more modern understanding of identity in Chaucer’s works. To be sure, many of the conclusions reached in this chapter echo Carruthers’, particularly as they relate to space and authorship. I hope, however, that the argument I have presented here furthers our understanding of how memory and space function intersubjectively.

²⁰ Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 41.

²¹ T.S. Miller, “Forms of Perspective and Chaucer’s Dream Spaces: Memory and the Catalogue in *The House of Fame*,” *Style* 48, no. 4 (2014): 489.

²² *Ibid.*, 43.

²³ Michael Frank, “Imaginative Geography as a Travelling Concept,” *European Journal of English Studies* 13, no. 1 (2009): 66.

“Thirdspace” theory offers us language whereby we can analyze how that space works *as a space*. Soja’s concept of “Thirdspace” “reentwines the making of history with the social production of space.”²⁴ “Thirling” is a trialectic of spatial layers or awarenesses that build upon and modify one another in a “cumulative trialectics that is radically open to additional otherness.”²⁵ The result is an understanding of space that “allows contradictory and seemingly incompatible ideas to coexist and be creatively restructured in new ways to produce new meaning.”²⁶ Through its radical openness, a Thirdspace becomes the site of contested and renegotiated boundaries. But more than allowing us to theorize how memory and narrative persist as spaces, however, spatial theorists like Soja are equally concerned with the ways in which space functions as a key component of identity. Soja argues that subjectivity is spatially inscribed: because space is imbricated in both sociality and historicity, it facilitates the construction of cultural identity and, moreover, because individuals cannot help but exist in space, individual identity is informed, limited, and produced by our relationship with space.²⁷ There is, in other words, no such thing as an aspatial identity. Each of the spaces that make up the dream visions are thus equally constitutive of the poet’s identity.

Space and narrative are thus concerned with the ways in which individuals exist in the world as social beings and in relation to the past. Both space and narrative, then, are strategies for collective remembering. I argue that the dream visions rely on the memorial capacity of space and narrative (and spatialized narratives and narrative spaces) to position poetic identity as contingent on memory. In offering the illusion of access to a single subjectivity, the dream visions show us how space and narrative interact to create identity on several levels, which correlate to Soja’s spatial awarenesses of Firstspace, Secondspace, and Thirdspace. Firstspace is “perceived space, a material and materialized ‘physical’ spatiality that is directly comprehended in empirically measureable configurations”.²⁸ Firstspace is self-evident, there to be observed and catalogued. But by privileging the material, Firstspace fails to account for the lived experience of

²⁴ Edward Soja, “History, Geography, Modernity,” in *The Cultural Studies Reader*, 3rd ed., ed. Simon During (Routledge, 2007), 115.

²⁵ Edward Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-And-Imagined Places* (Blackwell, 1996), 61.

²⁶ Claire Lauer, “Constructing the Self in/as Thirdspace: New Potentials for Identity Exploration in the Composition Classroom,” *Composition Studies* 37, no. 2 (2009): 57.

²⁷ Peter Woelert similarly argues that spatial patterns “anticipate, shape, and bestow meaning on human conceptual constructions.” (“Human cognition, space, and the sedimentation of meaning,” *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 10 (2011): 118).

²⁸ Soja, *Thirdspace*, 74.

space, or the ways people operate in space. This spatial awareness, I argue, corresponds to the perspective of the dreamer. Within the dreamspace, the physical reality has a Firstspace realness. The narratives that constitute the dreamer's identity literally take up space within Firstspace as buildings or other material objects that the dreamer is able to move through and engage with as a space with all of its attendant social and historical weight.²⁹ The spatialization of narrative suggests that spatial hermeneutics is a suitable mode of investigation for the visions. Firstspace epistemology allows us to analyze the concept of the "memory palace" or "memory place" by providing a language for discussing the material reality of space (and thus the way that memories and narrative can be understood to occupy or take up space).

Secondspace aligns with the space of memory, or the space of narration. It is "the spatial workings of the mind...[it] is entirely ideational...the interpretive locale of the creative artist...visually re-presenting the world in the image of their subjective imaginaries...with the image or representation coming to define and order the reality."³⁰ As Chaucer's narrators recollect their dream, each interprets the spaces experienced and the people in them and gives meaning to those experiences and spaces as social. What the Secondspace of narration foregrounds, then, is the relationship between space and sociality, or the ways in which the dreamer interacts with the narratives that occupy the dreamspace.³¹ The dream-space is separated from the space of the narrative by elements that draw attention to its status as composed, such as the proems and the dream vision framework, which take place outside the dream-space. Secondspace is, in other words, a space that is revelatory of "the spatial workings of the mind." It "visually re-[presents] the world in the image of [the narrator's, in this case] subjective imagin[ar[y]]." The narrator's own understanding of narrative both shapes the dreamscape and determines how narrative functions within it, and it also shapes how the narrator remembers and recounts the experience. The division between narrative and dream space simultaneously reflects a division in identity; the narrator who recounts the dream is and is not the figure who dreams it.

²⁹ See Piero Boitani, "Old Books Brought to Life in Dreams: The *Book of the Duchess*, the *House of Fame*, the *Parliament of Fowls*," in *The Cambridge Chaucer Companion*, ed. Piero Boitani and Jill Mann (Cambridge University Press, 1986).

³⁰ Soja, *Thirdspace*, 78-79.

³¹ As a recollection, "the mental imagery evoked by spatial descriptions can become bound up with emotional responses and with judgments about the thematic (ethical, social, aesthetic) relevance" of the experiences of the dream (Marco Caracciolo, "Narrative Space and the Readers' Responses to Stories: A Phenomenological Account," *Style* 47, no. 4 (2013): 425). So, for example, the *Book of the Duchess* narrator's tree catalogue and the spatial description of the forest is "bound up" with and reflective of the dreamer's experience and the narratives of the Black Knight.

As the space of narrative recollection, Secondspace's ideational epistemology enables the interpretation Firstspace experiences; in Secondspace, the narrator comments on what was originally only directly comprehended through the senses.³² In its interpretation, Firstspace experiences come into contact with the narrator's own understanding of what both space and narrative should do and be.

It is in the Thirdspace that the first two types of spatiality are negotiated; Thirdspace is a journey to the "real-and-imagined".³³ Inclusive of both First and Secondspace epistemologies, Thirdspace is a radically open spatiality that is both physical and mental: it comprises the two. Constructed through social practice, through the interaction of people and the world over time, it is the arena where cultural identity is figured through subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and concrete, real and imagined, conscious and unconscious, all of which exist simultaneously.³⁴ The product of the decision to record the dream experience and the narratives it contained—the poetic composition that renders the narrator an author and the creator of the space it occupies on the page, in effect the spatialization of narrative—is a Thirdspace.³⁵ The space of self-identification, once made public, is no longer a subjective but rather an intersubjective space, a space and identity constantly in flux, constantly re-negotiated as it is read and re-read and new meanings are produced.³⁶ In terms of poetic identity, Thirdspace accomplishes two things: First, it allows poetic identity to become intersubjective by providing the space for an encounter between author and audience, which in turn determines whether both author and narrative space are instituted into collective memory. Second, in that encounter, Thirdspace acts as the foundation for the creation of new poetic identities. Narratives that exist in Thirdspace—those that have been judged worthy of remembrance—are, as the dream vision narrators so clearly tell

³² Similarly, Ricœur suggests that the "development of a narrative always involves a combination of purely perceptual perspectives, implying position, angle of aperture, and depth of field" (*Time and Narrative*, vol. 2, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (University of Chicago Press, 1986), 94).

³³ Soja, *Thirdspace*, 5.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Certainly, any text with a narrator actively composing the narrative would constitute a Thirdspace encounter between author and audience; one need look no further than Chaucer's own *Canterbury Tales* or *Troilus and Criseyde*. And yet, the dream visions in particular are a singular kind of encounter with the poetic other by allowing the poet to turn their subjectivity outward, to present it for intersubjective approval. Unlike the avian narrative identities discussed in the previous chapter, the awareness the dream vision narrators have of the composedness of their selves and the conscious choice to present the narrative of that self separates telling one's narrative identity from composing it. And unlike, for example, the *Canterbury Tales*, the dream vision narrators' narratives are not simply stories they know or make up, but instead are part or representations of their very selves. What all these narratives have in common, however, is their reliance on the Other, on a receiver, for coherence and intelligibility.

³⁶ See Heather Blatt, *Participatory Reading in Late-Medieval England* (Manchester University Press, 2018).

us, rife with inspiration for new stories. For those who desire to become authors, to participate in the social life of narrative and memory, pre-existing narratives are one of the building blocks of composition, both in terms of inspiration and as a metric against which those new compositions are judged.³⁷

If we accept that space and society are mutually constituted, as Soja suggests, and we accept that narrative occupies a privileged place in sociality, as Ricœur suggests, it is then little wonder that the spaces of and within dream visions are reflective of the dreamer's social engagement with the world, that is, with narrative. That the stories narrators know affect them on an individual level is, perhaps, obvious. Because the dream vision genre provides the illusion of access to the narratorial (un)consciousness, these dreamscapes present as highly personal, individual creations of a single subjectivity. Claire Barbetti has thus termed the dream vision genre an "ekphrasis of the mind."³⁸ But while dream visions are an ekphrasis of an individual mind or memory, they are also an important piece of social remembering. Alceste and Cupid appear to the narrator of the *Legend of Good Women* to chastise him for Chaucer's own works: "...thou hast seyde as the lyste, / That maketh men to wommen lasse triste, / That ben as trewe as ever was any steel" (*LGW F* 332-334). Emphasizing those works' effect on the larger world, Alceste says likewise that though the narrator "kan nat wel endite" (*LGW F* 414), his poems have "maked lewed folk delyte / To serve yow, in preysinge of your name" (*LGW F* 415-416). In identifying the impact of a narrative, Alceste has identified the social function of poetry: to model and create a particular effect in its audience. This social function is enacted through the use of "appreved stories" that live in the memories of individuals and communities. The *Book of*

³⁷ Soja's spatial trialectic of First, Second, and Thirdspace dovetails with Ricœur's own narrative trialectic: the threefold mimesis. Firstspace's directly comprehended physicality resonates with mimesis₁, a prenarrative understanding of the world. This prenarrative epistemology relies on structures and symbols to confer an "initial readability" (*Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (University of Chicago Press, 1984), 58), much like Firstspace privileges objectivity and materiality as the first step in spatial awareness. Mimesis₂ is the configuration or ordering of experience. The emplotment or sense-making work of mimesis₂ echoes the interpretive spatial awareness of Secondspace. In Secondspace, our ideas of what space should be come into contact with what space actually is; but whereas Firstspace foregrounded the physical material aspects of reality, in Secondspace "the image or representation [comes] to define and order the reality" (Soja, *Thirdspace*, 79). Secondspace and mimesis₂ share this interest in representation. The cumulative epistemology of Thirdspace is where First and Secondspace interact: perceived and conceived space combine to create lived space, an epistemology in which meaning is produced through social interaction. Refiguration, or mimesis₃, functions similarly. Mimesis₃ likewise hinges on social interaction, as the world of the narrative meets the world of the reader. Just as Thirdspace expands our understanding of space and thereby existence by adding a social dimension, mimesis₃ expands our understanding of narrative and thereby existence by likewise adding a social dimension: a fusion of horizons (*Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 77).

³⁸ Claire Barbetti, *Ekphrastic Medieval Visions: A New Discussion in Interarts Theory* (Palgrave, 2011), esp. 9-14.

the Duchess, *House of Fame*, *Legend of Good Women*, and *Parliament of Fowls* are thus each woven through with narrative; not only are the dream spaces themselves carved out of or shaped by what the dreamer reads, but within the dreamscape the dreamer encounters physical spaces—usually buildings or open spaces—that are formed out of narrative. The spaces of each dreamer’s vision is informed by the narratives they experience in a waking state and, moreover, each space of poetic composition corresponds to a particular layer of poetic subjectivity: dreamers to Firstspace; narrators to Secondspace; authors to Thirdspace. What the dream visions thus reveal is a mutually productive relationship between space and narrative: narratives create space, and spaces are associated with narrative composition, exchange, or reception. On both spatial and narrative fronts, the dream visions depend on social interaction to produce meaning. The intersubjectivity of narrative—its reliance on the other—produces intersubjective, interactive space, while intersubjective spaces influence the intersubjective narrative processes of composition and reception.

The Narrative Space of Dreams³⁹

While each of the dream visions use the relationship between space and narrative to represent poetic identity, they do so in different ways, particularly in regard to the frame narrative. All, for instance, depict their narrators falling asleep, but the *Book of the Duchess* and *Parliament of Fowls* are unique in making books a central part of that process. The narrators’ Thirdspace encounter with the page (with the spatial presentation of a narrative subjectivity), which they choose to recreate as an author upon waking, thus shapes both the dreamscape and the narrative recollection of it. For the *Legend of Good Women* and *House of Fame*, however, the space of the page is integrated into the dream itself, as both dreams are concerned with what the

³⁹ Steven F. Kruger (*Dreaming in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge University Press, 1992)), Sarah Stanbury, and others have identified the self-reflexivity of dream visions. Referring specifically to space in dreams, though she focuses on the Gawain-poet, Stanbury says: “...the technique of organizing space around a point of view of a character within the text seems to offer us a commentary not only on the world but also on the mind of the perceiver within the text...[it] turns the world into an objective correlative of a character’s mind or commentary on his emotions” (Stanbury, “The Gawain-poet,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Literature 1100-1500*, ed. Larry Scanlon (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 140 [139-52]). More recently, in her book *Ekphrastic Medieval Visions*, Claire Barbetti makes a case for dream visions as ekphrases of the mind. The concept of an ekphrastic dream vision is not unrelated to what psychologist Douglas Hollan calls “selfscape dreams”: dreams that “map” “...how the self is constituted and represented to itself” in relation to other objects and people in the world. Hollan writes, “The self emerges and maintains itself in the biological and imaginal space between body and world. Selfscape dreams map this terrain” (Hollan, “Selfscape Dreams,” in *Dreaming and the Self: New Perspectives on Subjectivity, Identity, and Emotion*, ed. Jeannette Marie Mageo (SUNY Press, 2003), 62, 65).

narrators have already written. So the *Parliament of Fowls* and *Book of the Duchess* trace a quest for Thirdspace, which bookends the dream vision: Thirdspace both produces (through reading) the dream and results from it (through authorship). For the narrators of the *Legend of Good Women* and *House of Fame*, however, what is at issue is how their own narratives already exist as Thirdspace—how their narratives have already been received and how they are remembered as poets.

There is a clearer pattern of narrative influence, then, in the *Book of the Duchess* and *Parliament of Fowls*: Thirdspace (the interaction with the “Other” of narrative facilitated by the space of the page) constructs and interacts with Firstspace (dreaming) and its narrativization in Secondspace (narration), which is then turned into Thirdspace (the page) again. This recursive cycle positions memory as necessary to Thirdspace, as the point upon which poetic identity hinges. To construct one’s identity as a poet is to depend on the memories of the past enclosed in books (Thirdspace), which both motivates and shapes the dreamspace (Firstspace) and the subsequent recollection of it (Secondspace). What the following sections hope to show is the way that Thirdspace encounters resound through Firstspace by constructing physical spaces and through Secondspace by guiding the narrator to a particular interpretation of his Firstspace experience. Finally, that original Thirdspace creates a new Thirdspace—the space where the narrator becomes an author by turning his narrative outward and offering it as a contribution to social memory. Beginning with the *Book of the Duchess* and *Parliament of Fowls*, I will begin to develop this chapter’s key contentions: that the spatial interaction with narrative (as in a book) produces a new spatialized narrative; that this new narrative stages a negotiation of memory between author and audience, which is constitutive of poetic identity; and that the dream visions are particularly suited to this kind of analysis.

The Encounter with Thirdspace in the *Book of the Duchess*

The frame of the *Book of the Duchess* begins with the very “approved” stories I have suggested are necessary to poetic identity. This section will follow the recursive structure of narrative influence, beginning with how an encounter with well-remembered stories (with Thirdspace) creates the dream space (Firstspace) and influences its interpretation (Secondspace), finally to be turned back into Thirdspace. In his insomnia, the dreamer turns to poetry to “drive

the night away” (BD, 49); in it, he finds the exemplum of Alcyone, in whom the dreamer finds a kindred spirit and whose prayer to the god of sleep, Morpheus, the dreamer imitates: he desires to be put to sleep “As did the goddesse quene Alcione” (BD, 264). The dreamer is so suddenly struck by the urge to sleep that “ryght upon my book / Y fil aslepe” (BD, 274-275). The separation between the space of consciousness and the space of the dream is marked by deictic shift: “thus hyt was, thys was my sweven / Me thoghte thus” (BD, 290-291). By inverting the word order, the narrator represents a transition from waking into unconsciousness.⁴⁰ The parallel between the two lines suggests that the experience immediately preceding it and the dream that follows are likewise mirrored—a suggestion reiterated through the dreamer’s physical proximity to a book. By falling asleep *on* a book, the linguistic mirroring between consciousness and unconsciousness is bolstered by a more metaphorical mirroring between the physical book and the dream itself—the intersubjective space of narrative and the subjective space of dreaming. The dream begins with a parallel to the dreamer’s real-world experience, picking up where he left off to sleep:

And in the dawenyng I lay,
 ...in my bed al naked
 I loked forth, for I was waked
 ...out of my slep” (BD, 292-296).

And just as he lay sleeping on a book, in his dream, the dreamer awakens in a room whose walls and windows tell the story of Troy alongside the *Romance of the Rose*. His dream seems to begin inside a book: The walls’ “text and glose” of the *Romance of the Rose* and the windows “ful wel depeynted” with “hoolly al the storie of Troye” combine to create the effect of an illuminated manuscript.⁴¹ Like the story of Seyx and Alcyone, Troy and the *Romance* are both examples of

⁴⁰ For more on sleep in medieval literature, see Michael Raby, “Sleep and the Transformation of Sense in Late Medieval Literature,” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 39 (2017). For a more thorough discussion of sleep in the *Book of the Duchess* in particular, see Davis, “The Work of Sleep in Chaucer’s *Book of the Duchess*.”

⁴¹ Other scholars have likewise addressed this collapse between book and physical space. Jamie C. Fumo writes, “a bedroom with walls engraved with the stories of Troy and the Roman de la Rose, enfolds the dreamer as if within the pages of an illuminated manuscript anthology.” (*Making Chaucer’s Book of the Duchess: Textuality and Reception* (University of Wales Press, 2015), 40. Michael Salda notes, “The dreamer seems to see a book, even though he clearly is within a building. At the same time, the dreamer unquestionably sees a building, yet one so much like a manuscript that he can describe it only according to a textual idiom” (“Pages from History: The Medieval Palace of Westminster as a Source for the Dreamer’s Chamber in the *Book of the Duchess*,” *The Chaucer Review* 27, no. 2 (1992): 113).

“approved stories”—stories that have, through time, persisted in social memory. The position of such stories has been codified and their value as components of a larger social network of narrative—their social capital—is established; they are, in Ricœur’s words, an “institution of society.” As such, when the dreamer moves through the dreamspace, we can track how these stories influence not only his narrative production, but the social mores and relationships that occur throughout these narratively governed spaces. Passing through the courtly idiom of the *Romance* and the tragedy of Troy functions like falling into a manuscript; when the dreamer meets the Black Knight, these courtly and tragic discourses will inform their social encounter.

By marking the transition between waking and sleeping, the poem also marks an apparent regression from the sociality that consciousness demands into a more private, inner consciousness that no one else can understand. The descent from narrator to dreamer is equally a descent from intersubjective spaces to a more individualized subjectivity. Indeed, the dreamer cautions that he

...mette so ynly swete a sweven,

So wonderful that never yit

Y trowe no man had the wyt

To konne wel my sweven rede (*BD*, 276-279).

But despite the regression into a private subjectivity, the dreamer cannot escape the intersubjectivity of narrative. Not even, the dreamer cautions, can such famous interpreters of dream narratives as Joseph and Macrobius make sense of it. Such posturing further suggests the individuality and subjectivity of his dream and dreaming in general; however, upon waking the dreamer nonetheless decides that

Thys ys so queynt a sweven

That I wol, be processe of tyme,

Fonde to putte this sweven in ryme

As I kan best, and that anoon (*BD*, 1330-1333).

The “sweven,” while certainly “queynt,” is not the solitary affair that a traditional understanding of dreaming would seem to suggest. The influence of Seyx and Alcyone’s narrative reverberates throughout the dreamspace, coloring the events that transpire and providing context for the social

interactions that will follow. As we shall see, more than just merely waking up inside a book, the dreamer and the Black Knight play out a version of the Seyx and Alcyone story, literally upon which the dreamer is currently sleeping. The narrative that the narrator is putting into “ryme” is the telling of this interaction—certainly taking place inside his subjective mind, yet nonetheless indicative of the inherent sociality and intersubjectivity of narrative and narrative production. Without the Black Knight there is, if not nothing then certainly something much less, “queynt” about the narrator’s dream and, therefore, a story less worth telling.

The choice to write down his dream, which itself was shaped by the narrative of Seyx and Alcyone, presages the *Parliament of Fowls* narrator’s opinion that old stories are like fields out of which come new corn. But, moreover, the dream narrative framework likewise associates narrative production with the creation of new space, the dream space, which then serves as the impetus for the creation of a different kind of space: the space of the page. Like Macrobius and the authors of Scripture, the narrator of the *Book of the Duchess* is presenting his dream for social judgment and preservation for posterity.⁴² The *Book of the Duchess* thus demonstrates the recursive nature of Thirdspace: it is in relation to the spatialized narratives he encounters while waking that the narrator positions himself as an author by using the space of his own narrative to call attention to others. In so doing, the author invites the judgment of his presumably well-read audience: would Joseph or Macrobius indeed have trouble—and, moreover, do you? By spatializing his dream, the narrator offers his readers the potential for the same kind of Thirdspace interaction he found in his own book.

As the dream progresses, the dreamer foregrounds the dream’s material reality. From the perspective of the dreamer, both the bedchamber and the forest have a Firstspace realness. The dreamer moves through these spaces with intention that makes sense within his dream world and is compelled by sensory, Firstspace stimuli; it is only in the reflective space of memory and retelling (Secondspace) that this movement becomes meaningful, as the dream becomes emplotted and those spaces serve narrative purposes—namely, an indication of the worthiness of the dreamer’s tale conveyed by the illusion that the dreamer wakes up inside a book, and as the

⁴² The dreamer’s experience as a poet--the creation of narrative space to commemorate a particular event--is not unlike Chaucer’s own. Written as a tribute to Blanche of Lancaster (perhaps at the request of her husband and Chaucer’s sometimes patron John of Gaunt), the *Book of the Duchess* is a real example of the way in which narrative can function as a space--as a monument. Like the tomb that John of Gaunt had constructed for Blanche, Chaucer’s poem serves as a public display meant to assert her position in cultural memory. See Phillipa Hardman, “The *Book of the Duchess* as a Memorial Monument,” *The Chaucer Review* 28, no. 3 (1994).

setting for social encounters productive of narrative. The bedchamber may lack the attention to material detail of *House of Fame*, or indeed, that of the hypothetical bed the narrator would dedicate to his bringer of sleep (*BD*, 246-64), but nonetheless, the dreamer's waking is in a sensory, "directly comprehended" space.⁴³ The dreamer's spatial awareness begins locatively, noting that he is "in my bed al naked" (*BD*, 293), followed by a series of sensory experiences: birds singing "Upon my chambre roof wythoute, / Upon the tyles, overal aboute" (*BD*, 299-300), establishing that there is, indeed, an outside; next, he notices that "with glas / Were al the wyndowes wel yglased, / Ful clere, and nat an hoole ycrased" (*BD*, 322-324), and that the walls are painted "with colours fyne" (*BD*, 332).⁴⁴ In each of these observations, the material reality precedes the narrative recognition. The dreamer notes that the windows are clear and not cracked before he names the story represented on them; likewise, the walls are painted in fine colors before they are "peynted, bothe text and glose, / Of al the Romaunce of the Rose" (*BD*, 333-334). Finally, the dreamer completes his survey of the room by noting,

My wyndowes were shette echon,
 And throgh the glas the sonne shon
 Upon my bed with bryghte bemes,
 With many glade gilde stremes;
 And eke the welken was so fair—
 Blew, bryght, clere was the ayr,
 And ful attempre for sothe hyt was;
 For nother to cold nor hoot yt nas,
 Ne in al the welken was a clowde (*BD*, 335-342).

Despite a bit of dream logic—the dreamer can see that there are no clouds in the sky, despite the windows being shut and, moreover, glazed with the story of Troy—the bedchamber is nevertheless a measurable, physical space that he recognizes as belonging to him in some

⁴³ For more on the materiality of the bedchamber, see Sarah Stanbury, "The Place of the Bedchamber in Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 37 (2015).

⁴⁴ The dreamer's sense of Firstspace bears the influence of the story he was reading before. The dreamer, who wakes from sleep in his bed "al naked" (*BD*, 293), has the reverse experience of Alcyone, who is carried to her bed "al naked" (*BD*, 125), sleeps, and dreams of the dead Seyx.

capacity.⁴⁵ He is comfortably naked in the room and uses the possessive pronoun “my” throughout its description. Such ownership of space within the dream is comparable to the spatial practice of the narrator’s conscious existence. With nothing abnormal spatially, the dreamer is able to function and use this space as it is meant: a bedroom. The narrator’s own preconceived understanding of space influences how the dreamer understands and operates in this new space and, given his comfort, it is on par with the narrator’s estimation of how space should be used.

The exterior space the dreamer travels through before he meets the Black Knight and comes again to a narrative space has a parallel Firstspace materiality.⁴⁶ Though it is not a man-made environment, it is nonetheless an observable, physical space. As in the bedchamber, the dreamer’s enumeration of the forest’s physical features precedes its function as a space of narrative exchange. Before he notices the Black Knight sitting against a tree, the dreamer first explains that

...every tree stood by hymselfe
Fro other wel ten foot or twelve—
So grete trees, so huge of strengthe,
Of fourty or fifty fadme lengthe,
Clene withoute bowgh or stikke,
With croppes brode, and eke as thikke —
They were nat an ynche asonder (*BD*, 419-424).

In pausing to assess his material surroundings and even to gauge heights and distances, the dreamer foregrounds his own physical experience rather than the subsequent social encounter with the Black Knight. But while the dreamer’s use of space in the bedchamber was conditioned by his own understanding of space, the use of exterior space is defined by social interaction. In comparison with the solitude of the bedchamber, where the dreamer had only narratives for companions, outdoor spaces are social spaces and become founts of narrative. Narrative, in other words, creates space and connected the dreamer to the outside world in his room, but in the

⁴⁵ The observation that the dreamer can see the sky through the closed and decorated windows has its origins in a class lecture with Robyn Bartlett (ENGL 514: Chaucer (Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN, Spring 2017)).

⁴⁶ See Laura L. Howes, “Chaucer’s Forests, Parks, and Groves,” *The Chaucer Review* 49, no. 1 (2014) for a discussion of exterior space in Chaucer.

outside world, social encounter in space creates narrative.⁴⁷ Interaction with others provides the dreamer with context he otherwise would not have had and defines the spaces he occupies and their uses, first by identifying Octavian as the leader of the hunt, then through the Black Knight's tale. This narrativization allows the dreamer to contextualize his sensory experiences in Firstspace, which become central to his recollection of them upon waking.

This Firstspace dream is filtered through the Secondspace of the narrator's memory as it becomes a narrative. The dreamer's narrative, which he "putte...in ryme" (*BD*, 1332), is not the only one produced by the dream space, however. The Secondspace of his narration relates not only his own tale, the dream, but a companion piece to Seyx and Alcyone—two original compositions.⁴⁸ Each of these narratives are governed by the Thirdspace encounter with Alcyone's tale. What makes the dreamer's narrative worth telling is its relationship to the Alcyone story, which structures the dream space. The narrator primes his audience by relating the story of Seyx and Alcyone, which is completed by the dream. While the stories encountered in the bedchamber are already familiar to the *Book of the Duchess* dreamer, he witnesses a new act of composition: the Black Knight's song for his lost love. That lay—the Knight's seemingly original composition, but nonetheless occurring within the dreamer's own unconscious mind—bears similarity to the story of Seyx and Alcyone which sparked the dream framework from the start. The *Book of the Duchess* dreamer's Black Knight composes a song of loss not unlike the tragic story of Seyx and Alcyone he fell asleep reading, but mirrored. Just as the dreamer's descent into dreaming followed a linguistic mirroring, the narrative that he sees inside the dream mirrors in many ways what he read just prior. Like Alcyone, the Black Knight is in mourning, though for different reasons. While Alcyone desires to know whether Ceyx is "quyk or ded" (*BD*, 121), the Knight knows his lover's fate. What unites the two figures is the desire to follow

⁴⁷ For a different interpretation of how these two spaces are connected, see Nancy Ciccione, "The Chamber, the Man in Black, and the Structure of Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*," *The Chaucer Review* 44, no. 2 (2009).

⁴⁸ These are not, to be sure, *wholly* original; Chaucer is largely influenced by Froissart, Machaut, and Ovid. However, as this chapter does not ultimately refer to Chaucer as the poetic identity being constructed, I am limiting my analysis to the narrative perspective of the dreamer, from whose perspective the Black Knight's lay is an original composition, and the narrator, to whom the dream is original. The essays collected in *Chaucer's Book of the Duchess: Contexts and Interpretations*, ed. Jamie Fumo (D.S. Brewer, 2018) address the diverse influences on the poem. For more on Chaucer's French connection, see Charles Muscatine, *Chaucer and the French Tradition: A Study in Style and Meaning* (University of California Press, 1957); James Wimsatt, *Chaucer and the French Love Poets: The Literary Background of the Book of the Duchess* (University of North Carolina Press, 1968) and *Chaucer and His French Contemporaries: Natural Music in the Fourteenth Century* (University of Toronto Press, 1991); and R. Barton Palmer, "The *Book of the Duchess* and *Fonteinne Amoureuse*: Chaucer and Machaut Reconsidered," *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature* 7 (1980).

their beloved into death, but the dream-version is only an approximation of the actual narrative. Alcyone “deyede within the thridde morwe” (*BD*, 214), a mercy denied to the Black Knight. Though he chides Death for not also taking his life, the closest the Knight can come to modelling Alcyone’s perfect love is to “faste faynte / And his spirites wexen dede” (*BD*, 488-489). The lovers’ mourning is a narrative thread that weaves through waking and dreaming, as Alcyone’s narrative informs not only the dreamer’s unconsciousness and its subsequent retelling, but also a composition at several removes from the book in the dreamer’s sleeping hands.⁴⁹ In this way, then, the Black Knight’s composition occurs within a space that is inflected with the same narrative that forms the dreamer’s unconsciousness. The Knight’s mourning completes Alcyone’s, whose words “she sayede more in that swow / I may not telle yow as now; / Hyt were to longe for to dwelle” (*BD*, 215-217). Much like the *Legend of Good Women* narrator, however, the *Book of the Duchess* dreamer is slightly more loquacious while dreaming and records the entirety of the Black Knight’s lament.⁵⁰ The Knight is a surrogate Alcyone, whose narrative exchange with the dreamer fills in gaps left by what the narrator did not say, namely, Alcyone’s reaction to the death of her husband.⁵¹

In addition to being a space of narrative composition, the forest in which the dreamer finds the Black Knight also reflects certain truths about narrative exchange and reception: namely, its instability. The dreamer moves from one narratively structured space to another as he leaves the established literary tradition of the bedchamber and crosses into clearing, where the encounter with the Black Knight puts the dreamer into the position of actively having to receive the narratives that construct the Black Knight’s identity. The narrator remarks on the decidedly literary quality of the Knight’s lament: “He made of rym ten vers or twelve / Of a compleynte to hymselfe” (*BD*, 463-464) and calls it a “lay, a maner song, / Withoute noote, withoute song”

⁴⁹ For more on the role of suffering in the *Book of the Duchess*, see L.O. Aranye Fradenburg, *Sacrifice Your Love: Psychoanalysis, Historicism, and Chaucer* (University of Minnesota Press, 2002), esp. 79-112.

⁵⁰ Scholars widely regard the dreamer as having “missed the point” of the Ovidian tale. See in particular Michael D. Cherniss, *Boethian Apocalypse: Studies in Middle English Vision Poetry* (Pilgrim Books, 1987), 174 and Lynch, *Philosophical Visions*, 41. For more on the relationship between the Ovidian original and Chaucer’s retelling, see Elizaveta Strakhov, “‘Counterfeit’ Imitatio: Understanding the Poet-Patron Relationship in Machaut’s *Fonteinne amoureuse* and Chaucer’s *Book of the Duchess*,” in *Chaucer’s Book of the Duchess: Contexts and Interpretations*, ed. Jamie Fumo (D.S. Brewer, 2018).

⁵¹ This pattern has been recognized by several scholars; see Jamie Fumo, *Making Chaucer’s Book of the Duchess* and *Chaucer’s Book of the Duchess: Contexts and Interpretations*, as well as Katherine Heinrichs, *The Myths of Love: Classical Lovers in Medieval Literature* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010). For more on Chaucer’s Ovidian influences, see John M. Fyler, *Chaucer and Ovid* (Yale University Press, 1979); Andrew Galloway, “Ovid in Chaucer and Gower,” in *A Handbook to the Reception of Ovid*, ed. John F. Miller and Carole E. Newlands (Wiley, 2014).

(*BD*, 471-472), which inspires a sense of familiarity and compassion in the dreamer.⁵² Like Canacee and the falcon, whose tale of emotional and physical distress inspires a promise to right the falcon's wrongs, the dreamer likewise tells the Black Knight that

...yif that yee

Wolde ought discure me of youre woo,

I wolde, as wys God helpe me soo,

Amende hyt, yif I kan or may.

.....

And telleth me of your sorwes smerte;

Paraunter hyt may ese youre herte (*BD*, 548-556).

Here, the dreamer aligns story or narrative with identity; if, as the Black Knight says, he is sorrow and "sorwe ys Y" (*BD*, 597) then the story of "In what wyse, how, why, and wherfore" (*BD*, 747) he his "blysse lore" (*BD*, 748) sets an equivalency between the story the Knight tells and his actual self. Indeed, the Knight sets the stage for a storytelling event, inviting the dreamer to "com sytte adoun" (*BD*, 749) and conditions the telling of his tale on its reception: "I telle the upon a condicioun / That thou shalt hooly, with al thy wyt, / Doo thyn entent to herkene hit" (*BD*, 750-752). And yet, the dreamer's (perhaps willful) ignorance of the true meaning of the Black Knight's story does not correspond to "Hooly, with al the wit I have, / Here yow, as wel as I kan" (*BD*, 756-757). Given what we know of the dreamer's prowess as a reader and the Knight's richly allusioned tale, it seems unlikely that the dreamer could so badly have missed the point.⁵³ But, as we shall see again in the *Legend of Good Women* and other dream visions, Chaucer uses outdoor space as a metaphor for lack of narrative control or failure. Despite the Black Knight's very clear intent in telling his story, and despite having a relatively competent and receptive listener/reader, the success of his tale is ultimately at the whim of its audience. Just

⁵² For more on the Black Knight's use of literature, see Helen Phillips, "The Shock of the Old? The Unsettling Art of Chaucer's Antique Citations," in *Chaucer's Book of the Duchess: Contexts and Interpretations*, ed. Jamie C. Fumo (D.S. Brewer, 2018), esp. 188-95. For a discussion of the genre of the Black Knight's composition, see Ardis Butterfield, "Lyric and Elegy in the Book of the Duchess," *Medium Ævum* 60, no. 1 (1991): "Chaucer's decision to present the complex emotional experience of bereavement in the plain terms of the complaint seems perhaps more blunt, certainly more of a risk. For the terms (not only of the song, but of all responses to death in the poem) dare to be both crudely inarticulate and awkwardly misunderstood." (54).

⁵³ For a brief introduction to the conversation regarding the relationship between the dreamer and the Black Knight, see Ruth Morse, "Understanding the Man in Black," *The Chaucer Review* 15, no. 3 (1981).

as the narrator of the *Canterbury Tales* cautions readers of a certain disposition “whoso list it nat yheere, / Turne over the leef and chese another tale” or else “Blameth nat me,” (I.3176-77, 3181) the Black Knight holds his audience to a particular standard and yet, has no more control over his tale’s reception than do any of the Canterbury pilgrims. This anxiety is reinforced by the type of space in which the exchange takes place.

By positioning narrative exchange and reception in nature rather than a constructed space, the *Book of the Duchess* signals narrative’s instability. The forest the dreamer enters

...had forgete the poverttee

That wynter, throgh hys colde morwes,

Had mad hyt suffre, and his sorwes;

Al was forgeten, and that was sene (*BD*, 410-413).

The forest in which the Black Knight shares his lay is forgetful, suggesting that narrative memory—like natural memory—can be short. This is quite unlike the manmade bedchamber, a durable constructed monument to the similarly durable, established, and remembered narratives of Troy and the *Romance of the Rose*. No windows are likely to be glazed with the “text and glose” of the Black Knight’s complaint. And yet, the Knight’s composition and his narrative identity are immortalized in the narrator’s written word. The nestling of a space of forgetting within a space too “queynt” (*BD*, 1330) to be forgotten ensures the lay’s remembrance. One might speculate that, had the *Duchess* narrator had an encounter with a Knight in a waking state, he may not have found it so remarkable. Yet because narrative and space mutually produce one another, the Black Knight and his tale are in fact kin to the *Romance of the Rose*, as they take up space beside one another in the dreamer’s mind, “by process of tyme, / ...putte ... in ryme” (*BD*, 1331-32) and, like the dreamer’s book, presented for inclusion in the narratives of social memory.

The *Book of the Duchess* is a clear example, then, of the ways in which space shapes the process of becoming a poet and poetic subjectivity; what makes the narrator a poet is a narrative retelling of a dreamspace which, in turn, was inspired by other socially established narratives. That narrator’s poetic identity hinges on the reception of his narrative. In other words, the degree to which he may be considered a poet at all, much less a successful poet, depends on his

community's response to the poem.⁵⁴ Like all narrative identities, the dream vision's coherence as an identity is conditioned by the social realities and expectations in which it is constructed. Given that we know the narrator anticipates the retelling of his dream will be incomprehensible, it is possible that we are meant to understand the narrator's poetic endeavor as a failure. But what narrative allows the narrator to do is make his private unconscious public for consumption by a particular community. While serving as a memory of the narrator's own experience, the narrative (and its spatial representation on the page, Thirdspace) also functions as a monument to the Black Knight's experiences and to Whyte, his dead beloved.⁵⁵ Their tragedy is elevated to the same status as Seyx and Alcyone on account of sharing the same narrative and physical space. The equivalency implied by the sharing of space between the two stories, and by extension to the *Duchess* narrator's own story, reveals a narrative dependency on social acceptance, on being an "approved" story. These narratives' continued physical, spatial existence, and the narrator's poetic identity, is, in the end, determined by the community. In order for the narrator to be remembered as a poet, a community must first deem his dream—the narrative representation of the space of his subjective, unconscious mind—worth remembering. The space of the narrator's narrative identity is thus constructed intersubjectively first through the negotiation of narrative influence, then through its reception as a narrative.

The Recursive Movement of Spatial and Narrative Influence in the *Parliament of Fowls*

The *Parliament of Fowls*'s awareness of Firstspace begins not in the narrator's dream, but in his book. The *Dreme of Scipioun* functions like the *Book of the Duchess* dreamer's Seyx and Alcyone story: the page as Thirdspace.⁵⁶ As a retelling of a dream, the *Dreme of Scipioun*

⁵⁴ As Lara Ruffolo notes in regard to the *House of Fame*, "literary authority resides in the poet's ability to compel an audience to read and recall his work—in other words, in his ability to achieve Fame." ("Literary Authority and the Lists of Chaucer's *House of Fame*: Destruction and Definition through Proliferation," *The Chaucer Review* 27, no. 4 (1993), 326-27). This reliance on memory extends, I am arguing, to the rest of the dream visions and the construction of poetic identity.

⁵⁵ See Peter Travis, "White," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 22 (2000) and Holly A. Crocker, "'My First Matere I Wil Yow Telle': Visual Impact in the *Book of the Duchess*," in *Chaucer's Visions of Manhood* (Palgrave, 2007).

⁵⁶ The narrator refers to his book as "Tullyus of the Drem of Scipioun" (PF, 31). This is the *Somnium Scipionis*, originally part of Cicero's *De re publica*, which was preserved alongside a commentary by Macrobius. How extensive Chaucer's knowledge of Cicero was is unclear, but he or the *Somnium* are mentioned overtly in three of Chaucer's poems, including the *Parliament* (the other two are the *Book of the Duchess*, where Chaucer seems to confuse Macrobius for the author of the *Somnium* ("(He that wrot al th' avysyoun / That he mette..." (BD, 285-286) and the *House of Fame*). Throughout this section, I will follow the narrator's attribution of the book to Cicero. As Christy McCarter has pointed out, assuming the narrator meant Macrobius's commentary denies the reality of the

contains the same spatial levels as the dream visions: Firstspace dreamscape, Secondspace memorial narrative, and Thirdspace presentation which is an encounter with an authorial/poetic subjectivity. In the case of the *Parliament of Fowls*, that encounter becomes quite literal, as Scipio Africanus appears in the dreamer's unconscious. That encounter is facilitated by the *Dreme's* use of Firstspace as philosophical perspective: Africanus's understanding of "commune profyt" (*PF*, 47) originates in his view of "the Galaxy" (*PF*, 56), "the lytel erthe, that heer is, / At regard of the hevenes quantite" (*PF*, 57-58).⁵⁷ This spatial perspective informs Africanus' philosophy ("syn erthe was so lyte, / ... / That he ne shulde hym in the world delyte" (*PF*, 64-66)), which is then remembered and recorded on the page, and in turn comes to occupy space in the mind of the dreamer in the person of Scipio Africanus. Africanus bears heavily on the dreamer's experiences in the dreamscape, most notably by deciding the dreamer's narrative future by deciding what space the dreamer will occupy in accordance with narratives of which he himself approves. The space into which Africanus pushes the dreamer coincides with what Africanus deems a "mater of to wryte" (*PF*, 168).

Like the *Book of the Duchess* dreamer, the *Parliament of Fowls* dreamer finds himself in Firstspace when the dream begins, which calls attention to the primacy of sensory and material experience to that perspective. And yet, Thirdspace narratives continue to intrude into the Firstspace of the dream, shaping the unconscious experience and expectation of space. The dreamer, struck first by the materiality of the garden wall and gates in front of him, is then caught between the sentiments expressed by the gates and the experiences they promise.

Africanus

...unto a gate broughte,
 Ryght of a park walled of grene ston;
 And over the gate, with lettres large iwroughte,
 Ther weren vers iwriten...

text described by the narrator ("Locating the Literal Book," (unpublished manuscript, 5 March 2021), Microsoft Word file). For more on the relationship between Cicero, the *Somnium*, and Chaucer, see Timothy Shonk, "'For I Hadde Red of Affrycan Byforn': Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis* and Chaucer's Early Dream Visions," in *Cicero Refused to Die: Ciceronian Influence through the Centuries*, ed. Nancy van Deusen (Brill, 2014), and the introduction to *Macrobius: Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, ed. and trans. William Henry Stahl (Columbia University Press, 1990).

⁵⁷ Susan Crane, "'The lytel erthe that here is': Environmental Thought in Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls*," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 39 (2017).

On eyther half.... (PF, 121-125).

Each gate is emblazoned with verses that imbue them with a sort of subjectivity; the gates themselves seem to speak with first person pronouns and describe for themselves what they hold.⁵⁸ Indeed, the narrator recalls these verses as what the gates “spak” (PF, 134), despite the words having been “iwritten” (PF, 124).⁵⁹ The dreamer is “astoned to beholde” (PF, 142) this combination of materiality and narrative, an effect that is produced not by one feature independently, but by the material, Firstspace reality of the gates working in combination with the narrative potential inscribed upon them. The narrator further emphasizes his physical awareness of the gates by using a material metaphor to describe their effect:

Right as betwixen adamauntes two
Of evene myght, a pece of iren set,
That hath no myght to meve to ne fro —
For what that oon may hale, that other let —
Ferde I...” (PF, 148-152).

The dreamer’s Firstspace awareness persists into the narrator’s Secondspace recollection of the dream which, again, foregrounds the impact of Firstspace on the construction of the poet’s subjectivity. Because Firstspace experiences resound so strongly, the narrator uses spatial and material metaphors to come to terms with and account for physical space inside the Secondspace of narration.

Africanus’s presence, which projects into the Firstspace reality of the narrator’s dream from the Thirdspace, intersubjective encounter with Cicero’s book, is ultimately what determines the dreamer’s unconscious experience. Africanus not only “shof” (PF, 154) the dreamer at the gate of his choosing, but tells the dreamer what kind of narrative he is about to experience: It will not be one of love, “For thow of love hast lost thy tast” (PF, 160), but as a result of Africanus’s influence, one of “commoun profyt.” In describing the space he encounters beyond the gates

⁵⁸ See Blatt, *Participatory Reading*; for discussions of the subjectivity of things and object-oriented ontology in medieval literature, see Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Julian Yates, eds, *Object Oriented Environs* (Punctum, 2016); Kellie Robertson, “Medieval Things: Materiality, Historicism, and the Premodern Object,” *Literature Compass* 5, no. 6 (2008) and “Medieval Materialism: A Manifesto,” *Exemplaria* 22, no. 2 (2010); Bettina Bildhauer, *Medieval Things: Agency, Materiality, and Narratives of Objects in Medieval German Literature and Beyond* (Ohio State University Press, 2020).

⁵⁹ This is, perhaps, a foreshadowing of the kind of material subjectivity we see in the *House of Fame*, where (I will argue) the Temple of Venus tells the story of the *Aeneid* in both past and present tense.

over the course of six stanzas, the narrator emphasizes the sensory input of its physical reality, including a description and catalogue of trees (*PF*, 172-175, 183-186), birdsong (*PF*, 190-192), and other musical instruments (*PF*, 197-200). Like the *Book of the Duchess* dreamer, the *Parliament of Fowls* dreamer's Firstspace awareness is also atmospheric: "Th'air of that place so attempre was / That never was grevaunce of hot ne cold" (*PF*, 204-205; cf. *BD*, 341-342). Privileging his sensory, Firstspace experience reinforces the physical reality of the dream and that space's bearing both on subsequent subjective construction, which culminates in the temple versus Nature's parliament, and on further narrative, which results in the *Parliament*.

Like his evaluation of the garden, the dreamer's first observation of the temple is physical: that it is "upon pilers greete of jasper longe" (*PF*, 230) and "of bras ifounded stronge" (*PF*, 231). Within the temple, too, the dreamer focuses plainly on the directly perceivable aspects of the space. Though traditionally the figures the dreamer sees have been understood to be "there" in some real sense, (i.e., as people in the same sense as Nature or Africanus are "there"), I want to suggest that, alternatively, we might consider that these figures—Priapus, Bacchus, Venus herself—are part of the architecture of the temple. Unlike the men placing floral garland on Priapus's head or the young couple kneeling before Venus, the narrator gives no direct indication that the deities in the temple are animate. Rather, they function as set pieces, material ornament, more like the paintings of great and tragic love stories the dreamer encounters further into the temple. Indeed, Africanus's presence bears this out; such stories, and the gods they feature and revere, represent a social reality for which the dreamer has lost his taste. This is another example of the way that Thirdspace shapes the dreamspace; Africanus's choice of narrative is echoed in the dreamer's rejection of Venus's temple. Like the bedchamber in the *Book of the Duchess* and the garden gates, the temple imbues Soja's "directly comprehended" space with narrative potential, with Firstspace awareness preceding narrative comprehension. Like the *Romance of the Rose* and Trojan narratives in the *Book of the Duchess*, these stories-turned-Firstspace are a connection to the outside world, they speak to a particular kind of sociality—rooted in romantic love, in this case—that is not the previously articulated purpose of the narrator's dream: to tell a story Africanus has deemed worth writing. Whether statues or actual living beings, the dreamer neither interacts with nor lingers over them, but merely notes and recounts that they are there.

The dreamer ultimately rejects the space, narrative, and sociality of the temple in favor of another, exterior space in which he finds “solace” (PF, 297). It is the same garden he was in before, but now it takes on similar architectural features that echo the temple he just left. Upon recognizing the goddess Nature, the dreamer assigns her a spatial dimension: “Of braunches were here halles and here boures, / Iwrought after here cast and here hir mesure” (PF, 304-305). The forest in the *Book of the Duchess* certainly lacked this architecturality of being “iwrought” into halls and bowers. However, both poems feature a progression from interior spaces constructed out of or aligned with received, socially defined narratives, to an outdoor space that receives its narrativity through sociality and vice versa; it is in narrative exchange that outdoor spaces become both narrative and social and create a new connection to the other. For the *Parliament of Fowls* dreamer, this narrative connection is borne out of witnessing the bird parliament which, as I have said, culminates in Nature exemplifying what Africanus meant by “commoun profyt.”⁶⁰ The space of the parliament reveals what new “mater” (PF, 168) Africanus intended the dreamer to commit to writing which is in contrast to the familiar, architectural narratives of the temple. The narrator’s narrative endeavor, then, comes not from the socially conditioned (and accepted) stories of Venus’s prowess, but from the Thirdspace encounter with Cicero’s book that exemplifies the kind of story to which his narratively-induced guide directs him.

The *Parliament of Fowls* narrator’s narrative identity is constructed through a very similar Secondspace as in the *Book of the Duchess*. The narrator is influenced by “approved

⁶⁰ Nature’s appearance in the *Parliament of Fowls* “...right as Aleyn, in the Pleynte of Kynde, / Devyseth [her] of aray and face” (PF, 316-317) is, like Africanus, another instance of books come to life within the dreamscape. Because this occurs in Secondspace and refers to events in the dream, it bears little on the dreamer’s Firstspace experience. What it does reveal, however, is how Secondspace acts as an interpretation of Firstspace experience. Unlike Cicero’s *Dreme of Scipioun*, which resounds across dream and frame (both First and Secondspace), Alan de Lille’s *De planctu Naturae* appears only after the fact; it is only in recalling the experience of seeing Nature’s material existence that the narrator likens her to the *Natura* of *De planctu naturae*. This moment of interpretation, moreover, further demonstrates how First and Secondspace interact to create identity. The narrator imposes a particular meaning on the dream that corresponds to his idea of what happened. By referring to another narrative--and specifically a narrative well-established in social memory--the narrator is appealing to structures that make his own narrative more familiar to his audience, thereby demonstrating both the intersubjectivity of narrative and of authorship. The reference to Alan de Lille likewise brings the weight of the *Natura* tradition to bear on the events of the dream. As I argued in the chapter on recognition, Chaucer’s “goddess Nature” (PF, 303) as *vicaria Dei* is a model for humanity’s own relationship with nature and with nonhuman animals. This awareness shapes the narrator’s Secondspace retelling of his dream, accounting for both the swift narrative abandonment of Venus’s temple and the elaborate example of the bird parliament. Finally, in offering his narrative’s association with Alan de Lille in Thirdspace, the narrator positions himself as an author as part of the *Natura* tradition. In so doing, he invites comparison between his narrative and others while also relying on that association to facilitate its endurance.

stories”—in this case, the *Dreme of Scipioun*. But whereas the *Book of the Duchess* narrator falls asleep on one book and seems to wake up inside of another, the *Parliament of Fowls* narrator’s book comes to life inside his dreamspace. Scipio Africanus appears as a guide through the spaces of the narrator’s dream and, indeed, the dreamer speculates that Africanus’s presence may have been caused by his reading: “Can I nat seyn if that the cause were / For I hadde red of Affrican byforn / That made me to mete that he stod there” (*PF*, 106-108). Africanus’s presence is for a decidedly literary reason: Since the dreamer

...hast the so wel born

In lokyng of myn olde book totorn,

Of which Macrobye roughete nat a lyte,

That sumdel of thy labour wolde I quyte. (*PF*, 109-112)

But Africanus makes his intentions even clearer, telling the dreamer that “if thow haddest connyng for t’endite, / I shal the shewe mater of to wryte” (*PF*, 167-168). He plans to show the dreamer something worth writing about, or in other words, to turn the dreamer into a poet—to take Firstspace and turn it into Thirdspace by way of Secondspace. To do so, Africanus’s first act within the dream is to guide the dreamer to a particular space: “forth with hym unto a gate broughte” (*PF*, 121). With the dreamer paralyzed by indecision over which of two gates to enter, Africanus “shof in at the gates wide” (*PF*, 154) and decides the dreamer’s path for him. Africanus, having sprung from his own narrative into the dream, becomes a literary manifestation of the dreamer’s attitudes toward books and reading:

For out of olde feldes, as men seyth,

Cometh al this newe corn from yer to yere,

And out of olde bokes, in good feyth,

Cometh al this newe science that men lere (*PF*, 22-25).

Africanus and his narrative are, in this case, the “olde boke,” while the dreamer’s unconscious experience—what he “yit mayst...se” (*PF*, 163)—and the revelations that come from it are “newe science.” This, too, the dreamer understands; upon waking, he reflects and

...othere bokes tok me to,

To reede upon, and yit I rede alwey.

In hope, ywis, to rede so som day

That I shal mete som thyng for to fare

The bet, and thus to rede I nyl nat spare (*PF*, 695-699).

To the *Parliament* narrator, dreams are a natural byproduct of reading and, moreover, one that improves quality of life. Narrative's demonstrable social importance, reinforced by Africanus's "commoun profyt" philosophy, encourage the narrator in his pursuit of authorship. The Secondspace connection between "newe science" (*PF*, 25) and "othere bokes" (*PF*, 695) positions his own narrative production as part of this cycle; by writing the *Parliament of Fowls* into space, the narrator becomes an author and its Thirdspace pages become an "olde feld" (*PF*, 23).

The dreamspace that is ultimately constructed from the *Dreme of Scipoun*'s influence—the bird parliament's meditation on "commune profyt"—follows, as I argued in an earlier chapter, in the steps of Africanus's own philosophy.⁶¹ Africanus's presence shapes and conditions both our and the dreamer's narrative expectations. With a reminder that the dreamer "of love hast lost thy tast" (*PF*, 160) we are unsurprised, then, when they do not linger over Venus's temple, "peynted overal / Ful many a story, of which I touche shal / ... / And al here love, and in what plyt they dyde" (*PF*, 284-294). Like the *Book of the Duchess*, the *Parliament of Fowls* associates socially accepted, received narratives with material, constructed spaces. But the temple is not the "mater of to wryte" (*PF*, 168) that Africanus promised to show the dreamer. For such narratives, we must look instead to wild, natural, uncontrolled environments—environments that mimic the active, unpredictable reception of unestablished narratives. This space, too, is colored with narrative influence. Just as the outdoor space of the *Duchess* is woven out of a narrative link to Seyx and Alcyone and built as a space of narrative exchange, so too is "the place / ...that was so sote and grene, / ... / ...a launde, upon a hil of floures" (*PF*, 295-302). This space, in which every kind of bird is assembled before the goddess Nature, is a space of narrative exchange and influence. While the dreamer in the *Parliament of Fowls* is a passive observer rather than an active recipient of narrative as in the *Book of the Duchess*, the two bear in common that the narratives that make them poets are exchanged in natural spaces that are

⁶¹ See Chapter 3, 125-33. That what the dreamer finds in n(N)ature is an extension of the *Dreme of Scipioun*'s concern for "commune profyt," demonstrated by the birds' exchange of narratives that fosters narrative recognition is likewise part of the argument of this earlier chapter.

governed by a narrative influence on the dreamer's own unconsciousness—whether Africanus or Alcyone.

The frame of the *Parliament of Fowls* makes clear that, like the *Book of the Duchess* narrator, the *Parliament of Fowls* narrator is actively concerned with the reception of his narrative. But whereas the *Book of the Duchess* narrator is convinced his narrative will fail to be understood because it is so “So wonderful that never yit / I trowe no man had the wyt / To konne wel my sweven rede” (*BD*, 277-279), the *Parliament of Fowls* narrator prays for assistance and poetic skill:

Cytherea, thou blyful lady swete,
That with thy fyrbrond dauntest whom the lest
And madest me this sweven for to mete,
Be thow myn helpe in this, for thow mayst best!
As wisly as I sey thee north-north-west,
Whan I began my sweven for to write,
So yif me myght to ryme, and endyte! (*PF*, 113-119).

Even though the narrator understands his dream as coming from Venus and asks her to guide his skill as a poet, he ultimately rejects other Cytherean narratives within his own dream, such as those built into the temple walls. The attention to narrative reception implied by requesting the skill to ensure its success indicates that the narrator intends for his narrative to be consumed. Combined with his theory of reading/understanding of the power of narrative (that it brings dreams and thence new knowledge), this concern suggests that his narrative could likewise spark such revelations. The narrator situates himself as an author at the beginning of the same cycle of old narrative/dream/new narrative in which he had previously participated as a reader. Rather than occupying the latter two positions—the “newe science”—the narrator seems to think he has the potential to become an “olde feld.” The narrator’s awareness of the sociality of narrative governs the space of his own composition; rather than, as the *Book of the Duchess* narrator attempts, a faithful, unadorned recounting of what he dreamt (implied by the straightforward “this was my sweven” that bookends its retelling (*BD*, 290, 1334), the *Parliament of Fowls* narrator attends to the literary and stylistic features he attempts to “ryme” and “endyte” (*PF*,

119). In presenting his internal narrative for public reception on the space of the page, the narrator intentionally recreates for others the experience he had reading the *Dreme of Scipioun* and relies on others for his continued standing as a poet. Just as the space of his unconscious mind is conditioned by socially established narratives, so too is the product of that space, its narrative retelling, conditioned by its interest in becoming one of them.

The Legend of Good Women

The *Legend of Good Women* is perhaps, of all the dream visions, most explicitly concerned with composition, narrative reception, and to some extent, with Chaucer's own "approved stories" (though Chaucer himself as an author is not the focus of this chapter). This concern with poetic identity—with how one is remembered as a poet—manifests itself in the way the *Legend of Good Women* uses space. The *Legend of Good Women* follows a similar trajectory for narrative identity as the other two visions: the narrator retells a dream narrative and offers it to the community for preservation in social memory (which is an extension of the way each of these narrators understand the social function of narrative). But whereas the *Book of the Duchess* and the *Parliament of Fowls* carve their Firstspace dreams out of Thirdspace encounters with narrative and use that to position themselves as authors, the *Legend of Good Women* dreamer's Firstspace experience spatializes his pre-existing authorial identity. What for the dreamers in the *Book of the Duchess* and *Parliament of Fowls* was the spatialization of established narratives that are used as pieces of their own narrative identities, the dream in the *Legend of Good Women* uses previously established conceits of outdoor spaces—their unconstructedness, unpredictability, and malleability—to express in space the anxieties of poetic identity.

The *Legend of Good Women* narrator demonstrates the same reverence toward narrative as those in the *Book of the Duchess* and *Parliament of Fowls*, while most clearly articulating the social importance of narrative:

Than mote we to bokes that we fynde,
Thurgh whiche that olde things ben in mynde,
And to the doctrine of these olde wyse,
Yeve credence, in every skylful wise,

That tellen of these appreve stories

.....

And yf that olde bokes were aweye,

yloren were of remembraunce the keye.

Wel ought uthanne honouren and beleve

These bokes, there we han noon other preve.

.....

On bokes for to rede I me delyte,

And to hem yive I feyth and ful credence (LGW F 17-31).

While narrative is personally significant to the *Legend of Good Women* narrator as it is to the others—"in myn herte have hem in reverence" (LGW F 32)—he is equally aware of stories' social function to affect memory and, more significantly, he attributes the staying power of narrative to books, to the space narratives occupy in the world. With this spatial component of narrative not only, then, is his own identity formed, but so too is the identity of particular communities that keep narratives alive and active in their social memory through books. The narrator's attitude toward books recalls Ricœur's suggestion that texts can function as "memory places," as containers for social frameworks with which individuals continue to identify.

Where the *Legend of Good Women* differs most substantially from both the *Book of the Duchess* and the *Parliament of Fowls* is in the absence of constructed space. Even though the narrator is invested in narrative and received stories, the *Legend of Good Women* is motivated instead by the failure of narrative reception rather than its successful transmission codified in material, Firstspace architecture, as we saw in the *Book of the Duchess* and *Parliament of Fowls* where socially accepted narratives took shape as physical space. Though the *Book of the Duchess* narrator is not convinced of his success as a poet and whereas the *Parliament of Fowls* narrator actively works to ensure it, in his waking state the *Legend of Good Women* narrator is aware of his own failure. Despite his desire to compose in praise of the daisy he finds in a meadow, the narrator laments, "Allas, that I ne had Englyssh, ryme or prose, / Suffisant this flour to preyse aryght!" (LGW F 66-67). His ability as a poet hinges on narratives in praise of the daisy, which he lacks. In order to redress this lack of narrative, the narrator turns to other socially accepted,

“approved” stories. Building on the *Parliament of Fowls* narrator’s metaphor that out of “olde felds... / Cometh al this newe corn fro yere to yere” (*PF*, 22-23), the narrator of the *Legend of Good Women* appeals to

Ye lovers that kan make of sentement;

.....

To forthren me somewhat in my labour

.....

For wel I wot that ye han her-biforn

Of makyng ropen, and lad away the corn,

And I come after, glenyng here and there,

And am ful glad yf I may fynde an ere

Of any goodly word that ye han left (*LGW F* 69-77).

The narrator situates himself in a poetic tradition and turns to that tradition for inspiration when his own words have failed him. His self-identification as a poet relies on others’ narratives for coherence, just as the *Book of the Duchess* and *Parliament of Fowls* narrators did. But whereas others’ narratives shaped the dreamer’s unconscious space—Cicero’s *Dreme of Scipioun* and the story of Seyx and Alcyone—, in the *Legend of Good Women* the narrator’s own narratives construct the dreamspace as his status as an author is questioned by Cupid and Alceste. And where, in waking, the narrator was unable to compose, the pattern of dream spaces resulting in new narratives will continue as he composes a poem in the dream itself.

With his failure to praise the daisy still in mind, the dreamer retires home where he “mette how I lay in the medewe thoo, / To seen this flour that I so love and drede” (*LGW F* 210-211). The dream is, at first, a continuation of the narrator’s waking quest to compose a love poem in honor of the daisy now transformed into the goddess Alceste, who is “lyk a daysie for to sene” (*LGW F* 224). In his dream, however, he is successful: “And therefore may I seyn, as thynketh me, / This song in preysyng of this lady fre” (*LGW F* 247-248). Though he is able to compose the song, it does not, in the end, achieve his aim of praising Alceste for, as Cupid points out, the dreamer “forgate hir in thi song to sette” (*LGW F* 540). The *Balade* instead is littered, like the Black Knight’s song, with literary allusion. The network of narrative reference—

presumably to the same authors who “kan make of sentement” the narrator called upon before—builds for Alceste a narrative identity of socially established narratives. (Later, Cupid makes explicit Alceste’s narrative identity by referring the dreamer to “a book, lyth in thy cheste, / [in which is] The grete goodnesse of the quene Alceste,” (LGW F 510-511).) These narratives describing the daisy/Alceste are extended to the meadow of which the flower is part. But though the dreamer pays honor with “good entente,” that does little to ensure his song is well-received. Indeed, much to the surprise of the dreamer, Cupid informs him that “Yt were better worthy, trewely, / a worm to neghen ner my flour than thou” (LGW F 318-317). Because outdoor spaces are, throughout the dream visions, associated with the unpredictability of narrative reception, the dreamer’s “good entente” does not overcome the concerns and disposition of its audience.

The charges leveled against the dreamer by Cupid are for what he has “mysseyest” (LGW F 323) in translating the *Romance of the Rose* and in saying “as the lyste” (LGW F 332) of Criseyde.⁶² To Cupid these narratives make the dreamer his “foo” (LGW F 322) and constitute war on all Cupid’s followers, with negative social effects: the dreamer “hynderest hem ... / And lettest fold from hire devocioun / To serve me, and holdest it foley / To serve Love. ...” (LGW F 324-327). For a community whose identity coheres around Cupid and love, of which the dreamer is a member, narratives that result in a rejection of the grand narrative of community cohesion are detrimental to collective identity. But Alceste counters, reminding Cupid that the dreamer has also

...served yow of his kunnyng,
 And furthered wel youre lawe in his makynge.
 Al be hit that he kann at wel endite,
 Yet hath he maked lewed folk delyte

⁶² Though thus far I have focused on the F version of the Prologue, the G version here departs substantially from F. While Cupid is upset about the dreamer’s translation of the *Romance* and that he “mad in Englysh ek the bok / How that Criseyde Troylus forsok” (LGW G 2642-65), he further chides the dreamer for his poor skill as a reader:

Was there no good matere in thy mynde,
 Ne in all thy bokes ne coudest thou nat fynde
 Some story of wemen that were goode and trewe?
 Yis, God wot, sixty bokes olde and newe
 Hast thou thyself, alle ful of storyes grete,
 ...
 ...what eyleth the to wryte
 The draf of storyes, and forgete the corn? (LGW G 270-312)

To serve yow, in preysinge of your name (*LGW F 412-416*).

The dreamer accomplishes this through “many a lay and many a thing” (*LGW F 430*) that he has written, including the *House of Fame*, *Parliament of Fowls*, and the *Knight’s Tale*. All these narratives are part of the dreamer’s own narrative identity and contribute to how he is remembered as a poet. Cupid and Alceste have differing estimations of the dreamer’s success as it relates to their own concerns. And though the dreamer tries to defend himself and separate the narratives he has composed from his own “entente” (*LGW F 470-474*), what the dreamer intended ultimately has no sway over how the narratives were received or how he is remembered. His dreamspace is, then, a battlefield over his own position in social memory and, indeed, his identity as a poet. Which narratives determine his remembrance is ultimately subject to the whims of his audience, as—just as in the *Book of the Duchess* and *Parliament of Fowls*—the natural environment of their debate suggests. Cupid and Alceste, however, guide the dreamer’s narrative identity by ordering him,

While that thow lyvest, yer by yere,

The most partye of thy tyme spende

In makyng of a glorious legende

Of goode wymmen, maydenes and wyves (*LGW F 481-484*).

By asserting control over the dreamer’s narrative compositions, the two attempt to ensure that the resulting narratives will be in their favor; the resulting narratives then ensure that the dreamer’s position in social memory aligns with Love in a positive manner to create a specific kind of social affect.⁶³ This process affirms the intersubjectivity of poets through their reliance on others (in both consuming and presenting narratives) for coherence and endurance. This process occurs in nature, in an unconstructed space, recalling the other visions’ use of outdoor spaces to demonstrate the unpredictability of narrative exchange. The *Legend of Good Women* uses outdoor space to emphasize the role of the receiver in creating narrative memory and in establishing the role and memory of the poet.

The individual legends that follow are of uncertain status depending on which version of the *Prologue* one reads, which directly influences where the act of composition takes place—

⁶³ For more on the instructions Alceste and Cupid give to the dreamer, see Laura J. Getty, “‘Other smale ymaad before’: Chaucer as Historiographer in the *Legend of Good Women*,” *The Chaucer Review* 42, no. 1 (2007).

either in the dreamspace or outside of it. While in both cases the legends arise from the dreamer's unconscious experience (like the narratives of the *Parliament of Fowls* and *Book of the Duchess*), there is a crucial difference in the remove from the dream at which the legends are composed. The G text ends with a relatively familiar scene: "And with that word, of slep I gan awake, / And right thus on my Legende gan I make" (LGW G 544-545). Like the previous dream visions, the G text creates a clear boundary between sleeping (the space of inspiration) and waking (the space of composition). This cycle mimics the recursive nature of narrative influence of the previous two visions, only here the dream functions as Thirdspace: the dream's concern with the narrator's own stories, which shapes the dream's use of space, inspires the creation of new Thirdspace in retelling the dream and subsequent legends. However, the F Prologue ends with, "And with that word my bokes gan I take, / And ryght thus on my Legende gan I make" (LGW F 578-579). Here, it is not clear the dreamer awakens at all before beginning to write. If indeed the dreamer does not wake up and the legends are part of the dreamer's unconscious experience, then the *Legend of Good Women* would lack the intentional publicizing of interiority—the deliberate creation of Thirdspace—present in the other two visions. Without the dreamer's conscious decision to set down a narrative recollection of his dream experience, what remains is instead a voyeuristic glimpse into the stories that make up the dreamer's unconsciousness, like the "texte and glose" of the *Romance of the Rose* in the windows of the *Book of the Duchess* dreamer's bedchamber.

The distinction between public and private, waking and dreaming is made even more problematic as Cupid draws a distinction between the stories the dreamer knows and those he will find in books: "And in thy bookes alle thou shalt hem fynde. / Have hem now in thy legende al in mynde; I mene of hem that ben in thy knowynge" (LGW F 556-558). If the composition of the legends takes place only within the dreamer's unconsciousness, then they do not represent a clear foray into the realm of public opinion and social memory. It is possible, of course, that we are meant to understand the dreamer as in fact waking up, or that (since the *Legend of Good Women* is unfinished) the narrator would indicate he was writing at a later point. However, the existence of two versions of the *Prologue*—one with a clear line between dreaming and consciousness and one without—raises the question from which space the legends actually

originate: in the dreamer's unconscious mind, or in the physical books of his conscious world.⁶⁴ Either way, Cupid and the dreamer understand books as a method of encountering the other in a particularly real sense. Cupid tells the dreamer he may “fynde” (*LGW* F 556) Alceste and the others about which he will write in books, while the dreamer reflects on his reading experiences and is able to claim that he knows Alceste—not her story, which is now stored in his “knowynge,” but *her* (*LGW* F 558). For these two the book, either metaphorically or in its actual physicality, provides an encounter with a subjectivity that is not one's own. This implication—that on the space of the page, in the space that a narrative occupies in the world, a reader comes into contact with an other—is precisely what I have been terming Thirdspace.

The House of Fame

Like the other dream visions, the *House of Fame* is equally about poets.⁶⁵ The poem, though unfinished, synthesizes the other visions' position on the relation between sociality, space, narrative, memory, and poetic identity. Like the *Book of the Duchess* and *Parliament of Fowls*, the *House of Fame* features physical spaces that are built out of and around received, socially accepted narrative. Unlike those other two visions, however, and more along the lines of

⁶⁴ For more on the Prologue to the Legend of Good Women, see Julia Boffey and A.S.G. Edwards, who use the two versions as a metric to date Chaucer's other works (“Codicology, Text, and the *Book of the Duchess*,” in *Chaucer's Book of the Duchess: Contexts and Interpretations*, ed. Jamie Fumo (D.S. Brewer, 2018); M.C. Seymour, “Chaucer's Revision of the Prologue of *The Legend of Good Women*,” *The Modern Language Review* 92, no. 4 (1997) [832-841]; John H. Fisher, “The Revision of the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*: An Occasional Explanation,” *South Atlantic Bulletin* 43 (1978) [75-84]; Jesse M. Gellrich, “Problems of Misreading: The ‘Prologue’ to *The Legend of Good Women*,” in *The Idea of the Book in the Middle Ages: Language Theory, Mythology, and Fiction* (Cornell University Press, 1985) [202-23]; most recently, see the essays collected in a special issue of *The Chaucer Review* 52, no. 1 (2017): “Looking Forward, Looking Back on the *Legend of Good Women*.”

⁶⁵ Ruth Evans puts it quite succinctly: The *House of Fame* is “a poem about the public role of the writer and the instability of memory...” (“Chaucer in Cyberspace,” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 33 (2001): 56). Multiple articles and books have been written about the *House of Fame* and the extent to which it is about poetry and naming them all here would be impractical. In addition to those cited elsewhere, key works consulted in the writing of this chapter are Robert M. Jordan, “Lost in the Funhouse of Fame: Chaucer and Postmodernism,” *The Chaucer Review* 18, no. 2, (1983), Steven F. Kruger, “Imagination and the Complex Movement of Chaucer's *House of Fame*,” *The Chaucer Review* 28, no. 2 (1993), Andrew Lemons, “The Poetic Form of Voice in Chaucer's House of Fame,” *The Chaucer Review* 53, no. 2 (2018), Robert J. Meyer-Lee, “Literary Value and the Customs House: The Axiological Logic of the *House of Fame*,” *The Chaucer Review* 48, no. 4 (2014), William A. Quinn, “Chaucer's Recital Presence in the *House of Fame* and the Embodiment of Authority,” *The Chaucer Review* 43, no. 2 (2008), Nicholas Watson, “The Phantasmal Past: Time, History, and the Recombinative Imagination,” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 32 (2010), Sheila Delaney, *Chaucer's House of Fame: The Poetics of Skeptical Fideism* (University of Chicago Press, 1972), Piero Boitani, *Chaucer and the Imaginary World of Fame* (D.S. Brewer, 1984), Kathryn McKinley, *Chaucer's House of Fame and its Boccaccian Intertexts: Image, Vision, and the Vernacular* (Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2016).

the *Legend of Good Women*, the *House of Fame* uses outdoor space as the space of narrative failure rather than exchange.⁶⁶ *The House of Fame*'s Geoffrey begins his dream, like the *Book of the Duchess* dreamer, in a space that uses glass and narrative to evoke a book's materiality. And like the *Parliament of Fowls*, the *House of Fame* features a guide through the dreamspace. Moreover, all the visions concern themselves with what stories are worth being told and who is worthy to tell them. The *Book of the Duchess* dreamer uses comparison with other narratives to buoy the worthiness of his own; Africanus promises to show the *Parliament of Fowls* narrator something worth writing about; the *Legend of Good Women* narrator is at first unworthy of composing songs in praise of Alceste; and as I will discuss in more detail, the *House of Fame* narrator accords certain authors priority in telling a given story because they are better suited for it. But for all the four visions have in common, the *House of Fame* notably lacks what unites the other three: a frame that highlights the narrator's appreciation for, dependence on, and inspiration from pre-existing stories.⁶⁷ Instead of the frame narrator aligning his own narrative production with socially accepted stories, the dream of the *House of Fame* instead transforms the spatial metaphor of "the page" into a literal space. Within the dream itself (rather than in the relationship between dream and frame), as the dreamer travels between three narratively governed spaces, the *House of Fame* illustrates the poetic process and its reliance on narrative and the other.

The spaces that make up the *House of Fame*—the glass temple dedicated to Venus and the houses of Fame and Rumor—as well as the space between them (namely, the desert and the

⁶⁶ Though I will discuss this in more detail later, it is worth pointing out that this is not the only interpretation of the *House of Fame*'s depiction of outdoor space, namely the desert outside the walls of Venus's temple. While, to be sure, the most frequent understanding of the desert is that it represents the failure of certain narratives to become ingrained in social memory and to produce new stories--the sand is the remnants of other, less important glass temples--it is also important to remember that, conversely, glass is made of sand.

⁶⁷ This is not to deny the *House of Fame* prologue's *literariness*; certainly, the prologue is much indebted to Macrobius's commentary on the very book that sparked the *Parliament* dreamer's unconscious experience, the *Dream of Scipio*. However, the narrator gives no indication that he is familiar with the actual book, nor does he reference any other stories he knows or books he's read, or impute to books any particular authority. The closest the narrator comes to acknowledging that books may have a privileged place in his worldview is to suggest that,

Wel worthe of this thyng grete clerkys,
That trete of this and other werkes,
For I of noon opinioun
Nyl as now make mensyoun,
But oonly that the holy roode
Turne us every drem to goode!" (*HF*, 53-58).

Whereas the other three narrators impart authority and wisdom to texts and books themselves, the *House of Fame* narrator instead seems to rely on the figure behind the tale--the clerk who wrote it.

valley below the house of Fame) have the same sense of a physical, concrete and mappable reality with an “aim toward a formal science of space” as the previous visions.⁶⁸ In each of these spaces, the dreamer’s material observations precede any narrative judgment or connection that might be made; so, for example, the temple is “ymad of glas” (*HF*, 120) before it is “of Venus” (*HF*, 130). In other words, the narrator underscores the temple’s physical materiality.⁶⁹ With the physical reality of the dream at the forefront of the dreamer’s unconscious experience, the dreamspace takes the shape of a concrete and mappable reality with an “aim toward a formal science of space” as the dreamer tracks “the absolute and relative locations of things and activities, sites and situations” and “patterns of distribution, designs, and the differentiation of a multitude of materialized phenomena across spaces and places.”⁷⁰ Across Venus’s temple and both houses, the dreamer is acutely aware not only of physical materiality, but of architectural and spatial relations. The materiality of the temple is centered with the acknowledgement that the building is “ymad of glas” (*HF*, 120) with “ymages of gold” (*HF*, 121-122) and, later, a “table of bras” (*HF*, 142); however, the dreamer further demonstrates his awareness of the Temple as space by describing its architectural features:

And moo ryche tabernacles,
 And with perre moo pynacles,
 And moo curiouse portreytures,
 And queynte maner of figures
 Of olde werk, then I saugh ever” (*HF*, 123-127).

This description of temple architecture sets the *House of Fame* apart from the other dream-temple we’ve seen in the *Parliament of Fowls*; there, while the dreamer mentions the temple “auter” (*PF*, 249), he pays no other attention to what distinguishes the space of the temple from any other space, focusing instead on those who occupy the space and the kind of sociality they represent/engage. Geoffrey, however, marks in detail the spatial features that make the temple a

⁶⁸ Soja, *Thirdspace*, 74-5.

⁶⁹ Consider the difference in priority if, for instance, the temple dedicated to Venus *also happened* to be made of glass instead of a glass temple *that also happens* to be dedicated to Venus. This shift in emphasis prioritizes the material and coincides with a Firstspace experience. Later in Fame’s house, the pillars of literary authority will be identified by a similar pattern: material observation first, narrative alignment next. In this way, the material not only becomes the narrative by literally giving it shape, in a reciprocal relationship (certainly in the case of the pillars) the narrative purpose informs material choices.

⁷⁰ Soja, *Thirdspace*, 75.

temple. These features—the statues, alcoves, spires, etc.—render the dreamspace a familiar and, more importantly, identifiable architectural construction despite being more “queynte” than anything he had seen previously (including, presumably, while conscious).⁷¹ The effect is that while Geoffrey might not know where he is geographically, he is able to identify where he is spatially. Spatial awareness—rooted in a Firstspace understanding of what kind of space he is in—grounds the narrator’s memory of the dream in a physical reality that he is then able to interpret.

This interpretation happens through narrative. The *House of Fame* layers glass and narrative to create the effect of being inside the narrative. Rather than the glass itself being the narrative, however, the “table of bras” that Geoffrey encounters hanging on the walls depicts the opening lines of one of the most famous poems in the Middle Ages: Virgil’s *Aeneid*.⁷² This change of material is not insignificant; the stacking of glass and metal is evocative of a mirror.⁷³ For Geoffrey, then, the temple—like dreams themselves, which are also often regarded as a mirror of one’s subjectivity—reveals an integral part of himself. In this way, as the narrator recollects and interprets his experience in the construction of Secondspace, the *Aeneid* functions in much the same way as the *Dreme of Scipioun* or the story of Seyx and Alcyone by constructing and shaping the dreamscape. And in much the same way that Africanus guides the *Parliament of Fowls* dreamer through his dreamscape, the *Aeneid* likewise seems to come to life. When Geoffrey first encounters the brass tablet, the narrator very clearly indicates that the words are written and, indeed, what follows is a relatively faithful sense translation—rather than a literal, word-for-word translation—of the poem’s first three lines.⁷⁴ But as the narrator recollects the experience, the narrative fluctuates between what he sees “grave” (*HF*, 157, 193, 212, 253, 256, 433, 451) and what he simply “sawgh” (*HF*, 151, 162, 174, 198, 209, 219, 439). Though the shift

⁷¹ David Coley argues that “...the temple of Venus is a pagan temple masquerading as a gothic cathedral, a building whose architecture resonates with the contemporary ecclesiastical architecture of Europe.” (“Withyn a temple ymad of glas”: Glazing, Glossing, and Patronage in Chaucer’s *House of Fame*,” *The Chaucer Review* 45, no. 1 (2010): 76).

⁷² For more on the significance of the *Aeneid* in medieval English literature, see Christopher Baswell, *Virgil in Medieval England: Figuring the Aeneid from the Twelfth Century to Chaucer* (Cambridge University Press, 2006).

⁷³ Josephine Bloomfield, “Aristotelian Luminescence, Thomistic Charity: Vision, Reflection, and Self-Love in “Pearl,” *Studies in Philology* 108, no.2 (2011).

⁷⁴ This is not a literal, word-for-word translation. Latin: “Arma virumque cano, Troiae qui primus ab oris Italiam, fato profugus, Laviniaque venit litora...” (*Aeneid* I.1-3, *The Latin Library*, accessed 11 March 2021, <https://www.thelatinlibrary.com/vergil/aen1.shtml>). House of Fame: “I wol now synge, yif that I kan, / The armes and also the man, / That first cam, thugh his destinee, / Fugityf of Troy contree, / In Itayle, with ful moche pyne, / Unto the strondes of Lavyne” (*HF*, 143-148).

in emphasis is slight, as “grave” carries the valence of both pictorial and written engravings, when the narrator begins to record dialogue as part of the temple’s ekphrastic Firstspace reality we are left with the distinct impression of a premodern movie—of a difference in what is witnessed versus what is read. As Geoffrey witnesses the interaction between Dido and Aeneas, the two lovers are just as present to him as Africanus. Not only is the space of his dream quite literally the space (or the spatialization) of a narrative that exists as a piece of received tradition, but the layering of space and narrative itself enmeshes Geoffrey firmly within the social.

These aspects of narrative—its spatiality and sociality—are revealed to be an integral part of the dreamer’s own subjectivity, both through the mirror imagery and the narrator’s own words. The content of Dido’s speech comes to the narrator “As me mette redely— / Non other auctor alegge I” (*HF*, 313-314). Her speeches, which are additions to the *Aeneid*, suggest that what the dreamer is experiencing is not the poem as it exists in literary tradition as “text and glose” but rather his own interpretation of it. In his study of the Virgilian tradition in England, Baswell notes that Trojan narratives existed in several forms:

ever more heavily annotated older Latin manuscripts; newer Latin manuscripts, some of them largely free of extra-textual apparatus—“naked texts”: a relatively fresh tradition of illustration; a growing corpus of encyclopedic mythography, often daringly allegorized; and a burgeoning library of classical story in the vernacular, from important reformulations like the *Roman d’Eneas* to an infinite regress of translations of redactions in the various Troy-books.⁷⁵

Geoffrey’s experience with the *Aeneid* is an amalgamation of these types, containing elements of the annotated and naked text, the illustration tradition, allegorized mythography, and vernacular retelling. And so, the temple he occupies is both the space of socially established narrative of the Virgilian tradition and the space of narrative composition through its translation into the vernacular and additions. What the Temple reveals is the dependency of poets on narrative tradition. Had the story of Dido and Aeneas not already existed and were the narrator not able to “Rede Virgile in Eneydos / Or the Epistle of Ovyde” (*HF*, 378-379), he would be left with nothing against which he could position his own identity as an author. This positioning, moreover, happens *in space*; that is, in the (First)space of the temple and the (Second)space of his memory of it. The story of the *Aeneid* coming alive with the narrator’s own additions is dependent on his interaction with the *Aeneid* as a physical space; the space, in other words,

⁷⁵ Baswell, *Virgil in Medieval England*, 220.

facilitates both the dreamer's social interaction with the subjectivity of the *Aeneid* and his own composition in response.

Like both the *Book of the Duchess* and *Parliament of Fowls* dreamers, Geoffrey ultimately leaves the carefully constructed space of socially defined, pre-existing narrative. Each dreamer's travels serve a different purpose that connects the various spaces occupied by the dreamer: the *Book of the Duchess* dreamer's foray outside of his bedchamber is an extension of the narrative he wakes up inside; the *Parliament of Fowls* dreamer leaves the Temple of Venus in a rejection of the social relations and the narratives it represents; and Geoffrey leaves the temple in search of the creative hand behind the temple. Rather than simply accepting the *Aeneid*'s place in social memory, Geoffrey wants to know how it got there, and this, too, is described in particular spatial terms:

Yet sawgh I never swich noblesse
Of ymages, ne such richesse,
As I saugh graven in this chirche;
But not wot I whoo did hem wirche,
Ne where I am, ne in what contree.
But now wol I go out and see,
Ryght at the wicket, yf y kan
See owhere any stiryng man,
That may me telle where I am (HF, 471-479).

Geoffrey associates the “working” or creation of the images in the temple with its physical location; by discovering “wher” he is, it follows that he might also discover where the temple originated. This is not an innate knowledge or something that is easily observable, but rather an awareness of space that comes through social encounter. Just as the narrators of the *Book of the Duchess* and the *Parliament of Fowls* relied on social interaction to define and contextualize spaces within their dreams, Geoffrey likewise seeks someone out to aid in establishing the purpose of space.

Of course, Geoffrey does not find “stering any man” outside the temple but instead a vast, empty desert devoid of any sign of social life or habitation. For many scholars the “feld nas but

of sond” (*HF*, 486), which adjoins Venus’s temple and Fame’s house, is symbolic of the breakdown or failure of poetry.⁷⁶ Crossing a barren desert devoid of life or sociality between tradition and fame could certainly indicate the lack of control authors have once their narratives are put out into the world. As the *Legend of Good Women* narrator so acutely experienced, poetic reception is an inherently intersubjective process over which the author’s intent or purpose holds no sway; either monuments will be built or they will not. But, I argue, it is also possible that the space between the spaces concerns not the breakdown or lack of poetry, but instead its proliferation, an expansion of the kinds of stories that are able to be and indeed worthy of being told. While broken-down glass resembles sand, glass is likewise created out of sand.⁷⁷

It is while traveling over these grains of potential narratives that we get the first indications of the dreamer’s poetic identity. Like the *Legend of Good Women* dreamer, Geoffrey is a love poet:

To make bookys, songes, dytees,

In ryme or elles in cadence,

As thou best canst, in reverence

Of Love and of hys servants eke,

.....

In thy studye, so thou writest,

And ever mo of love enditest (*HF*, 622-625, 633-634).

Unlike the other dreamers, however, Geoffrey considers composition a solitary experience; both the *Parliament of Fowls* and *Book of the Duchess* dreamers understand their work as author both as public (meant for public consumption) and as social (dependent on being shared and endorsed by others). The narratives they record in their dreams as meaningful and worthy come from interpersonal experience (shaped as they are, of course, by the dreamers’ larger narrative awareness). In contrast, Geoffrey’s eagle guide chastises him for neglecting poetry’s

⁷⁶ Beryl Rowland, for example, argues that “[t]he treeless plain is a symbol of the poet’s creative sterility” (“The Art of Memory and the Art of Poetry in the *House of Fame*,” *University of Ottawa Quarterly* 51 (1981): 167). Rebecca Davis likewise argues that “the field of sand is made of the pieces of the past” (“Fugitive Poetics,” 113).

⁷⁷ See specifically Coley: “those many grains of sand become the origin of the vernacular poetic text itself, the raw *materia* that will be translated, structured, and fixed into the vitreous narrative window [...] [Chaucer] moves the dreamer backwards from the glass locus of the finished vernacular text to the sandy platea of as-yet-untransformed poetic detritus....” (“Glazing, Glossing, and Patronage,” 83).

intersubjective origins and spending his nights “at another book” (*HF*, 657) “as an heremyte” (*HF*, 659) where no “tydings” of his neighbors or foreign events can reach him. Despite spending his time with books as the other dreamers also do, the space of the page fails to spark the same kind of intersubjective dreamspace as it does for the others. Rather, as I mentioned above, it is only within the dream that the walls of the temple act as a surrogate Thirdspace for the space of the page. The *House of Fame* reflects upon the narrator’s own narratives and their failure to find appropriate inspiration in the Thirdspace of other narratives. This, ultimately, is what separates Geoffrey from his companion narrators: his relationship with established narrative is not one of inquiry or acquiring new knowledge, or one of respite, or even of entertainment. Instead he sits with books “as domb as any stoon” (*HF*, 656)—unresponsive, unmoved, idle.⁷⁸ (Again, compare this with Geoffrey’s active, inquisitive exploration of the temple.) In response to Geoffrey’s failure to recognize and engage with the intersubjectivity of narrative, the eagle claims to have been charged by Jupiter to show the dreamer another way, other stories, to repay his service as Love’s faithful scrivener, rooted in the stories of others. His movement through space represents his progressive understanding of how poetic composition is an intersubjective process. Geoffrey’s movement from the temple, where he begins to realize the intersubjectivity of narrative as he witnesses and composes the *Aeneid*, across a desert that awakens him to the narrative power of intersubjectivity sets the stage for his entry into the houses of Fame and Rumor, where sociality and intersubjectivity begin to take precedence over tradition in narrative composition.

Even in anticipation of the wonders he will encounter in each of the two houses, the narrator takes care to foreground his Firstspace experience through detailed descriptions of the buildings. Indeed, the narrator is aware that describing Fame’s house at such length is perhaps a diversion from his purpose, pausing to caution the audience that “or I ferther pace, / I wol yow al the shap devyse / Of hous and site” (*HF*, 1112-1114). The subsequent description of the house notes both material and architectural features, beginning with the ice mountain in yet another clear linkage between space and the social memory of narrative—both in the ice mountain’s physical representation of narrative fame through the names that are either preserved on or melted off of it, and in the house’s iconic literary pillars that hold it up. Both the mountain and

⁷⁸ *Middle English Dictionary*, s.v. “domb,” 3(a) failing to speak or respond, avoiding speech, reticent, silent, still; 4(a) lacking feeling or comprehension; unmoved, unenlightened; stupid; 4(b) unoccupied, idle (accessed 11 March 2021, https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED12341/track?counter=1&search_id=6031904).

house are ways that narrative and memory take up space and, moreover, function as spaces of social interaction where the negotiation over which narratives and authors become installed in social memory take place. The Firstspace of Fame's house, then, grounds the social processes of narrative and memory in physical, material space.

The Secondspace of narration allows for the interpretation of what Geoffrey witnessed firsthand; while from a Firstspace perspective all that is seen is a mountain "ygrave / With famous folkes names fele, / That had iben in mochel wele, / And her fames wyde iblowe" (*HF*, 1136-1139), in the retrospective, ideational Secondspace of memory and narration, the narrator is able to connect the dots between the actions of Fame and its physical representation. The names he is unable to read are of those "so unfamous was woxe hir fame" (*HF*, 1146), whereas the names of more well-known authors—those who have stood the test of time—look "as fressh as men has writen hem there / The selve day ryght, or that houre / That I upon hem gan to poure" (*HF*, 1156-1158). According to the mountain, fame is not an accident of social memory, or even one of talent. Rather, it is a consequence, to recall Soja's words, of "the absolute and relative locations of things and activities, sites and situations" and "patterns of distribution, designs, and the differentiation of a multitude of materialized phenomena across spaces and places"—in this case, the location at which a given name is carved on the ice relative to the mountain's position toward the sun.⁷⁹ The mountain's physicality concretizes the second-order, interpretive social processes of narrative and memory. For Soja, "[t]here is no unspatialized social reality. There is no aspatial social process. Even in the realm of pure abstraction ... there is a pervasive and pertinent, if often hidden, spatial dimension."⁸⁰ It is only natural, then, that fame—as a consequence of social existence—takes up space.

The interior of Fame's "castel" (*HF*, 1162) likewise emphasizes the spatial and material aspects of narrative and memory such that, in much the same way the mountain represents fame as a physical construct, the house in which Fame lives (both as a personified goddess and, more abstractly, where it is doled out) is defined by physical narrative structures. The pillars that support Fame's hall unite the social functions of space and narrative by aligning materiality with narrative purpose. The columns are

Of metal that shoon not ful cler;

⁷⁹ Soja, *Thirdspace*, 75.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 46.

But though they nere of no rychesse,
Yet they were mad for gret noblesse,
And in hem hy and gret sentence;
And folk of digne reverence (*HF*, 1422-1426).

The catalogue of pillars and the narratives they represent follow what is by now a well-worn pattern: material first, story second (though certainly the two inform one another). The metals of the columns both give shape and context to the “hy sentence” of the authors’ narratives. Taking the first pillar as example, the narrator takes care to explain both its material composition “of lede and yren fyn” (*HF*, 1431) and, indeed, the purpose behind it:

...yren Martes metal ys,
Which that god is of bataylle;
And the led, withouten faille,
Ys, loo, the metal of Saturne,
That hath a ful large whel to turne (*HF*, 1446-1450).

In a reciprocal relationship, the metals both describe and are explained by the narratives’ fame it upholds. This relationship underscores the necessity that narratives take up space, supported by other narratives, in order to be remembered. The “Ebrayk Iosephus” and the seven other writers that “bar... / The fame up of the Jewerye” (*HF*, 1435-1436) “writen of batayles, / As wel as other olde mervayles” (*HF*, 1441-1442), so iron and lead—materials that bear specific narrative connotations and associations with Mars and Saturn—emphasize the martial and tragic aspects of the Jewish story. And so on—the hall is full of pillars depicting “hem that written olde gestes” (*HF*, 1515) in materials that reflect the themes of their narratives. The pillars, then, demonstrate the ways in which narrative can take up space, but they also underscore the connection between an author’s identity and their stories. Lucan, having “writen of Romes myghty werkes” (*HF*, 1504), is remembered as a “grete poete” (*HF*, 1499) who “bar up than / ... / The fame of Julius and Pompe” (*HF*, 1500-1502); though, technically, his narratives have done this work, he and his narratives occupy the same space in the materialization of social memory. Lucan’s identity as a poet, and his existence in social memory, is dependent on the continued remembering of his stories.

As Geoffrey moves up the ice mountain, his focus continues to be the material construction (a solid piece of “ston of beryle” (*HF*, 1184)) as well as the architectural features (“Babewynnes and pynacles, / Ymageries and tabernacles” (*HF*, 1189-1190) of the building at its peak. Not only is the castle’s “grete craft” (*HF*, 1177) too great to be described (though he does endeavor to do so), it is so singular a structure that it is unable to be copied:

Ne coude casten no compace

Swich another for to make,

That myght of beaute ben hys make,

Ne so wonderlych ywrought (*HF*, 1170-1173).

In representing the house’s Firstspace reality in narrative, the narrator effectively does what he considers impossible: describing and recreating the physical experience of Fame’s house. There is continued irony in the narrator’s narrative ability being unequal to his memory of space playing out on the space of the page. Though his “wit ne may me not suffise” (*HF*, 1180), he nevertheless spends dozens of lines and takes up quite a bit of space to tell his audience about the space he cannot describe. This rhetorical technique is a Secondspace strategy for reproducing Firstspace *in* Thirdspace. In other words, the narrative replicates the immensity and grandiosity of the house on the page. Indeed, the construction of narrative is likened to physical labor: it “maketh al my wyt to swynke / On this castel to bethynke” (*HF*, 1175-1176). The idea of the narrator’s brain physically laboring with the effort of writing positions narrative composition against the literal construction of the temple. Both page and building are physical, concrete, spatial products that emphasize the Firstspace materiality of the dream space and the compositional space.

As in the *Book of the Duchess*, other sensory Firstspace stimuli contribute to the house’s sense of space, or to the ways in which it takes up space. For approximately eighty lines, the narrator catalogues the sounds he hears and the myriad of people making them—harps and harpists; pipers and their pipes; the “bloody soun / In trumpe, beme, and claryoun” (*HF*, 1239-1240). Through a clever use of *occupatio* here and elsewhere, the narrator emphasizes the space of his experience by minimizing it rhetorically⁸¹. Having arrived at the gates to Fame’s castle, for

⁸¹ T.S. Miller makes a parallel observation regarding the frequent use of catalogues throughout the poem: “Chaucer’s inventories...verbalize the visual, or rather re-verbalize the visual, reconfiguring the spatial relations of

example, the narrator prioritizes the immediacy of Geoffrey's Firstspace experience first by claiming that "Hyt nedeth noght yow more to tellen, / To make yow to longe duellen" (*HF*, 1299-1300), then proceeding to tell us anyway. The space of the dream, then, is replicated in both Second and Thirdspaces through rhetorical technique in narration and in the literal space the lines take up on the page.⁸² These spatial layers iterate the relationship between space and narrative in the production of identity. In becoming and presenting himself as an author, the narrator uses narrative to spatialize the experience of spaces within his dreamspace, which in turn is constructed out of a network of narrative influence.

The relationship of the materials that comprise the Firstspace setting of the house of Fame—a gemstone castle set on a mountain of ice—along with the kind of sociality that such a space facilitates—one in which past and present coincide to create the future, where individuals come together in the shadow of tradition to have additions to that tradition arbitrarily meted out and handed down to them—parallels the argument the dream visions have been making about poetic subjectivity. The identity of the poet fluctuates between states of permanence (gemstone castles, glass and bronze temples, iron pillars) and impermanence (ice mountains, forests, garden clearings). What ties the two together is an overarching reliance on tradition that makes poetic identity cohere. Received narrative tradition and social memory either provide a template or building blocks for poetic identity, as in the *Book of the Duchess* and *Parliament of Fowls*; or, as the *Legend of Good Women* demonstrates, serve as the baseline against which the relative success or failure of poetic identity is judged; or as in the *House of Fame*, oversee and create space for new poetic identities. For this reason, the three architectural spaces of the dream—the glass temple dedicated to Venus and the houses of Fame and Rumor—are frequently read as evocations of medieval memory palaces which signify the basis of poetic authority: an "architectural mnemonic" for the great classical *auctores*.⁸³ More than an exploration of an

one "interior space," the memory palace, as a different set of spatial relations represented in the narrative." ("Forms of Perspective and Chaucer's Dream Spaces," 484).

⁸² This trope occurs again a little later on in the poem (and a little further into Fame's castle). The narrator asks, "what nede is / To tellen" about the construction of Fame's hall, then proceeds to discuss exactly that: the hall's material and architectural features, some in concrete, measurable terms (like the "half a foote thikke" gold plating on the walls, floor, and roof) (*HF*, 1340-55).

⁸³ Cf. Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*; Marilyn Desmond, *Reading Dido: Gender, Textuality, and the Medieval Aeneid* (University of Minnesota Press, 1994), esp. 128-62; Alexandra Cook, "Creative Memory and Visual Image in Chaucer's *House of Fame*," in *Chaucer: Visual Approaches*, ed. Susanna Fein and David Raybin (Penn State University Press, 2016) [23-38]; Martin Irvine, "Medieval Grammatical Theory and Chaucer's *House of Fame*," *Speculum* 60, no. 4, 1985, Coley, "Glazing, Glossing, and Patronage," Rowland, "The Art of Memory and the Art of

individual memory, however, these spaces and the dreamer's travel between them insist on the fundamental intersubjectivity of that authority. By placing poetic tradition and authority in the midst of social spaces and relationships, the *House of Fame* signals that, just like Lucan's commemoration as a "grete poete" (*HF*, 1499), tradition and one's place in it depends on a larger social agreement that certain stories are worth being remembered.

The final space Geoffrey experiences most clearly articulates the social function of narrative upon which poetic subjectivity is built. Having found the stories that exist in the weighty shadows of the great authors in Fame's house lacking (for reasons that are not entirely clear), Geoffrey is instead directed elsewhere to find "Tydynges, other this or that, / Of love, or suche thynges glade" (*HF*, 1888-1889). That space, the House of Rumor, is "fild ful of tydynges," (*HF*, 1957), but in keeping with Geoffrey's habits of observation, is first foregrounded spatially and materially before its potential stories are catalogued.⁸⁴ The house's construction out of "twigges, falwe, rede, / And grene eke, and somme weren white" (*HF*, 1936-1937), along with a metaphorical description of its "entrees / As fele as of leves ben in trees / In somer, whan they grene been" (*HF*, 1945-1947) echo the natural spaces of narrative exchange seen in the earlier dream visions: the Black Knight's forest, Nature's parliament hall, and Alceste's garden. The narrator is, moreover, keen to emphasize the immense—if confusing—structure. The building "nas not lyte, / For hyt was sixty myle of lengthe. / Al was the tymber of no strengthe, / Yet hit is founded to endure" (*HF*, 1978-1981), foregrounding a physical direct comprehension of the space. In this, as he was in the house of Fame, the narrator is aided by noise. What for Geoffrey was "so greet a noise" becomes for the narrator something that can be heard from the banks of the Oise river all the way to Rome by using a spatial metaphor to describe a sensory experience.

Similarly, once inside the house the narrator conveys his experience and its occupants in spatial terms: he "wel unnethe, in that place / Hadde y a fote-brede of space" (*HF*, 2041-2042)

Poetry." Rebecca Davis otherwise argues that the spaces form a "fugitive poetics," wherein all things incline to fame (Davis, "Fugitive Poetics"). Jacqueline Miller argues *HF* questions literary authority rather than relying on it, suggesting that the desert the dreamer encounters upon leaving the Temple of Venus represents the breakdown of traditional textual authority and the exhaustion of new narratives that may arise from it. For Miller, the "feld of sond" is the shattered and eroded remnants of other glass temples. But while sand is indeed broken down glass, so too is glass made out of sand, with the possibility of new temples, new textual authority, to be created from it. The desert, then, is another example of "olde felde" out of which "Cometh al this newe corn fro yeer to yeer" (*PF*, 22-23) (Miller, "The Writing on the Wall: Authority and Authorship in Chaucer's *House of Fame*," *The Chaucer Review* 17, no. 2 (1982).

⁸⁴ After the initial spatial description, the narrator uses anaphora to account for forty-one genres of "tydynges" (*HF*, 1960-1976).

while the “congregacioun of folk” (*HF*, 2034-35) shares “A newe tydyng prively, / Or elles tolde al openly” (*HF*, 2045-2046). Even in such a large space as the house of Rumor, it seems, being surrounded by story is equated with a *lack* of space. The densely packed social space of the house’s interior, which allows for “tydynges” to be spread as quickly as “fyr ys wont to quyke and goo / ... / Til al a citee brent up ys” (*HF*, 2078-2080), is in contrast to the open basket-weave of the house’s exterior, through which the physical manifestation of “tydynges” or narrative fly to the house of Fame. The house of Rumor is both radically open and so tightly crowded that the line between what one is told and what one overhears seems to disappear entirely. The house’s occupants are so invested in spreading the stories they hear that the space is unable to accommodate them all; they “clamben up on other faste, / ... / And troden faste on others heles” (*HF*, 2151-2153) in order to have the closest access to the origin of a particular story. The house of Rumor emphasizes the social and spatial dimension of narrative (and thus the potential for becoming a poet) by describing its origin as a consequence of social interaction in a particular kind of space.

Despite the confusion, however, the narrator is clear on one thing: “al mot out” (*HF*, 2139), all these stories and “tydynges” he hears should be told if not by him, then by another, more appropriate author who “can synge hit bet than I” (*HF*, 2138). The narrator’s recollection of the house of Rumor as a space where authors or poets or storytellers discover the kernels of story recalls what the eagle chided Geoffrey for previously.⁸⁵ Story, the eagle corrects, comes from intersubjective experience, not simply from one’s own mind or merely from textual example:

In thy studye, so thou writest,
 And ever mo of love enditest,

 That is, that thou hast no tydynges
 Of Loves folk yf they be glade,

⁸⁵ For the effect the House of Rumor has on the dreamer, see Ashby Kinch, “‘Mind like wickerwork’: The Neuroplastic Aesthetics of Chaucer’s House of Tidings,” *postmedieval* 3, no. 3 (2012). Kinch argues that the House of Rumor is a “model for the way the objects of the literary past can rewire us” (312).

And noght oonly fro fer contree
 That ther no tydyng cometh to thee,
 But of thy verray neyghebores,
 That duellen almost at thy dores,
 Thou herist neyther that ne this;

 Thou sittest at another book,
 Tyl fully daswed ys thy look (*HF*, 633-658)

Geoffrey's writing is based neither on experience, nor on others' experiences, nor even on an earnest Thirdspace engagement with the intersubjectivity of narrative.⁸⁶ Narrative alone, when approached by a reader "domb as any stoon" (*HF*, 656) does not result in a story worth telling. Rather, it is in the conjunction of experience and tradition, and in the understanding that narrative is the expression of and participation in social mores and experiences, that poets find their subject matter. The eagle promises "Of Loves folk moo tydynges" (*HF*, 675) "then greynes be of sondes" (*HF*, 691). I have argued in this chapter that those "tydynges" are conditioned by the spaces in which the social encounters that produce them take place. And moreover, as the dream visions have demonstrated, both poet and society depend on the weight and authority of tradition first to compose a narrative, then to decide on its place in social memory. Much like Fame's house is supported by the pillars of great classical authors, so too does social memory use narrative tradition as a metric against which new compositions are inducted into the ranks. But even as the narrator recognizes the importance of all storytelling, the dreamer is wrapped up in the commotion and chaos; until, that is, "Atte laste" he sees a "man of gret auctorite" (*HF*, 2155, 2158). Though the poem ends here on a cliffhanger, the arrival of such an authority figure is perhaps meant to hearken back to the organizing and orienting role of narrative tradition in the construction of poetic identity. Geoffrey's acknowledgement of the "man of gret auctorite" comes at a moment in which he is, potentially, close to succumbing to uncontrolled narrative production. What the man's presence could provide is the same stability as one of Fame's pillars;

⁸⁶ This is the engagement that started the *Book of the Duchess* and *Parliament of Fowls*.

a reliable framework for the construction and dissemination of narrative that gives credibility to a newly created poetic identity.

It is possible, then, to read the *House of Fame* in reverse. If the spaces are read sequentially, interpretations that privilege a breakdown of authority and tradition make a fair amount of sense.⁸⁷ But whether intentionally or not, ending with the “man of gret auctorite” brings the narrative full circle. Having left the Temple of Venus in search of a “stiryng man / That may me telle where I am” (*HF*, 478-479) and coming up empty, Geoffrey finally finds the authority figure he needs to help make sense of his experiences. Rather than a linear progression of movement, we are left instead with a cycle that begins in the house of Rumor and the origin of story itself. This space is the most social and most densely packed of all the spaces, suggesting that one can find story anywhere. Like Africanus in the *Parliament of Fowls*, the “man of gret auctorite” orients the dreamer toward stories worth telling and provides a link to the “grete poetes” that support the house of Fame. Fame’s house, less social than Rumor’s, relies on a smaller network of social relationships to determine which narratives are worthy of being included in social memory.⁸⁸ Even this arbitrary judgment takes place under the watchful eye of literary tradition and narrative authority, manifested as physical space. The glass temple, empty of individual subjectivities except for those contained within the narrative itself, is a monument to those stories that Fame has approved and that people still remember. In these stories, poets find mirrors of their own selves and can construct their own poetic identity out of it. In constructing their own subjectivity in relation to a “grete poete,” the poet is made to confront the sociality of narrative and is returned back to the houses of Rumor and Fame to begin the process anew. Any of the “tydungen” that fly from Rumor’s house of the potential to become as great a story as the *Aeneid* and its author added as a pillar in Fame’s castle. Such decisions, however, lie not with the individual poet but in the interaction the audience has with the subjectivity of narrative in the space of the page.

⁸⁷ Rebecca Davis notes that “Geoffrey’s ascent to the House of Rumor has long been read as metapoetical, a writer’s meditation on the sources, purpose, and value of his art” (“Fugitive Poetics,” 102).

⁸⁸ To say that the house of Fame is less social than the house of Rumor is perhaps misleading; there is no textual evidence to support the idea that there are fewer occupants of Fame’s house over Rumor’s. Indeed, it could even be quite the opposite. And yet, the dense network of bodies and lack of space in the house of Rumor, compared to the soaring ceilings and openness of Fame’s castle, gives the illusion that the interior space of Rumor’s house is fuller and more interpersonal than Fame’s.

The Space of Poetic Identity: Conclusions

So indeed, while the use of space in the dream visions may contain echoes of practices of medieval *ars memoriae* by reflecting narratives stored in the individual memory as scholars tend to read them, Chaucer's dream visions also frequently employ the individual memory of the poet as a testament or contribution to collective, social memory. If narrative and memory are, as Ricœur suggests, two sides of the same identity coin, the dream visions are both narrative and memory: the putting into words for others the recollection of a subjective experience. The self-aware Thirdspace of composition located on the page allows the memories, narratives, and subjectivities of past and present, of author and audience, to interact and participate in the making of something new—new spaces, new narratives, new memories. The dream visions, by virtue of the separation of space and time inherent in their composition, are actively concerned with this process of creation. Narrators interact with narrative, which is the impetus and structure for a dream; that dream takes place in real time for the dreamer, but from the perspective of the narrator it is a past event, a narrative memory; narrators become authors once they—as the self-same subjectivity that had the dream—put quill to parchment and create their composition's space on the page, thereby offering themselves to collective, social memory. Thinking about the dream vision narratives in terms of space allows us to question how the poems interweave social norms and subjective experience as “a socially constructed sphere.”⁸⁹ Because there is always potential, Alceste cautions, for what one writes to become instantiated in collective memory and thus change the way a particular story and society operates (*LGW*, 412-16), poets have a responsibility both to the “lawe of kinde” (*BD*, 56) within which they write and to the audience that consumes it. How a poet will be remembered is determined not, in actuality, by what they write but by its reception. The dreams' preoccupation with composition affirms poetic subjectivity is necessarily intersubjective. And just as the poet's individual subjectivity, the space of his or her (un)consciousness, is shaped by narrative, social memory and poetic reception are likewise constructed through a negotiation of kinds of space, namely, the space of the page.

⁸⁹ Gerald Guest, “Space,” *Studies in Iconography* 33 (2012): 220. This chapter has taken up the questions Guest identifies as central to space: “how space interweaves social norms and subjective experience, about the ways in which meaning is created by ritual and performance in space, and how these concerns get bound up with individual and collective memory....space is not just a blank canvas or an empty vessel but a socially constructed sphere...”

CONCLUSION: “WHAT MAN ARTOW?”

Throughout this dissertation, I have endeavored to show what a narrative approach to identity can bring to Chaucer’s texts.¹ Appealing particularly to Ricœur, I have traced four modalities of identity—ipseity, self-esteem, recognition, and memory—as a way to account for the question that titles this conclusion and, in many ways, began my introduction: Who are you? Who are we? Just like *Star Trek*’s Tamarians, whose language, as well as personal and collective identity, respond to these questions with narrative, so too does Chaucer. Each chapter has thus analyzed identity construction in light of these aforementioned modalities. The question of “who” runs through them all: Who is Criseyde? Who are the Canterbury pilgrims? Who are Chaucer’s birds? To whom does Chaucer confer the status of author? In every case, the answer can be found in the stories that are told by and about the subjects in question.

When the Host finally notices the narrator of the *Canterbury Tales* travelling with the other pilgrims, he asks this fictive Chaucer, “What man artow?” In other words, “who are you?”² To get an answer to his question Harry Bailly asks the pilgrim to “Sey now somewhat, syn other folk han sayd; / Telle us a tale of myrthe, and that anon” (VII.705-706). That the Host expects this tale to reveal something of this mysterious pilgrim’s identity should not, by now, be a surprise. He anticipates that “now shul we heere / Som deyntee thyng, me thynketh by his cheere” (VII.710-11). I do not wish here, at the end of this work, to fall into the “roadside drama” trap and suggest that the *Tale of Sir Thopas* is determined or limited in any way on the subjectivity of its teller, the pilgrim Chaucer. *Harry Bailly*, however, has no such compunction. Having fitted the pilgrim into a particular narrative type, the Host’s expectations are dashed. He

¹ All references to Chaucer’s texts will be to *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd edition, ed. Larry D. Benson (Houghton Mifflin, 1987). Individual works will be cited parenthetically in the text. The *Canterbury Tales* will be cited in accordance with the fragment numbers provided by the *Riverside Chaucer*. Other works will follow the *Riverside*’s lineation. Where more than one set of line numbers is offered, I will note which set of line numbers I am following.

² Critical response to this question is often directed toward Chaucer himself. For Lee Patterson, the Host raises “[t]he question of authorial identity” that “explicitly preoccupies [Chaucer] throughout his career” (“‘What Man Artow?’: Authorial Self-Definition in the *Tale of Sir Thopas* and the *Tale of Melibee*,” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 11 (1985): 118). The *Tale of Sir Thopas* and the subsequent *Tale of Melibee* represent, Patterson argues, Chaucer’s attempt to define himself as an aggregate of “different definitions of writing as a social institution” (“Authorial Self-Definition,” 173), from court minstrel to princely adviser. Chaucer is both, and none, and somewhere in between. C. David Benson likewise understands the two tales the pilgrim Chaucer tells as working in conjunction; for Benson, they are “extreme examples of the stylistic experiments” that are “the central achievement of the *Canterbury Tales*” (“Their Telling Difference: Chaucer the Pilgrim and His Two Contrasting Tales,” *The Chaucer Review* 18, no. 1 (1983): 71, 74). They reveal nothing, in fact, about the pilgrim, but concerning the poet they reveal an authorial identity deeply invested in exploring different poetic principles in his works.

interrupts the tale on account of the pilgrim's "verray lewednesse" (VII.921) and tells the pilgrim, "Thy drasty rymyng is nat worth a toord! / Thou doost night elles but despendest tyme. / Sire, at o word, thou shalt no lenger ryme" (930-932). For the Host, the pilgrim's narrative failure is also a personal one. It must be noted that the *Tale of Sir Thopas* is not the pilgrim Chaucer telling us about himself, and thus does not immediately fall under the rubric of Ricœur's hermeneutic. If the pilgrim's appearance in the poem was accompanied by any presentation of his narrative identity in his own words, we could then analyze how his tale might function as a refraction of his identity, or how the discursive structures of his life might bear the influence of what he deems "the beste rym I kan" (VII.928). None of this actually happens; what this moment does reveal, however, is a certain medieval understanding that life takes shape in and as narrative.

Though I am unwilling to follow Harry Bailly along the roadside, the exchange between the two men distills much of what I have been arguing in this dissertation. In Chapter 1, I argued that Chaucer's women often frustrate the narrative expectations and authority of the men in relation to whom they construct their narrative identities. The pilgrim Chaucer's choice of narrative does something similar here. The *General Prologue* establishes the Host as

...oure governour,
 And of oure tales juge and reportour,

 And we wol reuled been at his devys
 In heigh and lough... (I.813-817).

His judgment, then, that the *Tale of Sir Thopas* is a failure, is an authoritative rejection of the pilgrim's narrative offering based on its failure to meet the host's expectations; it is neither the "tale of myrthe" (VII.706) asked for, nor the "deyntee thyng" (VII.711) expected based on how the pilgrim "semeth" to the Host. The pilgrim's ability to undermine the Host's discursive expectation does not, in the end, undermine his narrative identity or his authority; indeed, the pilgrim's discursive flexibility strengthens the Host's control. When he next asks for a prose tale "In which ther be som murthe or som doctryne" (VII.935), the *Tale of Melibee* that follows is received by the Host with resounding praise. What this reveals, then, is another way that the

ability to control discourse can result in either fulfilling or frustrating the narrative expectations of others.

In Chapter 2, I argued that the exchange of narrative is a technology of community identity construction—in that case, the exchange of particularly racialized narratives served to affirm and esteem the pilgrims' collective whiteness. In the case of the pilgrim Chaucer, the two narratives he offers are reflective of the character of the pilgrims' journey. Their collective efforts are geared toward telling the tale of “best sentence and moost solaas” (I.798)—so much that it often seems the reason for their trip was left back at the Tabard Inn. The *Tale of Sir Thopas* and the *Tale of Melibee* are examples from each end of the “sentence” and “solaas” spectrum; but where the “solaas” of *Thopas* goes unappreciated, the “sentence” of *Melibee* is effectively received. Especially in the context of the other tales it is told with—the so-called “literary group” of Fragment VII—the pilgrim Chaucer seems to represent the collective identity of the pilgrims and their journey.³ That both are from different genres and styles, with different morals, and that such disparate tales come from the same pilgrim, is indicative of the kind of community the pilgrims have established under the Host's authority. The group's narrative qualities of “sentence” and of “solaas” find expression as each individual's tale chooses a side, but as the only pilgrim to tell two tales (allowing, of course, for the fact that the *Canterbury Tales* are unfinished), the pilgrim Chaucer uses the exchange of narrative to participate in and reconcile both aspects of narrative and communal identity.

Chapter 3 argued that, for Chaucer's non-humans, the ability to express a narrative of their identity allowed the other to recognize selfhood within and across species and fostered empathy and care in response. While the narrative interaction between the pilgrim Chaucer and Harry Bailly is not rooted in either's narrative identity, and while I certainly will not go so far as to say that their cycle of narrative exchange and judgment results in a mutually caring relationship, it *does* result in a form of recognition. In the pilgrim's *Tale of Melibee*, the Host finds a narrative through which he is able to interpret his own life and his relationship with his wife. Harry responds to the pilgrim's narrative by offering a piece of his narrative identity; though not a “formal tale,” Tara Williams nonetheless argues that the Host's response is a

³ Larry D. Benson, “The Canterbury Tales,” in *The Riverside Chaucer* (Houghton Mifflin, 1987): 15.

“narrative” that has “significant implications” for the rest of the *Canterbury Tales*.⁴ This is not, as I have said, the same kind of recognition that the falcon’s lament invokes in Canacee. Yet the Host’s approval of the *Tale of Melibee* seems to correct for his previous negative opinion of the pilgrim Chaucer; the Host’s desire for his wife to hear the tale as an example of proper wifely behavior is in direct contrast to his earlier estimation of the pilgrim’s “verray lewednesse” (VII.921). This narrative-inspired reevaluation of the pilgrim’s character and worthiness is enabled by the recognition that narrative facilitates.

And in Chapter 4, I argued that social memory and the “approved” stories of which it consists serve as the basis for poetic authority, identity, recognition, and remembrance. This, perhaps, is one explanation for why the *Tale of Melibee* is successfully received by its audience and the *Tale of Sir Thopas* is not. While the latter has no known antecedent, the former is a translation of the *Liber de consolationis et consilii*.⁵ The pilgrim anticipates his audience will be familiar with the story:

If that yow thynke I varie as in my speche,
 As thus, though that I telle somewhat moore
 Of proverbes than ye han herd bifoore
 Comprehended in this litel tretys heere,
 To enforce with th’ effect of my mateere;
 And though I nat the same wordes seye
 As ye han herd, yet to yow alle I preye
 Blameth me nat; for, as in my sentence,
 Shul ye nowher fynden difference
 Fro the sentence of this tretys lyte
 After the which thys murye tale I write (VII.954-964).

The pilgrim not only anticipates, but indeed counts on—and defines his storytelling efforts through—the other pilgrims’ knowledge of the original story. Much like the dreamer in the

⁴ Tara Williams, “The Host, His Wife, and Their Communities in the *Canterbury Tales*,” *The Chaucer Review* 42, no. 4 (2008): 383.

⁵ Originally written in Latin by Albertanus of Brescia in the thirteenth century, Chaucer used Renaud de Louens’ fourteenth-century French translation as the basis for his tale.

Parliament of Fowls relied on Ciceronian notions of “commune profyt” to explain the meaning of the bird parliament, the pilgrim Chaucer likewise hangs his narratorial hat on the “proverbes” that structure his tale. By having a source that is known to the audience, the *Tale of Melibee* has the authority and familiarity to be received well.

These are then just some of the ways that Ricœur’s narrative hermeneutics begins to answer this question, “What man artow?” It is, after all, the question that drives much of Ricœur’s work on identity. The pilgrim Chaucer is like Criseyde, demonstrating discursive flexibility in constructing narrative(s) from a place of vulnerability in relation to a more powerful authority. He is a participant in a community of pilgrims defined by the exchange of narrative “sentence” and “solaas.” He is yet still a self-conscious author who uses narrative *auctoritee* to ensure his narratives are recognizable and socially acceptable. So rather than a roadside drama, these narrative hermeneutics allow us to theorize how an individual’s use of narrative constructs identity rather than narrative content determining or reflecting an identity. Story does not necessarily reveal a subjectivity that existed prior to it, but rather a subjectivity that is produced in its midst. A narrative approach to identity as offered by Ricœur works to reconcile Chaucer’s key interests: time, history, fictionality, and poetics; selfhood and alterity; the significance of language and fidelity to one’s word, or constancy; and agency, passivity, and suffering—many of which have been discussed in the previous chapters. But as this brief encounter between the pilgrim Chaucer and the Host in the frame of the *Canterbury Tales* has shown, Chaucer’s works are rife with narratives that disclose identity. In considering these narratives, this dissertation has, I hope, provided a new way of thinking about Chaucerian subjectivity.

GLOSSARY

Affective whiteness – the geographic, social, and religious concepts that are understood as white or in terms of whiteness. Participation in or association with these concepts marks a group or individual as white.

Care – a way of being in connection with others, rooted in empathy, that is attentive to the other's feelings and thoughts and responsive to their needs.

Discourse – linguistic-based context (with the capacity to acquire new signification) that limits the potential meaning of speech or action and shape the construction and interpretation of subjects and worlds.

Firstspace – the level of spatial awareness that corresponds to the physical, material reality of space; directly comprehended, measurable space.

Intersubjectivity – collective identity formed on the basis of agreed upon, shared social experiences and memories, which governs belonging within social group and transcends the individual.

Iipseity – self-sameness, or the ability to be recognized as the same despite change. *Iipseity* manifests itself most obviously in the form of promises, which pledge the consistency of selfhood (say today, do tomorrow). Narrative is key to the maintenance of *ipseity*, as it allows the self to be continuously attested.

Narrative – a form of discourse that allows human action and experience in and of time to be understood. Its most basic form, narrative provides conceptual unity to experience by providing coherence and structure.

Race – a means of separating and hierarchizing human differences to justify differential treatment and allocate social power.

Recognition – in both active (to recognize) and passive (to be recognized) senses, the goal of narrative identity and a principle of self-knowledge and community.

Secondspace – the level of spatial awareness that corresponds to mental or ideational space, such as a mental map; the interpretation of Firstspace.

Self-esteem – the judgment one makes of oneself as a self, particularly regarding the self's worthiness or ethical status.

Social memory – a shared pool of memory, knowledge, information, and stories associated with a particular social group's identity.

Subjectivation – the process of becoming a subject, specifically the powers and structures that represent, empower, or disempower the subject.

Subjectivity – an individual experience of and interaction with the world that both shapes and is shaped by the

Thirdspace – the negotiation of First and Secondspace; space as constructed through social practice.

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Chapter 1: Ipseity: Women and Discursive Authority from the 'pacience' of Griselda to the 'slydyng' of Criseyde

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Chapter 2: Esteem: Collective Identity and Affective Whiteness in the *Canterbury Tales*

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Chapter 3: Recognition: Talking Animals, Nonhuman Others, and a Narrative Ethics of Care

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Chapter 4: Memory: The Space of Poetic Identity in the Dream Visions

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Conclusion: "What Man Artow?"

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