

**CHAUCER'S SOLAR PAGEANT:  
AN ASTROLOGICAL READING  
OF THE CANTERBURY TALES**

**A THESIS SUBMITTED IN FULFILMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY,  
VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON.**

**GARTH CHIVALLE CARPENTER**

**1997.**

## ABSTRACT

This thesis proposes a correlation between the twenty-four *Canterbury Tales* and an external ordered system, namely the twelve signs of the zodiac, from which one might infer Chaucer's intended ordering of the *Tales*. While it is generally acknowledged that the *Tales* contain much astrological material, the radical suggestion here is that Chaucer wrote them as a means of fulfilling his intention, expressed in *A Treatise on the Astrolabe*, to write a fifth part of that *Treatise*, in which he would explain to his ten-year old son, Lewys, the principles of astrology.

The zodiac comprises twelve signs expressed as six binary oppositions throughout nature. In creating the *Canterbury Tales*, the thesis claims, Chaucer employed in each *Tale* two of those binary oppositions, a quadratic structure, to express the interplay of tensions between its main characters. The zodiacal signs symbolise parts of the human body which serve as metaphors of human characteristics according to an astrological medical *melothesia* that was commonplace in medieval times. The *melothesia* thus acts as a code, enabling Chaucer to covertly communicate sophisticated astrological knowledge whilst presenting it simplistically to political and royal court contemporaries who would have formed the bulk of his readership.

Chaucer makes two rounds of the zodiac, starting with the *Knight's Tale* aligned with Aries (the head), replete with pagan astrological practices, completing the sequence with the *Parson's Tale*, aligned with Pisces (the feet), in which the pilgrims are exhorted to save their souls by repentance. The consistency with which the *Tales* in sequence give an emphasis to characteristics believed in the Middle Ages to be representative of the zodiacal sequence of signs is claimed to provide substantive evidence in support of one particular ordering of the *Tales*.

**KEYWORDS: CHAUCER, CANTERBURY TALES, ASTROLOGY,**

**SIGNS OF THE ZODIAC, SOLAR PAGEANT, ALCHEMY**





## **CONTENTS**

<b>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</b>	p. 1
<b>CHAPTER ONE</b>	
A General Overview of this Thesis	p. 4
<b>CHAPTER TWO</b>	
A Picture of the Hour	p. 21
<b>CHAPTER THREE</b>	
Chaucer's Understanding of Astrology	p. 66
<b>CHAPTER FOUR</b>	
Secret Order in the <i>Canterbury Tales</i>	p. 91
<b>CHAPTER FIVE</b>	
The Framework of the Pilgrimage	p. 115
<b>CHAPTER SIX</b>	
The <i>Canterbury Tales</i> : <i>The First Circuit</i>	p. 165
<b>CHAPTER SEVEN</b>	
The <i>Canterbury Tales</i> : <i>The Second Circuit</i>	p. 336
<b>CHAPTER EIGHT</b>	
Recapitulation	p. 467
<b>APPENDICES</b>	
Appendix A: The Bradshaw Shift	p. 475
Appendix B: Abbreviations used in this Thesis	p. 476
Appendix C: The Final Coincidence	p. 477
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	
Primary and Secondary Sources	p. 478

## Index to Diagrams

### *Frontispiece: The Medieval Zodiacal Man*

<b>Diagram 1a</b>	
<i>Structure of the horoscope: Equal house method</i>	p. 29
<b>Diagram 1b</b>	
<i>Structure of the horoscope: Standard (Alchabitius method)</i>	p. 30
<b>Diagram 2</b>	
<i>Compass directions and the horoscope</i>	p. 31
<b>Diagram 3</b>	
<i>The Sun's culmination</i>	p. 36
<b>Diagram 4</b>	
<i>A new moon</i>	p. 38
<b>Diagram 5</b>	
<i>A full moon</i>	p. 39
<b>Diagram 6</b>	
<i>Astrological aspects</i>	p. 60
<b>Diagram 7</b>	
<i>Thomas Becket's murder</i>	p. 136
<b>Diagram 8</b>	
<i>Becket's Feast Day 1387</i>	p. 137
<b>Diagram 9</b>	
<i>Pilgrimage begins at sunrise</i>	p. 140
<b>Diagram 10</b>	
<i>Dayspring 5 May, 1388</i>	p. 149
<b>Diagram 11</b>	
<i>Beginning of tournament</i>	p. 150
<b>Diagram 12</b>	
<i>Chart for 6pm 5 May 1388</i>	p. 152
<b>Diagram 13</b>	
<i>The Parson's Prologue</i>	p. 158
<b>Diagram 14</b>	
<i>Wife of Bath's horoscope, earliest time</i>	p. 216
<b>Diagram 15</b>	
<i>Wife of Bath's horoscope, latest time</i>	p. 217
<b>Diagram 16</b>	
<i>Gemini rises, Sagittarius sets</i>	p. 272
<b>Diagram 17</b>	
<i>Removal of rocks (1), 25 Dec., 1387</i>	p. 322
<b>Diagram 18</b>	
<i>Removal of rocks (2), 25 Dec., 1387</i>	p. 329
<b>Diagram 19</b>	
<i>Virginia and the Judge</i>	p. 343

## Index to Tables

<b>TABLE 1</b>	
The Modes and Elements	p. 13
<b>TABLE 2</b>	
House-Sign relationships	p. 50
<b>TABLE 3</b>	
Dignities and debilities of the planets	p. 61
<b>TABLE 4</b>	
Original schedule for the <i>Tales</i> ?	p. 80
<b>TABLE 5</b>	
Calendar for April-May, 1386-1394	p. 142
<b>TABLE 6</b>	
Parallels between Custance's and Christ's lives	p. 287
<b>TABLE 7</b>	
Lunar mansions and precession	p. 328
<b>TABLE 8</b>	
The twelve gates of knowledge	pp. 442-3

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The myth of the lone researcher has long been exposed. Had it not been, it is very doubtful that it would have survived this century and the development of the Internet and the World Wide Web. The benefits of that technological facility are evident in the acknowledgments that follow.

First I owe a debt of inexpressible gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Geoffrey Miles, of the Department of English, Victoria University, for spartan endurance over a 6-year marathon course. His perspicacity and his sensitivity to tone set standards to which I could only aspire. To Professor Roger Robinson, a long-established real marathon runner and former Chairperson of the Department of English at Victoria University, I owe a debt for continuing moral support through times when it might not have appeared justifiable. And to Professor Don McKenzie, Visiting Fellow, Pembroke College, Oxford University, for providing the stimulus that initiated this thesis and for graciously arranging convenient accommodation at Pembroke.

I am grateful also to Dr. Robert Easting, Chairperson of Victoria University's Department of English, for his eagle-eyed scrutiny, and to Dr. Christine Franzen of the same Department, for her accessibility whenever I have called upon her expertise.

A warm thank-you is due also to the staff of the Bodleian Library, Oxford, and to that of the Warburg Institute, London, for their patience in coping with a 'colonial' unfamiliar with the protocols; to the Warburg especially, for privileged admission to the Aladdin's cave of treasure-trove on the fourth floor.

With regard to the Internet's World Wide Web, gratitude must be expressed to both Professor Owen Gingerich of the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics, and to Professor Hans Kolkott of the University of Munich, for helpful replies to my queries regarding *Les Tables Alphonsines*; and to Professor Sigmund Eisner ("Sig") of the University of Arizona, for his warm encouragement and his interest in my thesis. Also to many Internet correspondents on the Medieval History list, the Medieval Religion list, the Chaucer list, the History of Astronomy list, History of English Language and the Medieval Philosophy lists, who have tolerated my puckish contributions and given freely of their time to assist me with queries.

I was somewhat fortunate also in receiving a grant from the Victoria University Internal Grants Committee, enabling me to travel at least *to* Oxford, if not *from* there; and I am indebted in so many ways to my wife, Penelope, who financed my return and most of my study, who listened with unfathomable sympathy to my misgivings and whose support was always unflinching through the most challenging times.

Finally, a sincere thank-you to my neighbours Helen and Andrew Morrison, who took pains to assist me with the intricacies of calculations relating to the Jewish Feast Days, perhaps the most challenging of all tasks incurred in following Chaucer's pilgrims to Canterbury; to Dr. John Harper and Dr. Ken Pledger of the Maths Department, Victoria University for assistance with Al Biruni's shadow-theory; to the staff of the Turnbull Library, National Library of New Zealand, for their unreserved assistance; to my dear cousins Hazel and Dennis Mack of West Wickham, Kent, for accommodation; and to the staff of the Reference Department of the Library, Victoria University of Wellington, with special thanks to Victoria Boyack and Justin Cargill.

**This is not necessarily the truth. This is what  
Wittgenstein would have called an exercise in searching for  
that which is true enough.**

## Chapter One

### A General Overview of this Thesis

My original conjecture that Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* could be a solar pageant was prompted by Professor Muriel Bradbrook's suggestion that Shakespeare's play *Timon of Athens*, might be one. When Professor John North published *Chaucer's Universe*<sup>1</sup> in 1988, rumours reached me regarding hitherto unrevealed astrological material pervading the *Canterbury Tales*, which North had brought to light. At that time I was working on *Timon*, and remained unaware of the depth of North's scholarship. In 1992 I began researching the *Tales* before reading North's work. Fortunately, as it turned out, I had taken a different tack from him. So although in 1993 when I did read *Chaucer's Universe* I found myself close to and leeward of North and in some temporary slack air, our divergence soon gave me ample room to sail a clear course of my own.

The broad framework on which this thesis is constructed consists of a structural relationship between the twenty-four *Canterbury Tales* and the twelve signs of the zodiac with which most people are familiar. The solar cycle of twelve months, depicted, for example, in the *Eclogues* of Spenser's *Shepheard's Calender* and in the Duc de Berry's *Les Très Riches Heures*, although depicting the seasonal variations reflecting the sun's changing altitude through the astronomical year from March to the following March, is created by the annual orbit of the Earth around the Sun. That is, of course, a post-Copernican heliocentric perspective. Chaucer, living in the

---

<sup>1</sup> John David North, *Chaucer's Universe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).



fourteenth century, grew up with a geocentric view of the heavens and a Ptolemaic conception of the known universe, which was physically anthropocentric and spiritually theocentric, with Christ as intermediary in a hierarchical chain of being that linked the heavens with humanity. The *Canterbury Tales* reflects this amalgam of the astrological and Christian cosmological conceptions, although most of the astrological components are rather covert, subtle, and apparent only to those who take the trouble to investigate them. There is good reason for that. It was commonplace in medieval times for writers to compose their work in a form that comprised layers of significance. The most evident layers of meaning were the narrative - the surface level at which the plot develops; the anagogical - one at which Biblical allusion might be interwoven or symbolized by the personalities, actions and events of the story; and a philosophical layer - at which the major cruxes of the plot would be presented as the interstices of classical (usually Aristotelian or Platonic) philosophical problems: fate versus free will; fortune versus destiny; and epistemological questions regarding knowledge and belief, the verifiability of sense data, and the nominalist-realist debate.

The *Canterbury Tales* are written, it seems, with *five* layers of meaning, those being the three mentioned above, together with an astrological-astronomical component, and, finally and most covertly, an alchemical layer of significance. North catches a glimpse of the *Tales*' astrological correlations when he writes:

the existence of twenty-four story-tellers does make one wonder whether there was a relationship with the signs of the zodiac (taken twice over) or the twenty-four hours of day and night. Such an arrangement would have been exceedingly difficult to reconcile with the thematic arrangement that most critics find in the *Canterbury Tales*. I suspect that Chaucer attempted to achieve some such

arrangement, perhaps more than once, but abandoned the idea."<sup>2</sup>

Then in a footnote to that suggestion he writes:

Assuming the same planetary characters for the pilgrims as are to be justified shortly for another purpose, the first two fragments seem as though they might once have been meant to follow the sequence of planetary hours for a Tuesday: Mars (Knight), Sun (Miller), Venus (Reeve), Mercury and the Moon are missing, Saturn (Cook), Jupiter (Man of Laws)... The pattern soon breaks down completely.<sup>3</sup>

That seems so because North was looking at the wrong pattern. Although this thesis proposes to reveal the astrological layer, there are inevitable intrusions of other strata, particularly the philosophical and occasionally the alchemical one. That is because astrology was interwoven with philosophy, both subjects having been inherited from classical Greek thought about the nature and operations of the universe; and alchemy itself embraced some astrological mechanics such as the use of lunar phases for inaugurating and proceeding with various stages of the alchemical work, though the alchemists' main use of astrology was that of its symbolism.

There is, however, one very important component of Chaucer's use of the alchemists' techniques as he develops his own *magnum opus*, and that is the *repetition* of the work. Alchemists were required to carry out the process twice before their purported goal could be achieved: the first time in order to make silver, and the second time in order to make gold, the first time under the moon, the second time under the sun, symbolically speaking. Chaucer, in the performance of his role of poet as 'maker',

---

<sup>2</sup> North (1988), p. 505.

<sup>3</sup> North (1988), p. 505.

carries out a function analogous to that of the alchemist, in his case transmuting the base currency of the language available to him to the pure gold of good literature, and in order to achieve that he makes two rounds of the zodiacal circle, each sign of the zodiac being known to the alchemists as one of twelve "gates of knowledge". Chaucer thereby brings his audience, as pilgrims on the path to the New Jerusalem, symbolized by Canterbury, from a pagan level of consciousness in the *Knight's Tale* via twenty-four evolutionary stages of insight, to spiritual consciousness at the *Parson's Tale*. In alchemical terms the pilgrims have their base metal, the lead of their pagan, unredeemed souls, transmuted by the Philosophers' Stone - at one level Christ himself, at another the touchstone of language - to the spiritually pure nature of gold. This transmutation takes place by the process of catharsis as Chaucer, illustrating the uses and abuses of language, inspires his listeners and readers to a higher level of literary expression, at the same time as he induces the spiritual process of evolution from pagan superstition (the lunar or left-hand path) to spiritual redemption (the solar or right-hand path) by means of Christ, in gnostic terms the Solar Logos, under the new dispensation, or New Law, brought into effect by the crucifixion. And Chaucer uses the cross in all except one of his *Tales*, as his means of achieving that end, as I shall make evident shortly.

That is not to suggest that Chaucer was a rampant moralist or a proselytiser for the Christian faith. A man of his times, Chaucer held philosophical perspectives that appear to have been eclectic and non-judgmental, broad and humanitarian. What becomes clear, as the relationship between the *Tales* and astrological material is made explicit, is that he recognises both the aspirations of humanity to attain an ideal and at the same time the human fallibility that prevents us from ever attaining it. Such

perception, enriched as it is by compassion and humour, is brought also to the subject of astrologers and their practices. He appears to recognise those components of astrology that are useful: the elements and their corresponding humours by which it was possible to classify temperament types and depict them through literature in cameos revelant of medieval pop-psychology immediately recognizable by, and appealing to, his audience. But he also sees the inherently spiritual and romantic dimensions of astrology, the metaphysical perspective discernible, for example, in veins of Stoic philosophy, which envisages a mystical connection between patterns of stars in the heavens and the patterns of men's and women's lives.

Of course, he was far from alone in apprehending such a cosmological conception; it was endemic in the all-pervasive, but not unchallenged, spiritual and intellectual structure of the medieval universe, neatly packaged, and labelled (by later scholars), the "macrocosmic-microcosmic paradigm": "as above, so below". It is that *dictum* which gives this thesis its main thrust. The macrocosmic-microcosmic conception of the relationship between the heavens and humankind was depicted most succinctly in the figure of the zodiacal man and the astrological *melothesia* that formed the accepted basis of orthodox medical practice.<sup>4</sup> According to that ancient concept, each part of the human body represented one of the twelve signs of the zodiac. At its most simplistic level of presentation, Aries corresponded to the human head; Taurus to the mouth and throat; Gemini to the arms and hands; Cancer to the chest, breasts and stomach; Leo to the heart and spine; Virgo to the intestines; Libra to the kidneys and ovaries; Scorpio to the generative, reproductive and eliminatory organs; Sagittarius to

---

<sup>4</sup> Hilary M. Carey, *Courting Disaster: Astrology at the English Court and University in the Later Middle Ages* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1992), p. 13.

the thighs; Capricorn to the skeletal structure and the knees; Aquarius to the legs and ankles; and Pisces to the feet. Chaucer, who lists the first three correspondences in his *Treatise on the Astrolabe*,<sup>5</sup> promises in the same paragraph that he will explain them more fully when he writes Part V, a promise not fulfilled in the manner we might have expected. Robinson however, notes that the Paris manuscript of the *Tales* contains an illustration of the zodiacal man,<sup>6</sup> and it is possible that if Part V of the *Treatise* had been written, the illustration is part of that lost manuscript. My more radical suggestion, made in Chapter Three (pp. 82-83), is that the *Canterbury Tales* comprise the promised Part V.

The popularity of the 'zodiac man' *schema* should not be underestimated. Illustrations of it were to be found everywhere, and were very consistent. Comprehensive research concerning the universality of this *melothesia* has already been done.<sup>7</sup> But the author either misses the point or considers it irrelevant to his thesis. The point is that the illustration of the zodiac man is a crucial index to the essential constituents of the macrocosmic-microcosmic interrelationship, which is not simply a superficial and vaguely perceived correspondence between the zodiac and the human body, used only by medical practitioners, but rather a profound and closely

---

<sup>5</sup> Geoffrey Chaucer, *A Treatise on the Astrolabe*, 1, 21, 70-75, in Larry D. Benson (ed.), *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd edn. (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1987), pp. 668-669. All citations of Chaucer in this thesis are taken from this edition.

<sup>6</sup> Fred Norris Robinson (ed.), *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, 2nd. edn. (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1974), Explanatory Notes, p. 693, note to line 312.

<sup>7</sup> Charles West Clark, "The Zodiac Man in Medieval Medical Astrology," diss. University of Colorado, 1979.

integrated codification of universal principles. Associated with those were the medical theories relating to physiognomics, from which inferences relating to character and individuals' futures were frequently made.<sup>8</sup> These had descended from the Greek physicians to those of medieval times. The 'medieval' zodiac man comprised what might be understood by some - and almost certainly was perceived by Chaucer - as the medieval unified field theory. Thus, it was not that Aries represented the head which was important. Rather, it was the fact that both Aries and the head represented a universal principle or process which gave the correspondence significance. In this case, Aries and the head together represent beginnings, coming into being, independent existence, consciousness of one's being, self-consciousness. Similarly, Taurus and the mouth both symbolized ingestion, the taking in of nutrition that stabilizes and consolidates physical existence. Its concomitants are the physical appetites and their gratification, the acquisition and possession of whatever affords a sense of one's physical comfort and security.

The thesis itself necessarily enlarges upon these principles and makes explicit the internal structure of the zodiac as a codifying system according to which individuals in the Middle Ages made sense of their world, and as a system of binary oppositions in nature. According to that system, which becomes evident with a little reflection upon the respective principles of the signs as expressed by the functions of their respective anatomical correspondences, Aries forms a binary opposition with Libra; Taurus forms a binary opposition with Scorpio. It is clearly evident, not only geometrically in their respective positions in the zodiacal circle, but more pertinently in

---

<sup>8</sup> Tamsyn S. Barton, (2), *Power and Knowledge: Astrology, Physiognomics, and Medicine under the Roman Empire* (Michigan: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1994), pp. 100-101.

their respective functions of the assertion of one's own independent being in action (Aries: the head) interacting or compromising with (oppositional relationship) that which, on the horizon of one's experience (oppositional relationship), requires adjusting to in order to achieve equilibrium (Libra: the kidneys). Similarly, ingestion of nutrients for physical energy (Taurus: the mouth) maintains equilibrium with (oppositional relationship) the discharge of such resources in the processes of elimination and reproduction (Scorpio: excretory functions). On a larger scale, all aggregative, consolidatory and stabilizing processes in nature and society, whether by the photosynthesis of light by plants, or by the purchasing of raw materials by a manufacturer, or by the amassing of wealth by a financier, correspond to Taurus; all eliminatory, out-put processes such as the cyclical production of new plant growth, the output of consumer products by a factory, or the investment of money for the purpose of reaping a profit, correspond to Scorpio. Not only the individual, but society itself and all social systems, as well as the geographical and geological features of the land, were seen to hold to each other a macrocosmic-microcosmic relationship, reflecting those six binary oppositions of the zodiac. Vernant is cognizant of this when he writes:

So divinatory systems are established on the basis of more or less stable equilibria between opposite poles, in a sort of constant tension between on the one hand the formal framework, the logical structures, the grammar they put into play for a complete and rigorous codification of the event, the singular fact, and on the other the multiplicity of concrete situations, always diverse and shifting, on which people come to interrogate the oracle and to which its response must allow modification in the direction wanted by the consultant.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> Jean-Pierre Vernant (ed.), *Divination et rationalité* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1974), p. 18, cited in Barton (2) (1994), p. 70.

Tamsyn Barton comments: "From the point of view of astrological theory a complete codification involved an almost infinite number of permutations of determining factors."<sup>10</sup> Claudius Ptolemy, however, saw such codification encapsulated in types of temperament,<sup>11</sup> which in medieval times were related to the interaction of the four elements fire, earth, air and water, the basis of humoral theory and behaviour, inherited from Aristotle and Hippocrates by way of Galen.<sup>12</sup> Linked to that is the association of human characteristics with those of the animals of which most of the zodiacal signs are representative.<sup>13</sup> Chaucer expresses that perception simplistically in his *Treatise*:

And in the zodiak ben the 12 signes that han names of  
bestes, or ellis for whan the sonne entrith in eny of tho  
signes he takith the propirte of suche bestes, or ellis for  
that the sterres that ben ther fixed ben disposid in signes of  
bestes or shape like bestes, or elles whan the planetes ben  
under thilke signes thei causen us by her influence  
operaciouns and effectes like to the operaciouns of bestes.  
(*Astr.*I. 21. ll. 53-62)

Chaucer exploits the potential of the six binary oppositions comprising the zodiacal reference frame throughout the twenty-four *Canterbury Tales* through ingenious inter-relationships of characters and themes. In doing so he exemplifies the practice identified by Barton as "a search for images of the greatest perceptual concreteness that are best imprinted on the mind, a search carried out above all by means of the use of analogy. It is no accident that a great proportion of ancient

---

<sup>10</sup> Barton (2) (1994), p. 70.

<sup>11</sup> Ptolemy, *The Tetrabiblos*, ed. J.M.Ashmand (Chicago: Aries Press, 1936), I, ii, pp. 4-5.

<sup>12</sup> Barton (2) (1994), p. 98.

<sup>13</sup> Barton (2) (1994), pp. 124-128.



mnemonic technique rests on visual associations and analogical approaches; this also springs from the need to find images that best fix the recall of more or less abstract concepts.”<sup>14</sup>

It becomes evident that Chaucer recognizes the classical Greek structure of the zodiacal signs, with its three modes: the cardinal, fixed and mutable signs; and its elements of fire, earth, air and water signs. Each sign of the zodiac can be classified by mode and element. Cardinal (or moveable) signs imply physical, constructive, practical action to initiate projects, to get things moving. Fixed signs imply resistance to change, consistency, stability, consolidation, fixity, permanence. And mutable signs imply flexibility, adaptability, adjustment, versatility, change and opportunism. Aries is a cardinal mode, fire element sign. The opposing sign Libra is a cardinal mode, air element sign. Throughout the zodiac all binary opposition signs share the same mode but complementary elements: fire with air, earth with water, as the following list shows.

TABLE 1

Sign	Mode	Element	binary opposition with Sign	Mode	Element
♈ Aries	cardinal	fire	♎ Libra	cardinal	air
♉ Taurus	fixed	earth	♏ Scorpio	fixed	water
♊ Gemini	mutable	air	♐ Sagittarius	mutable	fire
♋ Cancer	cardinal	water	♑ Capricorn	cardinal	earth
♌ Leo	fixed	fire	♒ Aquarius	fixed	air
♍ Virgo	mutable	earth	♓ Pisces	mutable	water

Those who insist on a literal interpretation of the elements will fail to grasp Chaucer's understanding of the zodiac, which is never made directly explicit but must be extrapolated from the consistency with which the zodiacal principles persistently make themselves evident in the *Tales*. The basis of such an extrapolation is the general

<sup>14</sup> Barton (2) (1994), p. 128.

recognition that "[t]o this symbolic universe there corresponded a sacred rhetoric, in which tropes such as metaphor, metonymy, and allegory played a considerable role..."<sup>15</sup> in the philosophical conceptions of the Middle Ages.

The element Fire does not represent the kind of fire with which we are familiar, but the creative intellect and spiritual impetus which generate ideas that are the seeds of action and creative enterprise. Earth, on the other hand, does represent the earth with which we are familiar, simply because the element symbolizes whatever is material, tangible, physical, together with the activity of making things material, fabrication, composition, construction, in the interests of establishing order in the physical world. Air represents the intangible, abstract, ideal, theoretical and relational. And water, like earth, does represent the actual element, water, but also at a psychological level it represents the feelings, sympathy, compassion, subconscious perception, emotional insight, transcending the physical by seeing through, seeing beyond. Like water itself, it implies whatever is 'deep', the undercurrents hidden by deceptive surface appearances.

These elements and the signs to which they are related exist in geometrical relationships to each other of harmonious or discordant kinds as Greek astrology presented them. Accordingly, all fire and air element signs are harmoniously related, as are those of earth and water. But fire and water are discordant, as are earth and air.

One may easily comprehend that two binary oppositions such as Aries-Libra and Cancer-Capricorn have axes, the intersections of which construct a cross. There are altogether three crosses in the zodiac: the cardinal cross of Aries/Libra with

---

<sup>15</sup> Gerhart B. Ladner, "Medieval and Modern Understanding of Symbolism: A Comparison," *Speculum*, 54 (1979), pp. 223-256 (p. 226).

Cancer/Capricorn; the fixed cross of Taurus/Scorpio with Leo/Aquarius; and the mutable cross of Gemini/Sagittarius with Virgo/Pisces. It becomes apparent that Chaucer uses these crosses upon which to peg his twenty-four *Tales*, and groups the *Tales* into categories according to the modes of the crosses. He uses the cardinal mode for *Tales* that feature the grand metaphysical problems of existence, which concern themselves with Providence, God, Fortune and Destiny: among them the *Knight's*, *Man of Law's*, *Monk's*, *Physician's*, and *Prioress's*. He employs the fixed cross for philosophical problems having more direct relationship to individual weaknesses, human frailties and actions based upon personal beliefs about fate and free will, as well as the intrusion of social forces such as class and the effects of language: the *Miller's*, the *Wife of Bath's*, the *Clerk's*, *Squire's*, *Pardoner's* and *Nun's Priest's*. And he uses the mutable mode of the zodiac with which to tie in philosophical problems relating to epistemology, the sources and reliability of sense perception, belief and knowledge, motivation for action, personal sacrifice and faith, among others, the *Reeve's*, *Friar's*, *Merchant's*, *Franklin's* and *Shipman's*, his own *Tale of Melibee*, and the *Second Nun's Tale of St. Cecilia*.

Because Chaucer makes two circuits of the zodiac, it is possible to perceive the *Tales* in new relationships to each other previously unrecognized, but which have clearly discernible structural associations with the signs of the zodiac. The clearest of these is the twinning factor associated with Gemini. Both the *Reeve's Tale* and the *Shipman's Tale*, associated with the Gemini stage of the annual solar cycle, in the first and second circuits of the zodiac respectively, are concerned with duality, commercial exchange, and the mental and physical agility and adroit manoeuvring associated with the symbolism of the Twins, with mutability and the air element. And the emphasis on

physical desires and material substance in the *Miller's Tale* parallels the sensual emphasis and appetites of the *Pardoner's*, both being at the Taurus stage of the cycle, whilst the concern with free will and human folly because of astrology, dreams and predictions are posited at opposing viewpoints in the *Miller's* (Taurus) and the *Nun's Priest's* (Scorpio). Griselda is constant, and her *Tale* (the *Clerk's*) lies in the fixed mode of the zodiac at Scorpio. The Wife of Bath desires mastery, hardly surprising then that her *Tale* is discovered at the Leo stage of the zodiacal circuit. She attributes her lasciviousness to the sign and planet under which she was born - Mars rising in the fixed mode earth element sign Taurus - whilst her *Tale*, falling at the fixed mode sign Leo, reiterates Chaucer's use of that mode when a tale is concerned with free will and fatalism. The *Second Nun's Tale of St. Cecilia* falls at Sagittarius in the sun's annual cycle, and her feast day, 22 November, lies in the medieval Sagittarian phase of the solar year. The two prose *Tales*, that of Melibeus and the *Parson's* fall at opposing ends of the zodiac: Chaucer's *Tale of Melibee* at Virgo, and the *Parson's*, where one might expect, at Pisces. Chaucer's *Tale of Sir Thopas*, one of fun in which he plays with his listeners, is a piece of Leo entertainment and ostentatious display, whilst the *Monk's Tale* of the downfall of the great occurs at Libra, the sign of the sun's 'fall'.

Aware of Donaldson's well-known *caveat* regarding the ease with which it is possible, assuming a hypothesis, to read into the *Tales* whatever supports that assumption,<sup>16</sup> I have been especially sensitive to the vulnerability of this thesis to that charge. Fortunately, there comes a stage at which any proliferation of coincidences, each of which, taken alone, might have been thought meaningless, reaches a magnitude whereby they assume collective significance. That has most assuredly occurred with

---

<sup>16</sup> E. Talbot Donaldson, *Speaking of Chaucer* (Univ. of London: Athlone Press, 1970), p. 135.

the phenomenal number of correspondences illustrated in this thesis. The difficulty entailed by such collective significance is thereafter that of singling out any one coincidence and determining whether it is essentially meaningless or meaningful.

There remains the question as to why Chaucer chose astrology upon which to structure the *Tales*. A short answer is the rather modern retort, "why not?" But there is a more compelling reason than a cavalier whim for his having done so. Astrology and Christianity were the prevalent philosophies of Chaucer's era. They had reached an uneasy truce, one compelled by the respectability given the Arab translations of the works of the Greeks and Romans. As their works became available in England from the 10th century onwards, they entered into the chief, if not sole, sources of education, the Christian monasteries. Hence the pupil monks were initiated into the works of Aristotle, Plato, Boethius, Avicenna, Euclid, Manilius, Ovid and Herodotus, many of which contained astrological material. The 13th century had seen the major philosopher of the Christian Church, Thomas Aquinas, write somewhat leniently of astrology, contributing a revisionist perspective that modified considerably the hitherto prevalent anti-astrological doctrine of Augustine,<sup>17</sup> which had prevailed somewhat inconsistently, for the previous thousand years. Aquinas accepted the reality of stellar influences upon human corporeality, upon the weather and plant growth, but challenged Christians to accept Christ's spiritual influence as a means of freeing their 'sublunary nature' from stellar determinism. By Chaucer's era his views had become more prevalent. The controversy that was to arise regarding fate and free will was just beginning to simmer, though it had already resulted in the burning at the stake, in

---

<sup>17</sup> Augustine, *City of God* 5. 1-9. See also L. de Vreese, *Augustine en de Astrologie* (Maastricht, 1933), in which Augustine's views on astrology are collected together.

1327, of one Cecco d'Ascoli, an astrologer who had made too many claims in support of astrological determinism. No doubt mindful of this, and aware of the political implications of the public perception of astrology's power of prediction, whether justifiable or not, Chaucer hid his sophisticated astrological knowledge rather deeply within the *Tales*, presenting only the highly technical and harmless *Treatise on the Astrolabe* and the more amusing, superficial commonplaces to his public.

His alchemical knowledge, some of which is evident in the *Canon's Yeoman's Tale*, is even more covert, and for good reason. Pope John XXII had issued a decree in 1317 banning alchemy. It began: "Alchemies are here prohibited, and those who practise their being done are punished. They must forfeit to the public treasury for the benefit of the poor as much genuine gold and silver as they have manufactured of the false or adulterated metal... If they are clerics, they shall be deprived of any benefices they may hold and be deprived of holding others."<sup>18</sup> Both astrology and alchemy were related, in the public perception at least, if not to any great degree in actual practice, with medieval magic and witchcraft, the intensity of suspicion and fear of which cannot be appreciated today. The risk to reputation, career, life itself, was an ever-threatening reality no-one in Chaucer's professional and social position could afford to ignore without considerable jeopardy. On balance, it seems likely that Chaucer was aware that the public perception of astrology's power, particularly the perception of its predictive potential, was more dangerous than anyone's actual use of astrology itself. Even so, it is well known that Charles V of France, a contemporary of Chaucer's, employed an astrologer "who advised on propitious times for action and carried out

---

<sup>18</sup> Ronald Pearsall, *The Alchemists* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1970), p. 61.

confidential missions..."<sup>19</sup> and had also founded a college of astrology at the University of Paris. Barbara Tuchman tells us Charles' astrologer carried out an astrological experiment designed to expel the English from France. She writes:

Out of lead and tin, he fashioned hollow images of nude men, filled them with earth collected from the center and four corners of France, inscribed the foreheads with the names of King Edward or one of his captains, and, *when the constellations were right* [my emphasis], buried them face down while he recited spells to the effect that this was perpetual expulsion, annihilation, and burial of the said King, captains, and all adherents.<sup>20</sup>

Though Chaucer appears to have accepted the validity of some of the astrological aphorisms, he clearly rejected its predictive claims, implicitly conceding the view that whilst there may well be a language of the stars capable of revealing human destinies, it was one too difficult for obtuse human minds to interpret successfully, try though they undoubtedly would. The *Canterbury Tales* themselves, however, are more than a little successful in revealing the progress that Chaucer himself had made in working out the will of his God, on Earth, as it is in the heavens.

It is evident from the researches of North, of Eisner,<sup>21</sup> of Spencer<sup>22</sup> and of Hamlin,<sup>23</sup> as well as from the material contained in this thesis, that a comprehensive

---

<sup>19</sup> Barbara Tuchman, *A Distant Mirror - The Calamitous Fourteenth Century*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Inc., 1978; London: Macmillan, 1995), p. 227.

<sup>20</sup> Tuchman (1995), p. 227.

<sup>21</sup> Sigmund Eisner, ed. *The Kalendarium of Nicholas of Lynn* (Athens, Georgia: Georgia Univ. Press, 1980).

<sup>22</sup> William Spencer, "Are Chaucer's Pilgrims Keyed to the Signs of the Zodiac?" *The Chaucer Review*, 4 (1970), pp. 147-170.

understanding and appreciation of the *Canterbury Tales* are not possible without a grasp of the fundamentals of astrology. To assist the reader towards that end, I have included in the thesis the most essential astrological illustrations in the form of diagrams and horoscope maps.<sup>24</sup> And in order for the reader to make sense of such, I have provided, in Chapter Two, an elementary grounding in those precepts and techniques of medieval astrology that are relevant to this thesis.

---

<sup>23</sup> B.F. Hamlin, "Astrology and the Wife of Bath: A Reinterpretation," *The Chaucer Review*, 9 (1974-5), pp. 153-185.

<sup>24</sup> Because of the limitations of astrological software, it is not possible to draw the maps rectangular, as they were drawn in Chaucer's time. Instead, the charts are drawn in the more modern (circular) form; and for the sake of simplicity, by the method of dividing the chart by houses measured equally from the ascendant. Neither difference has any material consequence for the argument of the thesis. The ascendant degree as well as the midheaven degree of any horoscope, drawn according to any method, will, if accurately calculated, always be identical for a given time, longitude and latitude. The words "Natal Chart" frequently occur inappropriately on the charts but are unavoidable, due to the computer software employed.



## Chapter Two

### A Picture Of The Hour

The sensory impact of many works of art or of musical composition is direct. Although interpretation is personal, as it is for the reader of literature, there is an immediate involvement. By comparison, literary descriptions of astronomical phenomena, placed at one remove, distance the reader. Thus, one's response to Van Gogh's *Starry Night*<sup>25</sup> or to the strains of Neptune's theme in Holst's *The Planets* suite,<sup>26</sup> is a reaction to a dramatic sensory impact. But what one understands of Chaucer's

And also blisful Venus, wel arrayed,  
Sat in hire seventhe hous of hevene tho,  
Disposed wel, and with aspectes payed,  
To helpe sely Troilus of his woo  
(*Tr.* II. ll. 690-683),

depends upon the clarity and accuracy of textual notes and also upon one's own perspectives regarding the history of astronomy. For, while these are concerned with natural phenomena we are capable of experiencing directly, it seems that the more knowledge about astronomical phenomena we have acquired in our technological era, the more remote from us personally have they become. With modern pollution and the

---

<sup>25</sup> Vincent Van Gogh, *Starry Night*, 1889, Collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York (bequest of Lillie P. Bliss).

<sup>26</sup> *Neptune, the Mystic* in *The Planets*, suite for orchestra, organ and female chorus by Holst, op. 32 (1915).

reduction of a rainbow to prismatic variations, it is little wonder that the senses have become dulled in their personal perception of cosmic beauty, a state perhaps apprehended by Lorenzo in a more physiological sense: "Such harmony is in immortal souls,/But whilst this muddy vesture of decay/Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it."<sup>27</sup>

I am not supposing that in earlier times people had either a greater interest in or knowledge of their contemporary astronomy. Undoubtedly by the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries many could bandy astrological and some astronomical terms with as cavalier regard for accuracy as most of us today display when we ask people which star they are born under and they reply "Cancer" or "Pisces" or whatever; which is not a star but a sign of the zodiac. Or when, at a level of assumed erudition, a critic defines astrology as anachronistic because the precession of the equinoxes has displaced the sign Aries from the ancient zodiacal constellation Aries (a point developed here a little later on). But that was a symptom of the popular interest in what Wedel refers to as "the vulgar astrology of the almanac",<sup>28</sup> and in the earliest period of Middle English literature there is nothing to "warrant an assumption that there was any wide-spread enthusiasm for understanding even the rudiments of astronomy."<sup>29</sup> What I do suppose is that our alienation from the astronomical part of medieval and early Renaissance cosmology is commensurate with our consciousness of living in the post-Copernican

---

<sup>27</sup> Shakespeare, *Merchant of Venice*, V.i., 63-65, in William Shakespeare: *The Complete Works*, Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, Gen. Eds., Compact edn. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), p. 448.

<sup>28</sup> Theodore Otto Wedel, *The Mediaeval Attitude toward Astrology* (New Haven, Conn., 1920), p. 49.

<sup>29</sup> Hamilton M. Smyser, "A View of Chaucer's Astronomy," *Speculum*, 45 (1970), pp. 359-373 (p. 360).

era with its heliocentric paradigm. That makes it difficult for some to regard the Ptolemaic geocentric model as either valuable or worth serious attention, although recent scholarship has shown what a very good model it was for the purposes it served.<sup>30</sup>

Astrologers based their interpretations of horoscopes on the angular relationships formed by the planets, sun and moon to the birthplace, at the moment of birth. Those angular relationships were and are measurable and identical, irrespective of whether the sun goes around the Earth or vice versa. This is an important point frequently overlooked by modern critics of the medieval world view. The body of astrological lore accumulated over twenty centuries was based on that reference frame, which was a valid one for people who live on the Earth and not on the sun. That point was made prophetically by the Dominican Thommaso Campanella (1568-1639), as Tester affirms:

Lastly, and very importantly, he [Campanella] expresses simply the astrologers' answer to those who thought (and indeed think) that Copernican Heliocentrism was bound to give the death-blow to Astrology (Book I. c. 2, art.1, 3) *'Whether the sun moves or stands still, it is to be supposed a moving Planet by us, considering the matter from our senses and our description; for the same happens whether it moves or the earth.'* In other words, what matters to the astrologer is their *relative* position, as with all the planets; their angular distances seen from here.<sup>31</sup>

That is a fundamental reality, consistent with Einstein's Special Theory of Relativity. According to that theory, any object (in the universe) is a suitable frame of

---

<sup>30</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ.Press, 1964), p. 12 *et al.*

<sup>31</sup> S. Jim Tester, *A History of Western Astrology* (Bury St. Edmunds: Boydell Press, 1987), p. 214.

reference and the motion of any object can be referred to that frame. While one might choose not to change one's perspective in order to reconcile the post-Copernican theory with the Ptolemaic one, we do not have such freedom to choose if we really wish to understand the medieval point of view regarding some facets of the medieval astrological conception.

We today may find astrology difficult to understand because we try to conceptualise it in terms of cause and effect, or of "influences travelling through space." But in *Physics as Metaphor*, Jones says that astrology has nothing to do with causality:

In such a realm of organic connectedness, the medieval astrologer pondered the relationship of humans to the stars. He did not think in the terms that we might use of the influence of the planet Mercury on someone at the moment of his or her birth, projected across millions of miles of empty space. Rather, he recognised in the primal moment when a newborn child drew its first breath of life, the stamp of a unique event impressed upon the whole cosmos and reflected in its every rhythm and pattern...<sup>32</sup>

There were, however, frequent references to "influences", a notion inherited from antiquity and transmitted to the Renaissance via the Middle Ages. C.S. Lewis says:

On the physical side the influence of the spheres is unquestioned. Celestial bodies affect terrestrial bodies, including those of men. And by affecting our bodies they can, but need not, affect our reason and our will. They can, because our higher faculties certainly receive something (*accipiunt*) from our lower. They need not, because any alteration of our imaginative power produced in this way generates, not a necessity but only a propensity, to act thus or thus. The propensity can be resisted; hence the wise man

---

<sup>32</sup> Roger Stanley Jones, *Physics As Metaphor* (London: Wildwood House, 1983), p. 66.

will over-rule the stars. But more often it will not be resisted, for most men are not wise; hence, like actuarial predictions, astrological predictions about the behaviour of large masses of men will often be verified.<sup>33</sup>

But it is not with "large masses of men" that the astrologers or those who consulted them were predominantly concerned, but rather with the fates and fortunes of individuals. For that purpose the medieval astrologers studied astronomy, in order to cast horoscopes, or, as Eade says, "cast a nativity" or "erect a figure"<sup>34</sup> of the heavens showing the positions of the sun, moon and planets in their relationship to the birthplace of an individual at the moment of birth or, in the case of the 'figure', for the moment a querent poses a question. Robertson suggests an extrapolation as the underlying rationale for that:

From the obvious effects on earthly things of the sun's daily passage across the sky, and the pronounced change in the seasons that comes as the sun passes nearer to or farther from the celestial equator, an ability to affect earthly things was extended to other celestial bodies, and the planets were thought to be able to affect not only physical things like the leafing of the trees when the sun was in certain parts of the zodiac, but also mental and emotional conditions in people. The influence of astral configurations on character was thought to come mainly at the moment of birth, and so astrologers studied a person's horoscope, the positions of the stars at birth, in order to determine his character and probable future.<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>33</sup> Lewis (1964), pp. 103-104.

<sup>34</sup> John Christopher Eade, *The Forgotten Sky: a Guide to Astrology in English Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984), p. 39.

<sup>35</sup> D.W. Robertson Jr., *The Literature of Medieval England* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970), p. 15.

This leads us to another reason for the difficulty many readers of English literature experience with astrological references. Because astrology remained stable for several centuries,<sup>36</sup> so did its vocabulary and methodology. In fact, even modern astrologers use much of Claudius Ptolemy's vocabulary derived from his *Tetrabiblos* written in the 2nd century AD. But readers uninterested in astrology may justifiably shrink from astrological terminology with its obfuscatory effects that in themselves may evoke suspicion of hocus-pocus. Some scholars have tried to elucidate the terminology, but the opaque explication in North's *Chaucer's Universe* and the apparent complexity of astronomical mathematics in Eade's *The Forgotten Sky*<sup>37</sup> may further alienate students of literature for whom scientific and mathematical technicalities are anathema. Yet in fact the fundamental astronomy and terminology of astrology are quite simple and need not deter any reader prepared to follow a line of reasoning.

### The Horoscope

The horoscope, or 'scene of the hour', derived from the Greek *hora* and *skopein*, was drawn up for the moment the child drew its first breath. The horoscope depicted four fundamental components: first, the ascendant-descendant axis; secondly,

---

<sup>36</sup> Eade writes: "The primary doctrines of astrology remained stable from the time of Ptolemy onwards - as indeed they were bound to do. Until the discovery of Neptune, Uranus and Pluto, for instance, there was no motivation (and no warrant) for distributing the planets differently among the signs of the zodiac" (Eade (1984), p. 41.)

<sup>37</sup> Eade (1984).

the zenith-nadir axis; thirdly, the upper and lower midheavens known respectively as the *medium coeli* and the *imum coeli*, meaning 'the middle of the heavens' and 'the lower of the heavens'; and fourthly, the division of the sun's apparent diurnal circle of 360 degrees of zodiacal longitude into twelve divisions that comprised the houses of the horoscope.

The degree of the sign rising in the east was especially important and was known as '*horoscopus*'. The area stretching just 5 degrees above the eastern horizon and for 25 degrees below it was known as the **ascendant** (*ascendens*) of the horoscope. The area 5 degrees below the western horizon and 25 degrees above it was known as the **descendant** (*descendens*), because the sign it occupied was setting. The east-west horizontal line was thus a fundamental axis of the horoscope.

The point straight up above one's head is known as the **zenith**; that directly below one's feet is the **nadir**. The line joining both points is the zenith-nadir axis, which bisects the ascendant-descendant axis. The term used for the zenith line is sometimes '**nonagesimal**'. Astrologers attached much importance to the nonagesimal because, being at right angles to the *horoscopus*, it held a relationship (90 degrees, of course) which was considered inimical to life when a planet passed over it (i.e. transited that degree, or its opposite).

But thirdly, they attached more importance to the **midheaven** or *medium coeli*, the position attained in the heavens by the sun at its noon elevation above the horizon; and fourthly, to its opposite point below the horizon, the **lower midheaven**, or *imum coeli*. The midheaven-lower midheaven axis was thus considered the second most important axis in the horoscope. Because the midheaven was *symbolically* the highest point (the zenith being the literal highest) it was often considered to be so in *fact*; and

as the graphic representation of the horoscope evolved, the midheaven came to be drawn as a vertical line at right angles to the horizon. This is not apparent diagrammatically in the horoscopes of the period with which we are concerned, but it is important to remember that in the minds of those involved with astrology at the time, the midheaven was both drawn and conceived symbolically as aligned with the zenith, the highest point in the heavens, and therefore metaphorically representative of the highest status to which one would attain in life, hence one's destination or destiny, status and public identity; and those upon whom one's fate depended: those in control or charge of one; one's governor or the government, God or God's law.



# Structure of the horoscope

Diagram 1

## Natal Chart

18 Apr 1387

04:47:20 LMT +0:00:24

Southwark

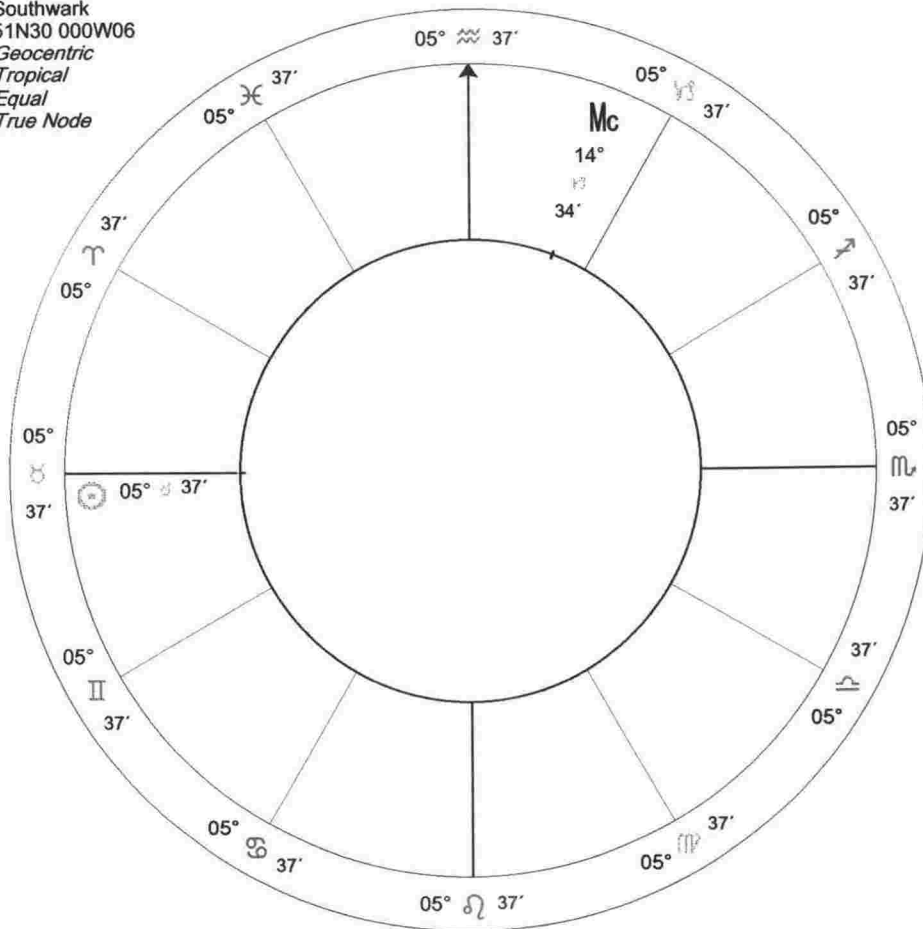
51N30 000W06

Geocentric

Tropical

Equal

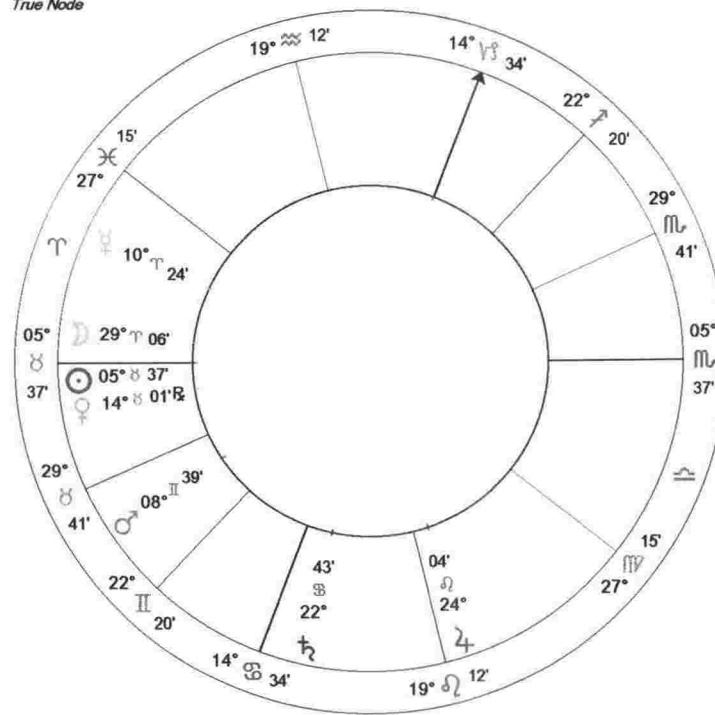
True Node



The diagram shows the ascendant in the zodiacal sign Taurus ♉, the zenith in the zodiacal sign Aquarius ♒, the midheaven (medium coeli: MC) in the zodiacal sign Capricorn ♐, and the descendant opposite the ascendant, in the zodiacal sign Scorpio ♏. Because it is sunrise (4.47 am), the sun ☉ is at the ascendant, conjunction the 1st house cusp or ascending degree, at 5 degrees of Taurus 37 minutes. The lower midheaven is not shown, but lies opposite to the upper midheaven, in the sign Cancer ♋, and would be labelled IC for imum coeli (the lower of the heavens). The 12 sectors into which the circle is divided are called the houses of the horoscope. In this chart structure, the zenith and the midheaven are shown separately, but in the Standard Method of house division the zenith and the midheaven were drawn as one and were frequently misunderstood to be one arc.

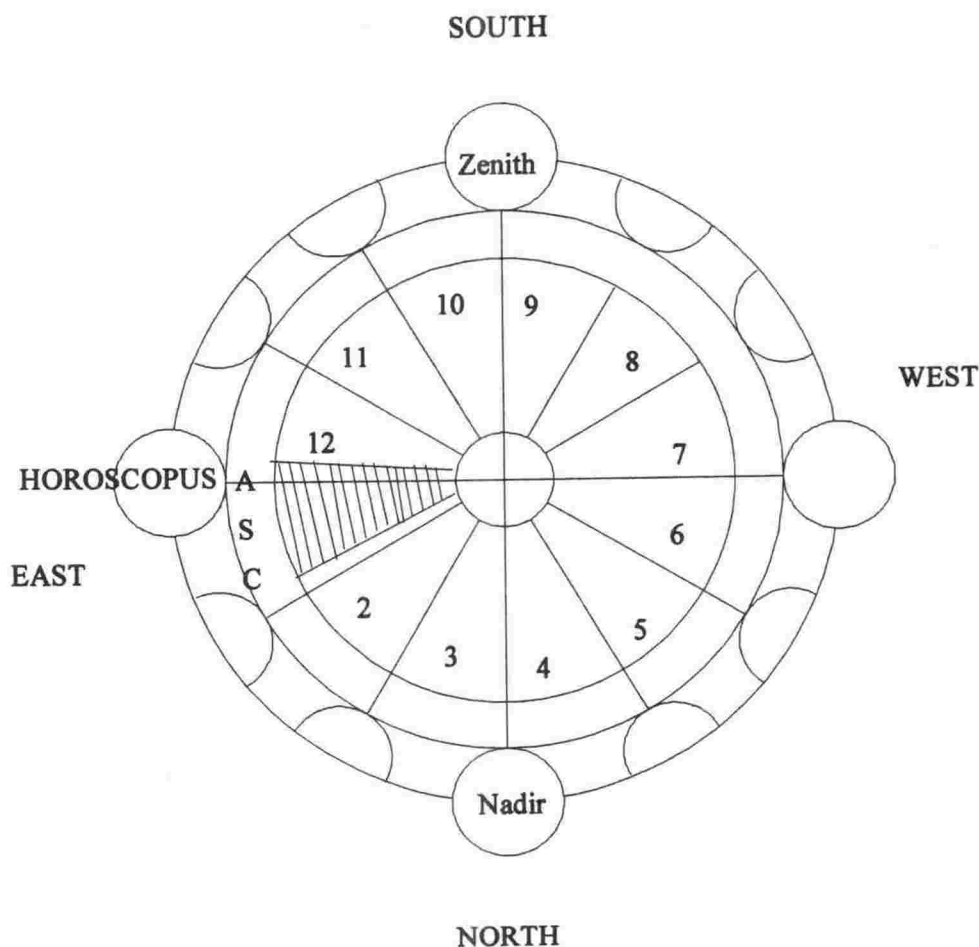
## Structure of the Horoscope

Natal Chart  
18 Apr 1387  
04:47:20 LMT +0:00:24  
Southwark  
51N30 00W06  
Geocentric  
Tropical  
Alcabitius  
True Node

Diagram 1b  
Standard House Division

This chart is constructed according to the Standard Method (Alcabitius) as described by North in *Horoscopes and History*. The houses are calculated by tri-secting the time taken for the ascending degree to culminate. Because this chart structure provides more information than is relevant to this thesis and adds to the difficulty for the newcomer to astrology, I have retained the use of the simpler 'Equal Houses from the Ascendant' division method throughout this thesis.

The reader should note that I cannot emphasize too strongly the fact that whilst Chaucer outlines two methods of ascertaining the houses of the horoscope, namely that of Porphyry (*Astr.* ii. 36) and that of Alcabitius (*Astr.* ii. 37), the use of the 'Equal Houses from the ascendant' method employed in this thesis for the reader's benefit, *does not invalidate any one of its arguments*. This is because the only matters dealt with in this thesis are concerned with the *relationships* held by planets to the ascending degree, or to the midheaven degree or to the zenith line (nonagesimal), locations *that are common to all systems of house division*. The fact that different systems of house division result in the placement of planets in different houses (e.g. a planet in the 5th house in Porphyry might appear in the 4th house in the Equal House division chart) is irrelevant to any topic discussed herein.



Planets culminate southward ( in seamen's terms 'southing'); that is, they come to the meridian of longitude of a location in a southerly direction in the northern hemisphere. Note the extent of the ascendant area, from 5 degrees above the horoscopus to 25 degrees below it (i.e. the last 5 degrees of the 12th house and the first 25 degrees of the 1st house.) Each house is 30 degrees of zodiacal longitude in extent and the houses are numbered in an anti-clockwise direction.

The names of the twelve signs of the zodiac are familiar enough. Most names are identical to and derived from some of the eighteen ancient Assyrian zodiacal constellations of antiquity.<sup>38</sup> The earliest evidence for placing the planets in a twelve-

<sup>38</sup> C.B.F. Walker, *A Sketch Of The Development Of Mesopotamian Astrology and Horoscopes*, in Annabella Kitson (ed.), *History and Astrology: Clio and Urania confer* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), pp.7-14 (p. 9).

sign division of the zodiac, Walker suggests, is found in astronomical diaries dating from the mid-sixth century BC.<sup>39</sup>

### **The Signs of the Zodiac and the Zodiacal Constellations**

In the period with which we are concerned, the signs of the zodiac themselves differ from the constellations of the same names in important respects. First, the constellations are groups of stars, varying in size. The signs of the zodiac are *not* groups of stars, but are areas of the sky measured in equal divisions along the **ecliptic**. The ecliptic, so called because eclipses of the sun and moon occur in it, is the sun's *apparent* path, and the central line of the zodiac, which extends about 8 degrees north and south of it, so that it forms a band, about 16 degrees wide. The sun's apparent path, being the central line of the zodiac, resembles the Earth's equator as a central line of latitude. That analogy is helpful because planets north of the central line drawn by the sun in its apparent motion are said to have northern '**latitude**' and those south of the sun's central line (the ecliptic) are said to have southern '**latitude**', just as places north or south of the Earth's equator are described as located at so many degrees north or south latitude.

The positions in the heavens corresponding to **lines of latitude** on Earth are **parallels of declination** in the heavens. Just as lines of latitude on Earth are measured north and south from the Earth's equator, so parallels of declination in the heavens are measured north and south of the **celestial equator** (the Earth's equator projected out into space, like a hoop around a barrel.) So, a planet north of the sun in the *ecliptic* but

---

<sup>39</sup> Walker (1989), p. 11.

over the Earth's southern *latitudes* would thus be said to have *northern latitude* but *southern declination*.

Secondly, the constellations lie in proximity to the ecliptic, some of them across it, others tangential to it. But the signs are divisions of the ecliptic; they are mathematical structures, abstractions. Although they have been reified by astrologers and philosophers and the general public, they are in fact simply tripartite divisions of each of the four seasons, and are created or defined by the actual motion of the Earth around the sun. But it is important to remember that the terminology of astrology is geocentric and that the apparent path of the sun around the Earth, has its starting point, or 'fiducial', each year in the position at which the sun crosses the Earth's horizon on its entry into the northern hemisphere. The moment it crosses that point is the start of the astrological (and the astronomical) year, which can occur at any time, on or very close to 21 March annually. That is the official start of the northern spring, and the position occupied by the sun at that moment is known as the **Vernal Point**, and the date is the date of the **Vernal Equinox**.

The sun's apparent journey northward from its intersection with the **celestial equator** (the Earth's equator projected out into space), through the signs Aries, Taurus and Gemini, is inclined to the equator at an angle of  $23\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$  and was so also in the Middle Ages, varying from today's inclination by a few minutes. When it reaches that degree of declination (corresponding of course, as we saw earlier, to Earth latitude  $23\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$  north), it is at its maximum distance north of the equator and marks mid-summer, turning around at the **Tropic of Cancer**, defining the sign Cancer in doing so. A 'tropic' is so called because it is the 'turning around' point, derived from the Greek *tropos*. The sun then begins its journey southwards, though of course remaining in the

northern hemisphere, creating Leo and Virgo before crossing the horizon again at Libra, the Balance, in late September. The continuously changing Earth-sun relationship then defines Scorpio and Sagittarius and presents the sun's declining southwards at an angle of  $23\frac{1}{2}$  to the horizon until it reaches that parallel of Earth latitude at declination  $23\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$  south, timing the southern hemisphere's midsummer, marking out the **Tropic of Capricorn**. It then starts its climb northwards while still in southern declination, defining Aquarius and Pisces before reaching the horizon again in late March to begin a new solar year.

### The Planetary Cycles

The planets too, wend their ways through the zodiacal band at various rates of motion. The word 'planets' derives from the Greek word *planetes*, meaning wanderers, which distinguishes them from the 'fixed stars' of the constellations. The planets' movements through the zodiacal band vary individually. While the sun defines the year, and could be said therefore to take one year to 'transit' the zodiac, the planet Saturn takes about 30 years to move through the 12 signs, thus spending about  $2\frac{1}{2}$  years in each sign. Jupiter takes approximately 12 years to move through the whole zodiac, spending approximately 1 year in each sign. Mars takes two years to complete the circuit; Venus and Mercury approximately 1 year. It is important to remember that Venus is never further from the sun than 48 degrees of longitude; that is, it must be in either the same sign as the sun or in one of two either side of the sun's; and Mercury is never further than 28 degrees from the sun, so Mercury must be in either the same sign as the sun or in one either side of the sun's.<sup>40</sup> This means that one should never

---

<sup>40</sup> This is relevant to the dating of some literary texts.

encounter a horoscope in which the planets Mercury and Venus are separated by more than 76 degrees.

The moon defines a month by returning to any degree in the zodiac after 28 days. That is the length of the ordinary **lunar cycle**. In the meantime, the sun will have moved on one whole sign. Each month it takes the moon about one and a half days longer than its lunar cycle to 'catch up' with the sun at its new position and when they again occupy an identical degree of celestial longitude a **new moon** is formed.

Fourteen to fifteen days later, the moon is in the opposite degree of the zodiac from the sun and a **full moon** is formed. It therefore takes twenty-nine and a half days from one encounter of the moon with the sun to the next and between one opposition of the moon to the sun and the next: that is the time between successive new moons and between successive full moons.

If, when the moon does share the same degree of **celestial (zodiacal) longitude** as the sun, they are simultaneously over the identical Earth latitude (ie. they share the same declination in the heavens), then the moon moves directly between the Earth and the sun, blocking the light of the sun, and we experience a **solar eclipse**. And if, when the moon is in the opposite degree of the zodiac from the sun, they both are at opposite degrees of Earth latitude - that is, the one over the Earth's southern latitudes is in precisely the opposite degree from the one over the Earth's northern latitudes - then they hold precisely opposite degrees of declination too, so the Earth must be in the centre between them, blocking the light of the sun from the moon, causing a **lunar eclipse**.

### The sun's culmination

#### Natal Chart

18 Apr 1387

11:57:10 LMT +0:00:24

London

51N30 000W06

Geocentric

Tropical

Equal

True Node

Diagram 3

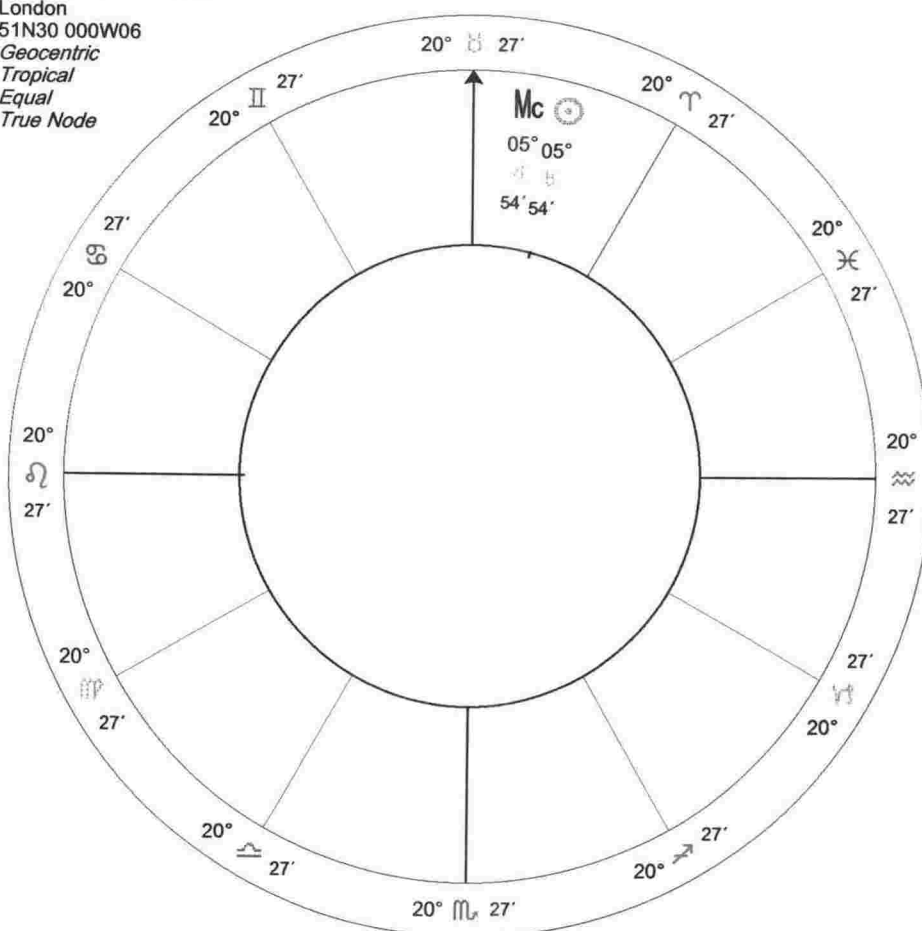


Diagram 3 shows the sun culminating over the longitude of London on 18 April, 1387. In relationship to its position depicted in diagram 1, it has moved up through houses 12, 11 and 10, passed over the zenith, and is now in house 9, conjunction the midheaven. As one might assume, the time is close to noon. This diurnal movement of the sun's is coincident with the sign in which it is placed, Taurus ♉, having risen up through those houses and is at this time culminating. The sun's actual direct motion in the zodiac runs counter to this clockwise motion of the zodiac, and the diagram shows that the sun has actually moved from 5 degrees 37 minutes of Taurus ♉ at sunrise (diagram 1) to 5 degrees 54 minutes of Taurus ♉ at culmination. The ascendant in this diagram is at this time, in Leo ♌. The sun will, from this point, move lower in the heavens in a westerly direction, down through houses 9, 8 and 7 to the descendant, which at sunset will, obviously, be in Taurus, and the opposite sign, Scorpio, will be at the ascendant. Southern hemisphere readers should note that the sun setting in the west is on the right because this is a northern hemisphere representation.

There is a minimum of two and a maximum of five solar eclipses in any one year; and a solar eclipse is always either preceded or followed by a lunar eclipse. That information, too, is useful for dating literary texts.



To sum up: a new moon occurs when the sun and moon occupy the same degree in the same sign of the zodiac. A full moon occurs when the sun and moon are in the same degree of opposite signs of the zodiac, eg. the sun in Aries, the moon in Libra, producing a full moon in Libra.

A solar eclipse occurs when the sun and moon are in not only the same degree of longitude in the same sign of the zodiac, but both also hold identical degrees of declination respectively north and south. So a solar eclipse is a **new moon**, but has the added factor of both bodies being the same distance north or south of the Earth's celestial equator (the Earth's equator projected out into space).

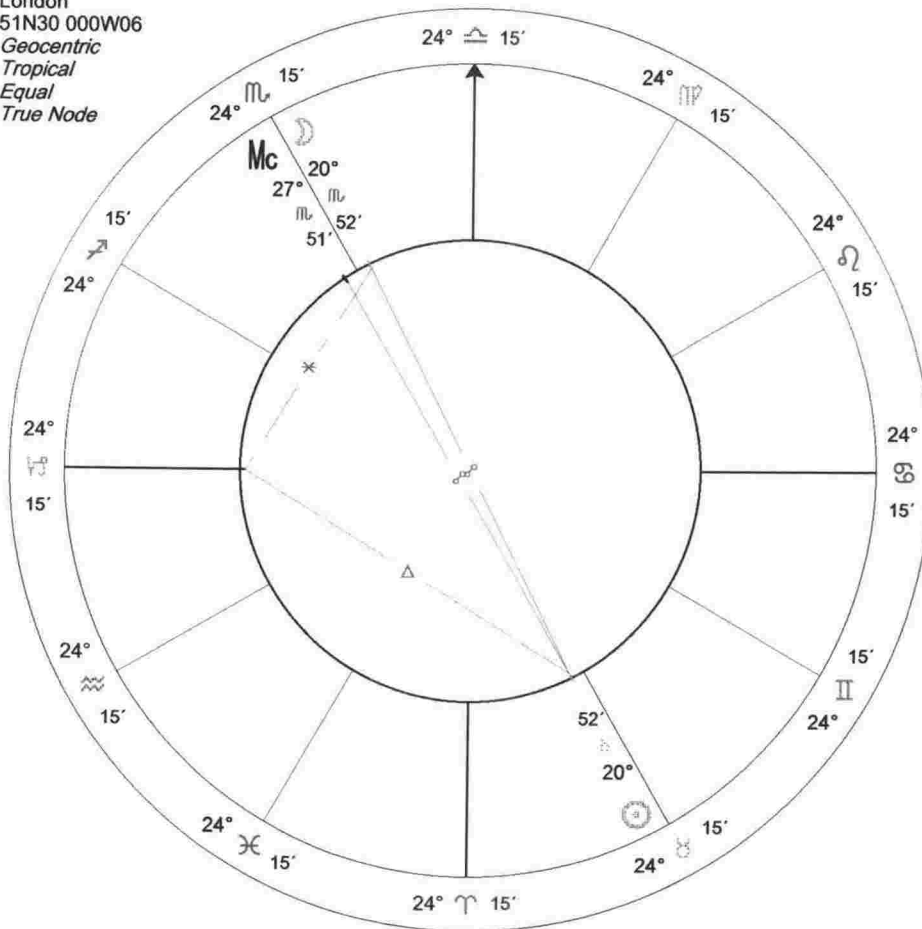
A lunar eclipse occurs when the sun and moon are in the same degree of opposite signs (or, if you like, opposite degrees of the zodiac) and also hold opposite degrees of declination. So a lunar eclipse is a **full moon** but has the added factor of both bodies being equally distant north **and** south (respectively) of the Earth's equator.

## A new moon

The diagram shows the new moon of 18 April, 1387, with the sun and moon both at 6 degrees of Taurus ♉, therefore in conjunction by longitude. If their declinations had been the same too, then the sun would have been eclipsed, because the sun, moon and Earth would have been in the same plane. As it is, one has to imagine that they are not here in the same plane when viewed from the Earth, i.e. from the centre of the horoscope diagram. If this had been a solar eclipse, it would have been visible because the sun and moon, although setting, are above the horizon, the descendant. Even when the new moon is relatively high in the sky as on this date, it will be invisible because of the sun's rays, until after sunset.

**A full moon**  
**Natal Chart**  
 4 May 1387  
 00:24 LMT +0:00:24  
 London  
 51N30 000W06  
*Geocentric*  
*Tropical*  
*Equal*  
*True Node*

Diagram 5



The diagram shows the full moon in Scorpio lying in direct opposition to the sun in Taurus. They lie in opposition degrees of zodiacal longitude. Had they also lain in opposite degrees of declination, then because they would have been in the same plane, the moon would have been eclipsed by the Earth's blocking of the light from the sun.

We never see the actual occurrence of the new moon, because the sun's light is too bright: the moon is always a day old at least before we notice its thin sliver of silver as it moves away from the sun's degree in the zodiac, which is usually of course in the evening with the paling of the sun's rays, though it may be seen in the east for an hour or two early in the morning around sunrise when it is only a day or so old. And

because the sun is setting, the moon, not far forward of the sun in the zodiac, must be setting too.

By contrast, we always, unless it is too cloudy, see the full moon. Being at 180 degrees distant from the sun, in the opposite half of the zodiac, the full moon rises as the sun sets. When the sun is at the lower midheaven, the full moon is culminating overhead; and as, at sunrise, the sun appears above the eastern horizon, the full moon sets in the west.

A solar eclipse occurs in the same degree of the same zodiacal sign every 18.03 years, a cycle known for centuries as the **Saros cycle**. The saros corresponds almost exactly to 19 returns of the sun to the same node.

The moon's monthly orbit around the zodiacal band in 28 days means that it crosses the ecliptic twice monthly, once on its journey northwards and once on its journey southwards. The positions in the heavens where it crosses the ecliptic are known as nodal points or the moon's **north and south nodes**, known as *Caput Draconis* (the Dragon's Head), and *Cauda Draconis* (the Dragon's Tail). Astrologers attributed to them similar kinds of qualities and influences to those accorded the planets.

### **The Precession of the Equinoxes**

The material covered thus far is not controversial, and most general reference texts on the astronomy of the zodiac would doubtless make those same salient points. Confusion does arise, however, with regard to two processes and structures: first, the **Precession of the Equinoxes**; secondly, the relationship between the **Houses of the Zodiac** and the **Houses of the Horoscope**. Both are problems directly relevant to this

thesis because much consistent criticism of astrology through the Medieval and Renaissance eras was founded on them.

One of the traditional charges laid against astrology, and one that rests on a basis of fallible common sense, is that due to the precession of the equinoxes (a phenomenon noticed by Hipparchus at least as early as the 2nd century BC),<sup>41</sup> the signs of the zodiac are no longer where they used to be and that astrologers were and are unaware of their shift. This means that when astrologers of the Middle Ages (or today) refer to a planet as being in, say, Scorpio, it is really in Libra; for the displacement of the Vernal Point, the first degree of Aries, at present by about 24 degrees, means that there is a virtual overlapping of the sign Aries by the constellation Pisces, so that all the twelve signs of the zodiac are, as it were, at one remove. Thus, allege the critics, to attribute (let us say) inflammation of the bladder to some supposed astrological influence of Mars in Scorpio must be fallacious, because that planet is actually lying in the constellation Libra.

To understand the fallacy of that charge one must acquaint oneself with a little of the history of astrology around the 2nd century AD, and with the structure of the zodiac. The central figure and the man inadvertently responsible for the controversy is Claudius Ptolemy (AD100-70), the astronomer and mathematician whose synthesis of the geocentric theory came to dominate astronomical thought until the 17th century. In his *Tetrabiblos* he writes:

The beginning of the whole zodiacal circle (which in its nature as a circle can have no other beginning, nor end, capable of being determined), is (therefore) assumed to be

---

<sup>41</sup> Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Copernican Revolution: Planetary Astronomy in the Development of Western Thought* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1957), p. 269.

the sign of Aries, which commences at the vernal equinox.<sup>42</sup>

And later:

The beginnings of the signs ... are to be taken from the equinoctial and tropical points. This rule is not only clearly stated by writers on the subject, but is also especially evident by the demonstration constantly afforded, that their natures, influences and familiarities have no other origins than from the tropics and equinoxes, as has been already plainly shown.<sup>43</sup>

Therein lies the origin of a problem that has rarely been explicated and which, with the passage of time, has served the critics well. There are two zodiacs: one, the ancient zodiac of constellations comprised of fixed stars; the other, a moving, tropical or seasonal zodiac of twelve signs that are mathematical structures. But this is a fortuitous dichotomy, the result of an unfortunate historical coincidence.

When Ptolemy wrote the *Tetrabiblos* in the 2nd century AD, the spring equinoctial point, that position in the heavens where the sun crosses the celestial equator from the southern to the northern hemisphere, lay fairly close (around 8°) to the first degree of the *constellation* Aries.<sup>44</sup> It happened to be there, though, at an unfortunate time; for Ptolemy's publication and his definition of the beginning point of the zodiac were to make an immense impact on his readers and to conceptualize for countless astrologers subsequently the anchoring point or fiducial of the zodiac. It seems as if for Ptolemy the coincidence in space of the first degree of the constellation

---

<sup>42</sup> Claudius Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, trans. J.M. Ashmand (1882; Chicago: Aries Press, 1936), p. 21

<sup>43</sup> Ptolemy (1936), p. 37.

<sup>44</sup> Nicholas Campion, "The Age of Aquarius: A Modern Myth," in Joan McEvers (ed.), *The Astrology of the Macrocosm* (St. Paul, Minn.: Llewellyn, 1990), p. 203.

Aries and the Vernal Point (VP) was simply a convenience. The zodiac was to be measured from the first degree of Aries; it had its starting point in the first degree of Aries, and was always to do so. *And the first degree of Aries was where the sun began the northern spring.*

Each year when the sun crossed the equator and started the official northern spring it marked the beginning of the zodiac. But due to precession, it was moving gradually into the tail end of the constellation Pisces, moving 'backward' through that stellar grouping at the rate of 50 seconds of longitude per annum, or one whole degree every 72 years. So that today there is an almost complete overlap of the constellation Pisces by the zodiacal sign Aries, that is, the 30-degree sector of space comprising the zodiacal sign delineated and defined by the sun's apparent motion. But is that what Ptolemy intended? Ashmand, in his translation, claims that it *is*. Pointing to Ptolemy's assertion as to the beginning of the zodiac, he says there can be no mistaking Ptolemy's intention: that the zodiac was to begin at the Vernal Point, that it was seasonal.<sup>45</sup> Certainly, Ptolemy knew of the factor of precession. Hipparchus, who was aware of it, had been credited, perhaps unjustifiably, with that discovery in 139 BC. Ptolemy knew that the VP shifted. So did most astronomers of the time. As Neugebauer and van Hoesen show, Greek horoscopes employ two different systems (System A and System B), locating the VP respectively in 10 degrees of the constellation Aries in the Alexandrian system and at 8 degrees of that constellation in the Babylonian system.<sup>46</sup> And even after Ptolemy had accepted the VP as fixed in Aries 0 for his star catalogue

---

<sup>45</sup> Ptolemy (1936), footnote, p. xxi.

<sup>46</sup> Otto Neugebauer and H.B. van Hoesen, *Greek Horoscopes* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1959), pp. 4-5.

in the *Almagest* (c.140 AD), horoscopes being calculated as late as the fifth century were based on a VP apparently at 3 degrees discrepancy from its true position.

But the crux of the matter is that Ptolemy seems to have assumed that the equinoxes were fixed and that it was the 'fixed stars' that were moving, and that the apparent movement of the equinoxes was therefore relative, not absolute. He accepted the precessional factor, but thought that Hipparchus and he were in agreement that it was the gradual movement of the stars which gave it the appearance of precessing. Thus, when he said that the zodiac was to be measured from the VP it was with the belief that it was a stationary, not a moving position; that the zodiac was a fixed structure in space, not a moving one; that while the stars might move away from those positions they presently held that nevertheless the fixity of the VP would ensure the stability and permanence of the zodiac in space. He appears not to have realised (or there is no evidence that he did) that it was the equinoxes that moved, and it wasn't until Copernicus that the Earth's motion was realised.

Fagan writes:

All the tropical versions of the zodiac were invented by the Greeks in the utter conviction that the equinoctial points were fixed in the ambient for all time, and as their zodiacs were wedded to these points, they considered them to be fixed zodiacs.<sup>47</sup>

Earlier, he writes:

Had Greek astronomers realised that the vernal point was not fixed for all time on the 8th or rotating sphere ... but was retrograding among the zodiacal constellations ... and therefore that their tropical zodiacs were not fixed ... they would never have been "invented." But they...were firmly convinced that it was the fixed stars that were progressing

---

<sup>47</sup> Cyril Fagan, *Astrological Origins* (St.Paul, Minn.: Llewellyn, 1971), p. 13.



in the order of the signs, while the equinoctial and tropical points remained eternally stationary.<sup>48</sup>

Maxwell Close states:

... had Hipparchus and Ptolemy suspected that the equinoxes were retrograding along the ecliptic path, they could not fail to have discovered that the earth itself was in motion....<sup>49</sup>

So far everything seems to support the critics' view: the signs of the zodiac, based on the Ptolemaic misconception of astronomical realities, have diverged from their intended defined location, and unless astrologers revert to the use of the zodiacal constellations as a framework, there is, and has been for centuries, no basis for the astrological hypothesis.

But that itself is so much supposition. Astrologers themselves were aware that even "[i]n Chaucer's day, more than half of the constellation of Leo was in the sign of Virgo."<sup>50</sup> Nicole Oresme, Bishop of Lisieux in 1382, wrote that astrological predictions were made on an out-of-date basis since precession had altered the state of things.<sup>51</sup> But North makes today the same point as Maxwell Close made at the turn of this century:

As long as the Earth was taken as fixed at the centre of the cosmos, the slow drift of which we are speaking was inevitably characterised as a movement of the sphere of stars, rather than (as Copernicus realised was preferable) a

---

<sup>48</sup> Fagan (1971), p. 12.

<sup>49</sup> Maxwell H. Close, "Hipparchus and the Precession of the Equinoxes" (paper delivered to Royal Irish Society, May 13, 1901), cited in Fagan (1971), p. 12.

<sup>50</sup> North (1988), p. 26.

<sup>51</sup> Tester (1987), p. 198.

precession of the vernal point, a 'precession of the equinoxes' as it is usually called. Our modern way of looking at the matter only became possible when the responsibility for the drift in longitudes was seen to rest with the Earth, and the peculiarities of its rotation.<sup>52</sup>

So it is not abysmal ignorance or even a kindlier oblivion which perpetuated astrologers', that is western astrologers', use of the tropical zodiac of signs. It was because they had found no reason for abandoning the seasonal zodiac. In their judgment, it worked. Ptolemy may have inadvertently set astrologers on the right track. The tropical zodiac may have been the correct and only valid one; or there may in fact be two zodiacs, a seasonal and a constellational one, for Indian astrologers continue to use the ancient zodiacal constellations of antiquity. Tester draws a similar conclusion. In his reference to the ambiguities to which the fourteenth century critic of astrology Pico della Miranda drew attention, including that of the precessional factor, Tester writes:

It is a question that still exercises astrologers, as it always must those who hold to the zodiac at all; *and it is difficult to see that there can be any other ground for decision other than experience - which works better?* [My italics]. Which is true for all the ambiguities Pico rightly fastens upon - rightly, though of course to perceive and state an ambiguity is not logically to refute the system which includes it.<sup>53</sup>

So the critic who points to the supposed association of Mars in Scorpio with inflammation of the bladder and castigates astrologers for confusing Scorpio with Libra is both right and wrong; for Mars in the *constellation* Libra might well be in the

---

<sup>52</sup> North (1988), p. 26.

<sup>53</sup> Tester (1987), p. 211.

zodiacal *sign* Scorpio, where astrologers say it is, depending on whether it is occupying the overlap, which is not yet totally one sign upon one constellation. That Mars *can and does occupy both simultaneously is a fact*. It does not mean that astrologers are saying that it is in two different locations; it is simply seen against both of two different frames of reference simultaneously. Yet again, the emphasis is on relativity, not on absolutes. And western astrologers' interpretation of Mars in Scorpio as indicating a vulnerability to inflammation of the bladder is paralleled by the Hindu astrologers' association of that ailment with Mars in Libra. Both groups are referring to the same position of Mars in the heavens-in-general, that is, in its spatial and angular relationship to Earth. It doesn't matter what that space is called; it is its qualitative significance that astrologers considered and consider significant. Whether or not such a correlation of the planet with the condition is justifiable or not is here irrelevant.

### **The Houses of the Horoscope and Houses of the Zodiac**

Another point of confusion arises in connection with the distinction between houses of the zodiac, which is a reference to the signs themselves as the domiciles of planets, and the houses of the horoscope, which is a reference to the twelve divisions of the horoscope. Although it appears never to have been stated as such, it would seem to me a simple distinction between twelve divisions of the Earth's orbital revolution on the one hand, and twelve analogous divisions of the Earth's axial rotation on the other, an analogy which maintains the fundamental macrocosmic-microcosmic relationship. Even so, such an analogy does not explain the use of the term '**houses**'; for a house implies, usually, a tenancy. And it is the planets which are the '**tenants**' of the houses.

They can in fact be what one might call 'landlords' and 'tenants'. If we use that metaphor, however, one must understand that the landlords may be absent or present.

To each sign of the zodiac, astrologers appointed a planetary ruler, and conversely, each sign of the zodiac was accordingly referred to, in the Middle Ages and Renaissance, as the 'house' (some say 'mansion') of its particular planetary ruler. Thus, Aries was said to be the house of Mars, as was Scorpio. Taurus and Libra were the houses of Venus; Gemini and Virgo the houses of Mercury; Cancer that of the moon; Leo that of the sun; Capricorn and Aquarius those of Saturn; and Sagittarius and Pisces those of Jupiter.

Schematically, there is a pleasant, even elegant symmetry about such attributions that would have appealed to the Hellenes. But the schema was rationalized by Ptolemy on a basis of compatibility between the planet and the characteristics of the sign or on the basis of the proximity of the planet to the sun.<sup>54</sup> The planet was frequently referred to as being 'lord' of a house, and in such a case, it is usually, during the Middle Ages and Renaissance period, the sign of the zodiac that is being referred to.

A planet that is actually tenanting its own house, that is, sign, in a horoscope, such as Mars in Aries, or Mercury in Virgo, is said to be 'dignified' and its characteristics manifest themselves untrammelled or with great strength. They will overpower the traits of any other planet in that same sign.

The second meaning of 'house', however, is to that sector of the heavens in relationship to the horizon, occupied by a planet. As mentioned earlier, the area 5 degrees above the ascending degree and 25 degrees below it is known as the

---

<sup>54</sup> Ptolemy (1936), p. 28.

ascendant, and is frequently also referred to as the 1st house of the horoscope. (See diagram 2.) The houses are numbered in an anti-clockwise direction from the ascendant and are not, in fact, divisions of static space but divisions of the time-space continuum through the 24 hours of the day. Traditionally, however, they have the incredible appearance of hypostatizing the experiences of consciousness in space. Thus, to the area immediately below the ascendant or first house, is attributed the state of the native's (ie. the owner of the *natus*, the birth chart) material fortunes: income, financial affairs, wealth. Below that, one's brothers and sisters are attributed to the third house; and at the bottom of the horoscope, in the 4th house, to the right of the *imum coeli*, are the experiences of accommodation, home, family, one of one's parents and conditions at the end of life. And so on, as shown below, for twelve houses *in toto*, the 12th house being just above the ascendant.

### **The Houses' and Signs' Referenda**

The matters to which each house of the horoscope relates are analogous to those with which each sign is associated. This was a schema generally understood to be a part of the astrological tradition, as Eade has shown. He writes:

Although it is important to keep the distinction between signs and houses in mind, there was a system of pairing the two together with the planets. The planets and the signs were said, in this system, to be 'consignificators' with the houses, whereas the planet whose mansion ('proper sign') lay on the cusp of a given house was said to be the 'dispositor' of that house.<sup>55</sup>

Eade then tabulates the house-sign relationship as follows:

---

<sup>55</sup> Eade (1984), p. 75.

TABLE 2

house	sign	house	sign
1st (life)	Aries	7th (enemies)	Libra
2nd (riches)	Taurus	8th (death)	Scorpio
3rd (siblings)	Gemini	9th (voyages)	Sagittarius
4th (father)	Cancer	10th (trade)	Capricorn
5th (children)	Leo	11th (friends)	Aquarius
6th (sickness)	Virgo	12th (prison)	Pisces

In order to demonstrate the stability of sign and house meanings down the centuries, the astrologers quoted represent a broad spectrum, beginning with the generally accepted associations, reinforced by examples from Julius Firmicus Maternus (4th century), Alchabitius (10th century) through Lilly (17th century) to Jones (20th century). I have also quoted below Eade's single-word summations for the houses because he is a modern scholar whose survey of astrology in literature is very economical, his list thereby distilling the 'essence' of the signs and houses as represented by various astrologers at different times.

**1st House (analogous to Aries):** One's head and face. One's existence; the physical appearance (qualified by planets in aspect to the ascendant or rising in the first house); one's disposition, similarly qualified. According to Firmicus Maternus: "... the life and vital spirit of men..."<sup>56</sup>, "*Vita*". According to Alchabitius,<sup>57</sup> the first house

---

<sup>56</sup> Firmicus Maternus, *Matheseos Libri VIII*, trans. Jean Rhys Bram (New Jersey: Noyes Press, 1975), p. 48. All references to Firmicus Maternus in this section are to pages 48-51 of the *Matheseos Libri VIII*.

governs “bodyes and lif and the bigynnynges of werkes”. Lilly says “[i]t has signification of the life of man, of the stature, colour, complexion, form, and shape of him that propounds the question, or is born”.<sup>58</sup> Jones writes “Identity and its persistence; immediate action and reaction; bodily form; general initiative; personality; early or undistributed experience.”<sup>59</sup> Eade says “Life” and “Horoscope”.<sup>60</sup>

**2nd House** (analogous to **Taurus**): One’s mouth and throat. One’s moveable assets, income, wealth, possessions. According to Firmicus Maternus: “increase in personal hopes and in material possessions.” “*Lucrum*”. Alchabitius says “substance and liflode of helperes of dues [?], of lif, id est, the ende of yongthe.” Lilly writes, “From this house is required judgment concerning the estate or fortune of him that asks the question, of his wealth of property, of all moveable goods, money lent, of profit or gain, loss or damage”. Jones writes, “Possessions as the expansion of social

---

<sup>57</sup> All attributions to Alchabitius have been taken from John D. North (1988), pp. 201-203, in which he cites *The Introductory of the Domes of the Sterres*, a fifteenth-century Trinity College (Cambridge) manuscript O.5.26. North says (p. 192) that this was close to Chaucer in time.

<sup>58</sup> William Lilly, *An Introduction to Astrology* (first published London, 1647); Zadkiel (ed.) (London: Bell and Sons, 1927), pp. 27-34. All descriptions attributed to Lilly in this section are taken from those pages.

<sup>59</sup> Marc Edmund Jones, *Astrology: How and Why it Works*, rev. edn. (London: Penguin, 1971), pp. 65-66. All descriptions attributed to Jones in this section are taken from those pages.

<sup>60</sup> Eade (1984), pp. 74-75. All descriptions attributed to Eade in this section are taken from those pages.

self-establishment; money and its loss or gain". Eade says "Riches" and "Inferna Porta (Hells' Gates)".

**3rd House** (analogous to **Gemini**): One's hands, arms and fingers; the lungs. The 'lower mind', casual and ephemeral experiences and acquaintances; brothers and sisters; short journeys. Firmicus Maternus: "everything that concerns brothers and friends ... it is also the house of travelers." "*Fratres*". Alchabitius says "brethren, sustren, neigh men, cosyns, loved men of feith and religioun, maundementes and legates". Lilly writes, "Has signification of brethren, sisters, cousins, or kindred, neighbours, small journeys, or inland journeys, often removing from one place to another; epistles, letters, rumours, messengers: it rules the shoulders, arms, hands, and fingers." [This affirms the analogy between the houses of the horoscope and the signs of the zodiac.] Jones writes, "Environment as immediately-at-hand and taken-for-granted relationships; minor skills, instrumentalities and conveniences; brothers and sisters; relatives in general; habitual procedures; communication by any means; local travel and change; simple perception." Eade says "Brothers, Sisters" and "Dea (Goddess)".

**4th House** (analogous to **Cancer**): One's breasts, stomach; the womb. The home, family, estate, heritage, ancestry, genealogy, one of one's parents (most often the mother). Firmicus Maternus: "family property, substance, possessions, household goods, anything that pertains to hidden and recovered wealth." "*Parentes*". Alchabitius writes, "fadres, heritages, and the ende of thinges; alle tresours hidde and privy". Lilly writes, "Gives judgment of fathers in general, ... of lands, houses,



tenements, inheritance, tillage of the earth, treasures hidden". Jones writes, "Home; the permanent estate; ... father or remote-link parent." Eade says "Father" and "Imum Coelum (Bottom of the Heaven)".

**5th House (analogous to Leo):** The spine and heart. Children, risky ventures, creative enterprises, recreational pursuits, speculation, desires, creative, coordinated and organised activities. Romance, courtship, personal prowess and solo performance. Firmicus Maternus: "...the number of children and their sex." "*Filii*." Alchabitius says, "sones, love, legates, ghiftes; what is to come after of praisinge and blamyng." Lilly writes, "By this house we judge of children, of ambassadors, of the state of a woman with child, of banquets, of ale-houses, taverns, plays". Jones writes, "Self-discovery and self-projection; offspring, literally and figuratively; courtship, experimentation and speculation; pleasure and the chance for pleasure; play and all educative processes; the creative dynamic in personal and esthetic relations." Eade says "Children" and "Bona Fortuna (Good Fortune)".

**6th House (analogous to Virgo):** The intestines, small bowel, digestive system. Servants and 'inferiors', working animals, small creatures, physical ailments, the kind of service one provides for others and the experiences to which one is generally subjected by employees and subordinates. One's occupational conditions and the physical ailments to which one is prone. Firmicus Maternus: "the cause of physical infirmities and sickness." "*Valetudo*". Alchabitius says, "sekenesses, servaunte, whatever is to come before elde." Lilly writes, "It concerns men and maid servants, galley slaves, hogs, sheep, goats, hares, conies, all manner of lesser cattle, and profit or

loss got thereby; sickness, its quality and cause; ...". Jones writes, "Fundamental social and occupational responsibilities; obligations of service due to or from others; work and sharpening of skills; misfit vocations; army and navy; sickness and healing". Eade says "Sickness" and "Mala Fortuna (Ill Fortune)".

**7th House (analogous to Libra):** Kidneys and ovaries. Partners and marriage; open enemies, rivals, competitors and threats to one's well-being or acts of war. Firmicus Maternus: "the nature and number of marriages." "*Coniunx*". Alchabitius says "wymmen, and weddinges, strives, participaciouns, opposites". Lilly writes, "It gives judgment of marriage; and describes the person inquired after, whether it be a man or woman; all manner of love questions; or public enemies, the defendant in a lawsuit, in war, the opposing party; all quarrels, duels, lawsuits". Jones writes, "Equal relationship in joint interest; ... personal conflict; warfare; ...". Eade says "Wife (and Open Enemies)" and "Occidens (the West)".

**8th House (analogous to Scorpio):** The reproductive system, excretory functions, sexual functioning. Secret activities, the hidden, covert, dark or occult. Sleep and death, giving birth; shared resources, joint security, investments. Firmicus Maternus: "the kind of death." "*Mors*". Alchabitius writes, "drede and deth; the substaunces or heritages of deed men, which eyres oweth to have after the deth of hem; the ende of the yeres of life after elde." Lilly writes, "[t]he estate of men deceased; death, its quality and nature; the wills, legacies, and testaments of men deceased; dowry of the wife, portion of the maid". Jones writes, "Regeneration;

challenging self-expectation and fretting; transcendental interests and spiritual self-discovery; death". Eade says "Death" and "Mors (Death)".

**9th House (analogous to Sagittarius):** The thighs, sciatic nerve, hip.

Projective activities such as long distance travel, philosophizing, preaching, religious activities, pilgrimages, faith, one's outlook on life, outreach activities such as disseminating information, teaching, education. Firmicus Maternus: "... the social class of men. It also has to do with religion and foreign travel." "*Peregrinatio*". Alchabitius says, "pilgrimages, weyes of feith and of religioun; wisdom, fre men; epistles, legates, tales, tithinges, dreams." Lilly says, "By this house we give judgment of voyages or long journies beyond seas, of religious men, or clergy of any kind, whether bishops or inferior ministers; dreams, visions, foreign countries, books, learning, church livings or benefices, and of the kindred of one's wife or husband." Jones writes, "Understanding as generalization, knowledge, and law; attitudes, religion and conscience". Eade says "Voyages, Religion" and "Deus (God)".

**10th House (analogous to Capricorn):** The skeletal structure, the knees and shin bone. One's business and its reputation, prestige, public status, honour, titles. One of one's parents (most often the father); 'superiors' or those in charge such as employers or one's governor or boss. Firmicus Maternus: "life and vital spirit, all our actions, country, home, all our dealings with others, professional careers, and whatever our choice of career brings us." "*Honores*". Alchabitius writes, "kynges, werkes, sutilnesse; exaltacioun of kynges". Lilly writes, "Commonly it personates kings, princes, dukes, earls, judges, prime officers, commanders-in-chief, whether in armies or

towns; all sorts of magistracy and officers in authority, also mothers; honour, preferment, dignity, office, lawyers, professions or trade". Jones writes, "Place in life; honor and recognition by others; professional capacity; business; authority and superiority in general; mother or close-link parent." Eade says "Trade, Honours" and "Medium Coelum (Midheaven)".

**11th House (analogous to Aquarius):** The legs and ankles; (after Harvey) the circulatory system. Friends, clubs, societies, groups, teams, people assembled for a common purpose, a community; advisors; hopes and wishes. Firmicus Maternus: "It is called the Bonus Daemon or *Bonus Genius*, by the Greeks *Agathos Daemon*." "Inamici" [sic.] [I consider this to be either an oversight by the author or translator or a misprint for "*Amici*", in view of the attribution of '*Inamici*' to the 12th house, and in the light of the earlier description of this house.] Alchabitius says, "trust, fortune, praising of frendes, ministres, helperes". Lilly writes, "It does naturally represent friends and friendship, hope, trust, confidence, the praise or dispraise of anyone; the fidelity or falseness of friends. As to kings, it personates their favourites, counsellors, servants, their associates or allies; ... In a commonwealth, governed by a few of the nobles and commons, it personates their assistance in council; as, in London, the tenth house represents the lord mayor; the eleventh, the common council." Jones writes, "Visualized ends of effort and objectives; potentiality in person-to-person relations; partiality in idea and act; advice, friends and friendship". Eade says "Friends" and "Bonus Genius (Good Spirit)".

**12th House** (analogous to **Pisces**): The feet, soles, toes. Exile, imprisonment, isolation, remoteness, dependency, bondage, being spell-bound, self-undoing, limitations, labour, slavery, penalties, penance, humility, atonement, spiritual insight or delusion, mystic and transcendent experience. Firmicus Maternus: "This house the Greeks call *Cacos Daemon*;... we call it *Malus Daemon*. From this house is easily determined the nature of enemies and the character of slaves. Also we find defects and illnesses in this house." "*Inamici*". Alchabitius writes, "enemyes, travel, sorowe, envye, grucching, sleighthes, wittes, beestes; the ende of lif, and what bifalleth in artes [?] in her concepcioun of good or evel." Lilly writes, "It has signification of private enemies, great cattle, or horses, oxen, elephants, &c.; sorrow, tribulation, imprisonment, all manner of affliction, self-undoing, &c.; and of such men as maliciously undermine their neighbours, or inform secretly against them." Jones writes, "Confinement, or experience through institutions, for good or evil; subjective sustainment or built-up spiritual resources; self-accepted limitation in experience, or underlying inclination; touch with the unknown or unexpected, both inimical and friendly." Eade says "Enemies, Prison" and "Malus Genius (Evil Spirit)".

Any contradictions in the list above are a reflection of differences between the affairs of the houses when they are considered in terms of the principles of judging 'electionaries' (Lilly's are frequently such), and when they are considered in terms of judging 'nativities'; and also of slight differences of opinion between some authorities. As Eade says,

[j]ust as the planets had their individual natures, so the signs of the zodiac were invested with a variety of characteristics in addition to those they possessed as members of triplicities ... or as grouped by seasons .... There were, of course, some variations, both in the

grouping and in the values assigned. But there was substantial agreement, not only because the doctrinal foundations of the subject were fixed... but also because many a handbook was simply a compilation from its predecessors.<sup>61</sup>

Put simplistically, each house of the horoscope is indicative of one's future experiences, according to the condition of the planetary tenant, the planet found occupying it. And if no planet is found in that house, then one infers such experiences from the condition of the planet that is 'ruler' of that house, that is, the lord of the sign that is placed on that **house cusp**.

A house cusp is a line, representing a degree of the zodiac, dividing one house, that is, sector, from the next, one of those segmenting the horoscope into twelve divisions. So, if Sagittarius were to be found occupying the cusp of the 6th house but no planet was in the sixth house, then Jupiter, absent landlord as it were, 'lord' or ruler of Sagittarius, would be regarded as the chief **significator** of matters relating to the sixth house: one's 'inferiors', a term applied to parts of the body such as the hands, as well as to working pets, such as sheepdogs, to employees, to conditions of employment and to one's health. Jupiter might be found to occupy the sign Taurus and be in the 11th house of the horoscope. So the affairs of the 6th house and the 11th house would be linked. As the 11th house is the "house of friends", formerly *Agatha Daemon*, the Benevolent Spirit, the astrologer might infer that one could rely upon good friends (Jupiter in the 11th) with plenty of substance (Jupiter in Taurus suggests wealth) in times of sickness to assist one, especially if Jupiter also happened to be in "good aspect" with the *horoscopus*; for the *horoscopus*, that degree of the zodiac

---

<sup>61</sup> Eade (1984), p. 69.

actually locating the eastern horizon<sup>62</sup> is one of the most sensitive points of the horoscope referring to one's life, existence and one's physical body.

### The Astrological Aspects

An aspect is simply a geometrical relationship formed between two positions in the heavens. Some aspects are regarded as fortunate; others unfortunate. Planets separated by 45, 90 or 180 degrees, comprising respectively the **semi-square**, **square** (or **quartile**) and **opposition** aspects, are regarded as being in unfortunate relationships; those separated by 30, 60 and 120 degrees, respectively the **semi-sextile**, **sextile** and **trine** aspects are regarded as being in fortunate relationships. Aspects took on extra significance depending on whether they were **applying** or **separating**, i.e. whether the faster moving planet was moving towards or away from the slower moving planet, thus either strengthening the aspect or weakening it as life proceeded; and on whether the planets forming aspects were **dignified** or in **detriment**, i.e. in the signs opposite to those they ruled. A difficult aspect between two planets in detriment would be much more challenging than one between two planets in their dignities. Similarly, a fortunate aspect between two planets in their detriment would promise much less good fortune, talent or recognition than two planets in fortunate aspect and also dignified.

---

<sup>62</sup> This refers to the rational or mathematical horizon, not to the sensible or visible horizon.

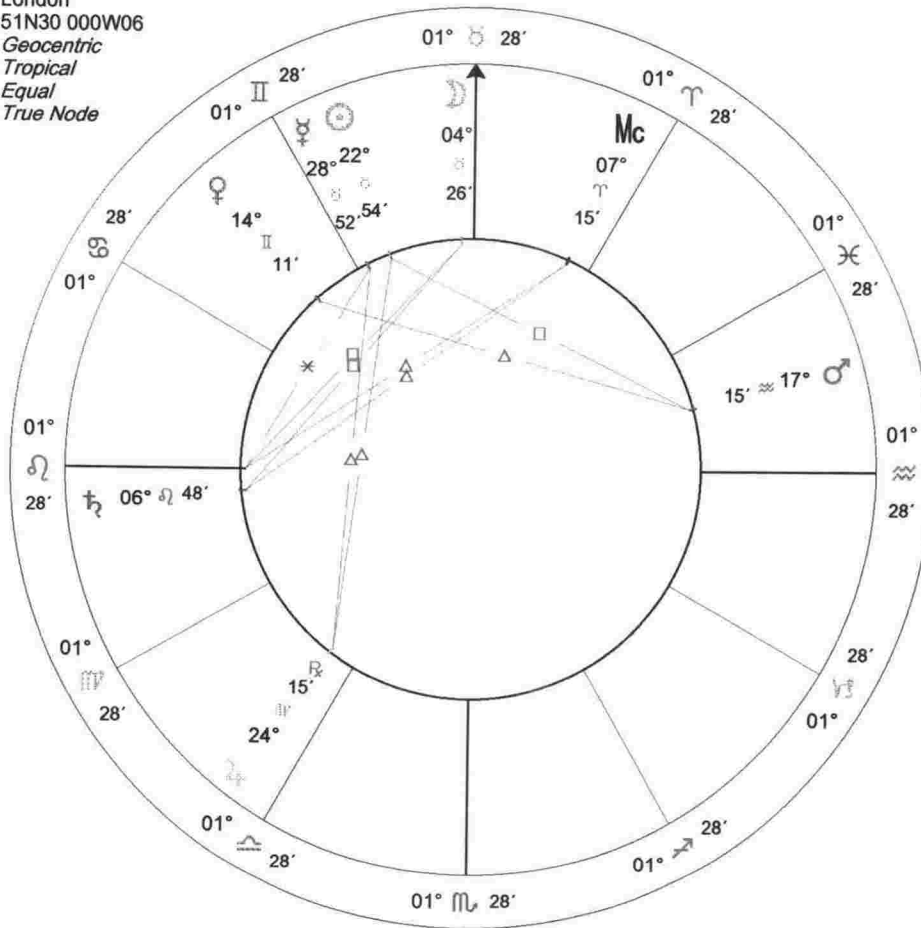
**Astrological Aspects****Natal Chart**

5 May 1388

09:00 LMT +0:00:24

London

51N30 000W06

*Geocentric**Tropical**Equal**True Node***Diagram 6**

This diagram shows a number of traditional astrological aspects, highlighted by linking lines, except in the case of conjunctions. Here, the sun ☉ is in conjunction ☿ with Mercury ☿; square ☐ to Mars ♂; trine △ to Jupiter ♃. Mercury ☿ is sextile ✕ to the Ascendant.

**The Dignities and Debilities of the Planets**

Another feature of medieval astrology considered very important was the 'exaltations' of the sun, moon and planets. When a body was in the sign of its exaltation it was considered to express its most superior qualities. 'Exaltation' was, in a subtle way, a signifier of better quality than 'dignity'. A planet in the sign of its



dignity would be considered to have maximum potency to express its astrological principle unqualified (except by astrological aspect.) Thus, whilst the planet Jupiter was 'dignified' in Sagittarius (i.e. the ruler of Sagittarius), it was 'exalted' in Cancer. So it could display its astrological significance unrestrainedly if in Sagittarius, but qualitatively in a superior manner if in Cancer. The exaltations of the planets play an important part in Chaucer, though he makes an error in the *Parson's Prologue* where he refers to Libra as the sign of the moon's exaltation, when in fact it was Taurus. (See table below).

TABLE 3

Planet	Exaltation in	Degree of exaltation	Fall in	Dignity in	Detriment in
Sun	<i>Aries</i>	19	<i>Libra</i>	<i>Leo</i>	<i>Aquarius</i>
Moon	<i>Taurus</i>	03	<i>Scorpio</i>	<i>Cancer</i>	<i>Capricorn</i>
Mercury	<i>Virgo</i>	15	<i>Pisces</i>	<i>Gem./Vir.</i>	<i>Sag./Pis.</i>
Venus	<i>Pisces</i>	27	<i>Virgo</i>	<i>Tau./Lib.</i>	<i>Sco./Ari.</i>
Mars	<i>Capricorn</i>	28	<i>Cancer</i>	<i>Ari./Sco.</i>	<i>Lib./Tau.</i>
Jupiter	<i>Cancer</i>	15	<i>Capricorn</i>	<i>Sag./Pis.</i>	<i>Gem./Vir.</i>
Saturn	<i>Libra</i>	21	<i>Aries</i>	<i>Cap./Aqu.</i>	<i>Can./Leo</i>

Other means of distinguishing the relative strengths of the planets were by 'decanate', 'term' and 'face', those being areas of signs thought capable of strengthening certain planets when they tenanted any of those degrees. Those are not relevant to this thesis. Comprehensive descriptions of the dignities, debilities and other areas of significance as described may be found in Ptolemy's *Tetrabiblos*<sup>63</sup> and in Eisner's edition of the *Kalendarium*.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>63</sup> Ptolemy (1936), pp. 32-38.

<sup>64</sup> Nicholas of Lynn (1980), pp. 180-181.

### The Ascendant or Rising Sign

The sign found upon the ascendant is determined by the **local sidereal time of birth**. That is dependent upon the local time of birth together with the longitude of the birthplace. The local sidereal time of birth, once calculated, tells the astrologer the amount of time elapsed since the vernal point, the first degree of the first sign of the zodiac, was culminating at the meridian of longitude of the birthplace. So, if the sidereal time of birth were 0 hours 8 minutes 0 seconds, then the astrologer would know that, because 1 degree of the zodiac culminates and passes over the midheaven every 4 minutes, that the midheaven, *medium coeli*, would now be occupied by the 2nd degree of Aries. So the lower midheaven, *imum coeli*, would be occupied by the 2nd degree of the opposite sign, Libra. In say, an hour's time, 15 degrees would have passed over the midheaven, there being 15 lots of 4 minutes in an hour, so 17 degrees of Aries would be culminating and 17 degrees of Libra would be at the lower midheaven.

The sidereal time of birth also provides the astrologer with the degree of the zodiac rising, ie. in the ascendant. But that depends on the latitude of the birthplace: any particular degree of the zodiac at the midheavens of two horoscopes does not necessarily coincide with an identical degree rising, unless the locations of birth share the same latitude. For that reason, astrologers use **Tables of Houses** or calculate the ascendant using spherical trigonometry or, like Chaucer and astrologers of his period did, use tables together with an astrolabe. And to ascertain the positions of the planets the astrologer uses an **ephemeris** of the planets' longitudes, declinations and latitudes, a set of tables that give their daily positions and rates of motion throughout the year,

such as the *Alfonsine Tables* or the *Kalendarium of Nicholas of Lynn*, with the latter of which we know Chaucer to have been familiar.

Calculation of the rising sign is considered the most important task, because the lord of that sign is said to be the **ruler of the horoscope**; and furthermore, any planet which is tenanted the rising sign, or in the first house, is said to be of primary importance as a **significator** of the disposition. Thus the Wife of Bath was born with Mars rising in Taurus. From that we know that her ascendant was Taurus, the 'lord' of which is Venus. We are not told where Venus is placed, but it is sufficient to know that it is her 'ruling' planet. And we are told that Mars was in Taurus, and is thus very likely to be in the ascendant, though it could have been in the 12th house, above the ascending degree, depending on which degree was rising and how far into the sign Mars happened to be placed. She says: "Venus me yaf my lust, my likerousnesse,/And Mars yaf me my sturdy hardynesse;/Myn ascendant was Taur, and Mars therinne" (*WBP*. ll. 611-613).<sup>65</sup>

### The Astrological Modes and Elements

It is necessary here to repeat a little of the information presented in Chapter One. My reasons for doing so are first, that for the majority of readers the information is unfamiliar and will bear repeating; secondly, the information is relevant also to this chapter's primary concern with definitions and technical terms; and thirdly, it is necessary at this stage to *amplify* a little of that material presented earlier.

The most important astrological conception, inherited from the Greeks, central to the concerns of this thesis, is the division of the zodiacal signs into **modes** and

---

<sup>65</sup> All quotations from Chaucer are taken from Benson (1987).

**elements.** There are three modes: cardinal signs, fixed signs and mutable signs. The cardinal signs are Aries, Cancer, Libra and Capricorn; the fixed signs are Taurus, Leo, Scorpio and Aquarius; and the mutable signs are Gemini, Virgo, Sagittarius and Pisces.

The **cardinal** or '**movable**' signs imply practical, constructive action for the purpose of implementing ideals. Events of importance and concerns of crucial significance are implied. The **fixed** signs imply stability, consolidation, resistance to change, consistency, firmness, resolution, determination. Situations tend to be rather static, still, permanent, and events tend to result from strong desires and fixed attitudes. The **mutable** signs imply change, adaptability, flexibility, versatility, inconstancy and inconsistency, vacillation and ambivalence. Situations tend to change rapidly and to either develop apace or dissolve. Events tend to be trivial and to result from or be motivated by opportunism and adroit manoeuvring in tight corners.

Al-Biruni describes these three modes as follows:-

The first sign of each season is called tropical as it is the turning point, the second fixed, because when the sun is in it the season is established, and the third bicorporeal. Each one of these is related by quartile to the others of its kind, and thus Aries, Cancer, Libra and Capricorn form the tropical tetragone, the indications of which are gentleness, purity and sociability with a tendency to science and details. Then Taurus, Scorpius, Aquarius and Leo form the fixed tetragone, the indications of which are mildness, thoughtfulness and justice, in many case of litigiousness and pugnacity, and sometimes of endurance in adversity and patience in trouble and injustice. Gemini, Virgo, Sagittarius and Pisces, the bicorporeal tetragone, indicate amiability, levity, playfulness, thoughtlessness, discord in business, capriciousness and duplicity.<sup>66</sup>

---

<sup>66</sup>Al-Biruni, Abu'l-Rayhan Muhammad Ibn Ahmad, *The Book of Instruction in the Elements of the Art of Astrology*, trans. R. Ramsay Wright (London: Luzac, 1934), p. 231.

The **fire element** signs, namely Aries, Leo and Sagittarius, imply energy, desire, warmth, spiritual and physical creative impulses, animation and humour, intellectual vigour and impetuosity. The **earth element** signs, namely Taurus, Virgo and Capricorn, imply practical action in the interests of establishing order among the physical components and elements of the visible, tangible world; materialism, pragmatism, caution and scepticism, physical sensuality and coarseness or bluntness. The **air element** signs, which are Gemini, Libra and Aquarius, imply idealism, aestheticism, a concern with principles, theories, communication, relationships, social cooperation and synthesis, the abstract. And the **water element** signs, Cancer, Scorpio and Pisces, imply subconscious motivation, empathy and sympathy, passion and compassion, subjective impressions, receptivity, emotional sensitivity and deep inner often unexpressed feelings, secrecy, self-containment.

The interpretation of the signs requires the astrologer to synthesize the characteristics of the mode and the element together with the zodiacal principles implied by the astrological *melothesia*. It is important to remember that although this is typical of a modern astrologer's method, it was also that of the astrologers of Chaucer's era, the modes, elements and zodiacal man having all been inherited from the classical astrology of the Greeks. In the next chapter I show how Chaucer is likely to have received and understood that information.

## Chapter Three

### Chaucer's Understanding of Astrology

In discussing Chaucer's use of astrology, it is necessary to explore first, the kinds of influence upon his thinking which turned his attention to that subject. One is prompted to ask whether the stimuli and sources of such interest were individual people, works of literature and legend; or was it the natural curiosity evoked by experiences of intensely dark medieval skies glistening with the dense myriads of stars weaving the creamy skein of the *Via Lactea*, our Milky Way. Such streams of influence are not, of course, mutually restrictive, and no doubt, within the poetic sensitivity of Chaucer's fertile mind, it was the confluence of them all which, over time, nurtured the rich resources that were to blossom as *flores astrologiae* in the *Canterbury Tales*.

Secondly, one might ask whether his maturing interest was also a developing belief in astrology or simply a perception of its potential use as an artistic device. Thirdly, if a belief, then how did Chaucer reconcile such with his commitment to Christianity? And finally, what is one to make of his statement in *A Treatise on the Astrolabe* regarding astrological practices, that "these ben observaunces of judicial matere and rytes of payens, in whiche my spirit hath no feith"? (*Astr.* 2. 4).

Although the answers to these questions are not of paramount relevance to the main contention of this thesis and cannot be examined in depth here, some brief considerations may help us to understand both Chaucer's motivation for and perspective on astrology. In consequence, we might qualify the conventional inferences that have been drawn regarding the attitudes of those characters in the *Canterbury Tales*, such as the Wife of Bath or the Man of Law, who have decided views on the

subject; and we might look twice at the oft-affirmed claim by sceptics, that Chaucer in his *Treatise on the Astrolabe*, denies the validity of astrology, and disclaims any belief in it. I intend to touch on all of these matters in this chapter.

One can only speculate about the ætiology of Chaucer's first acquaintanceship with astrology, or about the subsequent influences upon the development of his competence and erudition in the fields of *astronomia* and *astrologia*. Inferences have been drawn from his writings that it was not until his forties (in the 1380s) that Chaucer's philosophical perspectives shifted slightly, in the direction of those topics. Perhaps it would be more accurate to suggest that his views were broadened; for undoubtedly the earlier assimilation of Boethian philosophy, at the time he translated *De consolacione*, and about a third of the *Roman de la Rose*, which is replete with Boethian quotations, underpinned his writing throughout his life. Chaucer's concept of Fortune, his conjectures regarding free will versus predestination, let alone his ideas regarding the nature and cause of happiness, thematic concerns prevalent in *Troilus*, reveal the influence of Boethius more than that of anyone else. The *Canterbury Tales* themselves have as their chief concerns problems relating to fortune, fate, destiny, providence, 'cas' and 'aventure', and although Boethius and Chaucer differ slightly regarding their definitions of predestination, Chaucer "depends most evidently for knowledge concerning predestination on Boethius, whose division of necessity into simple and conditional is the one adopted by the poet."<sup>67</sup> So it would be incorrect to imply that a shift of focus occurred to any extent that would have diminished his Boethian views. Manzalaoui sees a lessening of Boethian influence in some of the later

---

<sup>67</sup> Naozo Uenō, *The Religious View of Chaucer in his Italian Period* (Tokyo: Nan'un-Do, n.y.), p. 91.

*Canterbury Tales*.<sup>68</sup> Such an apparent increase in what Manzalaoui calls 'independent vitality', is however, an inherent part of the structure and theme of the *Tales*, reflecting the developing spiritual impetus and evolution that are the paramount concern of the *Tales* as a whole, and may therefore not reflect anything about Chaucer's own development or values.

Such speculations regarding Chaucer's early acquaintanceship with astrology have taken into account the technical information available to mid-fourteenth century English and European scholars; Chaucer's possible and probable access to it; the community of scholars or perhaps a sole acquaintance or friend, such as the fourteenth-century philosopher and fellow of Merton College, Ralph Strode, to whom Chaucer dedicated *Troilus and Criseyde*, who might have assisted, advised or taught him; the extent of his own mathematical competence as revealed by the *Treatise on the Astrolabe* and possibly also by the *Equatorie of the Planetis*; and the progress he was making in his own understanding, as it becomes apparent through the chronology of literary allusions: "those of his works which are generally held to be datable before 1380 show...no astronomy."<sup>69</sup>

Indeed, it is evident that when Chaucer was translating Boethius' *De consolacione* in the late 1370s or early 1380s, his knowledge of astronomy was relatively meagre. Laird and Olson suggest that this is revealed by his ignorance of the fact that the constellation Boötes sets slowly and rises quickly, betrayed by his selection of the wrong verb to describe its motion when he was translating Boethius.

---

<sup>68</sup> Mahmoud Manzalaoui, "Chaucer and Science," in *Writers and their Background: Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. Derek Brewer (London: Bell, 1974), p. 238.

<sup>69</sup> Smyser (1970), pp. 359-362.



They argue that had Chaucer been a visual astronomer and not merely one who referred to literary sources for his knowledge of the stellar motions, he would not have made such an error. They also suggest that this endorses the views of others who assert that Chaucer employs astronomical allusions only after about 1385, and they refer to Manzalaoui's suggestion that "it was perhaps the astronomical portions of just such literary works as Boethius' *De consolacione* which first sparked Chaucer's interest in astronomy."<sup>70</sup>

A source not mentioned by scholars, but one that is suggested by Chaucer's references to its chief concerns, is the astrological text by the thirteenth-century pseudo-al-Majriti,<sup>71</sup> *Ghayat al-hakim*, known as the *Picatrix*. That work draws heavily from the astrological writings of the Arab astrologer Abu Ma'ashar (sometimes improperly 'Albumazar'), an eighth-century Arab astronomer and astrologer, born in Balkh, Khurasan (now western Iran), who spent much of his life in Baghdad, where he became the leading astrologer of his time.<sup>72</sup> His most important works, to which Chaucer could well have had access, were the *Flores Astrologiae*, translated by John of Seville; the *Little Introduction*, translated by Adelard of Bath; and the *De*

---

<sup>70</sup> Edgar S. Laird and Donald W. Olson, "Boethius, Boece, and Boötes: A Note on the Chronology of Chaucer's Astronomical Learning," *Modern Philology* (Nov. 1990), pp. 147-149.

<sup>71</sup> Ibn Khaldun (died 1406), author of the *Prolegomena*, described by Garin as "a cultured thinker", falsely attributed the original Arabic version of the *Picatrix* to Maslama al-Magriti. Garin says that it is more probable that the original compiler of what appears to be "a kind of anthology" was known as *Picatrix* and that the Latin version derived from the Spanish translation of the Arabic original, a translation ordered by King Alfonso in 1256. See Garin (1983), pp. 46-48.

<sup>72</sup> Magnus Magnusson (gen.ed.), *Chambers Biographical Dictionary*, 5th edn. (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1990).

*revolutionibus nativitatum*, translated by John of Seville and also by Hermann of Carinthia in the twelfth century.<sup>73</sup> *Picatrix* uses the lunar mansions for the making of wax and metal images that were used to achieve specific 'magical' purposes. *Picatrix* also deals in great detail with the doctrine of correspondences, with lists of planetary stones, language, law and religion, colours, tastes, animals, birds, spices, metals, trees, activities, the parts of the body, herbs, insects and psychological traits all attributed to planets; and with tastes, places, metals, animals, colours, birds and parts of the body related to each zodiacal sign. And it is in *Picatrix* that one discovers references to planetary hours and astrologically auspicious times of day and the rising of certain planets appropriate for praying to the planetary gods, an activity that plays a major part in Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*. There are no other contemporary astrological manuscripts, to my knowledge, in which the timing and use of those kinds of prayers are alluded to, though it must be conceded that there exist many hundreds of magical and astrological manuscripts to which scant attention has been paid by scholars.

Whilst it is highly improbable that Chaucer was familiar with the original *Picatrix*, Pingree tells us that most of the manuscripts are derived from one in Italy in the mid-fifteenth century and that there was a closely related codex that was near Liège in the 1380s. He adds that the archetype contained, "marginal material from the middle of the fourteenth century;" and "presumably it was copied either prior to or contemporaneously with that date."<sup>74</sup> The original *Picatrix* was Spanish, written at the

---

<sup>73</sup> Tester (1987), pp. 160-161.

<sup>74</sup> Pingree, David (ed.), *Picatrix: The Latin version of the Ghayat Al-Hakim*, (London: The Warburg Institute, 1986), p. xvi.

time of the reign of Alphonso the Wise (1226?-1284). Martha Waller provides a good case for the probability of Chaucer having led an English team to Spain in 1366.<sup>75</sup>

Further, following the assassination of Peter of Spain in 1369 there were two claimants to the Spanish throne, one of whom was Duchess Constance, who became the second wife of John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster. Waller points out that "[a]mong the ladies in personal attendance on the Duchess Constance in England from 1372 to 1387 was Philippa Chaucer, wife of Geoffrey."<sup>76</sup> Waller hypothesizes that it is possible Chaucer led a team to Spain partly because he had learned sufficient Spanish.<sup>77</sup> To the extent that it is possible that Chaucer would have had access to Juan Garcia de Castrojeriz's *Regimiento de Principes* as the source for the *Physician's Tale*,<sup>78</sup> either during his putative trip to Spain or as a consequence of Philippa's attendance on Duchess Constance, it is possible that he would have encountered a fragment or two of *Picatrix* during the same periods. Lynn Thorndike rejects the suggestion by Symphorien Champier, writing in 1514, that Peter of Abano, a prominent astrologer who lived from 1250 to 1316, borrowed from *Picatrix*.<sup>79</sup> But the fact that it was suggested at all lends

---

<sup>75</sup> Martha S. Waller, "The Physician's Tale: Geoffrey Chaucer and Fray Juan Garcia de Castrojeriz," *Speculum*, 51 (1976), pp. 292-306 (p. 305).

<sup>76</sup> Waller (1976), p. 306.

<sup>77</sup> Waller (1976), p. 304.

<sup>78</sup> Waller (1976), p. 294.

<sup>79</sup> Lynn Thorndike, *History of Magic and Experimental Science* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1923), Vol.2, p. 814.

support to my surmise that fragments of *Picatrix* might have been accessible to Chaucer, who was writing within a few decades of Peter's demise. The use to which information in *Picatrix* might have been put is suggested not only by the prayers to the planetary gods in the *Knight's Tale* but also by the magical practices recounted in the *Franklin's Tale*.

It is evident that in relationship to his own *Treatise on the Astrolabe* Chaucer drew upon Māsha 'Allāh's own treatise. Eisner writes: "Chaucer's major source materials of the *Treatise*, the eighth-century Mesahallah's *De Compositione Astrolabie* and *De Operatione Astrolabii*, were known to the fourteenth century in Latin versions which undoubtedly Chaucer used."<sup>80</sup> And Chaucer also drew upon John of Sacrobosco's *De Sphaera*. Curry identifies some version of the *Secreta secretorum* as one of Chaucer's certain sources.<sup>81</sup> Written in the form of a letter from Aristotle to the emperor Alexander, the *Secreta secretorum* was popular throughout western Europe<sup>82</sup> as a guide for rulers, a source of astrological knowledge, and advice on how to maintain good health and rule wisely. Roger Bacon compiled a version, expanding its astrological content, some time before 1257; and in 1326-7 Walter de Milemete, a clerk in the service of Edward III, drew up a copy for the king's use.<sup>83</sup> Carey tells us that the seventh book of Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, "originally written in 1390 at the

---

<sup>80</sup> Sigmund Eisner, "Chaucer as a Technical Writer," *The Chaucer Review*, 19 (1985), pp. 179-201 (p. 188).

<sup>81</sup> Walter Clyde Curry, *Chaucer and the Mediaeval Sciences*, 2nd edn. (London: Allen and Unwin, 1960), p. 72.

<sup>82</sup> Carey (1992), p. 26.

<sup>83</sup> Carey (1992), p. 33.

request of Richard II, is based firmly on the *Secreta*".<sup>84</sup> If Chaucer did, in fact, have recourse to the *Secreta*, then he would have felt less compunction than he might have otherwise, about writing the *Canterbury Tales* in the form of, among others, a digest of astrological principles. Remember that Chaucer was at the royal court, and Bacon's introduction to the *Secreta* suggests that

the Christian astrologer, and the physician learned in astrology, had the means to effect great good in their patients, not just physically but in their characters as well. When their charges included great men, they were placed under a positive moral obligation: 'And these principles are especially relevant in dealing with kings and their sons and other princes, and also with bishops and other men of importance, not only for their own good, but also for the good of their subjects, the church and the whole world.'<sup>85</sup>

By the late fourteenth century, Chaucer shows considerable sophistication in his astronomical knowledge. He uses the term "proporcioneles" in the *Franklin's Tale*, a word which refers to procedures used to calculate celestial positions from data furnished in tables - a method paralleled by today's astrologers using ephemerides to compute planetary positions from proportional logarithms. The word "proporcioneles" is explained in the 13th-century *Theorica Planetarum Gerardi* and in the *Theorica Planetarum* of Campanus of Novara, also 13th-century, as well as in a late 14th-century treatise *The Newe Theorik of Planetis*. At one point in the latter, the term "proporcional minutis" is reduced to "proporcionals", as Chaucer uses it in the *Franklin's Tale*. These texts were intended for university use in the later Middle Ages. As Laird points out: "The Franklin's use of the word "proporcioneles" thus reveals how far Western astronomy had progressed by the late fourteenth century, how far the

---

<sup>84</sup> Carey (1992), p. 34.

<sup>85</sup> Carey (1992), p. 35.

English language had extended its capacity to accommodate scientific concepts, and how very up-to-date Geoffrey Chaucer was in the matter."<sup>86</sup>

Chaucer's references to astrology in all of his works are diverse. He refers to astrological medical theory, including the making of images under astrological auspices, in order to make someone well or sick. No doubt he would have drawn upon the *Libellus de medicorum astrologia*, sometimes referred to as the *Astronomia* attributed to Hippocrates, which was "[f]amiliar... to Chaucer's contemporaries."<sup>87</sup> He uses astrometeorology, particularly in *Troilus and Criseyde*. He alludes to the selection of supposedly propitious times for the start of enterprises. He mentions natal astrology and uses astrological referenda instrumentally to illustrate medieval psychological typology in terms of both the doctrine of the humours and supposed planetary influences upon human personality. His sources for such association appear to have been Ptolemy's *Tetrabiblos*, the *Astronomicon* of Manilius, the *De Nativitatibus* of Julius Firmicus, and Albohazen Haly's *De Judiciis Astrorum*;<sup>88</sup> possibly Alchabitius' *Libellus Isagogicus* or Guido Bonatti's *De Astronomia Tractatus X*.<sup>88</sup> Chaucer himself mentions only three astrological authorities: Ptolemy,<sup>89</sup> Alchabitius,<sup>90</sup> author of the

---

<sup>86</sup> Edgar S. Laird, "Astronomical 'Proporcioneles' in Chaucer's *Franklin's Tale*," *English Language Notes*, 25 (March 1988), pp. 23-26.

<sup>87</sup> Laurel Braswell, "The Moon and Medicine in Chaucer's Time," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 8 (1986), pp. 145-156.

<sup>88</sup> William Spencer (1970), pp. 147-170.

<sup>89</sup> *The Wife of Bath's Prologue*, l. 182.

<sup>90</sup> *A Treatise on the Astrolabe*, l. 8.

*Introductorium ad magisterium judiciorum astrorum*, compiled around 948/949,<sup>91</sup> and Al-Kindi,<sup>92</sup> the latter a ninth-century Arab philosopher and tutor at the court in Baghdad, an astrologer, and one of the first disseminators of Aristotelian thought in the Arab world.<sup>93</sup> There are, however, in the *Ellesmere* and *Hengwrt* MSS of the *Canterbury Tales* marginal notes quoting the *Liber Electionum* of Zael, an early ninth century astronomer.<sup>94</sup>

Relationships between individuals are metaphorically represented by planetary "aspects". The movements of gods are allegorised by contemporary planetary motions, knowledge of which he is likely to have acquired from the *Alfonsine Tables*, "which by Chaucer's time had made all other astronomical tables obsolete,"<sup>95</sup> and also from the astronomical *Kalendarium* of Nicholas of Lynn.<sup>96</sup> Chaucer's actual reference to the *Kalendarium* at the start of his *Treatise on the Astrolabe* also affords a clue regarding sources of astrological and astronomical knowledge. Nicholas was an Oxford friar who may well have been part of the School of Astronomy at Merton College. The *Kalendarium*, composed in 1386, was dedicated to John of Gaunt, a close friend and

---

<sup>91</sup> Carey (1992), p. 259.

<sup>92</sup> The reference to Al-Kindi is found in the Paris Manuscript of the *Canterbury Tales*, in the *Miller's Tale*, where Nicholas is said to prize his "Grayel, Myssal, and Holy Euangel/Of Marke alkyndys wryten fayre and wel,/The Book that hight *Non est iudicium*."

<sup>93</sup> Magnusson (1990), p. 34.

<sup>94</sup> Annabella Kitson, "Chaucer's Astrology" in Kitson (ed.) (1989), pp. 60-88 (pp. 78-79).

<sup>95</sup> Laird and Olson (1990), p. 309.

<sup>96</sup> Eisner (1980).

benefactor of Chaucer. All of the details in the *General Prologue* about the Physician's astrological medicine are explained in Nicholas's *Kalendarium*.

All of that is commonplace knowledge since the researches of Walter Clyde Curry,<sup>97</sup> and later Chauncey Wood,<sup>98</sup> earlier in this century, and Eisner's introductory comments to his edition of the *Kalendarium*. But the extent of Chaucer's knowledge, and more importantly, its depth, have been underestimated until comparatively recently when North published *Chaucer's Universe*. The reader unacquainted with the extent to which Chaucer astrologically embellished his major work, *The Canterbury Tales*, and, among others, *Troilus and Criseyde*, *The Complaint of Mars*, *The Parliament of Fowls* and the *Prologue to the Legend of Good Women*, may refer to North's list of 54 specific dates *abstracted* from Chaucer's writings from covert astronomical-astrological clues embedded in the texts.<sup>99</sup> Such dates enable one to draw up astronomical maps of the events to which those dates refer, and to interpret their supposed mundane, characterological or literary significance by reference to then contemporary astrological works.

The work that summarises Chaucer's astronomical knowledge acquired by the late fourteenth century is, of course, *A Treatise on the Astrolabe*.<sup>100</sup> The astrolabe was one of a small range of instruments used for obtaining sightings of stellar and planetary positions used primarily for navigational purposes. Nearly all such tools were

---

<sup>97</sup> Curry (1960).

<sup>98</sup> Chauncey Wood, *Chaucer and the Country of the Stars: Poetic Uses of Astrological Imagery* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1970).

<sup>99</sup> North (1988), pp. 516-517.

<sup>100</sup> Benson (1987), pp. 662-683.



commonly referred to as astrolabes, for the simple reason that the Greek word 'astrolabe' means an instrument for 'taking the stars.'<sup>101</sup> The one that Chaucer gave to his son, and which is the subject of his description in the *Treatise*, ought properly to be called a planispheric astrolabe, a full technical description and exposition of its use being provided by North in *Chaucer's Universe*. Tester says that the astrolabe "was the most important observational instrument before the invention of the telescope."<sup>102</sup> He says that it could be used "not only for such observation of heavenly bodies, but for finding the time, or latitudes, or heights and distances, and for constructing horoscopes and calculating the mundane houses",<sup>103</sup> by which he means the distance in degrees of zodiacal longitude each house of a horoscope extends.

Chaucer evidently used the instrument for most of these purposes, though he might have needed recourse either to tables of lunar motion or to an equatorium to determine the position of the moon, the astrolabe not being the most reliable of instruments for that purpose. His *Treatise* describes in detail the sections of both the front and the back of the astrolabe: among other topics, how to obtain the altitude of an object (*Astr.* 1. 1); how to hold the astrolabe (*Astr.* 1. 2); locating the north-south line (i.e. the meridian) (*Astr.* 1. 4); how to ascertain the ascendant-descendant axis (*Astr.* 1. 5); the names of the signs of the zodiac (*Astr.* 1. 8); how to sight the sun's position by day (*Astr.* 2. 1) and the sun's nadir (the degree opposite) by night (*Astr.* 2. 6); how to determine the length of the artificial day (*Astr.* 2. 7), the planetary hours

---

<sup>101</sup> Tester (1987), p. 156.

<sup>102</sup> Tester (1987), p. 156.

<sup>103</sup> Tester (1987), pp. 156-157.

(*Astr.* 2. 12) and the risings and culminations of the fixed stars (*Astr.* 2. 18); the zenith (*Astr.* 1. 18) and the right ascensions of the stars and planets (*Astr.* 2. 25-28).

He makes a colourful comparison between the pattern formed by the matrix of interlacing lines of altitude (*almucanteras*) and azimuth,<sup>104</sup> comparing the lattice-like structure within the body of the astrolabe to a spider's legs and a woman's hairnet.

From this cenyth, as it semeth, there comen a maner  
croked strikes like to the clawes of a loppe, or elles like the  
werk of a womans calle, in kervyng overthwart the  
almykanteras. And these same strikes or divisiouns ben  
clepid azimuth, and thei dividen the orisounte of this  
Astrelabie in 24 divisiouns. And these azymutz serven to  
knowe the costes of the firmament, and to othere  
conclusions, as for to knowe the cenyth of the sonne and of  
every sterre.

(*Astr.* 1. 19).

Analogous to that structure is the zodiac itself, with the lines linking the modes and elements across the signs. And it might be more than a meaningless coincidence that Helen Cooper perceives the structure of the *Canterbury Tales* as resembling a spider's web.<sup>105</sup>

Chaucer's reference to the 24 divisions of the horizon by the azimuth lines is intriguing too. The horizon may be divided by any number of azimuth lines, so why 24 in this instance? Perhaps it is not only the small dimensions of the astrolabe that Lewys received which makes 24 convenient. Euclid's 29th Theorem presents an illustration of the division of the sphere, in which he divides the horizon into 24 arcs. As he shows, if

---

<sup>104</sup> 'Almucanteras' is a term that continues to be used by astronomers today: the 'almucantar' is the small circle through the star parallel to the plane of the horizon. Azimuth is the distance of a star measured along the horizon in degrees eastward from the north point.

<sup>105</sup> Helen Cooper, *The Structure of the Canterbury Tales*, (London: Duckworth, 1983), p. 69.

one divides the horizon by the 24 (azimuths) arcs, then the angle of each is  $7\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$  ( $180^{\circ}$  divided by 24). In hours of clock time, the horizon's  $180^{\circ}$  may represent 12 hours ( $15^{\circ}$  equating to 1 hour), so that each 24th division represents  $\frac{1}{2}$  an hour, perhaps the time allotted each pilgrim, with the exception of the Cook, to tell a *Tale* (given that the day of the pilgrimage is a literary construct only, of course, bearing no relationship to the amount of time it would actually take to tell any of the *Tales* or ride from London to Canterbury). As mentioned earlier, azimuth is the distance along the horizon measured eastward from true north. In medieval times, north was the direction associated with hell, so the point diametrically opposed, at azimuth  $180^{\circ}$ , the sun's noon distance along the horizon, southward, at 12 noon, symbolically indicates heaven. Alternatively, if the horizon is treated as the diameter of the sun's semi-arc, then the 24 azimuthal lines may be seen as 24 divisions of the artificial day (from sunrise to sunset), in which case they will vary in duration according to the date of the year and the latitude of the location.

Of course, it would be more sensible and appropriate, symbolically, to represent the sun's arc in terms of altitude lines rather than azimuth lines, and as Chaucer does allude to the *almucanteras* perhaps one should give attention to those. If Chaucer is referring to the altitude of the sun at Oxford, then it is an interesting fact that the sun's altitude at noon at Oxford on 18 April is slightly less than  $52^{\circ}$  (on the 19th exceeding  $52^{\circ}$ ), so equating to the number of weeks in the year. If the 12 hours of a day are treated as being symbolic of zodiacal months, then the passage of 3 hours would equate to 6 *Tales*, 1 hour to 2 *Tales*, giving again one half-hour to each *Tale*, the same duration as suggested by the azimuthal divisions. When one considers that the Man of Law stipulates the sun's altitude to be  $45^{\circ}$  at 10 a.m., it could be that at one

stage in writing the *Tales* Chaucer intended us to infer that 3 hours had passed, that the pilgrimage began at 7 a.m., that 6 Tales had been told, and the Man of Law was to tell the seventh, coinciding with the seventh sign of the zodiac, Libra, the sign of the scales of justice. It is evident, however, that he did not proceed with that arrangement because to fit the *Man of Law's Tale* in at such a position would necessitate a disturbance of a well-established linkage between the Wife's, Friar's, Summoner's, Clerk's and Merchant's tales. Alternatively, it is possible to fit both the *Man of Law's Tale* and the *Parson's Tale* into their allotted times, as I show below, with the correlation between the ratios of time and sun's altitudes as stated in both the *Introduction to the Man of Law's Tale* (MLT. ll. 12-14) and the *Parson's Prologue* (ParsT. ll. 4-5) which I later show to have been correct. But if one accepts the schedule below, then one must use clock hours rather than the hours of the natural day, and the *Parson's Tale* must finish at 4.30 p.m., leaving 17 minutes over for the Retraction.

TABLE 4

Teller	Time	Teller	Time
Knight	4:47 a.m.	Physician	10:30 a.m.
Miller	5:17 a.m.	Pardoner	11:00 a.m.
Reeve	5:47 a.m.	Shipman	11:30 a.m.
Cook	6:17 a.m.	Prioress	12:00 noon
Wife	6:30 a.m.	Sir Thopas (Chaucer)	12:30 p.m.
Friar	7:00 a.m.	Melibeus (Chaucer)	1:00 p.m.
Summoner	7:30 a.m.	Monk	1:30 p.m.
Clerk	8:00 a.m.	Nun's Priest	2:00 p.m.
Merchant	8:30 a.m.	Second Nun	2:30 p.m.
Squire	9:00 a.m.	Canon's Yeoman	3:00 p.m.
Franklin	9:30 a.m.	Manciple	3:30 p.m.
Man of Law	10:00 a.m.	Parson	4:00 p.m.

Although that scheme holds a certain appeal, especially with the *Prioress's Tale* starting at 12 noon (the position of the sun being at its highest altitude and symbolically located in 'heaven'), it works only provided the Cook is allotted just 13 minutes in which to tell his aborted *Tale*. Furthermore, the Man of Law is unlikely to have followed the Franklin, because of the Host's exhortation to the pilgrims to proceed with the story-telling and not to waste the day. On the other hand, as I shall subsequently show, Chaucer may have earlier intended the Man of Law to tell the first tale, and such intention would have given the Host's exhortation relevance. Having explored these alternatives, however, I consider them relatively fruitless and that it is best to move on to more substantive material.

In his introduction to his *Treatise* Chaucer indicates that the work will comprise five parts. Yet he appears to complete only two of them. The third part was to comprise a set of tables of longitudes and latitudes of fixed stars; geographical longitudes of cities and towns; time-telling aids for use with clocks, enabling the altitude meridian to be determined; and other useful technical data. It is possible that Chaucer realised that much of this would be superfluous because of the existence of other similarly constituted publications, and of course, the *Alphonsine Tables*.

His intention was that part four would "declare the moevyng of the celestial bodies with the causes. The whiche fourthe partie in speciall shal shewen a table of the verrey moevyng of the mone from houre to houre every day and in every signe after thyn almanak." Although *Peterhouse MS 71 I*, titled by its editor, Derek Price, the *Equatorie of the Planetis*, has not been ascertained beyond doubt to be a work of Chaucer's, there is a possibility that it is. Price wrote in his Preface to that 1955 publication :

Since the text was in English, and the date 1392 frequently occurred, it seemed at first possible that this might be a missing part of Chaucer's apparently incomplete Treatise on the Astrolabe written in 1391.<sup>106</sup>...there is, in my opinion, nothing in this book which can by itself be accepted as definite proof of authorship; there is however, a mass of lesser evidence which has the cumulative effect of suggesting that this is a Chaucer holograph and making it difficult to advance any other reasonable hypothesis to explain all the features of the manuscript.<sup>107</sup>

Since that publication, scholarship, chiefly that of Robinson and separately, the editors of the *Riverside* edition of Chaucer's works,<sup>108</sup> have reserved judgment, though tending to be somewhat sceptical of it being a work of Chaucer's. North, however, changed his mind over the 20 years between his initial scepticism and his more recent assurance that the *Equatorie* is a work of Chaucer's.<sup>109</sup> If it is, then it demonstrates Chaucer's astronomical competence to a level exceeding considerably that which is presented in his *Treatise*. The complexity of the astronomical material and computations in the *Equatorie* is such that Chaucer would have acted wisely in omitting it as part of a present to a ten-year-old boy. If Chaucer had intended to encourage Lewys' study of this subject, then part four could safely await discovery at a later age. I consider it interesting that the work was untitled, the name *Equatorie of the Planetis* having been given to it comparatively recently, when the manuscript was discovered in Peterhouse College, Cambridge. The absence of a title might well imply

---

<sup>106</sup> Geoffrey Chaucer, *Equatorie of the Planetis*, ed. Derek J. Price (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1955), p. xiv.

<sup>107</sup> Chaucer (1955), p. xv.

<sup>108</sup> Benson (1987), pp. xxiii-xxiv.

<sup>109</sup> North (1988), p. 174.

that the manuscript was intended to be part of a larger work. The manuscript contains an intriguing reference to a treatise on the astrolabe: "which lyne is cleped in the tretise of the astrelabie the midnyht line" (72 v. 29). To which and whose, do the words "the tretise" refer?

Finally, and more importantly for this thesis, Chaucer intended in part five of his *Treatise*, to present an introduction "after the statutes of oure doctours, in which thou maist lerne a gret part of the generall rewles of theorik in astrologie." These are to include "tables of dignitees of planetes, and othere notefull thinges" - in other words, astrological doctrine. What more entertaining manner might Chaucer have devised than to tell a set of twenty-four stories illustrating in numerous ways the principles of astrology, which, after all, were the medieval rationale of human temperament and behaviour?

This does beg the question as to whether Chaucer would have wished his son to learn the principles of astrology if his father did not believe in it. The only criticism Chaucer makes of astrology is his allusion to "judicial matere and rytes of payens, in whiche my spirit hath no feith" (*Astr.* 2. 4, ll. 57-59), where his criticism is directed not at astrology itself but at those practitioners of it, who, ignorant of astronomical realities, describe a planet's position as being in the ascendant, "*in horoscopo*" when, due to its latitude from the ecliptic, it may in fact not be holding such a position. Against that criticism must be weighed the facts that Chaucer presents his son with an astrolabe and writes to him a letter in which he refers to the signs of the zodiac, tells him how to ascertain the ascendant and other positions in a horoscope, instructs him in some of the astrological *melothesia* and in the concept of planetary hours, promises

him more, and then *subsequently* completes the *Canterbury Tales* in which astrology plays so great a part.

It is thus my hypothesis, based on the evidence within the *General Prologue* and the *Tales* themselves, that Chaucer completes *A Treatise on the Astrolabe* by such a device, allowing the passing of time to unfold and reveal to Lewys whatever his maturing mind and perception would make evident to him of both the elementary principles of astrology as depicted in this thesis, and the more advanced ones relating to the fixed stars and constellational movements as they have been revealed by North.

Another reason for supposing Chaucer to have embedded Part V of his *Treatise* in the *Tales* is related to the dates when Chaucer is believed to have been writing both works. There are no pre-1400 manuscripts of the *Tales*, so much must remain speculative. Nevertheless, Pearsall gives adequate reason for supposing that Chaucer started work on the *Tales* around 1387,<sup>110</sup> and Chaucer took time off to write the *Treatise on the Astrolabe* in 1391. Of more importance is Pearsall's suggestion that the work of Chaucer's last years "or even his last months" was the "knitting up" of Fragment I and the writing of the *Miller's Tale* and the *Reeve's Tale*.<sup>111</sup>

That Chaucer was technically proficient in his exposition of astrological theory and quite competent, though not infallible, in his astronomical computations, can now be better appreciated by us today than at any time since, perhaps, the Middle Ages. But as Chaucer was not an astronomer nor an astrologer by profession, one might wonder what motivated such scrupulous and assiduous investigation into those subjects, and ask also why he chose to incorporate such an immense amount of astrological

---

<sup>110</sup> Derek Pearsall, *The Life of Geoffrey Chaucer* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), p. 227.

<sup>111</sup> Pearsall, D. (1992), p. 227.



technicality into his writings with such specificity as North has made apparent. And if it was the case that Chaucer possessed this skill and knowledge but did not, like some of his contemporary thinkers, actually practise horoscope interpretation, what purpose would such knowledge have served in his life?

I think it more than likely, judging from the content of his literary work, that his concern with astrology was both philosophical and poetic. By the latter I mean that he saw in the symbolism of astrology an attractive device of representing the multifarious facets of existence in colourful metaphor. Being a student of Ovid, Plato, Aristotle and Boethius and other classical authors, and living at a period when Christianity and pagan astrology were vying for subscribers, someone of Chaucer's temperament would have had little choice but to speculate about fate and free will and the implications of supposedly deterministic stellar influences for the Christian message of hope and liberation, as well as those of the Christian doctrine for cosmology.

It is evident to most readers that Chaucer's poetry contains a mixture of classical, religious and astrological knowledge. What is not so immediately apparent is whether, in Chaucer's mind, an intellectual reconciliation ever occurred between those disparate strands of wisdom. In the slowly changing social context of prevalent belief systems between the tenth and fourteenth centuries Christianity and astrology had, as we have seen, moved towards an uneasy truce. There were areas of compatibility, and areas of conflict. Brown and Butcher write:

Within the consciousness of Chaucer and his contemporaries the determining forces of nature and season, astrological influence, and the ecclesiastical calendar, were woven together. They provided a loosely integrated system of explanation which depended upon a sense of temporal auspiciousness and magical or quasi-magical effects. Although in popular practice such a system might permit the loose combination of its explanatory

elements, in the process of understanding there was also a real tension between them. The uncontrollable forces of nature were, arguably, determined and directed by religious and astrological forces. Religion and astrology stood in the fourteenth century as, theoretically, the only two systematic schemes which pretended to a total explanation of human behaviour, and thus might appear to be rival authorities.<sup>112</sup>

The scholarship of D. W. Robertson Jr. has revealed the depth of Chaucer's allusions to Old and New Testament sources and allusions.<sup>113</sup> The latter consist of misapplications of scriptural reference, sometimes used to undercut the *Tales* of pilgrims, such as those of the Physician and Prioress; scores of citations that distort the Biblical original for artistic effect, one such distortion being the personality of Absolon, who in the *Miller's Tale* is hardly comparable in character or action with his Biblical prototype; and those straightforward, accurate references to scripture found in the *Parson's Tale*.

Reiss suggests that while it was possible for secular authors to use scriptural material, they had no conventional method of using it. Chaucer's use of the Bible differs from that of his contemporaries, he claims, and "may profitably be examined by itself."<sup>114</sup> While that might be true also of Chaucer's astrological hermeneutics, I suspect that his use of both Biblical and astrological material throughout the

---

<sup>112</sup> Peter Brown and Andrew F. Butcher, *The Age of Saturn: Literature and History in the Canterbury Tales* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), p. 34.

<sup>113</sup> D. W. Robertson Jr., *A Preface to Chaucer: Studies in Medieval Perspectives* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1962).

<sup>114</sup> Edmund Reiss, "Number Symbolism and Medieval Literature," *Medievalia et Humanistica*, NS1 (1970), pp. 161-174.

*Canterbury Tales* in interwoven texture serves a philosophical end and reflects a contemporary philosophical dilemma: to what extent can someone be a Christian and an astrologer? That is a subtly different question from that which asks whether one can be a Christian astrologer. (The difference is perhaps best exemplified in the work of the 17th century astrologer William Lilly, who wrote *Christian Astrology*, a textbook purporting to incorporate Christian ethics into astrological practice, differentiating such practice from those of astrologers who were Christians but to whom religion was irrelevant to their astrology and vice versa.) The first question is more applicable than the second, to Chaucer, and it is that question which I propose to show Chaucer answers in *The Canterbury Tales*.

Although North, Eade, Wood and Thorndike have pointed to the complexity of astrological material in *The Canterbury Tales*, none has so far commented upon a fundamental component of classical Greek and medieval astrological technique, namely the three crosses that comprised the twelve signs of the zodiac: the cardinal cross (Aries, Cancer, Libra and Capricorn); the fixed cross (Taurus, Leo, Scorpio and Aquarius); and the mutable cross (Gemini, Virgo, Sagittarius and Pisces). Chaucer's Christian philosophy would have given him the vision of those three crosses - a triadic structure of tetradic dimensions: the numbers 3 and 4 totalling the mystical 7 and hinting of an anagogical stratum to the *Tales*. Lest one entertain any doubt regarding that point, note that the date of May 3, which occurs twice in the first of the *Tales*, the *Knight's Tale*, is the date in the Christian calendar on which is celebrated The Invention of the Cross.

Eight of the *Tales* are expressive of each cross, respectively, beginning with the cardinal cross in the *Knight's Tale* and ending with the mutable cross in the *Parson's*

*Tale*. Perhaps this becomes a more readily acceptable suggestion if one considers that the prevalent heuristic tool of medieval scholasticism was the *disputatio* of the Schoolmen, according to which protagonists argued on the basis of opposing theoretical principles. That style parallels the conflict inherent in the binary oppositions within the zodiac.

It would be foolish to suppose that Chaucer could have anticipated the Hegelian triadic concept of thesis, antithesis and synthesis in so many words. But if one is not content with superficial explanations, and if one takes philosophy at all seriously, as Chaucer evidently did, one is likely to be not simply fascinated by the symmetry and aesthetic appeal of the zodiacal structure and inter-relationship, but will examine it closely for its heuristic value regarding the nature of reality and for clues of epistemic value concerning the fundamental philosophical questions that confront us. And primary among those is the question of existence: not simply, "Why am I here?" but that of "being" itself. Whilst most people's conception of astrology is that of a belief that heavenly or astronomical phenomena are causative agents of earthly phenomena, the macrocosmic/microcosmic perception embraces the notion of a two-way correspondence. That entails the notion of earthly phenomena being reflected in the heavens. A medieval philosopher, and particularly one interested in cosmology as was Chaucer, would look to the heavens, to the zodiac, for information it might contain regarding our own existence. He would expect to find, if not answers, then at least some symbolic reference to the kinds of questions that would be asked by human beings; for if the heavens did reflect the affairs of men, if the zodiac was indeed a macrocosmic image of humanity, then the state of society, of social relationships, the political structures and institutions devised by human beings to accommodate human

needs must also be represented in the cosmic structures. Such cosmic structures are represented in astrology by symbols, from the Greek noun "*symbolon*", derived from "*symballein*", meaning "to bring together, put together." In the Middle Ages however, except in the context of the Pseudo-Dionysian tradition, the term "*signum*" tended to absorb the meaning of symbol, as is apparent from Origen and in St. Augustine's *De doctrina christiana*.<sup>115</sup> Ladner writes:

It was on a basis of *significatio* that the Western Middle Ages conceptualized a universe of symbols in which, with the sole exception of God, everything could signify something else. Thus man, the microcosm, was a symbol of the universe, the macrocosm, and individual personalities could symbolize entire movements of the mind. Above all, material things signified spiritual things or even God himself.<sup>116</sup>

It might be apparent from this brief introduction, that from such an internal structure, were it shown to be consistent, a persuasive argument could be made for inferring Chaucer's intended ordering of the *Tales*. While the *Ellesmere* and *Hengwrt* manuscripts have been generally accepted as orderings of the *Tales* that appeal to common sense, Allen and Moritz suggest a radically different schema based on a most important criterion, namely the kind of framing or structure that would have been required of medieval storytellers by a medieval audience.<sup>117</sup> And while I agree with the fundamental premise of their methodology, it seems to me that their exposition of it is not the only possible one; nor is their proposed ordering of the *Tales*, which departs

---

<sup>115</sup> Ladner (1979), p. 225.

<sup>116</sup> Ladner (1979), p. 226.

<sup>117</sup> Judson Boyce Allen and Theresa Anne Moritz, *A distinction of stories: the medieval unity of Chaucer's fair chain of narratives for Canterbury* (Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 1981).

radically from the *Ellesmere-Hengwrt* order. In the next chapter I take up the issue of the ordering of the *Tales* and propose that their correlation with the zodiacal sequence provides evidence of Chaucer's intended plan.

## Chapter FOUR

### Secret Order in the Canterbury Tales

*"Daedalus, an architect famous for his skill, constructed the maze, confusing the usual marks of direction and leading the eye of the beholder astray by devious paths winding in different directions....so Daedalus constructed countless wandering paths and was himself scarcely able to find his way back to the entrance, so confusing was the maze."*

Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Book 8.

Two of the major concerns of Chaucer scholars through the centuries have been ascertaining whether or not the twenty-four *Canterbury Tales* had an order intended by their author prior to arrangement by various editors; and if so, what it was. It seems to me that if it were possible to demonstrate a one-to-one correspondence between the great majority of the twenty-four *Tales* and the components of an external ordered system, then it might be possible to determine the correspondence of the remaining *Tales* with other components of that external system, and thus to conclude that Chaucer did have such an intention and to deduce what that was.

We are helped in employing that technique by the existence of fragments in which some of the *Tales* do have a clearly established order. That reduces the likelihood of deciding somewhat arbitrarily upon the correlation between many of the *Tales* and the external ordered system. That would certainly have been more of a danger had the twenty-four *Tales* existed as completely discrete units. Thus, if it can be shown clearly that the order in the tales of Fragment One, comprising the *Knight's*, *Miller's*, *Reeve's* and *Cook's* corresponds clearly with sequential components of an

external ordered system, and that the order of the majority of the *Tales* in other fragments does the same, then it ought to be possible to determine the placement of those about which there has been some uncertainty. I propose to demonstrate a close correspondence between a considerable majority of the twenty-four *Tales* and the twelve signs of the zodiac, a correspondence that might help to resolve ambiguity regarding the placement of the *Man of Law's Tale* and the "Bradshaw Shift". The *Man of Law's Tale* exists as a sole-tale fragment and there is no certainty as to its location in the sequence. The "Bradshaw Shift", as it has come to be known, is an ordering of the *Tales* followed by the Chaucer Society, whereby, according to Benson, "Fragment VII (B2) is printed following Fragment II(B), and with Fragment VI following next"<sup>118</sup>. (See *Appendix A* for a comparison of the order including the "Bradshaw Shift" with that suggested by Benson and that suggested by this thesis.)

The problem for the researcher concerned with astrology in the *Canterbury Tales* is certainly not that of establishing Chaucer's use of that knowledge. Walter Clyde Curry,<sup>119</sup> Chauncey Wood<sup>120</sup> and John North,<sup>121</sup> chiefs among others, have done that beyond question. The challenge is rather to show the different ways in which Chaucer employed astrology and in doing so to both avoid attributing to the text purely hypothetical astrological reference, whilst revealing hitherto undiscovered usage of demonstrably astrological material accessible to the medieval writer of the *Tales*. One might ask first: why would Chaucer create astrological types in the *Prologue*, as

---

<sup>118</sup> Benson (1987), p. 5.

<sup>119</sup> Curry (1960).

<sup>120</sup> Wood (1970).

<sup>121</sup> North (1988).



William Spencer has demonstrated,<sup>122</sup> unless he intended that the *Tales* themselves were to embrace some kinds of astrological content? A prologue is, after all, a prologue. Yet at the surface, with the exception of the *Knight's*, *Wife of Bath's* and *Franklin's* tales, there are relatively few explicit references of an astrological kind, though many of the themes or topics arising within the other *Tales* are concerned with the problems of fortune and destiny. I suggest that this is because Chaucer is presenting a deeper level of astrological concept and content than that accessible to the casual and cursory acquaintance. This view is supported by Annabella Kitson, who writes:

... I should like to characterize some of the ways he handled astrological themes and to note in passing that he does not merely make glancing, decorative allusions as do some of his contemporaries for whom astrological time references were a conventional rhetorical device. ... In a very distinctive way Chaucer also used these themes as a means of encoding a level of meaning which it might have been politically indiscreet or artistically undesirable to present unambiguously. Lastly, and significantly, astrological concepts and techniques are presented in considerable detail - not only in the *Treatise on the Astrolabe* but throughout the poetry - and in ways which capture the attention and stimulate curiosity. I suggest that it is by the encoding of secret meanings and the detailed technicalities - so often in departures from his source material - that we are led to what is peculiar and intense in Chaucer's relationship with astrology. It is never extraneous, it always illuminates and interacts with character, theme and plot.<sup>123</sup>

---

<sup>122</sup> Spencer (1970), pp. 153-170.

<sup>123</sup> Annabella Kitson, "Chaucer's Astrology: Some Aspects of its Influence," in A. Kitson (ed.), *History and Astrology: Clío and Urania confer* (London: Unwin), 1989, pp. 60-88 (p. 63).

It is not improbable, with the characters of the *General Prologue* to the *Canterbury Tales* being embellished by astrological imagery of the planets, that the *Tales* themselves are constructed on what might be perceived as an astrological scaffolding. It seems to me that Chaucer has perceived within the zodiac its integral structure as a set of binary oppositions, according to which, signs of opposing but complementary elements such as fire and air, and earth and water, engage in a war: the *concordia discors* or *discordia concors*, which, acted out by their planetary agents at the macrocosmic level, is fought by their earthly counterparts both externally through interpersonal conflicts as well as internally in psychological ones. Thus, for example, the signs Aries and Libra, forming a binary opposition of fire and air, represent a conflict of impulsive desire and idealistic (Platonic) love, fought between Mars and Venus, in the heavens the respective 'rulers' of those two signs, and acted out on Earth by protagonists such as Arcite and Palamon, who are themselves worshippers respectively of Mars and Venus.

Although Spencer claims that for medieval astrologers the zodiac is little more than a reference grid in the heavens, and thereby implies that the signs played comparatively little part in the considerations of an astrologer,<sup>124</sup> we must remember that astrology played a major part in medical theory of the times,<sup>125</sup> inherited from the works of Galen, Avicenna, Averroes and Hippocrates. And medical theory was interwoven with the fundamental conception of the four humours, which themselves were derived from the four basic astrological elements: fire, earth, air and water, of which the 12 *signs* themselves were archetypal. We need recall too, that "[m]edical

---

<sup>124</sup> Spencer (1970), p. 148.

<sup>125</sup> Curry (1960).

prescriptions were normally based on assumptions such as that the *signs* ruled different parts of the body".<sup>126</sup> (My emphasis.) As Yates points out, "It was absolutely inevitable that a medical treatise of the Middle Ages or Renaissance should make use of astrological presuppositions universally taken for granted."<sup>127</sup> Furthermore, in her survey of the distinctions between various kinds of astrological charts that were drawn up by astrologers, namely electionaries, lunaries, destinaries and questionaries, Laurel Means conveys the importance of the zodiacal signs. She refers to the 'horary' (another name for the 'electionary'), as being "based upon the notion of the election of hours or of 'times' (*temporum*) in different conditions, especially during the reigns and dignities of planets and signs".<sup>128</sup> Whatever importance might be attributed to a planet was dependent upon its condition according to the sign in which it was placed. The *Abbreviatio* of John Eschenden's *Summa Iudicialis de accidentibus Mundi*, titled *The Introductory of Asschenden*, describes the qualities and natures of both planets and signs through whose agencies events are determined. The Middle English text "*De Electionibus in Horis Planetarum*" in *BL MS. Sloane 636*, ff. 104-104v, contains a *caveat* that "the best elections of hours must occur when a planet is in its dignity, i.e., the sign which it rules by nature of its first ascendancy and which augments its positive qualities."<sup>129</sup> Laurel Means, in describing the 'lunary', alludes to one type which

---

<sup>126</sup> Frances A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno And The Hermetic Tradition* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964), p. 62.

<sup>127</sup> Yates (1964), p. 62.

<sup>128</sup> Laurel Means, "Electionary, Lunary, Destinary, and Questionary: Toward Defining Categories of Middle English Prognostic Material," *Studies in Philology*, 89 (1992), pp. 367-403 (p. 371).

<sup>129</sup> Means (1992), p. 375.

lends itself well to certain types of prognostication such as traveling, imprisonment, or friendship, because of the general association between the signs and certain properties or conditions. Gemini, for example, is seen anthropomorphically as twins or bi-corporeal and therefore conducive to friendship, while Pisces, visualized as fish, characterized as a watery sign and governing the feet, is propitious for travel - especially by water.<sup>130</sup>

Not only electionaries and lunaries required consideration to be given to the zodiacal signs, but some destinaries too, generically close to the electionary, were based on their implications. One of the most influential treatments of destinies was that of Firmicus Maternus, derived from Ptolemy, which begins the nativity section in Book V with "prognostics for individuals whose horoscope begins with the sun ascendant in Aries. Then, having gone through all twelve signs, he returns to prognostics based on the seven ascendant planets, beginning with Saturn, followed by consideration of effects of aspect within the signs (Saturn in Aries, and so on)."<sup>131</sup> Finally, the signs were of crucial importance also in questionaries. As Means describes it, "[t]he sign containing the degrees of fortune determines the nature of the question to be asked, e.g., if in Leo, then the question will concern children; if ascendant in a fixed sign, then the questioner "intends no ill."<sup>132</sup> It is thus evident that the signs played as important a part in medieval astrology as did the planets. In fact, without their 'colouring' by the signs in which they were placed, the planets' roles would have been severely diminished in scope.

---

<sup>130</sup> Means (1992), pp. 380-381.

<sup>131</sup> Means (1992), p. 389.

<sup>132</sup> Means (1992), p. 398.

One might logically ask, however, why, in view of there being only twelve zodiacal signs, Chaucer wrote twenty-four *Tales*. We might suppose that were there to have been such an intention of the author's to illustrate the zodiac through the *Tales* he would have ensured there were only twelve, so that his readers might draw the correct inference. I believe that Chaucer's intention, however, was more significant than that of creating a superficial illustration of the zodiac: that he wished to illustrate a spiritual progression from pagan belief to Christian redemption; that he intended to do this through a two-layered presentation of the zodiacal sequence which itself embraced a complex interweaving of sign-relationships.

And the fact that there are 24 *Tales*, contrary to the apparent paradox mentioned above, is itself evidence of a task completed; for as Annemarie Schimmel, Professor of Indo-Muslim Culture at Harvard University tells us, "[t]wenty-four is the number of totality since it is connected with the 24 hours of the day and night....." and "In a similar vein 24 is a most important number in the *Book of Revelation*, where the 24 Elders embody the harmony of priest and king. The number can therefore be explained," she concludes, "as representing the great harmony between heaven, 12 and earth, 2."<sup>133</sup> Such harmony between heaven and earth was, of course, the macrocosmic-microcosmic philosophy underpinning the astrological conception. Also commenting on the number 24, Hopper writes, "A peculiarity arising from the habitual usage of other than decimal limits is the occasional appearance of such unusual round numbers as 24 (also astrological) and 48."<sup>134</sup>

---

<sup>133</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, *The Mystery Of Numbers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 235.

<sup>134</sup> Vincent Foster Hopper, *Medieval Number Symbolism: Its Sources, Meaning, and Influence on Thought and Expression* (1938; 2nd edn., New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1969), p. 128.

While modern scholars may view with distaste a concern with topics that are suggestive of mediocre intellect, those such as gematria and astrology were woven into the fabric of medieval thought. If Chaucer, in his likely perception of poet as 'maker', wished to create a great work reflective of his two personal philosophies and of his contemporary *Zeitgeist*, he would have had little or no reason at all for excluding medieval number-mysticism. Edmund Reiss says that while it was hardly peculiar to the Middle Ages, awareness of the symbolism of numbers "was doubtless then more pervasive and acute than at any other time in Western civilization."<sup>135</sup> Prominent in the writings of the Neoplatonists, it was seen to have a basis in both the Bible and the Apocrypha, and had been linked with astrology since the first century AD when Philo Judaeus combined it with Pythagorean principles and set in place an explicatory prototype for later Biblical exegesis. Augustine himself, as Reiss says, "constructed the *De civitate Dei* in 22 books, thereby having it parallel the *Old Testament* as well as the Hebrew alphabet."<sup>136</sup> It might not be insignificant that Chaucer's *Tales* comprise two of prose and twenty-two of poetry, suggesting a possible link also with the Hebrew alphabet, particularly as that alphabet contains three letters known as 'the mothers', whilst three and only three of the *Tales* are concerned chiefly with women whose roles as mothers are significant for the tales, namely the *Clerk's* tale of Griselda, the *Man of Law's* tale of Custance, and the *Prioress's* tale's allusion to St. Hugh and the Virgin Mary. Chaucer's interest in and knowledge of gematria are revealed in his *Book of the Duchess*, where he alludes to the Arab mathematician Al-Kwarizm, who, he says, was one who used the number ten, which, comments Chaucer, all who are "crafty" are able

---

<sup>135</sup> Reiss (1970), pp. 161-74.

<sup>136</sup> Reiss (1970), p. 164.

to know ("mowe al ken," l. 438) and thereby "*telle of every thing the noumbre*" (l. 440). Butler suggests that we can "safely conclude that numerological exegesis as practised from Philo on, must have made some knowledge of number symbolism the possession of every educated Christian in those centuries, well up to the close of the Renaissance, in which an allegorical mode of understanding a literary text was intellectually respectable."<sup>137</sup>

It is not primarily with number symbolism however, that we need concern ourselves. There is little to deeply delight or enrich us today, Fowler's revelations regarding Spenser and the numbers of time<sup>138</sup> notwithstanding, in discoveries of number-ratios that fascinated those to whom, in former centuries, it was undoubtedly of central philosophic concern. One might even suggest that the fact that number underscores the astrological *motif* with which our chief concern lies is tangential to the thesis. But such a tangent does touch upon the conceptual thematic circle, the zodiac, at very significant points, namely: the duad, the triad, the tetrad, which all derive of course, from the monad. These fundamental 'numbers', formerly regarded as expressing the basic *qualia* of the universe, the world soul, together sum 10, the *tetractys*, the number of perfection, whilst their product is 24, the number of completion. It is Chaucer's writing of 24 tales and his relating them to the 12 signs, suggesting a dual coverage of the zodiac, which lead me to the suggestion that he is concerned to employ the zodiac and its relevance to the astrolabe and the sundial as a means of illustrating and demonstrating astrological principles for Lewys; and also

---

<sup>137</sup> Christopher Butler, *Number Symbolism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), p. 30.

<sup>138</sup> Alastair Fowler, *Spenser and the Numbers of Time* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964).

meeting the dual-round requirement of the alchemical process, the 'completion' again being appropriately symbolized by the number 24.

The most interesting 'puzzles' in the *Tales* are ones that seem, taken at face value and *in toto*, to create an impression of Chaucer's incompetence, at odds with the overwhelming evidence to the contrary presented by his accomplishments in astronomy, his knowledge of astrology, and his meticulous attention to detail in his writings. It has been suggested that, contrary to earlier descriptions of the man, Chaucer was not the most scholarly of scholars. But his mistaken allusions or quotations are frequently from the mouths of his pilgrims and do not necessarily reflect a lack of assiduity by their creator. His chief fault appears to have been his reliance on secondary sources. Given the tools of his time, however, his astronomy and astrology can rarely be faulted.

The first of the puzzles is why Theseus builds his theatre with only three temples and not four, when they are situated in a completely circular structure that is recognized by North, and by Brooks and Fowler, to be representative of the zodiac.<sup>139</sup> And what is the astronomical significance of Theseus' theatre, the circumference of which "a myle was aboute", which was round, "in manere of compas,/Ful of degrees, the heighte of sixty pas,/That whan a man was set on o degree/He letted nat his felawe for to see."? (*KnT*. ll. 1889-1892). Though there is no direct literary evidence that he did, if Chaucer used *The Alphonsine Tables* for his calculations, then it is possible that he is alluding to its hexagesimal system of representing the zodiac, according to which each sign of the zodiac is represented as 60 degrees in extent. The technicalities of this are complex and irrelevant to this thesis. Suffice it to say here, that the circle is a

---

<sup>139</sup> Benson (1987), Explanatory Notes, note to line 1884, p. 834.



symbol of, and means of measuring, time. The Babylonians, among whom astrology had its origins, divided the circle into  $360^\circ$  and sub-divided those into six portions of  $60^\circ$ . Its Babylonian name was *shar*, meaning universe or cosmos.<sup>140</sup>

Secondly, why does Chaucer refer to the number of pilgrims as twenty-nine when there are clearly thirty and later, with the arrival of others, thirty-four? At least two explanations have been provided by Caroline Eckhardt<sup>141</sup> and Russell Peck<sup>142</sup> respectively, but there could be another, and the three explanations are not mutually exclusive.

Thirdly, why does the Man of Law state that because it is 10 o'clock, a quarter of the natural day has passed, when, according to most scholars, this clearly is not the case?

Fourthly, why does Chaucer state in the *Prologue* to the *Parson's Tale* that it is 4 p.m. and the sun is less than 29 degrees above the horizon, a fact apparently incompatible with the date of the pilgrimage?

Fifthly, why does Theseus, who, being a Knight, is clearly symbolised by his banner carrying the colours red and white associated with Aries (*KnT*. ll. 975, 976), confuse the issue by bearing a pennant with a bull, symbolising Taurus (*KnT*. ll. 979, 980), apart, that is, from its obvious association with the slaying of the minotaur?

---

<sup>140</sup> Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant, *The Penguin Dictionary of Symbols*, trans. John Buchanan-Brown, 2nd edn. (London: Penguin, 1996), p. 197.

<sup>141</sup> Caroline D. Eckhardt, "The Number of Chaucer's Pilgrims: A Review and Reappraisal," *The Chaucer Review*, 5 (1975), pp. 1-18.

<sup>142</sup> Russell Peck, "Number Symbolism in the *Prologue* to Chaucer's *Parson's Tale*," *English Studies* 48 (1967), pp. 205-15.

Next, the inclusion of the incomplete *Cook's Tale* in a set of completed *Tales* would also appear in need of better explanation than the rather feeble one that Chaucer was hesitant about further degrading the quality of the pilgrims' entertainment.

And finally, smaller concerns but equally intriguing: why is the young lady May, in the *Merchant's Tale*, not called Maya (*Maia*) but Mayus (*Maius*) (MT. ll. 1693), the Latin masculine nominative singular for the month of May? And why does he set one tale about a character from Oxford (MT.) and another tale about two clerks from Cambridge? (RvT.)

I propose that the astrological basis of the structure of the *Canterbury Tales* provides possible answers to all of those puzzles, resembling the astronomers' unified field theory: once the fourth force is identified, all twelve fundamental laws of the universe will result in an all-inclusive explanatory model.

This becomes immediately more appealing as an initial hypothesis when one considers the zodiac as an integrated system of signs, each having its own distinct autonomy but also each being in meaningful relationships to the others: as a component of a quaternary (fire, earth, air or water element); as a component of a trinity (cardinal, fixed or mutable); as one of a pair in a binary opposition (positive or negative, or "masculine" or "feminine"), as one in a sequence of  $n$  signs, such a grouping having a special significance. The appeal is enhanced because the *Canterbury Tales* has a parallel structuring: each *Tale* has its autonomous *sentence* and *solaas*; each *Tale* is in perceived relationships to others. Thus the *Knight's Tale* and the *Monk's Tale* are supposedly in opposition; the *Wife of Bath's Tale* is "answered" by the *Clerk's Tale*; there is Kittredge's so-called "marriage group"; and the *Tales* are also paired by the attempts of tellers to "quit" each other. As mentioned earlier, Helen

Cooper uses the very apt simile of a "kind of cobweb effect, of lines of contact going off in a number of directions from any given point."<sup>143</sup> What could resemble a spider's web more than the structure of the zodiac with its inter-connecting lines between oppositions, quadratures, trigons and consecutive signs?

Furthermore, one may "read" the signs of the zodiac for their intrinsic entertainment interest and their meaning, in any order one pleases, whether one chooses to begin at Aries and read through the sequence to Pisces, or simply chooses the signs of more interest to oneself because of some personal association. And Chaucer tells that section of his audience whom he expects to read rather than listen to the *Tales*, that if they do not like one *Tale*, they can turn the page to another:

... whoso list it nat yheere,  
Turne over the leef and chese another tale  
(*MilT.* ll. 3176-3177).

That initial impression of Chaucer's not having any concern for the ordering of the *Tales* is of course belied by his very obvious concern to structure the set according to some preconceived plan, a plan that mattered very much to his thematic intentions if they were to be perceived. Similarly, the signs of the zodiac, whilst to most disinterested observers apparently lacking cohesion, actually represent an evolutionary theme of individual human and collective social development. Chaucer may have perceived that; he may not have. One of the great difficulties facing researchers into Chaucer's astrological knowledge is the question of how much personal knowledge of astrology he acquired in his studies, as distinct from the knowledge acquired through his reading. The extent of his astronomical competence has already been discussed; and

---

<sup>143</sup> Cooper (1983), p. 69.

in his *Treatise on the Astrolabe* it is apparent from its concluding section that he was interested, if not a believer, in some parts of astrological theory. It is difficult to believe that someone who had mastered positional astronomy to the extent that Chaucer had, did not do so motivated by an intense curiosity about astrology, and such curiosity would have resulted in personal discoveries about the subject, discoveries that may well underlie the *sentence* and *solaas* of *The Canterbury Tales* themselves.

This conception, which of course is widely embracing, will survive or perish according to its capacity for assimilating all of the *Tales*, not just the few it might easily incorporate. And the temptation that must be resisted is that of reading into any tale just those components that measure up to the requirements of its supposed matching astrological sign. Consequently, it is necessary to consider various ways in which Chaucer depicts each sign in sequence, starting with Aries, Taurus, Gemini and Cancer in Fragment One, corresponding respectively to the *Knight's Tale*, the *Miller's Tale*, the *Reeve's Tale* and the *Cook's Tale*, moving through to the Squire's and Franklin's tales for the end of the first sequence, then beginning with the *Physician's Tale* for the next zodiacal sequence starting at Aries, followed by the *Pardoner's Tale* at Taurus and continuing around to one of the only two prose tales, that of Melibee, at Virgo, through to the other prose tale, the concluding *Parson's Tale*, at Pisces. For the reader with a keen intuition, some glimpses of possible associations might already have been caught.

Let us consider just briefly, some of the coincidences that are more, in my opinion, than meaningless occurrences of simultaneous events.

Aries is the first sign of the zodiac, associated therefore with beginnings. Its melothesiac correspondence is with the head, the part of the body which usually

emerges first at birth, and the only part of the body considered, in medieval times anyway, to contain all five senses and therefore to be a microcosm in itself. The *Knight's Tale*, by parallel inference, might be read as a thematic prototype of the *Tales* as a whole work. If indeed the *Knight's Tale* corresponds to the head, then *The Canterbury Tales* comprises a body, which in medieval psychology, was analogous to a temple or the house of the soul. It might be supposed, for the moment, that although the *Tales* were not written in sequence, Chaucer's concern to order them was a concern to ensure that the building of the temple, of the body of the work, adhered to certain principles, some of which are doubtless quite esoteric. But a hint that this was in fact his purpose is possibly provided by the considerable attention given in the *Knight's Tale* to the features of the temples at the gates of Theseus' theatre. Chaucer's concern with the positioning of the temples, and their dedication to Mars, ruler of Aries, to Venus, ruler of Libra, and to Diana, the moon, ruler of Cancer, three of the cardinal signs of the zodiac, orientated to cardinal points of the compass, hint at the *Tales'* concern with order. Saturn, ruler of Capricorn, the sign of order, has no gate, however, and it may be that we are intended to note the parallel between its absence in *the Knight's Tale* and the fact that during the hours of the pilgrimage on 18th April, the only cardinal signs of the zodiac to come into the ascendant are Aries, Cancer and Libra. That would certainly be a strong hint as to an astronomical-astrological structuring of the *Tales* as a body, and possibly an affirmation that the *Knight's Tale* is a microcosmic representation of an underlying theme in the *Canterbury Tales* as a whole: the disorder in human lives and affairs apparent when God's ordering law (Capricorn) is unobserved.

In the *Miller's Tale*, the most evident concern is with the physical body, its physical attraction and with material causes. Taurus is a fixed earth sign of the zodiac, lying opposite to Scorpio. The Taurus-Scorpio opposition is apparent in Chaucer's concern with the visible and the invisible, the day and night, light and darkness, with kissing (the mouth, Taurus) and with privy parts (Scorpio, "the secretes"), and with physical causation (Taurus) versus metaphysical or astrological causation, the secret love of "hende Nicholas" alone (remote) in his private room (Scorpio), which was unusual in the Middle Ages.

In the *Reeve's Tale*, corresponding to Gemini, the twins, everything is doubled. As Helen Cooper points out,

It would seem much (more) likely that Chaucer had the two tales in mind as a pair - one Oxford student sleeps with one woman, two Cambridge students sleep with two -... the Reeve will push ahead by sheer advantage of numbers, both because he has two students successful, and because in deflowering the miller's daughter as well as cuckolding him his tale kicks his rival twice, where John the carpenter only suffered once, through his wife. Physical injury is repaid on equal terms. John knocks himself out and breaks his arm, Symkyn is beaten over the head and left lying; but the students run off with the cake, thus depriving the miller of the profit he had hoped to make, and so Symkyn suffers materially as well as physically.<sup>144</sup>

Thus the miller is tricked twice. And trickery is notoriously mercurial, the mode of action of Gemini. The emphasis on movement, on spatial relationships and on moving things around, on sensory perception or misperception, are also Geminian; for the sign Gemini is that of sensory-motor activity, the perception and denotation of data and the mobility of objects. Why? Because it belongs to the mutable mode and the air element.

---

<sup>144</sup> Cooper (1983), p. 117.

Fragment A concludes with the *Cook's Tale*, which is incomplete, but not necessarily uncompleted. As far as it goes its concern with a city, instead of a town, and its sentence, namely, advice to be wary to whom one offers herbergage, that is, whom one "harbours" in one's home, point clearly to the zodiacal sign Cancer. That sign was the sign of cities generally and also of homes, houses, accommodation, hostels and hotels and also of harbours. *Herbergage* was also, in the Middle Ages, derived from the Middle English word 'herberwe', 'herborwe', one of the meanings of which, according to Larry Benson is "house, position in the zodiac".<sup>145</sup>

One might consider the possibility then, that among Chaucer's purposes was to put together *The Canterbury Tales* as a temple or house. It might have been necessary for him to have curtailed the *Cook's Tale* in order to show that the house was incomplete, that he was in the process of building it. The *Cook's Tale* is just one of the rooms, a part of the model. To have completed it would have been contrary to the thematic development of the *Tales* as a whole. The curtailing of the *Cook's Tale* might also contain a clue as to an important astronomical feature represented by the body of tales as a whole. I find it difficult to accept that a writer so conscientious and assiduous as Chaucer would have been content to leave an uncompleted story as a component of his major opus. Were it not as important as all that, then would he not have been content to leave the number of *Tales* at twenty-three instead of twenty-three and a fraction? *The Canterbury Tales* was to be what Helen Cooper calls "a masterwork, not by doing a single thing well, but by doing everything well."<sup>146</sup>

---

<sup>145</sup> Benson (1987), p. 1256

<sup>146</sup> Cooper (1983), p. 53.

As we shall see later, each *Tale* can be similarly elaborated, but for now a brief summary of each of the *Tales* and its relationship to a sign or signs ought to be adequate to show that there is a consistent correlation worth further investigation.

### **The first 12 *Tales***

*Aries-Libra*: cardinal fire and cardinal air; signs of Mars' and Venus' dignity and detriment; **Knight's Tale**: a tale about knights and the opposition of egocentricity and altercentricity.

*Taurus-Scorpio*:: fixed earth and fixed water; signs of Venus' and Mars' dignity and detriment; **Miller's Tale**: a tale about material causation and physical attraction.

*Gemini-Sagittarius*: mutable air and mutable fire; signs of Mercury's and Jupiter's dignity and detriment; **Reeve's Tale**: a tale of duality, movement, spatial relationships involving two clerks from Cambridge university.

*Fragment of Gemini/Cancer-Sagittarius/Capricorn*: mutable air/cardinal water and mutable fire/cardinal earth; signs of Mercury's, the moon's, Jupiter's and Saturn's dignity and detriment; **Cook's Tale**: a tale intended to be about herbergage.

*Capricorn-Cancer* cardinal water and cardinal earth: signs of Saturn's and the moon's dignity and detriment; **Man of Law's Tale**: a tale of nobility and constancy.

*Leo-Aquarius*: fixed fire and fixed air: signs of the sun's and Saturn's dignity and detriment; **Wife Beside Bath's Tale**: a tale about mastery in marriage.

*Virgo-Pisces*: mutable earth and mutable water: signs of Mercury's and Jupiter's dignity and detriment; **Friar's Tale**: a tale relating to the role of a servant and the usage of language.

*Libra-Aries*:: cardinal air and cardinal fire; signs of Venus' and Mars' dignity and detriment; **Summoner's Tale**: a tale about anger and sharing.



*Scorpio-Taurus*: fixed water and fixed earth; signs of Mars' and Venus' dignity and detriment: **Clerk's Tale**: a tale of secrecy and constancy.

*Sagittarius-Gemini*: mutable fire and mutable air; signs of Jupiter's and Mercury's dignity and detriment: **Merchant's Tale**: a tale about impetuous marriage and opportunism.

*Capricorn-Cancer*: cardinal earth and cardinal water; signs of Saturn's and the moon's dignity and detriment: **Man of Law's Tale**: a tale about heathen practice and Christian faith.

*Aquarius-Leo*: fixed air and fixed fire: **Squire's Tale**: a tale about universal knowledge

*Pisces-Virgo*: mutable water and mutable earth; signs of Jupiter's and Mercury's dignity and detriment: **Franklin's Tale**: a tale about illusion and the deceptive manipulation of language.

**The second 12 Tales (involving same planetary rulers as above):**

*Aries-Libra*: **Physician's Tale**: a story of (the lamb of) innocence and injustice, and like the **Monk's Tale** (at Libra), a story about Fortune.

*Taurus-Scorpio*: **Pardoner's Tale**: a story about the sins of the mouth, and death, and like the **Miller's Tale** (Taurus), the **Clerk's Tale** (Scorpio) and the **Nun's Priest's Tale** (Scorpio), involves secret plots and the abuse of power to take advantage of others.

*Gemini-Sagittarius*: **Shipman's Tale**: a story about duality, puns, a play on language, relationships and a commercial contract, and mirrors the **Reeve's Tale's** (Gemini) and **Merchant's Tale's** (Sagittarius) concerns with the same things.

*Cancer-Capricorn: Prioress's Tale:* a story about a miracle, a mother and containing anti-semitic elements (opposing Capricorn, the sign of the Jews). The **Man of Law's Tale** (Capricorn) and the **Canon's Yeoman's Tale** (Capricorn) are also concerned with anti-Christian themes.

*Leo-Aquarius: Tale of Sir Thopas:* a story of romantic desire told for fun and pleasure, like a children's story about toys (Leo). The **Wife of Bath's Tales's** (Leo) concern with desire and power of human nature. The **Squire's Tale** (Aquarius) with its class-consciousness is matched by that of the **Manciple's Tale** (Aquarius), all four being concerned with the manipulation of power.

*Virgo-Pisces: Tale of Melibee* (Virgo): sententious prose, matching the **Parson's** (Pisces); a concern with the motivation for action, as in the **Friar's** (Virgo) and **Franklin's** (Pisces).

*Libra-Aries: Monk's Tale:* stories of the fall of the great (Libra). Matches the **Knight's** (Aries), **Physician's** (Libra) and **Summoner's Tale's** (Libra) concern with transitional epochs of life and the turning of the wheel of fortune. These signs are cardinal (i.e. moveable), signs of the zodiac, at the equinoxes, and implicative of turning points, transition.

*Scorpio-Taurus: Nun's Priest's Tale:* Story of Chauntecleer, a cock who believes in occult causes, married to Pertelote, a down-to-earth pragmatic hen (Taurus) and 7 hens (the Pleiades, once known as the Hen and Chickens), and a fox (Scorpio).

*Sagittarius-Gemini: Second Nun's Tale:* a story about St. Cecilia, whose Saint's Day falls in this period of the year; a story about *pietas* or faith (the old name for the sign Sagittarius).

*Capricorn-Cancer: Canon's Yeoman's Tale*: A story about alchemy or the making of gold, traditionally associated with Capricorn.

*Aquarius-Leo: The Manciple's Tale*: a story about truth-telling, falsehood and rhetoric.

*Pisces-Virgo: The Parson's Tale*: a prose penitential tract, denying "the legitimacy of imagination and art".

I do not claim that Chaucer intended this order from the start, however; and there is a possibility that the *Man of Law's Tale* should be placed at Cancer, following the *Reeve's Tale*, instead of at Capricorn, following the *Merchant's*. In either case, the correlation with the zodiacal structure is maintained in terms of the *Tale's* association with the cardinal cross of the zodiac, though Custance is evidently more typical of Cancerean traits and experiences than she is of Capricornian ones.

I suggest also that in addition to each *Tale* having an association with one zodiacal sign, its teller is associated with the diametrically opposed sign. It is to the *General Prologue* that one must turn for descriptions regarding the tale-tellers' personalities. The Knight is described not as one might expect, in Martial terms, but in those of Libran and Venerean language. He is a man who "loved chivalrie,/trouthe and honour, fredom and curtesie" (GP. ll. 45-46). He was "a verray, parfit gentile knyght" (GP. l. 72). Another teller of a tale similarly described is the Physician, whose *Tale*, as we shall see is associated like the Knight's, with Aries. Again, this physician, who, being associated by profession with sharp instruments might be thought to be described by martial language, is given a Libran description by Chaucer: "He was a verray, parfit praktisour" (GP. l. 422). Such an attribution, devoid of Martial words, not only parallels the description of the knight, but is extended by further Libran terminology

implying 'balance': "Of his diete mesurable was he,/For it was of no superfluitee" (*GP.* ll. 435-6) as well as "And yet he was but esy of dispenche" (*GP.* l. 441), interpreted by the *Riverside* as meaning "moderate in (careful about) spending."<sup>147</sup>

The Miller is described in the *General Prologue* as "a janglere" or teller of dirty stories, "And that was moost of synne and harlotries" (*GP.* ll. 560-1) This is suggestive of Scorpio, and its ruler Mars is implied in the opening of the passage describing the Miller: "a stout carl for the nones;/Ful byg he was of brawn, and eek of bones" (*GP.* ll. 545-6.). That is compounded by other Mars associations:

His berd as any sowe or fox was reed,  
And thereto brood, as though it were a spade.  
Upon the cop right of his nose he hade  
A werthe, and theon stood a toft of herys,  
Reed as the bristles of a sowes erys;  
His nosethirles blake were and wyde.  
A swerd and a bokeler bar he by his syde  
(*GP.* ll. 552-558).

The Scorpio symbolism, rather than that of Mars' other sign, Aries, is reinforced by the symbol of "A baggepipe wel koude he blowe and sowne" (*GP.* l. 565), the bagpipe possibly being a further direction to genitalia.

The Reeve is "a sclendre colerik man" (*GP.* l. 587) and Chaucer knew that choler was associated with the element fire, to which zodiacal element Sagittarius belongs. Furthermore, he was long-legged, typical of Sagittarius, its melothesiac association being the lower limbs, the 'extensors', as they were called.

The teller of the abbreviated *Tale* about herbergage is thus Capricornian, and the mormal on his shin, being a subcutaneous condition and therefore in the shin bone,

---

<sup>147</sup> Benson (1987), p. 30, footnote 441.

affirms the Cook's association with Capricorn rather than Aquarius, the latter being the sign of the legs.

Following the Aquarian Wife, the Friar would need to fit into Pisces, ruled by Jupiter, the planet of benevolence and excess. Chaucer describes him as "a wantowne and a merye" (*GP*. l. 208), and the *Riverside* obligingly interprets this as "jovial, pleasure-loving" and "merry",<sup>148</sup> all of which can safely be placed under Jupiter's *aegis*. The Friar had the power of confession, that office having a well recognized relationship with Pisces, the sign of penance, atonement and renunciation. Furthermore, he "knew the tavernes wel in every town/And everich hostiler and tappestere" (*GP*. ll. 240-241), from which one might infer that the Friar drank like a fish. Further evidence of the Friar's association with Jupiter is Chaucer's comparison of him to "a maister or a pope" (*GP*. l. 261). The Friar's corpulence, suggested by the rounded-out double worsted semycope reminds us that jolly Jupiter is also renowned for largesse, expansion and superfluity.

Confirmation of this sequence of tellers' signs and *Tales*' signs appears to be amply provided by the Summoner. Following the Pisces Friar, the Summoner would be portrayed by Aries, and Chaucer provides this richly with his description of the man's "fyr-reed cherubynnes face" (*GP*. l. 624), and the "knobbes sittynge on his chekes" (*GP*. l. 633); his love of "garleek, oynons, and eek lekes" (*GP*. l. 634), strong wyn, reed as blood" (*GP*. l. 635), all associated with the choleric temperament and the fiery nature of Mars and Aries; the association with the head and face given further emphasis by the "garland hadde he set upon his heed" (*GP*. l. 666).

---

<sup>148</sup> Benson (1987), p. 26, footnote 208.

Such a consistency of associations is maintained throughout the *Canterbury Tales*, giving the sign Aquarius to the Wife of Bath and to Chaucer, tempting one to speculate that the horoscope presented in the chapter on the *Wife of Bath's Tale*, ostensibly that of the Wife herself, might be Chaucer's actual birth-chart, which would give 1342 as his formerly undiscovered year of birth! But that is another thesis.

## Chapter Five

### The Framework of the Pilgrimage

#### In the Beginning

Before exploring the relationship of the *Tales* to the zodiacal structure, I propose to establish a chronological framework for the pilgrimage, which I, like Sigmund Eisner, believe Chaucer intends us to understand as a poetic conceit taking place in a single day. Both Eisner and I agree that the 18th April is the date Chaucer had in mind,<sup>149</sup> but whereas Eisner suggests that it occurred in the year 1394, I retain the traditionally accepted year, 1387. My reasons are explained fully in what follows. In this explication I shall also show that it is not necessary to conclude that Chaucer made mistakes when suggesting that at the time the Man of Law was beginning his *Tale* it was 10 o'clock; nor was he mistaken when, in the *Prologue* to the *Parson's Tale*, he describes the time as 4 o'clock.

First, it is worthwhile to explore the 'realism' of the astrological content in the *Introduction To The Man of Law's Tale*, chiefly because it has puzzled us for so long and the conclusion critics have reached is that Chaucer made a mistake. The *Introduction* tells us that the Host, noticing that the shadows of the trees were equal to

---

<sup>149</sup> Sigmund Eisner, "Canterbury Day: A Fresh Aspect," *The Chaucer Review*, 27, 1 (1992), pp. 31-44 (pp. 42-43).

their height, inferred that the sun's angle must be 45 degrees above the horizon, and therefore on that date, 18 April, it must be 10 o'clock. From that he concludes that a fourth part of the natural day and half an hour and more had passed.

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

(*MLT*. ll. 1-14)

Therein would appear to be a mixture of fact and fiction, both of which raise most importantly, questions of definition before the problem can be tackled. First, it is true that, according to the 'shadow theory' of the time, imported from the Arab astrologer Al Biruni, and tabulated by Nicholas of Lynn in his *Kalendarium*,<sup>150</sup> at Oxford's latitude, at 10.00 a.m., the sun's height above the horizon is given as being 45 degrees. It is also true that for 45 degrees, the ratio of shadow to the height of the shadow-causing object is unity.<sup>151</sup> But a problem arises when one attempts to reconcile the period of a quarter of the natural day with such a calculation. The *Riverside Chaucer* explains the difficulty thus:-

The Host's other means of calculating time, by reference to the **artificial day** (the time the sun is above the horizon, cf. *Astr* 2.7) presents problems. On 18 April the sun rose at 4.47 and the artificial day had 14 hours

<sup>150</sup> Eisner (1980).

<sup>151</sup> The shadow of an object is equal in length to the height of the shadow-causing object.



26 minutes (Kalendarium, 83, 86) and **The ferthe part, and half an houre and moore** would be closer to nine than to **ten of the klokke**. Brae (ed. Astr. 1870, 68-71) argues that Chaucer mistook the azimuthal day for the artificial day, an explanation which Eisner rejects as unlikely (Kalendarium, 31), noting that the Host **was nat depe ystert in loore**. Whether one accepts Brae's explanation or uses Nicholas's tables, the error remains (Eade, SAC, 4, 1982, 82-85). It is unlikely that many of Chaucer's listeners noticed it. (Note on ll. 1-14, p. 854).

I believe the explanatory note to be mistaken and propose to demonstrate how easily that misunderstanding arises, how it is based on a misinterpretation of Chaucer's terminology, and how a simple, direct interpretation vindicates Chaucer and thereby exonerates his Host.

It is fairly widely understood that in the 14th century accurate recording of time was not easy. Clocks had only recently been introduced into England and were used somewhat less than other means of time-telling,<sup>152</sup> which tended to be regulated by official church offices such as Prime, Compline, Terce, Matins, etc. Clocks were not very accurate, anyway. In a transitional period, it was inevitable that some confusion existed, created by the confluence of different time-recording systems, and this difficulty was further compounded by the various methods of defining a day. For some the day began at midnight, lasting 24 hours until the following midnight. For others it began at noon, when in fact the date changed, and lasted 24 hours until the following noon. A third kind of day, described by Chaucer (*Astr.* 2, 6), began at dawn, before sunrise, lasting to the end of dusk. It covered the hours and minutes between the time the sun was 18 degrees below the *eastern* horizon shortly before sunrise until after

---

<sup>152</sup> Linne R. Mooney, "The Cock and the Clock: Telling Time in Chaucer's Day," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 15 (1993), pp. 91-109.

sunset, at the very end of twilight, or what Chaucer describes in his *Treatise on the Astrolabe* as “*verrey nyght*” (*Astr.* 2, 6), when the sun was 18 degrees below the western horizon. And in addition to those there was the artificial day, which began at sunrise with the sun crossing the eastern horizon and ended at sunset with the sun sinking across the western horizon. Irrespective of whether the *Riverside*’s justifiably hesitant repetition of others’ surmise of 1387,<sup>153</sup> or Eisner’s tentative but slightly more confident hypothesis of 1394 as the date of the pilgrimage, is accurate or not, the sun rises at approximately 4.47a.m. on April 18th at Oxford’s coordinates, and sets at approximately 7.13 p.m. The statement in the *Riverside* that the ‘artificial day’ lasted 14 hours 26 minutes is therefore correct.

Commentators have then reasoned in this way: If the artificial day is 14 hours 26 minutes long, then one-fourth part of that is 3 hours 37 minutes duration. If one adds that amount to the time of sunrise, then 4.47 plus 3 hours 37 minutes results in 8.24 a.m. Add a further 30 minutes, as Chaucer tells us, and that brings us to 8.54 a.m., with the result that the words “*and moore*” are likely, as the *Riverside* note suggests, to bring us to 9.00 a.m. rather than to “*ten of the clockke*”. In Chaucer’s time, an hour of an artificial day was an artificial hour. Its duration was calculated in two ways: the first being to divide the time from sunset to sunrise by 12, producing the twelve equal night hours; the second being to divide the time from sunrise to sunset by 12, producing the twelve equal day hours. Because the sun’s diurnal and nocturnal arcs differ in duration, meaning that the sun’s journey above the horizon differs in extent from that which it describes when below the horizon, night hours and day hours differ from each other in length.

---

<sup>153</sup> Benson (1987), p. 3.

Reviewing Sigmund Eisner's 1980 publication, *The Kalendarium of Nicholas of Lynn*, Owen Gingerich of the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics at Cambridge, Massachusetts writes:

... Chaucer uses the *Kalendarium* in at least three places in *The Canterbury Tales* - not explicitly to set a clock, but at least to establish the time by shadow length."... "In good Chaucerian manner this sets more problems for the interpreter, but now, armed with a readily available almanac, we can all play the game. The first example is in the introduction to *The Man of Law's Tale*, where the host, knowing that it is the 18th of April, deduces from the observation that every shadow equals "the body erect that caused it" that it is 10 a.m. From the table (p. 87) we can readily see that at 10 a.m. and at 2 p.m. on April 18th this is so, and at no other tabulated time in all of March, April, or May. Nicholas' entry is like a wonderful footnote awaiting some supporting text, and Chaucer has indeed found a place to exploit it. But there is a problem-has Chaucer done it deliberately just to confound us? His host also "saugh wel that the brighte sonne/The ark of his artificial day hath ronne/The ferthe part, and half an houre and more." Chaucer knows full well that the artificial day is the time between sunrise and sunset; he defines it so in the *Astrolabe*, and he can read the length for each day, so labeled, in Nicholas' *Kalendarium*. On April 18th the artificial day is 14h 19m, and a quarter part of that is 3h 35m, or 8.25a.m. Matters would be much simpler if Chaucer had said a third part of the arc, which would be 4h 47m, or 9:37 a.m., and with about half-an-hour more, it would be at least approximately 10 a.m. With the *Kalendarium* now conveniently available, it can be left as a problem for the reader!<sup>154</sup>

And Sigmund Eisner himself perpetuates that interpretation when he writes:

The time from sunrise to sunset or the artificial day is 14 hours, 26 minutes. One canonical hour would be on that day about 1 hour and 12 minutes. That amount multiplied by three and added to the time of

---

<sup>154</sup> Owen Gingerich, rev. of *The Kalendarium of Nicholas of Lynn*, ed: Sigmund Eisner and trans.

sunrise would yield prime at about 8:23 "of the klokke."

155

Another commentator, closer to home, J.C. Eade of the Australian National University, is of the same opinion. Asking how Chaucer himself would have performed the calculation, he writes:

Either by using tables, or by using an instrument (which would almost certainly have been an astrolabe). Since he gives every appearance of having employed Nicholas of Lynn's *Kalendarium* for the rest of the Host's calculations, it is not difficult to suppose that he also inspected Nicholas' values for the 'Quantitates diei artificialis' in this first part. If he did, though, then he found a single figure (14 hrs. 26 mins.), to which he was obliged to apply a number of numerical adjustments. The figure represents the total time the sun is above the horizon (at latitude  $51^{\circ} 50'$ ) on 18 April. When halved and subtracted from noon it gives the time of sunrise (4.47 a.m.). When quartered and added to the time of sunrise, it would show how much had to be added to bring the time to 10 o'clock. His answer, however, should have been 8 hrs. 23 mins. 30 secs., (8.24 a.m.). We need only suppose a slip that led him to believe his answer was 9.24 a.m., and the anomaly is resolved.<sup>156</sup>

Eade then goes on to suggest that although that is the more plausible explanation, one should be aware that Skeat had adopted A.E. Brae's conjecture that Chaucer had "confused the arc of the artificial day with the arc of azimuth - that he did not measure the sun's track through the sky but rather its path in relation to the local horizon," finding that the sun rose twenty-two and a half degrees north of east and that it was half way at 9.20 a.m. Eade points out that Sigmund Eisner, in attempting to refute

---

<sup>155</sup> Eisner (1992), p. 36.

<sup>156</sup> J.C. Eade, "*We ben to lewed or to slowe*": Chaucer's Astronomy and Audience Participation," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 4 (1982), pp. 53-85 (p. 83).

Brae, asserts that in fact the sun rose twenty-four degrees 26 minutes 15 seconds north of east and that "the time at half way was 9.04 a.m." Eade himself goes to some lengths and uses trigonometry to show that, derived from Nicholas' tables it is possible to arrive at 9.14 a.m. and that using the equivalent calculations on an astrolabe valid for 52° and a 42-inch celestial globe - "a more reliable because more approximate means" - he has "no trouble at all in getting 9.15± as an answer." Eade concludes that there are strong grounds for not dismissing Brae's argument as though it was invalidated by his procedure, but claims instead that "the issue lies between concluding that Chaucer made an error in his numerical calculations or that he made an error in reading his astrolabe" and he sees no evidence of sufficient weight to choose between the two. But I suggest that all of this is quite unnecessary. Chaucer means exactly what he says: "the brighte sonne/The ark of his artificial day hath ronne/The ferthe part, and half an houre and moore."

Let us look at the calculation again. Twelve equal divisions of 14 hours 26 minutes means that each division or part, each 'artificial hour', lasts 1 hour 12 minutes in duration. So four 'parts' comprise 4 hours 48 minutes, and that is not the same amount as 'a quarter'. In fact, by "*the ferthe part*" Chaucer is actually telling us that the sun has passed, not *a quarter*, but *one third* of the artificial day, indeed anticipating Owen Gingerich's suggestion but having done so in such an elementary arithmetical manner that Gingerich remains oblivious.

So, if we add 4 hours 48 minutes to the time of sunrise at 4.47 a.m., we arrive at 9.35 a.m. Add a further 30 minutes for the "half an houre" and we have 10.05 a.m. It is apparent that without including the unknown amount of time implied by the words "*and moore*", the calculation above takes us to only 5 minutes past the desired time of

10.0 a.m. It might be objected that the estimation of sunrise, in the fourteenth century, would have been only an approximation. In fact, Nicholas of Lynn's *Kalendarium* gives 4.47 a.m. as the time of sunrise, and a modern astronomical personal computer programme gives 4.47.20 a.m.,<sup>157</sup> such a minute discrepancy not being of consequence for the calculation.

The observant reader might have noticed however, that in the calculation above, the half hour was taken as comprising 30 minutes, whereas were it to be half of the canonical or artificial hour, then it would, of course, be 36 minutes. That takes the time to 10.11 a.m. If we assume that by "and moore" the Host meant an amount of about 4 or 5 minutes, it would not be unreasonable to deduce that the time was in fact about 10.15 a.m. Even so, that is a far better result than the 9.00 a.m. apparent to earlier critics.

The situation is still not without some minor difficulties. The sun's altitude in the quarter of an hour from 10.00 a.m. to 10.15 a.m. increased by one and a half degrees. Although it is unlikely that the Host would have discerned that difference in the heavens, the effect of a change by that amount of solar altitude upon the length of a shadow is considerable. (To be technically scrupulous, the sun's altitude at 10.00 a.m. was not precisely 45 degrees as the Commentator reports, but 45 degrees 20 minutes.) By 10.15 a.m., the altitude was 46 degrees 51 minutes, and a pilgrim's shadow would have been shortened from .9884 of unity at 10.00 a.m. to .9374 of unity at 10.15 a.m..

---

<sup>157</sup> Astronomical software titled *Red Shift 2* by Maris Multimedia Ltd. (1993-1995), California Blvd., Suite 600, Walnut Creek, CA 94596-9854, in which positions calculated are accurate to better than 10 arc-seconds for the outer planets, thirty arc-seconds for the inner planets, and a few arc-minutes for the Moon.

This means that a pilgrim 6 feet tall would have found his shadow short of *unity* by about four and a half inches. As pilgrims went, in those days, a height of 6 feet would be very exceptional. But the shadow of someone even just 5 feet tall would have been short of unity by about three and a half inches, and that of a tree 20 feet tall would have reduced 15 inches, a discernible difference. And it was by the shadow lengths of trees that the Host deduced the time. This fact compels the question: if Chaucer was so keen for the Host to display his shadow knowledge, then why does he not simply have him state that it is ten of the clock? That would have been sufficient and very impressive to those of the pilgrims unaware that it was a simple enough task for the Host to have consulted a set of tables the previous night. Why then does Chaucer, knowing that any of his later readers who follows the calculation closely is likely to discover that the Host is fudging his knowledge when in fact it is easier for him not to do so, compel us to pay attention to ten of the clock?

An answer to such a question might well be that Chaucer, by making a deliberate error, is forcing our attention to a puzzle, a puzzle surrounding an embedded code, the solving of which is delightfully sapid.

To understand the most forceful arguments and reasons for Chaucer's decision that it is 10.00 a.m. and not the more accurate time of 10.15 a.m. however, we have to return to the *General Prologue* to the *Canterbury Tales* and to the time at which the pilgrims are roused from their slumbers early in the morning of the 18th April. In the *General Prologue*, Chaucer tells us that "whan that day bigan to sprynge,/Up roosoure Hoost, and wasoure aller cok" (*MLT*.II.822-823). The timing of activity here is, I suggest, quite critical. The day has sprung but it would appear to have been before cock-crow because the Host acts as the pilgrims' "cock." It is, however, very near to

sunrise because the day had begun to spring. Sigmund Eisner assumes that the pilgrims were roused by their Host at the beginning of the morning twilight, which, as he says is 2.17 a.m, and that they are *on their way by sunrise*.<sup>158</sup> There is not, however, any firm textual support for the assumption that they would have been roused by the Host at such a very early time, and it seems, on reflection, unlikely. For what purpose would they have been roused so early in the morning if they weren't to set out for another two and a half hours, assuming sunrise to have been the time of their embarking on the pilgrimage? One may surmise, of course, that the pilgrims would have had to prepare their horses and themselves by giving some cursory attention to what passed for hygiene in the fourteenth century. That would have taken a little time prior to their setting out at "a litel moore than paas/Unto the Wateryng of Seint Thomas," a distance of two miles. There the pilgrims take more time to draw lots before setting out on the journey proper. It would seem safe to conclude that a little more than an hour would have passed between the time of their rising, shortly before sunrise, until the time they start on the real journey, the inaugural moment of which and the starting time of the *Tales* themselves being given sharp emphasis by the Knight, in the last six lines of the *General Prologue*:

He seyde, "Syn I shal bigynne the game,  
 What, welcome be the cut, a Goddes name!  
 Now lat us ryde, and herkneth what I seye."  
 And with that word we ryden forth oure weye,  
 And he bigan with right a myrie cheere  
 His tale anon, and seyde as ye may heere.  
 (GP. ll. 853-858).

---

<sup>158</sup> Eisner (1992), p. 35.



Eisner selects 1394 as the year of the pilgrimage for two reasons. Although quite rightly observing that the year of the pilgrimage must not be confused with the year of Chaucer's composition,<sup>159</sup> from research by Cook in 1916 that "some of the travels of Chaucer's Knight, as outlined in the General Prologue, are similar to several Baltic expeditions made between 1390 and 1393 by Henry, Earl of Derby, the future King Henry IV of England", Eisner deduces that "a post-1390 date must be a *terminus a quo* for the Canterbury Pilgrimage and also for the composition of the part of the *General Prologue* which includes the Knight's northern adventures."<sup>160</sup> His second reason is that he believes that the best astrological aspects for a journey, occurring during a Holy Week, the time traditionally given to pilgrimages,<sup>161</sup> occurred on Saturday 18 April, 1394, the pilgrims having assembled at the Tabard Inn on Good Friday evening, 17 April that year.<sup>162</sup> My objections to his arguments are first, that Chaucer could have set the pilgrimage for any year in history (irrespective of the dates of Henry's voyages), on which Chaucer wrote or rewrote the *General Prologue* and the *Knight's Tale*. The pilgrimage was, as far as we are aware, only a literary one, not an historical event. Secondly, although a plausible argument can be made for Chaucer having selected 18 April 1394 as the date of the pilgrimage because of what he believed to be appropriate and current astrological aspects, there is no evidence

---

<sup>159</sup> Eisner (1992), p. 36.

<sup>160</sup> Eisner (1992), p. 37.

<sup>161</sup> Eisner (1992), p. 37.

<sup>162</sup> Eisner (1992), pp. 42-43.

whatsoever that he did so; and secondly there are 'valid' astrological reasons as to why Chaucer might not have chosen that date in 1394.

If the pilgrims had risen at sunrise and begun their pilgrimage within the hour following, they would have started their journey during what was believed to be a most inauspicious time. Sigmund Eisner says that "[s]unrise on 18 April 1394 was just about as propitious for a journey as any moment of any day could be."<sup>163</sup> But in fact it is not; it was a Saturday and no medieval pilgrim with any savvy would have begun a journey on a Saturn day in a Saturn hour. Eisner also says that "[o]n no other appropriate day between 1391 and 1400 were the positions of the planets so favorable for travel."<sup>164</sup> But if Chaucer could have known and used that fact, an inference for which there is no specific textual evidence, then it follows that as there *is* specific textual evidence that he knew about the planetary hours (see below), he would have used them. Chaucer writes:

The firste houre inequal of every Saturday is to  
Saturne, and the second to Jupiter, the thirde to Mars,  
the fourthe to the sonne, the fifte to Venus, the sixte to  
Mercurius, the seventhe to the mone. (*Astr.* 2. 12)

The planetary hours then repeat the sequence through to the start of the succeeding day, which begins in the first hour with the planet associated with that day, the sun being the 'planet' ruling the first hour of Sunday, and so on. It is much more likely that Chaucer would have selected, for a pilgrimage, Jupiter's hour on Jupiter's day, that planet being ruler of Sagittarius, sign of pilgrimages (*peregrinatio*). The 18th

---

<sup>163</sup> Eisner (1992), p. 42.

<sup>164</sup> Eisner (1992), p. 42.

April in 1387 was a Thursday, Jupiter's day, and sunrise would, of course, have been Jupiter's hour.

Sigmund Eisner has provided the astrological evidence he believes favours Saturday, 18 April, 1394: the moon was applying to (that is, approaching) a favourable trine (120° aspect) to Jupiter, as well as to Mercury, Venus and Mars.<sup>165</sup> A trine aspect is the best possible relationship, astrologically speaking, between two bodies of the solar system.

But if Chaucer was using the *Equatorie of the Planetis* or equivalent tables, and the *Kalendarium* of Nicholas of Lynn, then had the year been 1394, he would have believed the lunar longitude at sunrise, 4.47 a.m., to be 28 degrees 54 minutes of Scorpio.<sup>166</sup> (The moon was in fact, according to modern computers, at 26 degrees 42 minutes of Scorpio at sunrise). Although the locating of the moon's degree was obviously a slight problem (because one had to count the days elapsed since the preceding new moon and interpolate its position), the calculation of its daily motion through the zodiac was not: one simply subtracted the lunar position on one day from its position for the same time on the next. The moon's *mean* motion through the zodiac is 13 degrees 10 minutes per day, but on 18 April 1394 it moved 14 degrees 40 minutes. If Chaucer was sufficiently knowledgeable about lunar aspects as to be capable of selecting an auspicious day for travel, then it is indeed unlikely that he would have had the pilgrims set off on a Saturn day at a Saturn hour during a period when the moon was coming to the end of the sign Scorpio, that was also its fall, the sign opposite to Taurus, that of its exaltation. It would be about 10.15 a.m. before the

---

<sup>165</sup> Eisner (1992), pp. 41-43.

<sup>166</sup> Eisner (1992), p. 39.

moon actually entered Sagittarius, the sign of pilgrimages, on Saturday 18 April, 1394, although Chaucer would probably have believed it to do so at 9.35 a.m. For those reasons, I must question the reasons for Eisner's choice.

I would have been happier had Eisner hypothesized that the pilgrims set off at 10.00 a.m. on that date in 1394; for at that time the 29th degree of Cancer was rising, giving rulership of the pilgrimage to the moon, and the moon would have been believed by Chaucer to be in Sagittarius, the appropriate sign. It would have given us a plausible reason for Chaucer's having drawn our attention to 10.00 a.m. by making a slight error that he knew would be eventually discovered, and we would have had a horoscope map for the pilgrimage that would have been a neat analogical answer to those questions asked in the *Man of Law's Tale* itself:

Was ther no philosophre in al thy toun?  
Is no tyme bet than oother in swich cas?  
Of viage is ther noon eleccioun,  
Namely to folk of heigh condicioun?  
(*MLT*. ll. 310-313)

In view of the fact that Chaucer provides no evidence in favour of one year over another, no evidence linking the pilgrimage with 1394, and in consideration of the astrological facts discussed above, I see no reason for choosing that year in favour of 1387. If, however, Eisner is right in his choice of year but wrong in his selection of sunrise as the time of the inaugural stepping out, then I believe a strong case could be made for Chaucer's having, at least at some time, considered 10:00 a.m. on 18 April, 1394 to have been the critical time. But not a moment later! By 10:01 a.m. on that date, the ascendant changes to Leo, the 'ruler' of the event is the sun; the sun is afflicted and the moon's aspects lose most of their strength. That could have explained why Chaucer is having the Man of Law insist that it is 10:00 a.m., and not the true

time of around 10.15 a.m. But that, of course, would be dependent on Eisner being partially correct. If Eisner is, as I suspect, wrong, it does raise again the question as to why the hour of 10:00 a.m. was considered significant enough to draw our attention to it. I suspect that there are two reasons: first, the horoscope for sunrise on 18 April in the year 1387 shows the moon at 29 degrees Aries, which Chaucer would have regarded as immensely satisfying (for reasons to be mentioned later), and at 10:00 a.m. that degree of the zodiac comes to the zenith of the horoscope, considered the most powerful position; secondly, his allusion to the sun being at  $45^\circ$  is drawing our attention to its altitude, which I believe to be the key measure of Chaucer's allocation of time, distance and story-telling portions for each pilgrim. One should note that although earlier I pointed to the difficulty of identifying the true lunar position because of the necessity to count the number of days from the new moon and interpolate, in this instance such a difficulty doesn't arise, because 18 April 1387 was the very day of that month's new moon, so Chaucer's source, or Chaucer himself, would have had no difficulty ascertaining the lunar longitude on that date. The same cannot be said for 18 April, 1394! Chaucer might have attempted an early speculative exploration of a suitable time on 18 April at which to begin the pilgrimage, irrespective of whichever year, but after this initial consideration, he would evidently have changed his mind and also changed the teller of his first *Tale* from the Man of Law to the Knight. As Helen Cooper writes: "Chaucer may once have intended the Introduction of the Man of Law's Tale to preface all the story-telling; but the tale he apparently had in mind for the Man of Law at that point was one in prose".<sup>167</sup>

---

<sup>167</sup> Cooper (1983), pp. 120-121.

## Beginning with Becket

It is not immediately evident that astrology is to play a major role in the *Knight's Tale*. But it proves to be the case that astrology is of more importance in this *Tale* than in any other. Furthermore, the astrological indices are so important that they inextricably bind the *General Prologue* and the *Parson's Prologue* and *Tale* to the *Knight's* in a manner that makes it impossible to examine this *Tale* without giving considerable attention simultaneously to those other components of the *Canterbury Tales*. I hope to show that from the examination of those three major components together, it is possible to find very strong evidence for the long-suspected year 1387 being that which Chaucer had in mind for the literary pilgrimage. In the process of that examination, it is possible that some other contentious issues might tend towards easier resolution: the timing of the start of the pilgrimage; the timing of the start of the *Knight's Tale's* tournament; the accuracy of the Parson's claim, towards the end of the pilgrimage, that it is 4:00 p.m.; whether or not Chaucer made an error in his reference to the moon's exaltation; the year of the literary pilgrimage itself; and the relationship of all these matters to St. Thomas Becket.

Arcite does, fairly early on in the *Knight's Tale*, attribute his and Palamon's misfortune and imprisonment to Saturn and its placement at their births (*KnT*. ll. 1087-1090), ignoring the probability that it would have been differently placed in their respective horoscopes; but there is no other direct astrological reference until Theseus builds his theatre for the proposed battle. It then becomes apparent that although Mars, Venus and Diana are gods, the *Tale* is set rather late in that transitional epoch in the development of Greek cosmogony when some of the gods relocated from Olympus to

the heavenly empyrean, and were generally perceived as actually inhabiting their respective planets.

There are covert astrological references, however, early in the *Knight's Tale*, appearing in the description of Theseus riding into battle:

And forth he rit; ther is namoore to telle.  
The rede statue of Mars, with spere and targe,  
So shyneth in his white baner large  
That all the feeldes glyteren up and doun;  
And by his baner born is his penoun  
Of gold ful riche, in which ther was ybete  
The Mynotaur, which that he wan in Crete.  
(*KnT.* ll. 974-980).

There is ample evidence for associating Theseus with the god Mars and, of course, with the Minotaur of Greek mythology, but the cautious scholar might dispute that there is anything astrological to which any of those lines refers. Another word for banner, however, is 'sign' (*signum*), and possibly it shares etymological association with the word 'band'. Further, the colours red and white together were astrologically representative of the zodiacal sign Aries, according to the Renaissance astrologer Lilly, who was simply reiterating an astrological tradition.<sup>168</sup> The contiguity of a banner depicting Mars as a red statue on a white background, alongside a pennant, which is much smaller, carrying an effigy of the Minotaur, would be an apt representation of the constellation Aries providing the stellar background to half of the zodiacal sign Taurus. Such a configuration is of considerable significance, because it reiterates that astronomical picture Chaucer presents in somewhat enigmatic language in the famous opening lines to the *General Prologue* to the *Canterbury Tales*:

Whan that Aprill with his shoures soote  
The droghte of March hath perced to the roote,  
And bathed every veyne in swich licour

---

<sup>168</sup> Lilly (1927), p. 57.

Of which vertue engendred is the flour;  
 When Zephirus eek with his sweete breeth  
 Inspired hath in every holt and heeth  
 The tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne  
 Hath in the Ram his half cours yronne,...  
 (GP. ll. 1-8)

How easy it is for us, today, to mistake the date Chaucer had in mind. We might be inclined to forget, for example, that although in modern times the season of the northern spring begins when the sun enters Aries on March 21, in Chaucer's time the sun entered that sign on March 12. That presents a problem, because if Chaucer is implying that the sun has run only half its course through Aries, then the date would seem to be around March 27. But the *Prologue* tells us that it is April, which initially suggests that the sun is certainly in the second half of Aries. But then we discover in the *Prologue* to the *Man of Law's Tale* that the date is April 18th. By then the sun had completed its second half course through Aries and is in Taurus, having entered that sign on April 12th. How is it possible to reconcile such an apparent conflict of astronomical and literary evidence?

The relevant footnote in the *Riverside* edition states that the reference to 'yonge sun' is because the solar year has just begun with the vernal equinox. The sun has passed through the second half of the zodiacal sign Aries (the Ram), says the footnote; the time is thus late April - April 18 is specified in *Intr MLT* (II. 5)<sup>169</sup>.

That explanation is somewhat ambiguous. On April 18 in Chaucer's time, the sun would be between 5 and 6 degrees of Taurus. It is therefore, obviously, no longer in the sign Aries. The *Riverside* edition says, however, that the sun has passed through the second half of Aries - a statement not made by Chaucer. According to Chaucer,

---

<sup>169</sup> Benson (1987), footnote to line 7, p. 23.



“the yonge sonne/Hath in the Ram his half cours yronne” (*GP*. ll. 7-8). If Chaucer had meant that the sun had completed its passage of the whole of Aries, would he not have said so, or mentioned that it was in Taurus? And should not the *Riverside*, instead of gliding lightly over this apparent discrepancy, have mentioned that the sun on April 18 has covered nearly a fifth of its transit of Taurus; or at least alluded to the apparent ambiguity?

The situation may have been resolved beautifully by Sigmund Eisner with the following argument. Chaucer realises that the zodiacal sign Taurus lies within the constellation Aries, due to the precession of the Vernal Point. Eisner has shown that on April 18 the sun in the sixth degree of the zodiacal *sign* Taurus was, in Chaucer’s time, half-way through the zodiacal *constellation* Aries.<sup>170</sup> So when Chaucer says that the “yonge sonne/Hath in the Ram his half cours yronne” he is referring to its position in the constellation Aries, not the zodiacal sign Aries. Hence the *Riverside*’s footnote referring to the sun having passed through the second half of the zodiacal sign Aries is correct in that the sun has actually long left that *sign*, being in fact in the *sign* Taurus; but it may well be incorrect in its implicit suggestion that it is this latter fact that Chaucer meant us to understand by that line.

This is important for our comprehension of the astronomical schema on which, I suggest, the twenty-four *Tales* are based. The sun is in the zodiacal sign Taurus but the constellation Aries when the pilgrims set out. And it is very likely this astronomical picture that is restated symbolically in the *Knight’s Tale* by the small pennant depicting

---

<sup>170</sup> Sigmund Eisner, “The Ram Revisited: A Canterbury Conundrum,” *The Chaucer Review*, 28 (1994), pp. 330-343 (p. 335).

the Minotaur set against the background of the red and white banner, symbolic of the constellation Aries, featuring prominently the figure of the god Mars (*Ares*), whose planetary analogue was the 'lord' of Aries.

The question arises then, as to why this astronomical alignment of sign and constellation of the *General Prologue* is reiterated by Chaucer in the *Knight's Tale*. I suggest that it is first, because it is in the *Knight's Tale* that Chaucer states the ground and ground-plan for the *Canterbury Tales* as a whole; secondly, that the selection of April 18th and possibly 1387 too, is a deliberate choice to illustrate the link to Thomas Becket; and thirdly, that Thomas Becket's feast date is fundamental to the linking of the *General Prologue* of the *Canterbury Tales* to the *Knight's Tale* and to the *Parson's Tale*, those two *Tales* being, of course, the opening and closing ones of the complete work. In order to understand what follows it is imperative that the reader become familiar with the signs and symbols of the astronomical factors that feature as evidence for such a contention. Without such familiarity, the reader may find the technical explanation confusing or seemingly far-fetched.

The purpose of the pilgrimage often seems to have been overlooked by scholars, who have, naturally, concentrated primarily on the texts of the pilgrims' stories. But if one accepts, as North has clearly demonstrated, the Chaucer was intent on having astronomical and astrological material incorporated into the texts, then the astronomical pictures of all relevant times and dates Chaucer mentions or even implies, should be examined.

Thomas Becket's feast day is 29 December, commemorating the date of his martyrdom in the year 1170. It occurred to me that prior to the examination of astronomical factors relating to any of the dates in the *Canterbury Tales*, those relating

to 29 December 1170 should be examined first of all. In the absence of evidence showing that Chaucer knew of the time of Becket's murder, the most appropriate astrological task is to construct a chart for the time of the sun's culmination over Canterbury for that date. In the twelfth century the sun entered the zodiacal sign Capricorn on 15 December (in 1170 it entered that sign at 31 minutes past midnight on 15 December), so that, moving forward through that sign at one degree per day, by the 29th the sun would have been at 14 degrees of Capricorn. The diagram below shows this to have been the case, with the sun having culminated over Canterbury at 12:07 Local Mean Time in 14 degrees 45 minutes of Capricorn. The first observations of importance are the degrees held by the midheaven and sun (already noted) and the ascendant, which is 5 degrees of Taurus.

**Thomas Becket's murder****Natal Chart**

29 Dec 1170

12:07:15 LMT -0:04:20

Canterbury

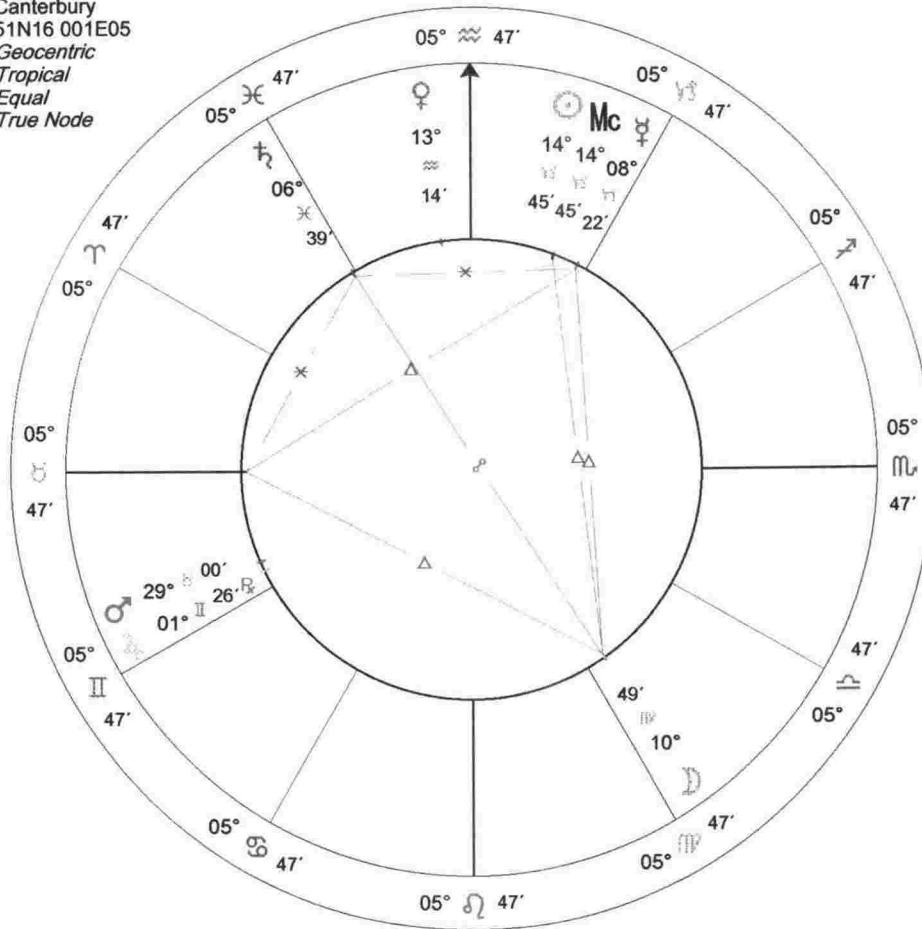
51N16 001E05

Geocentric

Tropical

Equal

True Node

**Diagram 7**

The next requirement seemed to me to be an examination of the astronomical features of Becket's Feast Day in the generally accepted year of the *Canterbury Tales*' pilgrimage, 1387. Again, the only time relevant to such a date would be that of the sun's culmination. By Chaucer's era, the sun was entering Capricorn on December 12th, so by the 29th of that month it will be moving through 16-17 degrees of that sign. But of course, the planets' positions will be very different from where they were in 1170, and their positions on 29 December 1387 will be forming relationships to

those of the 1170 chart, such relationships being known to astrologers as ‘transits’ to the original chart, that chart sometimes being referred to, likewise with a natal chart, as the root chart or *radix*. It is worth noting in particular in the diagram below, the longitudes of the moon at 5 degrees Virgo; Venus at 5 degrees Capricorn; and Jupiter, at 3 degrees of Libra, and noting too, that Jupiter is the symbol for priests and parsons.



### Natal Chart

29 Dec 1387

12:07:18 LMT -0:04:20

Canterbury

51N16 001E05

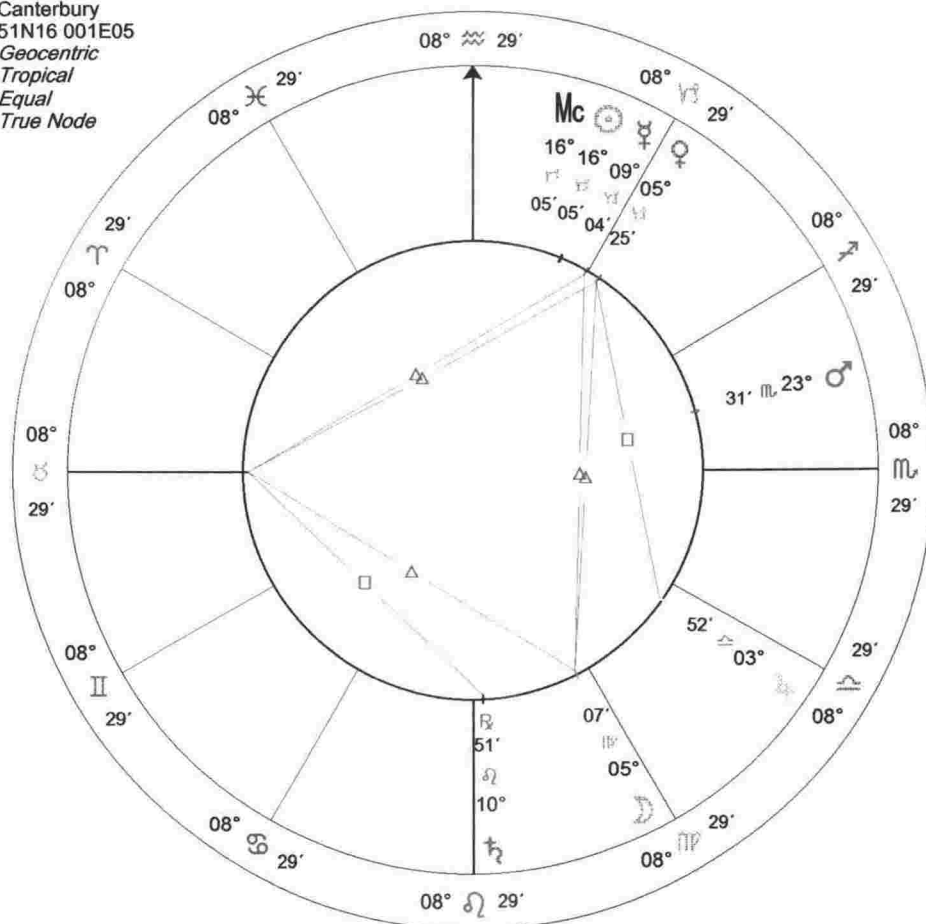
*Geocentric*

Tropical

### Equal

True Node

**Diagram 8**



If one takes out the moon's and Venus' positions and inserts them in the original 1170 chart, then those bodies will form a Grand Trine to the original chart's

ascendant degree at 5 degrees Taurus. A Grand Trine comprises 3 or more positions in the zodiac linked by bodies approximately 120° apart. All of this is, however, relatively unimportant by comparison with what follows.

The reader may recall that in the *General Prologue* to the *Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer tells us that the pilgrims rose at spring of day, which is a time when the sun has not yet risen, but is 18 degrees below the ascendant degree. If by that, the sun's altitude is being referred to, then that would have had the pilgrims rising at approximately 2.20 a.m. If it is zodiacal longitude below the horizon, then it is likely that they would have been roused at 4:14 a.m. Eisner considers however, that the inaugural moment for the pilgrimage is sunrise because Chaucer is using a symbolic day to describe a symbolic pilgrimage and is employing the 'unequal hours' of the day, which, as described by Chaucer in his *Treatise on the Astrolabe*, comprise 12 divisions of the period from sunrise to sunset. Sunrise on 18 April 1387 occurred, according to Nicholas' *Kalendarium*, at 4.47 a.m.: ("*Quantitates a noctis medio ad solis ortum.*")<sup>171</sup> A modern computer program puts it at 04:47:20, which gives us a very clear picture of the accuracy of this part of the *Kalendarium*. The map below (Diagram 9) shows a most fascinating picture, the most striking part of which is the sun's rising longitude: 5 degrees Taurus, the very degree of the ascendant of Becket's murder chart. And the midheaven of this chart is 14 degrees Capricorn, the degree held by the sun when it culminated on the date of Becket's assassination. The moon's position is interesting too. The moon symbolises the general population, a crowd, an assembly of people. It lies in 29 degrees of Aries. The position of the moon at the 29th degree of Aries at sunrise is likely to have been regarded by Chaucer as rather special; for he has stated

---

<sup>171</sup> Eisner (1980), p. 85.

the number of pilgrims to be 29; Becket's date of assassination was the 29th; and perhaps most interestingly, Euclid's 29th Theorem concerned the division of the sphere. And it was, I believe, this theorem that Chaucer employed in dividing the sun's semi-diurnal arc from sunrise to sunset, the duration of the pilgrimage, into 24 sections of half-hour for each pilgrim to tell a story. And the reason why he calls our attention to the fact that at 10:00 a.m. the sun is 45 degrees above the horizon and that at 4:00 p.m. it is not quite 29 degrees above the horizon is that he is emphasizing that such a division of the solar semi-arc is calculated in degrees of solar altitude and not in degrees of zodiacal longitude. This in turn directs our attention to the astronomy of the sphere and to the two men whose theories relating to that were taught in the universities: Ptolemy and his *Almagest*, and Euclid and his *Elements*. Both works were concerned with the ratios of sines and versed sines and the methods of dividing the sphere by trigonometrical means, a problem to be picked up later by the Renaissance mathematician Oronce Finé. One such method was the division of the semi-diurnal arc into 24 parts, each part being  $7\frac{1}{2}^\circ$  of altitude. Chaucer's measurement of time and distance, in which he states that 15 degrees equates to 1 hour, that 5 degrees equates to 1 mile, and that 3 miles equates to one hour, suggests that  $7\frac{1}{2}^\circ$  of solar altitude equates to half an hour and one and a half miles per *Tale*.

The sun's position at 5 Taurus, the ascendant of Becket's horoscope suggests the relevance of 18 April; but of course not necessarily the relevance of the year 1387 - the sun rises in that degree,  $5^\circ$  Taurus, every April 18, though not necessarily so in leap years, when it is likely to be in 6 degrees Taurus. And that is an important consideration when one comes to the *Knight's Tale*.

Diagram 9

**Pilgrimage begins at sunrise****Natal Chart**

18 Apr 1387

04:47:20 LMT +0:00:24

Southwark

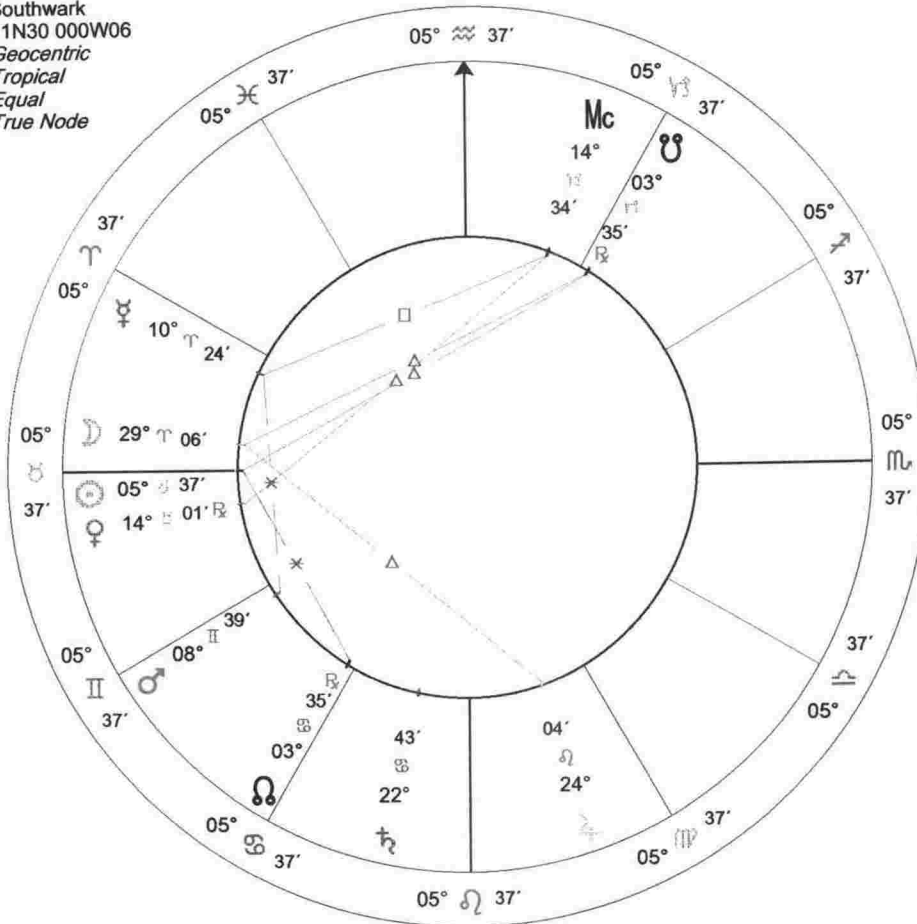
51N30 000W06

Geocentric

Tropical

Equal

True Node



When, in the *Knight's Tale*, Theseus builds his theatre for the tournament, his construction is described in these words:-

Round was the shap, in manere of compas,  
 Ful of degrees, the heighte of sixty pas,  
 That whan a man was set on o degree,  
 He letted nat his felawe for to see.  
 Estward ther stood a gate of marbul whit,  
 Westward right swich another in the opposit.  
 And shortly to concluden, swich a place  
 Was noon in erthe, as in so litel space;  
 For in the lond ther was no crafty man  
 That geometrie or ars-metrike kan,  
 Ne portreyour, ne kervere of ymages,  
 That Theseus ne yaf him mete and wages  
 The theatre for to maken and devyse.



And for to doon his ryte and sacrifise,  
 He estward hath, upon the gate above,  
 In worshipe of Venus, goddesses of love,  
 Doon make an auter and an oratorie;  
 And on the gate westward, in memorie  
 Of Mars, he maked hath right swich another,  
 That coste largely of gold a fother.  
 And northward, in a touret on the wal,  
 Of alabastre whit and reed coral,  
 An oratorie, riche for to see,  
 In worshipe of Dyane of chastitee,  
 Hath Theseus doon wroghte in noble wyse  
 (*KnT*. ll. 1890-1913).

Scholarship during the last two decades has recognized that this describes an astronomical structure. Brookes and Fowler write: "What can this round construction be, with its carefully calculated positions for domiciles of planetary deities? Only a zodiac."<sup>172</sup> Their opinion is decried by Schweitzer as "persuasive" and he says it is "supported by the changes Chaucer has here made in the *Teseida*."<sup>173</sup> Opinions regarding subsequent events relating to the theatre, as expressed variously by North, Brookes and Fowler, and by Schweitzer then appear to be rather confused and certainly confusing. Brookes and Fowler write:

It will be recalled that Palamon and Arcite fought their first duel on Saturday 5 May and that Theseus instructed them to return a year later for the tournament. This instruction they obeyed to the letter, arriving at Athens on Sunday 5 May of the following year. Sunday night and early Monday morning were given over to the devotions of Palamon, Emelye and Arcite, and Monday 6 May was a feast day, spent in Venus' service, so that the tournament itself took place on Tuesday 7 May. On that day, before the sun had

---

<sup>172</sup> D. Brookes and A. Fowler, "The Meaning of Chaucer's Knight's Tale," *Medium Aevum*, 39 (1970), pp. 123-147 (p. 128).

<sup>173</sup> Edward C. Schweitzer, "Fate and Freedom in the *Knight's Tale*," *SAC*, 3 (1981), pp. 13-35 (p. 17).

fully risen - 'It nas nat of the day yet fully pryme' - Theseus and the spectators took their places 'in degrees about' and Arcite entered 'westward, thurgh the gates under Marte', that is, under the house of Mars situated above the western gate:...<sup>174</sup>

The problem with that is the dating of the events. In 1388, the year North has identified as that of the tournament, May 5 is a Tuesday. Because of the intervention of 2 leap-years between 1386 and 1394 (the years covering the period between the generally accepted year of the pilgrimage and that suggested by Eisner), memorizing which day of the week corresponds to which date in the month may be difficult, so I present below a calendar of the relevant days and dates.

TABLE 5

Date	1386	1387	1388	1389	1390	1391	1392	1393	1394
			LEAP				LEAP		
Apr 17	Tue	Wed	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Wed	Thu	Fri
Apr 18	Wed	Thu	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue	Thu	Fri	Sat
Apr 19	Thu	Fri	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Fri	Sat	Sun
Apr 20	Fri	Sat	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Sat	Sun	Mon
Apr 21	Sat	Sun	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sun	Mon	Tue
Apr 22	Sun	Mon	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Mon	Tue	Wed
Apr 23	Mon	Tue	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun	Tue	Wed	Thu
Apr 24	Tue	Wed	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Wed	Thu	Fri
Apr 25	Wed	Thu	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue	Thu	Fri	Sat
Apr 26	Thu	Fri	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Fri	Sat	Sun
Apr 27	Fri	Sat	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Sat	Sun	Mon
Apr 28	Sat	Sun	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sun	Mon	Tue
Apr 29	Sun	Mon	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Mon	Tue	Wed
Apr 30	Mon	Tue	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun	Tue	Wed	Thu
May 1	Tue	Wed	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Wed	Thu	Fri
May 2	Wed	Thu	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue	Thu	Fri	Sat
May 3	Thu	Fri	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Fri	Sat	Sun
May 4	Fri	Sat	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Sat	Sun	Mon
May 5	Sat	Sun	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sun	Mon	Tue
May 6	Sun	Mon	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Mon	Tue	Wed
May 7	Mon	Tue	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun	Tue	Wed	Thu
May 8	Tue	Wed	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Wed	Thu	Fri

<sup>174</sup> Brookes and Fowler (1970), p. 129.

It is obvious that Brookes and Fowler do not consider 1388 to be the relevant year, but they do not state in their article the year that they do have in mind. From the calendar above it is evident that they consider the year of Arcite's and Palamon's initial fight to have been 1386 and the year of the tournament to have been 1387. They might have been oblivious of North's proposal of 1388 as the relevant year.<sup>175</sup> Of course, the specific year is of importance only if one considers that the astrology-astronomy alluded to in the *Tale* is a depiction of stellar realities. It is possible that Brookes and Fowler had in mind only the symbolism of the relevant days of the week, and consider the year to be irrelevant except insofar as Arcite and Palamon do return one year later than their first dual, which was evidently on a Sunday. They do, however, state that the tournament begins just before sunrise. An argument against that is the lack of flood-lighting, though Theseus has spared no expense in his preparations and it is possible, one supposes, that the medieval equivalent would be thousands of flaring torches. Bear in mind the size of the theatre: a mile round about. An argument in favour of such a time, however, is that the day is Tuesday, Mars' day, 7 May if the tournament was engaged in 1387; on 5 May if in 1388. On a Tuesday just before sunrise, the planetary hour belongs to Jupiter. It is appropriate that Theseus, the Jupiter-ruled patron of the tournament, should take his seat at that time. As soon as the sun rises however, the hour belongs to the planetary ruler of the day, Mars. What better symbolism could there be than to have a major battle begin on a Mars day in a Mars hour, just as the sun appears over the horizon in the zodiacal sign Taurus, honouring May and Emelye, the

---

<sup>175</sup> J.D. North, "Kalenderes Enlumyned Ben They: Some Astronomical Themes in Chaucer," *RES*, 20 (1969), p. 154.

latter being the prize to which both Arcite and Palamon are aspiring. But there are further difficulties.

Returning to Schweitzer, who supports North's chosen date, the conclusion he draws is that "the date Chaucer imagined for the tournament in *The Knight's Tale* must have been Tuesday, May 5, 1388, when Saturn was in the seventh degree of Leo, since that date accords perfectly with the chronology of the tale and of Chaucer's career and is the only one in Chaucer's literary lifetime which does so."<sup>176</sup>

More confusion follows, this time created by Schweitzer. He first disagrees with the suggestion by Brookes and Fowler that the "the disposition of forces at the beginning of the tournament also reflects the zodiac and so symbolizes the underlying disposition of cosmic forces". But he then gives his reason for such rejection in these ambiguous words:

Chaucer specifies that 'it nas nat of the day yet fully pryme' when Theseus took his seat in the stadium and Arcite's and Palmon's forces came onto the field (2575-86). But although *prime* is ambiguous in Middle English, referring, as Skeat explained, 'sometimes to the *beginning*, sometimes to the *end* of the period from 6 to 9, or again sometimes to the *whole* of the period,' the phrase high prime, or, as here, 'fully Pryme' means unequivocally 9.00. The tale itself makes clear that the knights arm themselves 'whan that day gan sprynge' (2941-93), and only after a long series of events (2494-567) do they ride to the stadium. The correspondence between the stadium and the zodiac, then, cannot extend to the tournament itself, but it is nevertheless astrologically significant that the tournament begins at 9:00.

One must question Schweitzer's interpretation of the word "fully". It would have been easier to agree with him had Chaucer said "full" Pryme, not "fully Pryme." Chaucer doesn't use the words "high prime", and for Schweitzer to equate those two

---

<sup>176</sup> Schweitzer (1981), pp. 17-18.

terms is not legitimate. "Fully" may, apparently, be applied to any of those three periods to which the term 'prime' applies. And besides, if, as Chaucer states, "it nas nat of the day yet fully pryme" when Arcite's and Palamon's forces came onto the field, then contrary to Schweitzer's final assertion, it cannot yet have been 9 o'clock. So why are North and Schweitzer separately keen that it be so? The answer lies, I believe, in their attraction to the astrological set-up they perceive as having direct reference to Arcite's and Palamon's fight. Schweitzer writes:

Though we cannot know the configuration of the heavens at the time of their birth, it seems we can know it at the time of the tournament that decides their destiny. And indeed in London on Tuesday, May 5, 1388, the sign of Leo, with Saturn in its seventh degree, began to rise above the eastern horizon a little before 9.00 a.m., so the tournament itself begins with Saturn in the ascendant [*sic*], in the sign of Leo, ....<sup>177</sup>

Well, that is stretching a point. Certainly by 9:00 a.m. exactly, the first degree of Leo is in the ascendant. Any earlier than 8.53 a.m., and it would not have been. It is certainly true that Saturn is rising (in the ascendant) in Leo on that date at that time. But Schweitzer and North appear to want to justify that date on the grounds that the astrological factors prevailing were appropriate for the battle between Arcite's and Palamon's forces. "On that date" says Schweitzer, "Saturn is in favorable sextile aspect with Venus, in 15 Gemini, and in near opposition to Mars, in 17 Aquarius, a domicile of Saturn, so that the relationship between Chaucer's Saturn, Venus and Mars - and the outcome of the tournament, which follows from it - reflects the configuration of the planets within the zodiac on the day of the tournament."<sup>178</sup> Whilst the positions of

---

<sup>177</sup> Schweitzer (1981), pp. 18-19.

<sup>178</sup> Schweitzer (1981), p. 18.

the planets are stated accurately, the aspects alluded to and the inferences drawn from them, as well as stronger and more important aspects and inferences that are not mentioned, makes a nonsense of such a claim. That Venus and Saturn are in a sextile (favourable) relationship is correct, but they are at the extremity of that aspect's effective orb (leeway of effectiveness). Mars and Saturn are not actually in the opposition aspect Schweitzer and North specify, but have just moved beyond it. To evaluate an aspect's effectiveness, one takes half the sum of the two planets' respective orbs of effectiveness and compares that with the distance the two planets lie apart. The orb for Mars was 8 degrees and that for Saturn 9 degrees in Chaucer's time. Half of seventeen degrees is eight and a half degrees. The two planets lie 170 degrees apart. An opposition aspect is 180 degrees. As the two planets are 10 degrees away from that distance of exact (partile) opposition, they are also outside the orb allowable for that aspect, namely eight and a half degrees.

A critic might interpret this as a mere quibble. So let us consider another factor. Venus, as stated by Schweitzer, is in the 15th degree of Gemini and Mars is in the 17th degree of Aquarius. Both planets have orbs of 8 degrees, half the sum of which is, of course, 8 degrees. They are 118 degrees apart, only 2 degrees from an exact trine aspect of 120 degrees, so well within that orb of 8 degrees. To have Venus in close trine aspect to Mars is a much stronger aspect and much more favourable in its implications for Mars, than to have Venus in platic (inexact) aspect and separating, which is the relationship it holds to Saturn. And whilst Venus is *separating from* the favourable relationship to Saturn mentioned by Schweitzer, it is actually *applying to* (i.e. moving towards) and strengthening the relationship with Mars. This is hardly what one would expect if the map were that of the tournament, which, although won by

Arcite, is finally the context of his demise as a consequence of Saturn's intervention on behalf of Venus!

But let us concede, for a moment, that such a chart might be the tournament chart. Schweitzer proceeds to interpret it thus:

"Furthermore, according to the tradition which discovers a correspondence between every part of the body and a sign of the zodiac, a tradition to which Chaucer refers in his *Treatise on the Astrolabe* (1.21.70-77, p. 549), Leo governs the heart. And it is about the heart that Arcite is injured by his fall: he is carried "with herte soor" (2695) to Theseus' palace, where, despite the best efforts of his physicians, the breast swells and "the soore/Encreeseth at this herte moore and moore" (2743-44).

Saturn in Leo would undoubtedly have had such implications for any individual if it had been rising in an individual's horoscope. But this map of the tournament's commencement, if it were such, would not be applicable to an individual. If it could be made to apply to Arcite, then it could be made to apply equally to Palamon. The exception would have been in the case that Arcite had been a challenger to a duel and Palamon the acceptor of the challenge. In that case, the ascendant and any planet rising, would have characterized Arcite, and the descendant and any planet setting would have described Palamon. Saturn rising in Leo would then most certainly have described the challenger as someone with a defective heart. But the *Knight's Tale* gives no indication that Arcite is to be regarded as such, and even if that had been the case, the planet setting in the descendant at prime on that date is Mars. Arcite is martial (Aries) and Palamon venerean (Libra), so such a placement of Mars is clearly inappropriate for Palamon as respondent. In terms of planetary friendships and enmities, Saturn and Venus are friends; Saturn and Mars are enemies. That is why Saturn is obliged to assist Venus in the grand scheme of things. So he sends the fury to

upset Arcite's horse and Arcite falls and is wounded. Saturn is renowned for falls and bruising. Unfortunately, Arcite lands on his head. He eventually dies, is given a splendid funeral and proves that all men are cremated equal.

The astronomical map for 9:00 a.m. on 5 May 1388, aside from the rising of Saturn in Leo, would appear at first to be quite unimpressive in its symbolism.

Brookes and Fowler, Schweitzer and North have, however, provided much food for thought, and regardless of my criticism of their grounds for selecting this particular time and date, there are more pressing reasons than theirs for accepting it. It turns out that Chaucer has been much more ingenious than they have given him credit for. Tuesday is doubtless significant. It is Mars' day. Before sunrise, "whan that day gan sprynge" (*KnT*. l. 2491), that is, when the sun is 18 degrees below the horizon, defined as the day's spring, everyone is rising early in order to obtain a good seat at the tournament. It is in fact only 3:36 a.m. In order to appreciate Chaucer's ingenuity it is unavoidable that one should observe what is happening, graphically.



Diagram 10

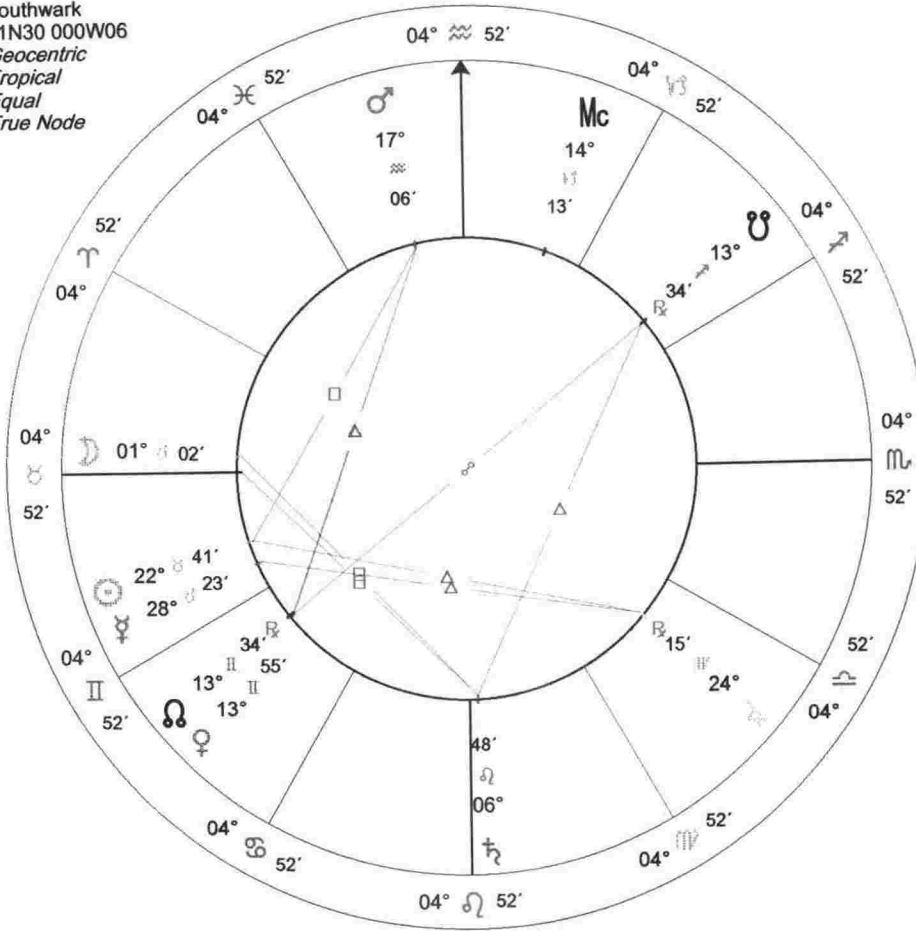
**Dayspring 5 May 1388****Natal Chart**

5 May 1388

03:36 LMT +0:00:24

Southwark

51N30 000W06

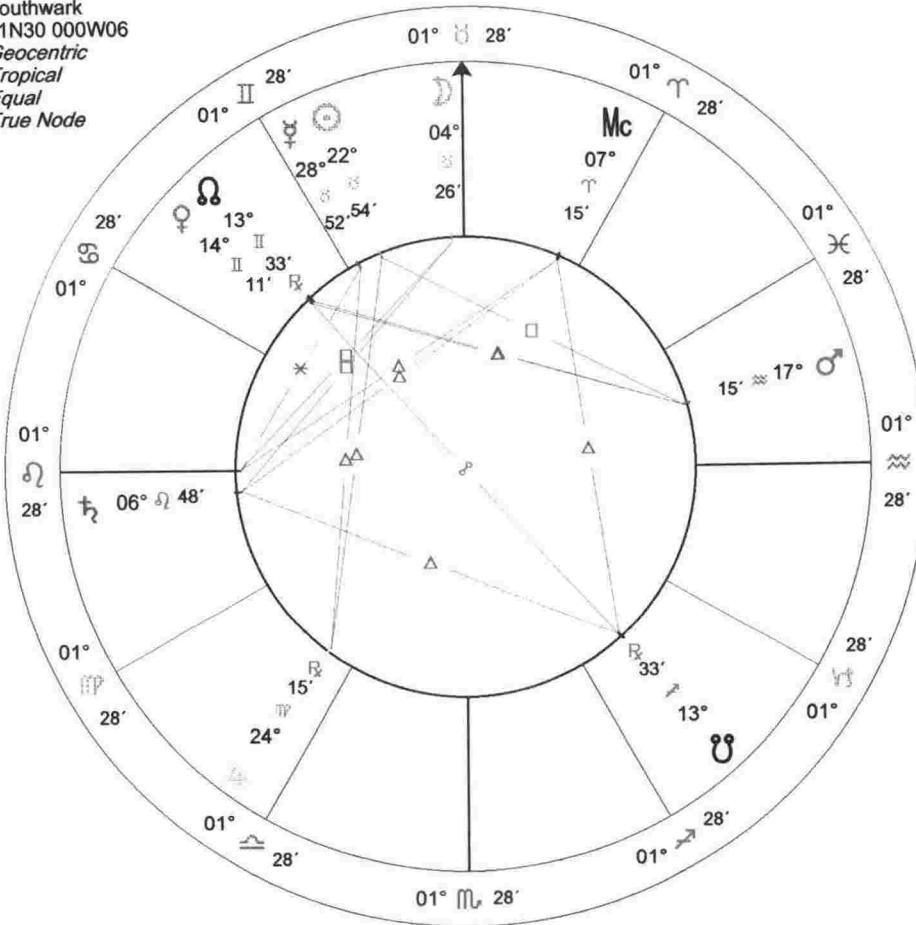
*Geocentric**Tropical**Equal**True Node*

As the diagram (10) above shows, at that time, the moon is in the second degree of Taurus (shown as 1 degree 2 minutes). The ascending degree lies only 8 minutes of a degree from 5 degrees of Taurus. The moon will move slowly forward through Taurus as the early morning passes, gradually coming to the ascending degree. At the same time, the Earth's diurnal motion will carry it higher and higher into the heavens, so that there are two motions to bear in mind: the moon's forward or anti-clockwise movement through Taurus, from 1, through 2, through 3 degrees etc., coming towards that ascendant degree at 4 degrees; and its motion created by the

Earth's spin on its axis, which takes the moon up through houses 12, 11 into 10, up towards the zenith of the horoscope (not the *astronomical* zenith, but the nonagesimal) as the diagram below illustrates.

**Beginning of tournament**  
**Natal Chart**  
 5 May 1388  
 09:00 LMT +0:00:24  
 Southwark  
 51N30 00W06  
*Geocentric*  
*Tropical*  
*Equal*  
*True Node*

Diagram 11



And this is where Chaucer has been most ingenious in choosing 9.00 a.m. It is unlikely to have been because of the planetary aspects formed or not between Mars, Saturn and Venus (unless he was prepared to abandon the astrological rules in the interest of poetic licence), but rather because the moon will have come into that

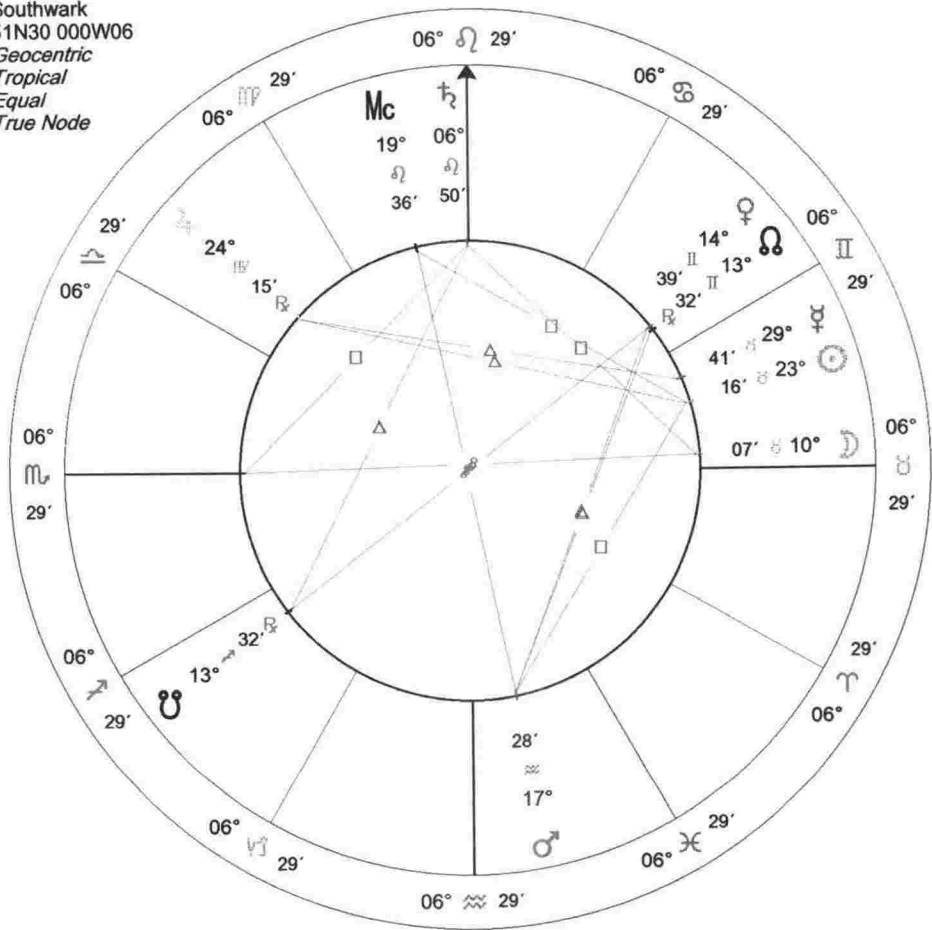
ascending degree at 4 Taurus and so be right on the ascendant of the day-spring chart; and furthermore the nonagesimal will, at 9:00 a.m., have entered 1 degree of Taurus, the degree of the moon's position at the day-spring time, just as the tournament begins. The moon will be riding high in the sky in the 5th degree of Taurus, coming to the nonagesimal, which at 9:00 a.m. holds the very degree earlier held by the moon as day sprung and the people rose from their beds. These are significant times for starting events: the moon's conjunction with the ascendant and the nonagesimal's conjunction with the moon's day-spring position.

If one now chooses to take either or both of two approaches to the astronomical picture, surprising results are obtained. It has been shown that at 9:00 a.m. the moon's dayspring position comes to the nonagesimal and very shortly afterwards in fact, the moon in its new position reaches that position. Just as one of the medieval symbols for Mars (a cross imposed over a circle) turned upside-down becomes the symbol for Venus (a circle imposed over a cross), so the number 9 turned upside-down becomes the number 6. So one might ask, what happens at 6:00 p.m. on the date of the tournament? It might come as no surprise to find that the planet Saturn is now at the zenith line, in 6 degrees of Leo. And the ascendant lies in 6 degrees 21 minutes of Scorpio, in severe affliction from Saturn, by exact quadrature. By now both the dying moon and the sun are lowering in the western sky. Is this not what Chaucer writes about? "Som tyme an ende ther is of every dede./For er the sonne unto the reste wente" (*KnT*. ll. 2636-2637). Palamon is captured and it appears that Arcite has won Emelye. But Saturn's power for evil (it is in the sign of its detriment, Leo) has now reached its climax, the zenith line being the highest line over the location of the

tournament (assuming that Chaucer is employing the coordinates of London, of course).

**The 6pm chart**  
**Natal Chart**  
5 May 1388  
18:00 LMT +0:00:24  
Southwark  
51N30 000W06  
*Geocentric*  
*Tropical*  
*Equal*  
*True Node*

Diagram 12



The significance of this map will elude us if we forget that the position of 6 degrees of any sign after February's in 1388, a leap-year, is the representation of 5 degrees in any year that isn't a leap-year, such as 1170 or 1387.

Once one accepts that the rising of 5/6 degrees of Taurus is of significance, being the entrance to Theseus' theatre of war (with 5/6 Scorpio being the exit), then

one is also accepting that the rising of the constellation Aries and the setting of the constellation Libra are important; for they are the stellar background to such positions. The sun is rising against the constellation Aries at the start of the pilgrimage and as it sets, the constellation Libra rises at the end of the pilgrimage. The Aries-Libra binary opposition is then, established as an axis of relevance to the *Canterbury Tales* and to the *Knight's Tale* in particular. As the first *Tale*, the Knight's is equivalent to the head, and that is appropriate to the symbolism of Aries: being, existence, coming into conscious awareness of the self. That is to be the recurrent theme of all the *Tales*: the awakening to the self, through the vices and virtues revealed by the warring impulses of that which is Venus and that which is Mars, within us all. At the same time, the moon, ruler of Cancer, and of Fortune with its fluctuating and mutable nature, vies with Necessity, ruled by Saturn the lord of Capricorn, that sign completing the cardinal axis upon which both the *Knight's Tale* and the *Canterbury Tales* are framed.

## Towards the End

There is, as any Chaucer reader will doubtless recall, a long-standing problem with the *Parson's Prologue*. It lies in the opening twelve lines, which read:

By that the Maunciple hadde his tale al ended,  
 The sonne fro the south lyne was descended  
 So lowe that he nas nat, to my sighte,  
 Degrees nyne and twenty as in highte.  
 Foure of the klokke it was tho, as I gesse,  
 For ellevene foot, or litel moore or lesse,  
 My shadwe was at thilke tyme, as there  
 Of swiche feet as my lengthe parted were  
 In sixe feet equal of proporcioun.  
 Therwith the moones exaltacioun -  
 I meene Libra - alwey gan ascende  
 As we were entryng at a thropes end

(*ParsPro.* ll. 1-12).

To me, this is a fairly straight-forward description of the scene, but not so, apparently, to the contributor to the *Riverside* edition, or to Sigmund Eisner. The *Riverside* note reads, in part:

For the elaborate specification of time Chaucer again, as in *IntrMLT* II.I-14 (see n.), draws on the *Kalendarium* of Nicholas of Lynne, according to which the sun is descended from the meridian (south lyne) not quite  $29^{\circ}$  and a man's shadow is eleven times one-sixth the height of his body (cf. X. 6-9) at four P.M. on 16 or 17 April. And at four P.M. on 15 through 17 April, to an observer in London, the zodiacal sign Libra (the Scale) was beginning to rise (ascende) above the horizon (North, RES 20, 1969, 424-26). This contradicts the date given in *IntrMLT* II. 5-6, 18 April, as well as the traditional assumption that the pilgrimage began on 17 April and ended with The Parson's Tale on 20 April. Eisner (E&S 29, 1976, 20-21) suggests Chaucer was not bothered by the temporal contradiction and chose to set the Parson's Prologue and Tale on 17 April because in 1394, 17 April was Good Friday.<sup>179</sup>

But this is not what Chaucer writes. He does not say that the sun had descended from the meridian line not quite  $29^{\circ}$ . He says that the sun is not quite  $29^{\circ}$  above the horizon: "... he nas nat...degrees nyne and twenty as in highte." The south line is the meridian culminating. At 4:00 p.m. the sun is well down from the meridian, nearly  $60$  degrees in fact, whether one is at London or at Canterbury (differing by only 1 degree, approximately). So there is no question that Chaucer was *not* referring to the sun's distance from the south line. But when it comes to the sun's height above the horizon, we are confronted with a choice. Was Chaucer referring to the height above the horizon in zodiacal longitude? Or was he talking about the sun's altitude? A glance at the diagram above shows the sun sinking towards the western horizon. If we count the distance from 3 degrees Aries, the western horizon, to 6 degrees Taurus, the sun's

---

<sup>179</sup> Benson (1987), Explanatory Note to *The Parson's Prologue*, note 1, p. 955.

zodiacal longitude, the result is 33 degrees distance. That clearly is *not* what Chaucer was talking about. Scholars, including North and Eisner, appear to have been confused by this reference to the sun's position. Eisner writes:

J. D. North in 1969 was the first note [sic] that because Chaucer says in the *Prologue* to the *Parson's Tale* that the time is 4:00 p.m. and that the sun is less than 29 degrees high (I2-9), the date, according to the *Kalendarium*, has to be 17 April or earlier. In 1976 (and again in 1980) I echoed his assessment. Since the date 18 April is mentioned early in the *Pilgrimage*, it seems incongruous that a time no later than 17 April should be offered late on the journey. There is no real answer. What North said is right. All I can add here is that on 18 April, my choice for the Canterbury Day, the sun would not sink to below 29° until a few minutes after 4:00. If 18 April is the Canterbury Day, we must assume that Chaucer's time of 4:00 p.m. is an approximation.

And certainly that is what the *Kalendarium* shows.<sup>180</sup> Whilst commentators are generally in agreement that Chaucer made a mistake when he claims that at 4:00 p.m. the sun is less than 29 degrees above the horizon if the date is April 18th, they have drawn that conclusion on the basis of two suppositions, either or both of which may not be valid. The first supposition is that Chaucer was using the *Kalendarium*, which, it must be conceded, does show that the sun's altitude at 4:00 p.m. exceeds 29° after April 17th.<sup>181</sup> The second supposition is that Chaucer was using the tables for the latitude of Oxford, which the *Kalendarium* shows as 51° N 50' (true latitude 51° N 46'). The *Prologue*, however, directs our attention away from tables altogether and refers to the sun's altitude according to "sight", which implies not only that a visual reference is being used, such as that obtained by the use of an astrolabe; but also that

---

<sup>180</sup> Eisner (1980), p. 86.

<sup>181</sup> Eisner (1980), p. 86.

the sun is being viewed from the location of the pilgrimage, which, being about to terminate, must be near Canterbury. We are possibly unable to ascertain what Chaucer considered the latitude of Canterbury to be. Lynn's latitude for Oxford is 4' north of true, that approximation having been provided by Bishop William Rede (or Reed) of the Merton College School of Astronomy, who died in 1385.<sup>182</sup> If, however, one were to maintain the 4' discrepancy from true and apply that to the true latitude of Canterbury, which is 51° N 16', then it would be fair to conclude that Chaucer would have used 51° N 20' as Canterbury's latitude.

Most importantly, it is generally known that there was no standardized clock time such as G.M.T. (Greenwich Mean Time) or U.T. (Universal Time) devised within Chaucer's era or for a few hundred years afterwards. Each community's clock-time would have been L.M.T. (Local Mean Time), determined by the sun's culmination at the longitude of the local meridian daily, defining local noon. Linne Mooney writes: "in Chaucer's day, time of day varied with the times of sunrise, meridian, and sunset, which changed with longitude and latitude: a certain hour might occur in Norwich as much as half an hour before it struck in Bristol."<sup>183</sup> If one calculates the sun's altitude at 4:0 p.m. Local Mean Time, for Canterbury, using the hypothetical latitude 51° N 20' and its modern longitude of 1° E 05'<sup>184</sup> then the sun's altitude is found to have been

---

<sup>182</sup> Eisner (1980), p. 4.

<sup>183</sup> Mooney (1993), p. 97.

<sup>184</sup> Irrespective of the base-meridian for the measurement of longitude in Chaucer's time - possibly the Canary Islands - relativities are maintained and so using the modern longitude does not invalidate the argument.



28° 22' on the 17th April, and 28° 43' on the 18 April, 1387.<sup>185</sup> It is unlikely however, that Chaucer's observation would have noted such precise minutes of altitude, but if we use the discrepancy from true altitude as displayed by the *Kalendarium*, which is 9' less than true, then a deduction of 9' from the true altitude on either the 17th or 18th April 1387 gives a solar altitude of less than 29° above the horizon. Chaucer did not, therefore, necessarily make a mistake.

That is not evidence that 1387 is the relevant year for the pilgrimage, however, because the sun will hold that approximate altitude on 18 April at 4:00 p.m., Local Mean Time, in any year other than a leap-year, at that latitude. What is, in my opinion, very strong confirmatory evidence that 1387 is the year relevant to the pilgrimage is the astronomical picture formed at 4:00 p.m.

First, let us consider the relevant textual material. The Parson is invited to tell the final tale, because sunset is fast approaching. The words in which the invitation is phrased however, are quite telling. He is invited to

Unbokele and shewe us what is in thy male;  
For trewely, me thynketh by thy cheere  
Thou sholdest knytte up wel a greet mateere.  
Telle us a fable anon, for cokkes bones!  
(*ParsT.* ll.25-29).

To which the Parson replies: "I wol yow telle a myrie tale in prose/To knytte up al this feeste and make an ende" (*ParsT.* ll.46-47).

Diagram 13, below, is the map that I believe affirms 1387 as the year of the pilgrimage, for two reasons. Constructed for the time of the *Parson's Prologue*, the moon is moving to its dying position just prior to the occurrence of the new moon. It is

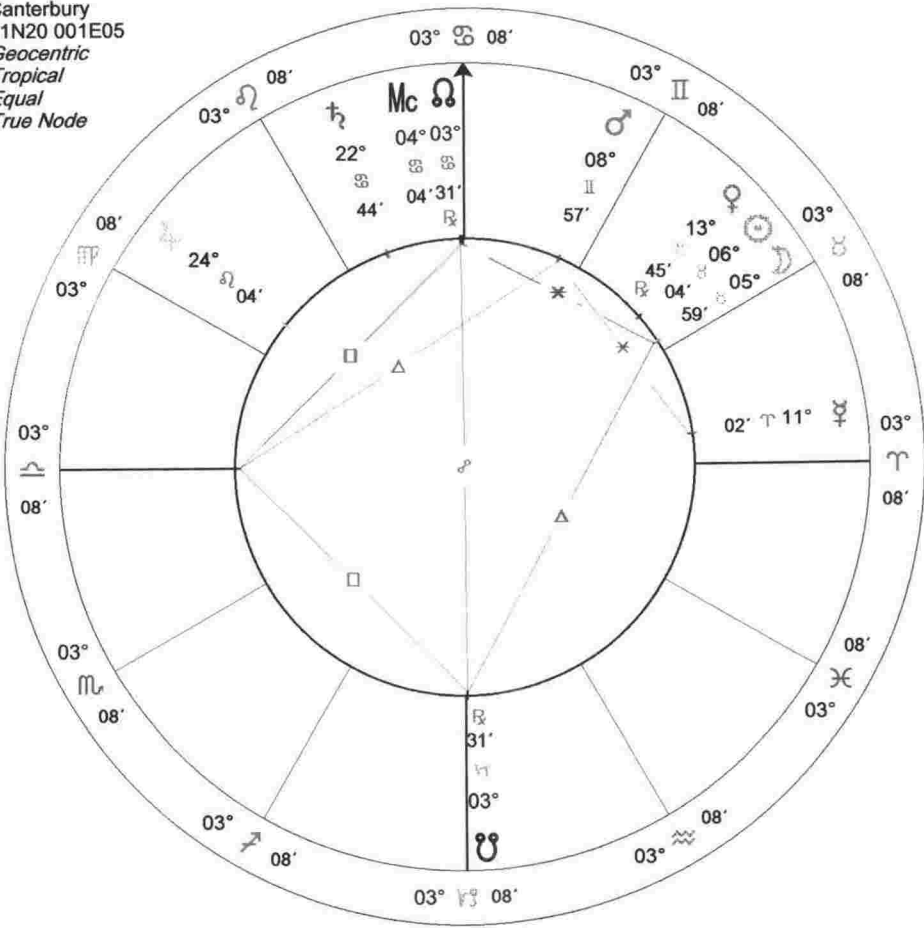
---

<sup>185</sup> Even were one not to make such precise adjustments to accommodate the slight deviation from the true latitude for Canterbury, the result would not be critically different from this.

highly symbolic of a knitting up of a great matter, in particular as Taurus is the sign of wool, knitting, fabric-making. (Taurus is sign next forward from Aries, the ram, signifying the ram's possessions: wool.) Further, the sun and the moon form that new moon in 6 degrees of Taurus, the sun having been at 5 degrees all day, the moon now at 5 degrees at 4:00 p.m., the very ascendant of Becket's assassination horoscope. They are now to form the new moon just one degree beyond that significant position, symbolic of a new cycle, a new way forward.

**The Parson's Prologue**  
Natal Chart  
18 Apr 1387  
16:00 LMT -0:04:20  
Canterbury  
51N20 001E05  
Geocentric  
Tropical  
Equal  
True Node

Diagram 13



## CHART ANGLES:-

Ascendant

Midheaven

03°Li08'15''

04°Cn04'27''

## CHART POINTS

Point	Longitude	Travel	Latitude	Rt.Asc.	Decl.	Azi(0°N)	Alti.
Mon	05°Ta59'19''	+14°49'	-04°17'	035°06'	+09°31'	251°10'	+26°19'
Sun	06°Ta04'04''	+00°58'	-00°00'	033°44'	+13°35'	255°10'	+28°43'
Mer	11°Ar02	+01°22'	-02°54'	011°16'	+01°43'	265°44'	+05°36'
Ven	13°Ta45 R	-00°35'	+05°13'	039°36'	+21°00'	255°36'	+38°00'
Mar	08°Ge57	+00°40'	+00°53'	067°05'	+22°44'	226°48'	+54°27'
Jup	24°Le04	+00°01'	+01°15'	146°49'	+14°43'	111°32'	+34°34'
Sat	22°Cn44	+00°04'	+00°28'	114°39'	+22°03'	144°15'	+56°47'
Asc	03°Li08	+00°00'	+00°00'	182°53'	-01°15'	092°00'	+00°00'
MC	04°Cn04	+00°00'	+00°00'	094°27'	+23°27'	180°00'	+62°07'

This computer-produced report on the chart (13) above<sup>186</sup> shows clearly that the sun's altitude at 4:00 p.m., local mean time on 18 April, 1387, was 28° 43'.

Another problem, which examination may solve in part, is the rather strange wording regarding what scholars regard as another Chaucer error in the *Parson's Prologue*, the words: "Therwith the moones exaltacioun -/ I meene Libra - alwey gan ascende/As we were entryng at a thropes ende" (*ParsT.* ll.10-12). Critics seem keen to point out that Taurus is the moon's exaltation, not Libra. In that assertion, they are correct. But again, Chaucer isn't really suggesting that Libra is the moon's exaltation, although it must be conceded that it could sound that way if one chose to read it that way. But that ignores the main subject of the paragraph, which appears much higher up: "The sonne fro the south lyne was descended" (*ParsT.* l. 2). Then, at line 10, the word "Therwith the moones exaltacioun -". If one looks at the map above, one finds the sun beginning to sink in the west in Taurus (everyone would accept that) and

<sup>186</sup> The computer-calculated chart is by an astrological program called *Solar Fire*, Version 3.3,

produced by Esoteric Technologies Pty. Ltd. PO Box 578, Magill SA 5072 Australia. All the

astrological charts in this thesis are produced by this program; all astronomical positions checked with

Red Shift 2: see earlier citation.

therewith the moon's exaltation, that is, the moon in Taurus, the sign of its exaltation. As shown much earlier in this thesis, the moon is exalted in the whole sign Taurus but particularly in the 3rd degree of that sign. This leaves open a number of possible interpretations, each or all of which would be appropriate and would obviate the need to excuse Chaucer on grounds of indifference, carelessness or simple error. The first interpretation is that the sun was setting and therewith the moon's exaltation (i.e. the *sign* Taurus). That interpretation would apply whether or not the moon was also in Taurus at that time, but it treats the setting sun as a distinct entity apart from the sign in which it is placed. It would, admittedly, be more commonplace, to talk of the sun setting 'in' the moon's exaltation, rather than 'therewith'. The second possible interpretation is that the sun was setting and therewith the moon's exaltation degree (i.e. the moon actually being in 3 degrees Taurus: remember that using the *Kalendarium* or the *Alphonsine Tables* didn't guarantee lunar degree accuracy). The moon is, as we can see, about to occupy the same degree as the sun, 6 degrees Taurus. The third possible interpretation is that Chaucer is simply alluding to the sun setting and therewith the moon's exaltation, which it is in fact: the moon is setting with the sun in the sign of the moon's exaltation. I see no problem there. The first possible interpretation would apply to any year; the second two would apply only to the year 1387, taking into account the small range of years available.

The next two lines in the *Parson's Prologue* are slightly problematic. "I meene Libra -alwey gan ascende/As we were entryng at a thropes ende". I cannot agree with scholars who suggest that Chaucer is implying, erroneously, that he means that Libra is the moon's exaltation. I believe that this is a misinterpretation of the word "Therwith". Certainly if one interprets "Therwith" to refer to the rising of Libra (which sign is in

fact rising), there is an option of interpreting Chaucer to be suggesting that Libra is the moon's exaltation. But there is another option, one suggested by North, which is that Chaucer had written "In mene", not "I mene". He explains that when the astrolabe is set up with Cancer on the midheaven and Capricorn on the lower midheaven, the sign rising in the middle, that is "in mene", is Libra, as Chaucer describes it.<sup>187</sup> Certainly Libra begins to ascend. Libra was the sign believed by medieval astrologer Pierre d'Ailly as having been in the ascendant at Christ's birth.<sup>188</sup> But my most firm opinion is that Chaucer creates here deliberate ambiguity in order to compel our attention to what was a most appropriate conjunction of the sun and moon in Taurus, closing down or knitting up, the story-telling contest. And also to the 3rd degree of Libra. The reader might recall that in the Becket Feast Day horoscope, Jupiter, symbol of parsons and priests, occupied 3 degrees of Libra. Here, in the *Parson's Prologue*, 3 degrees of Libra have risen. What could be more apt? It is not one of the factors relevant to the year 1387 however; for the same ascending degree would be produced at 4.00 p.m. on 18 April in any year other than a leap-year.

And here too, I suggest, Chaucer may be providing us with one of those intriguing clues to what he is doing, with that very strange line in the *Parson's Prologue*: "As we were entryng at a thrope's end" (*ParsT.* l. 12). Whilst a village has two ends, one normally describes the end at which one enters as its 'entrance' or 'beginning', not its end, which is usually defined as its exit. It happens that one of Chaucer's contemporaries was an astrologer named Richard Thorp. And 'thorp' is an alternative word for 'thrope', according to the *Shorter Oxford Dictionary*. In 1387

---

<sup>187</sup> North (1988), p. 127.

<sup>188</sup> North (1988), p. 130.

Richard Thorp produced a calendar,<sup>189</sup> which, despite a prevalent habit among calendar-makers of copying others' work, was "certainly not identical with" the work of John Somer or Nicholas of Lynn.<sup>190</sup> Thus were Nicholas's calendar to be in error, it doesn't follow that Richard's would be; and it is just as likely for Chaucer to have referred to the latter as to the former. Thorp's calendar was a beautiful production that included the kind of material for which he had become renowned, namely illustrated tables of sun-moon conjunctions and oppositions, that is, new and full moons, and lunar and solar eclipses. Chaucer may well be telling us that they were approaching Canterbury as the new moon was being formed, as indicated *in the end of Thorp's calendar*. I am drawn more assuredly to this hypothesis by a fortuitously appropriate footnote by North, where he writes, in reference to Thorp's calendar: "As with all such material, it is not easy to say where the work was deemed to end. The format is large (A4!), and some of the illustration elaborate (especially the delicate zodiac-man...)". Chaucer, however, in all probability having the work to hand possibly in, or certainly close to, the very year of its publication, 1387, would be far likelier to have located its end, as well as the end of the zodiac man, which is, of course, Pisces, the sign associated with the *Parson's Tale*. More importantly, this work contained "lengthy and relatively accurate nineteen-year tables of new and full moons, that is, of conjunctions and oppositions of the Sun and Moon" and "included the more precise form (with times to hours and minutes, rather than to hours only)".<sup>191</sup>

---

<sup>189</sup> MS Ashmole 210, fos.2v-9v (?), inc.: 'Universis veras Solis et Lune coniunctionis temporaque...'.  
Cited in North (1988), footnote 14, p. 94.

<sup>190</sup> North (1988), p. 94.

<sup>191</sup> North (1988), p. 95.

With reference to all of these astronomical details provided above, I feel compelled to remark that those who are familiar with astronomical and astrological maps will know how it is impossible to 'contrive' these arrangements; they are simply astronomical realities, verifiable facts. They move beyond the expression of opinion regarding a literary matter, except insofar as the symbolism is perceived as appropriate or not. The sign of Taurus is, after all, the sign of meals and restaurants, and the prize of a free meal to the winner would be very pertinent to the new moon in the 7th house of contests and evaluations, in Taurus, which lies on the 8th house cusp, the house of other people's resources. And it surely requires little imaginative flexibility to perceive the dying moon in Taurus as appropriate for the ending of an enterprise, especially when, in a few moments' time, the moon will move into exact conjunction with the sun, setting westward, a new moon in that sign signifying, with the *Parson's Tale*, a new sacrament and hence renewed spiritual life for the pilgrims as they approach Canterbury.

So what does all this mean for the structure of the *Canterbury Tales*? I think Chaucer is pointing us to the relevance of the *Knight's Tale* and to the *General Prologue* and the schema upon which he is to fabricate the work. At the moment Saturn culminates, 6 degrees of Taurus sets (because the ascendant is 6 degrees of Scorpio). One might recall that, as pointed out earlier, on April 18, 1387, the date accepted by most scholars as the date of the pilgrimage to Canterbury, the sun (in the constellation Aries) rose in 6 degrees of the zodiacal sign Taurus. The probability of the sun being at 6 Taurus on 18 April 1387 in the *General Prologue*, and 6 degrees of Taurus setting at the end of the tournament in the *Knight's Tale*, and the sun being at 6

---

Taurus at the time described in the *Parson's Prologue*, all related to 5 Taurus, the ascendant of the Becket chart, is too remote for me to accept as a set of meaningless coincidences.



## Chapter Six

### The Canterbury Tales

#### The first Circuit

#### The Knight's Tale

γ

Chaucer's final selection of a tale with which to initiate his Canterbury pilgrims' story-telling contest<sup>192</sup> is the *Knight's Tale*. As mentioned earlier in this thesis, Aries is associated in the astrological *melothesia* with the head. In Chaucer's time it was believed that the head is the only part of the body to contain all five senses. It was a microcosm of the whole body. And so it is logical, in terms of astro-logic anyway, to find in the *Knight's Tale* a blueprint of the *Canterbury Tales* as a whole. If the *Knight's Tale* can be shown to comprise either a study of a binary opposition, or of an astrological cross, or of some structure inherent in the zodiac, then it is highly probable that the other *Tales* will be similarly structured: that the twenty-four tales are a 'set' mirroring an internal zodiacal 'set'.

The *Tale's* vivid tapestry displays noble knights and royal ladies, chivalrous and courtly romance, pagan and powerful gods and goddesses, hunting, a grand tournament and a tragic but noble death, the climax of its theme being plans for a royal marriage. Boethian influences abound: through the weft and warp that weave into the fabric of mortal lives the threads of Fortune, Chance and Providence, as well as the

---

<sup>192</sup> See Helen Cooper's comment about Chaucer's intentions in Cooper (1983), pp. 120-121.

astrological influences of planets and zodiacal signs, the *Tale* reveals a grand metaphysical conception appropriate to the high style of language in which it is told. If it came to choosing between the tale of Custance, given to the Man of Law, or the tale of Emelye and her suitors Arcite and Palamon, recounted by the 'parfit, gentil knight', there was probably little contest as to which should open Chaucer's greatest work.

'Whilom' is the word the knight chooses with which to begin his *Tale*. This medieval equivalent of 'Once upon a time' assists our suspension of disbelief by locating the story in the realm of historical truth or fairy-tale, that questionable but frequently unquestioned complex of few facts and much legend. Readers and listeners are accordingly permitted to relax their guard, hold scepticism at bay and let wonder and credulity rule. Philosophical conjecture and speculative assertions regarding the roles of Fortune, 'cas' and Providence, whether or not those are the instruments of Fate, of the gods or of planets (or vice versa), are thus given a wider arena for their dramatic instrumentation. It is evident from this *Tale*, as well as others, that Chaucer is interested in philosophical questions related to these matters; probably less so in any truth claims regarding their answers.

The *Knight's Tale* has a simple plot. Two knights, Arcite and Palamon, cousins of royal Theban lineage, are captured after losing a battle won by Theseus, a noble and courageous fighter but compassionate man, who, somewhat paradoxically, imprisons them, ostensibly for life. The two knights fall in love with Emelye, the sister-in-law of Theseus, and become jealous of each other's desire for her. Arcite is freed from prison as a consequence of a friend's visit to Theseus. Palamon later escapes. Arcite, emaciated and unrecognizable, returns and infiltrates Theseus' household, where he renders Theseus excellent service in order to acquire his confidence, and so gain closer

access to Emelye. Palamon and Arcite meet fortuitously in a nearby wood and begin a fight to the death, witnessed by Theseus who is out hunting. He interrupts them and they confess their identities and their love for Emelye. He forgives them their past offences and tells them that they should return in a year's time to fight in a tournament, the victor to receive Emelye's hand in marriage. In the interim Theseus builds a magnificent theatre of battle just outside Athens.

On the eve of the tournament Arcite and Palamon pray to their respective gods Mars and Venus, whilst Emelye prays to Diana, each at the appropriate planetary hour. During the battle between Arcite's and Palamon's forces, Palamon is 'captured' and rendered *hors de combat*, fulfilling Mars' promise to Arcite that he will be victorious. It seems that Arcite is to win his lady. But the god Saturn has promised the goddess Venus that her human hero, Palamon, will be Emelye's. Saturn arranges for Pluto to send a 'furie' to upset Arcite's horse and Arcite is mortally wounded after falling from the horse and striking his head. He is given a decent military funeral, after which Theseus gives his blessing to the betrothal of Palamon and Emelye.

It would be implausible to argue, however tempting, that Chaucer concerned himself with the phenomenological problem of Being and Non-Being through astrological perspectives (though possibly the Platonic concern with Being and Becoming might have concerned him) yet he might have come very close to doing so. It is more likely that he arrived, via the astrological route, at questions concerning the Self and the Other. That is more clearly discernible in the binary opposition of Aries and Libra; for Aries represents '*invenire*': the coming into existence of one's own being; invention, the beginning, the start, the entrance, the springing forth of the primal

undifferentiated energy of the new spring; the rising of the sun at the vernal equinox (the rising of the Son, at Easter); new life, birth, self-consciousness.

Across from Aries lies Libra, the sign associated with partnership and marriage, ruled by Venus, the symbol of love and of that which presents itself to consciousness as that which is *not* the self. Few could be oblivious of this dichotomy: one's own existence and desire impelling one towards unity with another. If Chaucer missed the point that one's own identity is affirmed only by the existence of another's, it seems that the point which did not escape him is that the other exists both independently of the self and also as a creation of the self: that who is seen out there - on the horizon of one's perception or experience - exists as much within oneself and of oneself as it exists apart from oneself, independently. And that apparent dichotomy, expressed as nature's attempt to unify opposites and manifesting itself through the continuum of self-concern/other-concern, is what Aries and Libra, two polar opposites, represent. But this 'conflict' is intersected by the binary opposition of Cancer-Capricorn, bisecting the Aries-Libra axis in constructing the cardinal cross of the zodiac. The Cancer-Capricorn axis of social custom, heritage, family (Cancer), and of order established by law, the government, the regulating forces of necessity, the gods and duration of time (Capricorn), together with individual self-interested impulsive desire (Aries) and reasoned altruism (Libra), comprise the crux of most of the issues confronting us from day to day. And it is that crux, our assumption that some kind of expedient compromise between selfishness and altruism is sufficient to justify any action we care to take, confronted by the intervention of another order, a vertical or hierarchical one in which the 'press' of heritage and the expectations of those who have power over us, have to be accommodated, sometimes at some considerable

personal sacrifice, which is the subject matter of the *Knight's Tale*: the cardinal cross of Aries-Libra intersected by Cancer-Capricorn. It poses the tetradic question: what possible just solution is there to the problem posed by the conflict between self-interest and other-concern if by following either our instinctual nature or higher reason, we nonetheless compromise our social position with its attendant legal obligations or moral imperatives, especially if, in any case, chance may intervene haphazardly? The answer, suggests Chaucer, is to make a virtue of necessity: whatever happens, life goes on, so make the best of it.

Such a tetradic structure is consistent with the medieval philosophical notion of *concordia discors*. McAlindon stresses that the pre-modern cosmology comprised "two distinct principles: *hierarchy* (which includes analogy or correspondence) and *polarity*."<sup>193</sup> He further suggests that "the notion of the universe as a tense system of interacting, *interdependent opposites* suggests that every pattern of harmonious order is impermanent, no more perhaps than a truce in a war that has no end."<sup>194</sup>

When Arcite and Palamon are first introduced to us in the story, Chaucer employs *commutatio*, a repetition of words or phrases in reverse order: "Of which two Arcite highte that oon/And that oother knyght highte Palamon" (*KnT*. ll. 1013-1014). The signs Aries and Libra are opposite yet complementary principles, symbolising the commutative principle of the known being in the knower, the knower in the known. This parallels the concept of self and other (the not-self), by which the self is both part

---

<sup>193</sup> T. McAlindon, "Cosmology, Contrariety and the *Knight's Tale*," *Medium Aevum*, 55 (1986), pp. 41-57 (p. 44).

<sup>194</sup> McAlindon (1986), p. 44.

of but different from the other. The scholarly debate about the respective dispositions of Arcite and Palamon has, not without irony, illustrated the problematic in that Aries-Libra relationship of thesis-antithesis. Fairchild, for example, represents the knights Arcite and Palamon respectively as active and contemplative.<sup>195</sup> And Baum perceives both men as complementary halves of a world view antagonistic to that of Theseus.<sup>196</sup> In a note to his 'Cosmology, Contrariety and the Knight's Tale', McAlindon refers to Chaucer's use of contraries "imaginatively linked to the conception of universal nature as a dynamic system of interacting opposites."<sup>197</sup>

One might easily infer from the text that Arcite astrologically symbolizes the planet Mars, and Palamon the planet Venus. But I would question any such inference, because of the differences between the symbolism of the planet Mars and the sign Aries, and between the planet Venus and the sign Libra. Even if we concede that Arcite's action is symbolically equivalent to Mars, there is no support for equating Palamon's contemplation with the symbolism of Venus. There is, however, a sustainable parallel of Palamon's contemplative reasoning with the zodiacal air element sign Libra, and consistent with that, Arcite's impulsive, independent action, what Gallacher describes as his "flurry of autonomy and initiative",<sup>198</sup> with the fire element sign Aries. Arcite falls on and injures his head, another pointer to Aries. Furthermore,

---

<sup>195</sup> Hoxie Neale Fairchild, "Active Arcite, Contemplative Palamon," *JEGP*, 26 (1927), pp. 285-293.

<sup>196</sup> Paull Franklin Baum, *Chaucer: A Critical Appreciation* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 1958), pp. 88-104.

<sup>197</sup> McAlindon (1986), note 2, p. 55.

<sup>198</sup> Patrick J. Gallacher, "Chaucer and the Rhetoric of the Body," *The Chaucer Review*, 28 (1994), pp. 216-236 (p. 219).

he suffers from a disease of the brain, the *arche*, one known as *hereos*, a kind of love angst that leads to paralysing depression. The brain too, was related to Aries in the zodiacal melothesia.

Our attention is drawn to an important difference between Arcite and Palamon by Chaucer's indicative change to Boccaccio's *Teseida*. In that work both Arcita and Palemone perceive Emilia as the goddess Venus. But in the *Knight's Tale* it is only Palamon who entertains such a perception, whilst Arcite is aware only of his own desire for Emelye as she is, a human being. Arcite, addressing Palamon, exclaims:

And thou art fals, I telle thee outrely,  
 For paramour I loved hire first er thou.  
 What wiltow seyen? Thou woost nat yet now  
 Wheither she be a womman or goddessse!  
 Thyn is affeccoun of hoolynesse,  
 And myn is love as to a creature;  
 For which I tolde thee myn aventure  
 As to my cosyn and my brother sworn.  
 I pose that thou lovedest hire biforen;  
 Wostow nat wel the olde clerkes sawe,  
 That 'who shal yeve a love any lawe?'  
 Love is a gretter lawe, by my pan,  
 Than may be yeve to any erthely man;  
 And therefore positif lawe and swich decree  
 Is broken al day for love in ech degree.  
 A man moot nedes love, maugree his heed;  
 He may nat fleen it, thogh he sholde be deed,  
 Al be she mayde, or wydwe, or elles wyf  
 (KnT. ll. 1154-1171).

Hence the difference between Arcite's Aries ideation and Palamon's Libran idealisation. Chevalier and Gheerbrant bring out vividly the difference between Aries and Libra. Of Aries:

Nature wakes from the torpor of Winter and this sign symbolizes first and foremost the thrust of Spring and hence impetus, virility (it is the chief sign of MARS), energy, independence and courage. It is *par excellence* the 'positive' or male sign.... The sign of Aries is a symbol intimately connected with the nature of primordial FIRE. ...

This fiery power is at one with the original gush of life-giving forces, the primal surge of life, with all which such a process possesses in terms of pure animal impulse, shattering, uncontrollable lightning discharge, measureless ecstasy, fiery breath. ... essentially aggressive and super-male, which corresponds to a panting, impetuous, tumultuous, bubbling, convulsive nature.... Thus the Arian type belongs to the choleric (emotional-active-primary) type under modern character classification, with its white-hot vitality, its enthusiasm to live untrammelled in the confusion and intensity of its instincts and violent emotions in a life of action, with all its risks, successes and failures.<sup>199</sup>

With regard to Libra:

The precise mid-point, upon which everything is balanced, displays the equipoise of external Autumn dusk and internal Spring dawn.... From it is derived the golden mean, the measured response, half-tones, shades and colours of meaning. Before our eyes opens a world of discrimination of the subtlest character, symbolized by the element of Air. The airy environment of Libra is to that of Gemini what the heart is to the soul. The ego occupies it with someone other than itself, equal in worth, opening an emotional dialogue between the I and the You. The sign which governs parties of pleasure is in any case ruled by Venus, Saturn bringing a measure of detachment and spiritualization to her company. The Venus concerned is the Aphrodite of Autumn roses, the goddess of ideal beauty, of spiritual grace and of sacramental marriage as well as of serenade and stately dance.<sup>200</sup>

Though Aries and Libra are ruled by Mars and Venus respectively, such a difference between Arcite's and Palamon's conceptualisation of Emelye ought not to be attributed to that between the effects of Mars and Venus; for both planets are associated with physical desire and its satisfaction, not with creative intellectual

---

<sup>199</sup> Chevalier and Gheerbrant (1996), p. 40.

<sup>200</sup> Chevalier and Gheerbrant (1996), p. 600.



inventiveness and the contemplation of ideals, as are the zodiacal signs Aries and Libra respectively.

Furthermore, there is an emphasis on Arcite's independence or solo action, which is not apparent with reference to Palamon. Independence, action and existence by oneself, is characteristic of the principle of Aries but not of Libra, whereas it is irrelevant to the symbolism of both Mars and Venus. Five of the six uses of the word "allone" in the *Knight's Tale* refer to Arcite's aloneness. Chaucer's use of 'allone' draws attention to the rarity of privacy, as described by the French social historian Philippe Ariès: "Until the end of the seventeenth century, nobody was ever left alone. The density of social life made isolation virtually impossible, and people who managed to shut themselves up in a room for some time were regarded as exceptional characters."<sup>201</sup>

Arcite's self-interested desire to 'deflower' Emelye without even a hint of betrothal, is an example of testosterone-dominated Aries instinctual behaviour contrasting with that of Palamon, whose contemplation of marriage expresses the concern of Libra with matters of equality, integration, unity and regard for the other, but characteristics not usually associated with the concupiscence of Venus.

Arcite's Aries self-consciousness is at its most intense when he confronts himself in a mirror:

And with that word he caughte a greet mirour,  
And saugh that chaunged was al his colour,  
And saugh his visage al in another kynde  
(*KnT*. ll. 1399-1401).

---

<sup>201</sup> Philippe Ariès, "Centuries of Childhood," trans. Robert Baldick (London, 1962), p. 398, cited in P. Goodall, "Being Alone in Chaucer," *The Chaucer Review*, 27 (1992), pp. 1-15.

He responds in a manner also typifying Aries: he takes the initiative in an inventive manner:

And right anon it ran hym in his mynde,  
 That, sith his face was so disfigured  
 Of maladye the which he hadde endured,  
 He myghte wel, if that he bar hym lowe,  
 Lyve in Atthenes everemoore unknowe,  
 And seen his lady wel ny day by day.  
 And right anon he chaunged his array,  
 And cladde hym as a povre laborer,  
 And al alone, save oonly a squier  
 That knew his privetee and al his cas,  
 Which was disguised povrely as he was,  
 To Atthenes is he goon the nexte way  
 (*KnT.* ll. 1402-1413).

To the extent that Arcite is inward-looking and actively self-interested, Palamon is outward-looking and inclined to a more passive policy of compromise. It is Palamon who is pacing to and fro in a high chamber from where it is possible to see the city of Athens. It is he who is looking out and first sees Emelye (*KnT.* ll. 1074-1077). It is Palamon who is more concerned about the Libran matter of breach of contract, agreement, the code of chivalry sworn by both knights (*KnT.* ll. 1129-1139), which Arcite infringes on the grounds that all is fair in love and war (*KnT.* ll. 1163-1165). Such a presumption calls into question the code of honour and rules by which the orders of knighthood were supposed to conduct themselves (Capricorn), and places heritage, family loyalty and tradition (Cancer), on rocky foundations. Tuchman describes the chivalric code in this way:

Loyalty, meaning the pledged word, was chivalry's fulcrum. The extreme emphasis given to it derived from a time when a pledge between a lord and vassal was the only form of government. A knight who broke his oath was charged with 'treason' for betraying the order of knighthood.<sup>202</sup>

---

<sup>202</sup> Tuchman (1995), p. 64.

She says that chivalry was regarded "as a universal order of all Christian knights, a trans-national class moved by a single ideal".<sup>203</sup>

It is Palamon who asks Theseus to kill them both, a request motivated by a belief that as he himself is to die, Arcite must too, so that neither shall have Emelye's hand. No such compromising request would be forthcoming from Arcite.

The character of Emelye is lunar rather than Venus-related, and therefore more representative of Cancer, despite Palamon's perception of her as a goddess in Venus' likeness. She prays to Diana, a lunar figure; and she has a rather colourless personality with a very changeable, inconstant, one might say fickle emotional nature. As would be typical of someone dominated by a water element sign, she cries frequently. She cries when, with Theseus and Ypolita, his wife, she encounters Arcite and Palamon fighting in the wood: "The queene anon, for verray wommanhede,/Gan for to wepe, and so dide Emelye" (*KnT*. ll.1748-1749). She cries when she is praying to Diana and blood drips from the ends of the burning brands:

For which so soore agast was Emelye  
That she was wel ny mad and gan to crye,  
For she ne wiste what it signyfyed,  
But oonly for the feere thus hath she cried,  
And weep that it was pitee for to heere  
(*KnT*. ll. 2341-2345).

And she cries at Arcite's death:

Shrighte Emelye, and howleth Palamon,  
And Theseus his suster took anon  
Swownynge, and baar hire fro the corps away.  
What helpeth it to tarien forth the day  
To tellen how she weep bothe eve and morwe?  
(*KnT*. ll. 2817-2821).

---

<sup>203</sup> Tuchman (1995), p. 64.

Theseus performs the Capricornian function as arbiter of the knights' and ultimately his sister's fate. He controls the plot. It is his decision to imprison the knights for life. It is his decision to free Arcite, and his that both knights shall return to fight the battle for Emelye. He determines the size of the armies and the rules of the contest, thereby affecting the outcome; for the battle is not to the death, but only to injury, whereby the vanquished is merely tied to a stake, disqualified. But Palamon, to whom that happens, in consequence lives on, and so remains a candidate for Emelye's hand until Arcite's death. It is Theseus who arranges the marriage. In true Capricornian fashion, Theseus is a controller, motivated "to establish limits" as McAlindon puts it.<sup>204</sup> He displays a "hatred of lawless will"<sup>205</sup> and in his changing character from a rather hard and dispassionate to a more humane nature displays the positive Saturnian virtues of the chivalric code. And just as Theseus' Capricornian nature moves towards the softer, more malleable nature of Cancer, so does Arcite's Arian self-centredness move, finally, towards the considerate and ameliorative one of Libra. Referring to Arcite's forgiveness of and reconciliation with Palamon and his request that Emily accept Arcite as her husband, Patrick Gallacher writes:

Arcite's consent expresses itself in a voluntary act of giving and persuading; and in his dying body, he achieves a final lived union of self and otherness...<sup>206</sup>

As befits an Arian however, Arcite dies nobly, is given a military funeral with honours and is buried alone, 'withouten any compaignye.' Palamon fulfills his Libran

---

<sup>204</sup> McAlindon (1986), p. 41.

<sup>205</sup> McAlindon (1986), p. 46.

<sup>206</sup> Gallacher (1994), p. 221.

destiny by marriage to Emelye, who doubtless is to finally fulfill her Cancerean one as home-maker. Theseus rules; God is in heaven; all's right with the world.

## The Miller's Tale



After the Knight has told his tale the Host invites the Monk to tell something to "quite with the Knyghtes tale" (*MilT.* ll. 3118-3119). But it is the Miller, Robyn, who insists on doing so, despite protests from the Host and the Reeve. "By Goddes soule," quod he, "that wol nat I;/For I wol speke or elles go my wey" (*MilT.* ll. 3132-3133). Here is the first hint that the Miller is expressing the characteristics of fixity - in this instance resistance to external pressure and persistence in a determined, obstinate course of action. And those traits are underpinned a little later: "He nolde his wordes for no man forbere,/But tolde his cherles tale in this manere" (*MilT.* ll. 3168-3169).

It is pertinent to ask by what means one determines the astrological typologies to which one ascribes various characters in the tales. The answer is provided by the "zodiacal man", so popular in the Middle Ages, which was used in a manner resembling the use of that other popular device at the time, the 'rota'. Rotae were employed for various purposes, not least among which was as a means of remembering various forms of logical syllogisms. The zodiacal man, the history and purposes of which are comprehensively covered by Clark,<sup>207</sup> displays the ascription of various parts of the body to the twelve zodiacal signs. These are intended as a mnemonic device pointing to the zodiacal sign principles, reflected in the various bodily functions. One of the most widely known in the 14th century was the table in Michael Scot's *Liber introductorius* where he tells us that the twelve signs are prefigured as inscribed

---

<sup>207</sup> Clark (1979).

characters (*prefiguratis in modum karacterarum*).<sup>208</sup> Taurus, being associated with the mouth, alludes not only to the mouth but to eating, food, the voice and the acquisition of the primary needs of the body for sustaining life: physical love, material comforts and, by implication, money with which to acquire them. Additional characteristics are derived from the mode and element within which a sign lies.

The tale the Miller tells is larded with earthy imagery, the sensuous description of Alison by a kind of Sears' catalogue of fabrics, food and flowers. Her body is delicate and slender, her belt decorated with strips of silk, her apron "as white as morne milk/Upon hir lendes" (*MilT.* ll. 3234-3237). Her brows were black as any sloe and she was "more blisful on to see/Than is the new pere-jonette tree/And softer than the wolfe is of a wether" (*MilT.* ll. 3244-3249). The emphasis throughout is on the visible, physical world, on what can be seen, touched, grasped, smelt or savoured by sense. Alison's mouth was "sweete as bragot or the meeth/Or hoord of apples" (*MilT.* ll. 3261-3262). She is likened to a wether (*MilT.* l. 3249), a swallow (*MilT.* l. 3258), a kid (*MilT.* l. 3260), a calf (*MilT.* l. 3260) and a colt (*MilT.* l. 3263) - all commonplace barnyard creatures. She exudes those earthy traits associated with Taurus. Chevalier and Gheerbrant, in their description of Taurus write: "Taurus bestows an animal nature, temperamentally linked to the instincts and especially acute in sensory perceptions in a world of smell, taste, touch, seeing and hearing."<sup>209</sup> As the description of her moves in a demeaning mock blazon manner from top to toe, we are encouraged to enjoy the physical sensation as voyeurs. But, like voyeurs, we too are brought from prurient fantasy to bedrock reality; for Alison is "Long as a mast, and

<sup>208</sup> Michael Scot, *Liber introductorius*, MS BN graec 2180, fol. 108r (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale).

<sup>209</sup> Chevalier and Gheerbrant (1996), p. 976.

upright as a bolt" (*MilT.* l. 3264) - a prymerole, a piggesnye (*MilT.* l. 3268) - that is to say - a commonplace flower of the field "[f]or any lord to leggen in his bede" (*MilT.* l. 3269).

This accentuation of primary sense and physical sensation contrasts the *Miller's Tale* with the highly idealistic chivalry of the romantic ideal portrayed in the *Knight's Tale*, a comparison generally recognised. What has not been proposed, and therefore not acknowledged, is the association of the *Miller's Tale* with the fixed mode of the zodiac, so clearly depicted initially by the fixed earth element Taurus. The commonplace associations of Taurus are those of the mouth, food, song, voice, and of primary substances and fundamental resources related to the fixed earth, the land, the soil, stock and primary produce. The common factor in Taurean imagery is physical, material and visible substance, the world: fixed earth, realism, pragmatic and sensory experience of concrete reality. Thus the connotations of physical contact, raw primary appetite and sensory satisfactions. There is nothing idealistic in the *Miller's Tale*; it is not related to the cardinal mode of the zodiac.

The *Miller's Tale* has given extended attention to appearance, but not with the more usual intention of pointing to the discrepancy between image and substance. Rather the contrary: image reveals substance. Alison's outward manner of dress, her physical body and those features of the physical world with which she is compared in terms of texture, colour, movement and posture serve to reveal her inner being, the substance of her character, the core of her personality: what you see is what you get. By contrast, the boarder Nicholas the clerk is anything but visible. He lives in the world of the mind, contemplating the mysteries of the heavens, concerning himself with secrets. He is described as knowing "Of deerne love" (*MilT.* l. 3200), that is, 'secret'



love; and as being "sleight and ful privee". He is reclusive, studying mysteries in private and seeking out what John, his landlord describes as "Goddess pryvetee" (*MilT.* l. 3454). His love for Alison is also necessarily covert and he pats her "prively".

Reference to the zodiacal man reveals that the parts of the body regarded as private and frequently named 'the secrets' are assigned to Scorpio. He is "Allone, withouten any compaignye", hence remote from others and virtually "invisible", because in medieval times it was very difficult to get away from others in shared accommodation, even bedrooms being frequently communal. Nicholas knew about secret love and the satisfaction of sexual desire, whether that of the courtly tradition or through his private fantasies. His predilection for privacy is again alluded to in his furtive accosting of Alison, ("And prively he caughte hire by the queynte" (*MilT.* l. 3276)), about whom he confesses to have indulged his imagination. It might be stretching a point to suggest that Nicholas is 'fixated' on Alison - it would be news to Chaucer anyway; yet he shows the characteristics of the fixed water element, still waters running deep. The intensity, the privacy, the remoteness and introvert nature, the liking for mystery, and his secret lechery are characteristic of Scorpio, the sign of the zodiac in binary opposition to Taurus and therefore the point at maximum differentiation along the continuum of visibility-invisibility; the physical dimension-the metaphysical dimension; the down-to-earth-up-in-the-heavens polarity. This is evidence that Chaucer is concerned here too with the zodiac, not with planets; for in the Middle Ages there was no planet astrologically associated with secrecy. Describing Scorpio, Chevalier and Gheerbrant write:

Scorpio, the black scorpion which flees the light and lives concealed, is equipped with a poisoned sting. Together they comprise a world of gloomy properties which rightly conjure visions of the torments and tragedies of life, including the absurd, annihilation and death itself... This

takes us to the core of the Freudian sado-anal complex, but the psychotic properties of the anus combine with those of the sexual organs. A dialectic of destruction and creation, of death and resurrection, of damnation and salvation takes shape since Scorpio is the love-song on the battlefield and the war-cry on the fields of love. Against such a red and black background, the individual becomes rooted in the convolutions of his inhibitions and is only really an individual when torn by the brutal fits of the inner demon which thirsts, not for well-being, but for fuller being, even if this involves the bitter anguish of living torn between divine vocation and diabolic temptation.<sup>210</sup>

One might ask, facetiously, whether it is astrology or Alison's body which is Nicholas' divine vocation, or his diabolic temptation.

The descriptions of Alison and Absolon at first create some ambiguity, however, because she might fit Leo or Taurus typology. Animal imagery is appropriate to both Taurus and Leo. Alison is however, "fair" (*MilT.* l. 3233), and the emphasis on the material fabric of her clothing, on food and fruit, and on common barnyard animals rather than on noble beasts, together with the comparison of her with a newly minted coin, all suggest the feminine zodiacal sign Taurus with its rulership by Venus in preference to the masculine sign Leo ruled by the sun.

The ambiguity is further dissolved, however, by the fact that the only characters in the *Miller's Tale* to engage in sexual intercourse are Nicholas the astrologer and Alison the carpenter's wife. Assuming, for the sake of argument that Alison represents Taurus and Nicholas Scorpio, we have then a conjunction of those signs' respective representatives, Venus and Mars. Such a conjunction, according to the Roman

---

<sup>210</sup> Chevalier and Gheerbrant (1996), p. 835.

astrologer Firmicus Maternus "causes adultery".<sup>211</sup> We may therefore safely infer that Alison is born under Taurus, leaving Absolon unchallenged as the representative of Leo. Chevalier and Gheerbrant continue their description of Taurus with words one is compelled to associate with Alison: "In Taureans, the lust for life is rooted in a warm-hearted temperament and strong, keen-edged vitality. Its acquisitive drives may be satisfied by a life of pleasure and sexual abandon as easily as in that of the workaholic."<sup>212</sup>

Descriptions of Absolon suggest his mock- 'Apollonian' character. The name Absolon, although having a Hebrew etymology meaning 'father-peace', might easily, in the Middle Ages with its Latin bias, have been surmised as deriving from *ab sole*, meaning 'from the sun'. He "koude trippe and daunce/After the scole of Oxenford" (*MilT.* ll. 3328/3329), "And playen songes on a smal rubible" (*MilT.* l. 3331); he sings songs and plays a cithern too (*MilT.* l. 3333), and he is hypothetically compared with a cat (*MilT.* l. 3347). His complexion is red (*MilT.* l. 3317) affirming the dominance of blood and the fire element in his make-up, and he is '[a] myrie child' (*MilT.* l. 3325), 'jolif and amorous' (*MilT.* l. 3355). Associated in the astrological melothesia with the spine, Leo represents overall organisation of the total organic being expressed through performance and display, exhibitions of personal power and prowess. Chevalier and Gheerbrant write, of this sign:

Both the sign and the Sun symbolize life governed by heat, light, glamour, power and the glitter of the élite. Thus Leo-types are like trimphant odes sung to the accompaniment of sounding brass, aflame with the life

---

<sup>211</sup> Julius Firmicus Maternus, *Matheosis libri VIII*, eds. W. Kroll and F. Shutsch (Leipzig, 1897-1913), II, 124.

<sup>212</sup> Chevalier and Gheerbrant (1996), p. 976.

force. This zodiacal type corresponds to the high-powered character of the strong-willed fanatic driven by the obsession to do. The love of action, that emotionally active strength, is controlled and directed towards a goal and subservient to long-term designs. A strong nature, inherently endowed with a full-blooded enjoyment of life, finds justification for existence by making the heavens ring with its achievements.<sup>213</sup>

The remaining character, John, is a carpenter, and, as an erector of buildings and user of instruments for measurement and construction, is symbolised by Saturn (cf. Durer's engraving *Saturn and Melancholy*), the ruler of the sign Aquarius, the remaining fixed sign of the zodiac. One of the occupations of Aquarius is that of building aqueducts, not too far removed, one might suppose, from the construction work required by the kind of contraption John builds to escape the predicted flood. As Chauncey Wood implies, Noah is a Saturnian figure and John noted "for a kind of miserliness" (*MilT.* l. 3851).<sup>214</sup> Aquarius, although zodiacally an air element sign, has traditionally been grouped with that list of 'watery' constellations at the end of the zodiac, comprising *Capricornus*, *Cetus*, *Delphinus*, *Eridanus*, *Hydra*, *Pisces* and *Piscis Australis*, "all the watery shapes in the early heavens, some of whose stars Aratos said were called the Water."<sup>215</sup> In the 16th and 17th centuries Christians likened Aquarius to John the Baptist.<sup>216</sup> How long before that the custom had

---

<sup>213</sup> Chevalier and Gheerbrant (1996), p. 594.

<sup>214</sup> Wood (1970), p. 267.

<sup>215</sup> Richard Hinckley Allen, *Star Names* (New York: Dover, 1963), p. 45, first published 1899 under the title *Star-Names and Their Meanings*.

<sup>216</sup> Allen (1963), p. 44.

developed is unknown, but it is interesting that Chauncey Wood reads the *Miller's Tale* and its concern with the flood as a symbol of Christian baptism.<sup>217</sup>

If one chooses to read the *Knight's Tale* at a level of metaphysical debate, then one is obliged to penetrate beyond the perception of the *Miller's Tale* as merely a merry farce of a fabliau. Recognition of Alison, her husband John, Nicholas and Absolon as types depicting the fixed cross of the zodiac is likely to prompt further investigation into the archetypology of its component signs. Observation of the constellations reminds us that Taurus rises in reverse, the haunches or rear end of the bull presented to us first as it crosses over the eastern horizon. Chaucer is very likely to have been aware of that fact; for in Book II of *Troilus and Criseyde* (Tr. l. 55) he refers to the sign Taurus as "the white Bole", the Greek mythological allusion to which descended via Manilius' "*aversaque Tauri sidera-*", a reference generally translated as "backward"- alluding to the constellation rising in reversed position. Manilius writes thus:

The *Bull's* bright part that first appears, creates  
Vile *Pathicks* scandals to the other Fates.  
The Cause, if it be fit to search for one  
When Nature works, may easily be shewn;  
His *Back-Part* first appears, in that he bears  
The Cloudy Train of *Female* Stars:  
And thus the *Posture*, and the *Sex* combine  
To show the Influence of the rising Sign:  
He bends to Plow, and o're the Fruitful Plains  
The Labouring *Ox* grows Fat upon his Pains.<sup>218</sup>

---

<sup>217</sup> Wood (1970), p. 168.

<sup>218</sup> Manilius, *The Five Books of Manilius*, trans. "T. C." (printed for Jacob Tonson, London, 1697, republished by National Astrological Library: Washington, 1953), Bk. IV, p. 135.

Aratos too, qualifies his reference to Taurus by the word 'crouching' - which is the posture adopted by Alison for the purpose of her notorious practical joke on Absolon. And Nicholas also, with more painful consequences for himself, adopts a similar position, as representative of Scorpio, to which Manilius refers, actually using the Greek [sic] adjective for "Walking Backward". It is doubtless Chaucerian irony that Nicholas 'ends up', one might say, with a sting in his tail.

Manilius' poetic lines "The Cause, if it be fit to search for one/When Nature works, may easily be shewn" raises interest in the fabliau to a new level. Recognising in the *Knight's Tale* a concern with metaphysical questions regarding fate, free will and chance, we might be persuaded that the *Miller's Tale* too, is concerned, though in less abstract terms, with philosophical questions topical in the Middle Ages, in this case, about the nature of causation and the source of true knowledge. Aquinas had given Aristotle's philosophy a boost in the fourteenth century. His four notions of causation - the material, the efficient, the formal and the final cause - are expressed through the actions of each of the *Miller's Tale* characters respectively. Alison, described in purely material ways, as a flesh and blood woman of considerable attraction, embodying one of the four fundamental causative agencies of the universe, namely the element earth, represents the material cause and has an 'effect' on Absolon. Absolon, being the effective source of motion, generation and change, represents the efficient cause: he is fixed fire and without his persistent movement and the generation or organisation of circumstance by means of which all goes awry, Alison's and Nicholas's story would have little to remark upon. Nicholas represents the formal cause, being the accidental designer of the scheme by which eventually the four elements come together, a conflation by which, under normal circumstances, according to the pagan conception

of the universe, a macrocosm is created. It is only by Chaucerian ingenuity that when, this time, those four elements come together, their world falls apart. Absolon affects Nicholas and causes him to cry out for water, an action that brings about the final cause: the successful operation of John's contraption as he comes crashing down from the ceiling to the floor and of course the creation of the fabliau itself. Nicholas therefore has an effect on the actions of John, as he had done earlier in causing him to build his 'ark'. Had it not been for Absolon, however, whose 'change' of heart following the humiliating kiss caused him to return for revenge on Alison, everything might have gone according to plan. But Nicholas's unspoken expectations, his anticipation of eventualities, were upset by the intervention of human biological need, a chance event that had nothing to do with Aristotle's philosophy. As Marsha Siegel perceptively points out, "the Miller's Tale aims to articulate the most exact of causes.....[which] might be rephrased thus: there are particular causes for everything in this world, and such causes are determinately located in transparent human psychology and in the placement of physical objects."<sup>219</sup>

The concern with knowledge of causes necessarily entails a simultaneous concern with knowledge. The *Miller's Tale* appears to me to be a subtle setting-up of pagan claims to knowledge, for the purpose of undercutting them. All actions based on claims of knowledge in fact fail in their purposes. The four fixed signs of the zodiac, which have a common characteristic of stability implying permanence, also have their qualities undermined and so can no longer be relied upon as having epistemic value. How does all that happen?

---

<sup>219</sup> Marsha Siegel, "What the Debate Is and Why it Founders in Fragment A of The Canterbury Tales," *Studies in Philology*, 82 (Winter, 1985), pp. 1-24 (pp. 4-5).

It begins with Nicholas, who claims foreknowledge of a flood. As a representative of Scorpio, a fixed water sign, he claims to have knowledge based on the hidden processes of nature, the secrets of which Nicholas has uncovered by prying beneath the surface of manifest phenomena. The prediction of the flood is evidence that he has realised the cyclical characteristic of nature's laws, and such cyclicity implies fixity, through consistent recurrence. Were it not for the consistency of correlation implying cause and effect, Nicholas's predictions would be unsuccessful. The fact that, in this instance, he is inventing an astrological cause for an event he knows will not happen is all the more ironic when, in an analogous manner, with somewhat less water than one might expect, events transpire to fulfill his prediction somewhat chaotically.

Alison, as Taurus, representing the physical and therefore visible evidence of material stability, implying constancy, is proven somewhat less constant in her affections. She too, is therefore undercut by Chaucer's inversion and so detracts from the evidence of physical sense as a means of validating knowledge. This is a less than subtle Chaucerian comment on Aristotle's views.

Absolon is the arbiter of all their fates, resulting in his being the prime mover. We have seen earlier how he is presented in Apollonic guise by his dancing and playing of musical instruments. But some suspicion might be thrown upon that by his downfall, and by the realisation that Absolon doesn't escape Chaucer's subtle wit either; for the ribek and cithera (or gittern) are played by other characters in the *Tales*, both of whom are disreputable types. (The gittern is among the instruments played by the three rioters in the *Pardoner's Tale*; and the rebek is the one in the hands of Perkyn Reveler of the



*Cook's Tale*.)<sup>220</sup> Furthermore, whilst Absolon sings, dances and plays an instrument, the three forms of music which together hint at divinity, each form of music is in some manner debased. If we have been led to infer that Absolon has divine omniscience foretelling him of the final outcome of Alison's jape, then we are shown clearly that he is less than divine, and his knowledge fallible, by the purely fortuitous occurrence of Nicholas's needing to go to the lavatory, an intervention of fate resulting in Absolon's misapplication of the burning coulter. Had Nicholas not had to obey a call of nature, fulfilling his Scorpio melothesiac function of having a pee, then all might have gone according to plan.

John's knowledge, by contrast, is that of the practical man. He applies universal principles symbolised by Aquarius, the fixed air sign of the zodiac, suggestive of scientific theory. John holds an idealistic belief in *scientia*, according to which, experiments may be expected to work according to their precepts. He believes in knowledge as truth. His downfall results from believing in claims to knowledge without personal investigation, raising the Chaucerian kind of question: whose claims to knowledge ought one to trust?

---

<sup>220</sup> Robert Boenig, "Absolon's Musical Instruments," *English Language Notes* (September 1990), pp. 7-15 (p. 9).

# The Reeve's Tale

## II

The Reeve, motivated by revenge on the Miller, tells a story about two students who visit a miller to obtain grain for their college Master, who is sick and cannot make the journey himself. Although they anticipate the miller's attempt to give them short measure, he diverts their attention by freeing their horse and while they are chasing it he deprives them of some of the grain for which they are paying him. The miller is motivated chiefly by a desire to take the young philosophers down a peg or two.

Upon their return after a long and tiring chase, they decide to stay the night at the miller's home. After going to bed in a room which they share with the miller, his wife, daughter and small baby, one of the two students, Aleyne, decides to seduce the daughter while her father is in a drunken sleep. The daughter, Malyne, thus loses her virginity, but doesn't seem to mind too much and the next day rewards the student responsible by betraying her father's chicanery and giving the student a loaf baked with the short-changed meal. In the meantime, the other student, John, moves the baby's cradle from beside the wife's bed to a place near his own. When the wife returns from answering a call of nature, she gropes her way to the cradle, and believing it to be near her own bed, mistakenly enters John's, who shortly afterwards, enters her:

Withinne a while this John the clerk up leep,  
 And on this goode wyf he leith on soore.  
 So myrie a fit ne hadde she nat ful yoore;  
 He priketh harde and depe as he were mad.  
 This joly lyf han thise two clerkes lad  
 Til that the thridde cok bigan to synge  
 (RvT. ll. 4228-4231.)

Aleyn, having satisfied the daughter Malyne and himself, decides to confide the fact to his fellow-student and tries to find John's bed. Making the same mistake as the miller's wife, on account of the relocated cradle, he creeps in beside the miller and boasts proudly to him of having seduced Malyne. The miller is furious and bloodies Aleyn's nose, a fierce fight ensuing. In the resulting brouhaha, the miller's wife awakens when her husband, stumbling on a stone, lands on top of her. She believes that the devil has fallen on her. Grasping for a staff, she "saugh a whit thyng in hir ye/And whan she gan this white thyng espye" (*RvT*. l. 4301-2) she lashed out "And smoot the millere on the pyled skulle/That down he goeth, and cride, "Harrow! I dye!" (*RvT*. ll. 4306-4307.)

The students make their escape, having been recompensed in more ways than one for their initial loss.

The *Tale* develops from an initial verbal skirmish with innuendo and nuance of meaning, to a final physical conflict with a ribald romp, arms and legs akimbo. The early verbal exchanges between students and the miller are characterised by consciously intended double-meanings; the later physical exchanges by unintended misperceptions of sensory input resulting from an altered environment.

If, as has been suggested, the *Miller's Tale* is about causation located in "transparent human psychology and in the placement of physical objects",<sup>221</sup> then the *Reeve's Tale* is, at least in part, about causation located in human folly and in the removal of physical objects. Such a theme is developed through the concern with the dual opposition of sensory perception and motor activity, at one pole, and implication and directional movement at the other. At the level of language it is an opposition

---


<sup>221</sup> Siegel (1985), pp. 4-5.

between denotation and connotation; at the level of movement it is an opposition between nervous reaction and goal-directed movement.

In the traditional zodiacal sign sequence the Bull is followed by the Twins. The sign Gemini belongs to the air element triplicity, and to the quadruplicity constituting the mutable cross, the binary oppositions Gemini-Sagittarius and Virgo-Pisces comprising the respective complementary elements air-fire and earth-water. Their planetary rulers are Mercury and Jupiter, so if the *Reeve's Tale* signifies the mutable cross, then it should be evident that conflicts within the *Tale* depict a crux centred in the principles of those four signs and the interaction of the two planets and their human representatives.

Gemini is representative of the lungs, arms, hands and fingers, those parts of the body with which we communicate, either verbally or non-verbally, through articulation or gesture. Being of the mutable mode, Gemini implies changes; and being an air element sign, it suggests a facility for making adaptive movements and connections. These are exploited by engaging in adaptive verbal and motor activities, commonly described as quick-wittedness and deft or agile movements. Such dual activities necessarily entail cognition and adjustment; for cognition is necessary for information or sense-data to be processed. Adaptive movement or adjustments occur either before or after making a connection or contact. Gemini represents, therefore, the synaptic response to stimuli, the neural reaction to whatever one contacts, hence cognition and connection.

Sagittarius, being the polar opposition to Gemini, represents implication or connotation. It is the sign of the inferential 'movement' of mind, from the denotatory (Gemini) to that of shared signification; and movement directed towards an end or

goal. Thus, as the projective vector sign of Sagittarius illustrates () , movement has conscious direction in the space-time dimension. That is why it is associated in the zodiacal *melothesia* with the thighs, which enable us to stride towards our destination, giving our movement meaning. Similarly, its projective significance has implications for how and what we understand intellectually of other people's ideas and opinions, such inferences as we may draw being a 're-view', in part, the projection of our own lexicon of ideas/words upon other people's. The association of Sagittarius with religion, philosophy and higher education is based on this binary opposition to Gemini (cognition and connection), the significance of the sign former being that of recognition and re-connecting ('religion' deriving from the Latin *re-ligare*: to re-connect).

(To assist the reader to grasp the multi-layered analogical concepts of astrology: Gemini and Sagittarius may also be perceived as 'mutation' and 'evolution' respectively. The former occurs fortuitously, the latter implies a '*telos*' that is analogous to the physical movement in travel directed towards a destination, and also to linguistic connotation that leads to definition.)

Gemini and Sagittarius being ruled respectively by Mercury and Jupiter, and the two remaining signs Virgo and Pisces being also ruled by those two planets, it is evident that Chaucer is, in the *Reeve's Tale*, concerned with ways of knowing and with the conflicts that may arise through trusting in knowledge derived from different sources: through the senses (Gemini); through functional discrimination (Virgo) - Virgo being symbolic of the intestines, which perform the physiological process of breaking down ingested substances, through the action of enzymes, into particular

nutritional functions; through the intellect (Sagittarius) and through transcendent insight (Pisces).

One might detect here the influence of the medieval philosopher, William of Ockham (c.1285-c.1349). Ockham's influence on fourteenth century thinking was considerable, evident in the thinking of such prominent Oxford scholars as Robert Holcot, Thomas Bradwardine, John Wyclif and Ralph Strode, among others. Ockham's epistemology divides existence into exterior reality which is knowable, and interior reality which is empirically known and reknowable through reflection and abstraction. Russell Peck writes:

Ockham discusses two stages in the acquisition of knowledge. The process begins in experience, or rather, in the intellective perception of experience, which he calls intuitive cognition.... This second stage Ockham calls abstractive cognition. From intuited information, the intellect, motivated by the will, abstracts words, images, and concepts which it holds in the mind for further abstraction and confirmation. Through repetition these processes lead to principles and habits which constitute each individual's sense of reality.<sup>222</sup>

The students' knowledge is intellectual and philosophical. The miller's knowledge is local and derives from home-spun philosophy. The wife's knowledge is that of *economia* and *phronesis*, that is, household management and practical wisdom, the discrimination of function and maintenance of order. Malyne's knowledge is latent, dormant, awaiting inspiration, an awakening.

The title of the *Reeve's Tale* contains a pun, in fact a double pun, which distinguishes it from the other tales with the exception of the *Shipman's Tale*, the

---

<sup>222</sup> Russell A. Peck, "Chaucer and the Nominalist Questions," (*Speculum*, 53, 1978), pp. 745-760 (pp. 747-748).

fabric of which is woven around a double pun too. The Reeve has announced his intention of 'quiting' the Miller (*RvT*. l. 3916) - that is, paying him back for the insult to carpenters offered in the *Miller's Tale* - and Chaucer's choice of a reeve to do so is likely to have been prompted in part by the etymology of the word itself, which derives from two languages: the Latin '*refero*' which can mean 'to pay back' or 'get even', and the Anglo-Saxon '*reven*' meaning 'to rob' or 'rip off'. The miller cheats his customers by short-supplying them with their flour. By such chicanery he flourishes. He is twice victimized himself, however, by the two students from Cambridge, one of whom makes love to his wife, the other deflowering his daughter. There is, then, another implicit pun exchanging deflowering for deflouring. The *Tale* thus begins by drawing our attention to words, to language, and in particular to sound; for a pun works better by sound than by written word, having a dual significance but no immediately comprehensible meaning. We come to understand the meaning of the sound only when it is placed within the developed context of extended reference, a context that 'points to' which of its implications we should select. That is the predicative, connotative function of Sagittarius as distinct from, yet inclusive of, the indicative, denotatory function of Gemini.

It is difficult to miss the emphasis on 'doubling' content in the brief summation of title and plot. If Chaucer is developing a linear progression through the sequence of tales and in doing so following the zodiacal sign sequence, he has reached, by this third *Tale*, the zodiacal sign Gemini. Symbolized in Greek astrology by the *Didymoi*, Castor and Pollux, and in Roman astrology by Romulus and Remus, the twins were more often than not shown as two males with their arms entwined. This, according to Clark,

emphasizes in medieval iconography the melothesiac association of the sign Gemini with the shoulders, arms, hands and fingers.<sup>223</sup>

Chaucer's awareness of such an association, made explicit in the *Treatise on the Astrolabe* (*Astr.* I, 70-77), combined with his knowledge of the divisions of the signs into the modes and elements (*Astr.* I, 63-70), enable him to use the implication of mutable air (adaptive movement in response to visual and auditory perception), together with the symbolism of Mercury, the planetary lord of Gemini, manifesting itself through commerce, trickery,<sup>224</sup> physical and mental agility.

Symkin the miller is representative of Gemini, being a trader as well as evidently versatile: "Pipen he koude and fisshe, and nettes beete,/And turne coppes, and wel wrastle and sheete" (*RvT.* ll. 3927-3928). He also carried arms. (*RvT.* ll. 3929-3931). In *Picatrix*, though doubtless in other concurrent astrological literature, one finds an allusion to the kinds of arms associated with Gemini: "*Et ascendit in secunda facie Geminorum ... in eius manu balistam et sagittas habens ... Et ascendit in tertia facie Geminorum vir lorica indutus, habens balistam et sagittas et pharetram.*"<sup>225</sup>

Such activities, one notes, are all carried out by the parts of the body associated with Gemini: piping by the fingers (an activity noted by Manilius in his *Astronomicon* as associated with Gemini);<sup>226</sup> fishing, mending nets and playing a

---

<sup>223</sup> Clark (1979), p. 70.

<sup>224</sup> Cf. John Heath-Stubbs, *The Astrological Basis of Spenser's "Shepheard's Calender"*, in which, referring to Eclogue III, he writes, "It is a tale of trickery and thefts appropriate to Mercury, the patron of thieves." In Kitson (ed.) (1989), pp. 137-151 (p. 143).

<sup>225</sup> *Picatrix*, II, xi, p. 76.

<sup>226</sup> Manilius (1953), stanza 21, p. 124.



drinking game by using fingers and hands; wrestling and archery by using the shoulders, arms and hands.

The name 'Symkin' is very likely a hint as to his features: monkey-like. Upon reading *Picatrix*, one finds, included in the description of Geminian associations, the following: "... *et ex animalibus hominem et simiam*" .<sup>227</sup> Is this another piece of evidence for *Picatrix* being one of Chaucer's sources?

Symkin is married to a woman whose name is not revealed. It may be that wives were accorded low status in the Middle Ages and that Chaucer is pointing to that fact by emphasizing her namelessness; but discussion on the Internet has generally disputed the suggestion that wives were treated as inferiors and has alluded to the fact that if a man married a wealthy woman he would probably take her surname as a means of ensuring the lineage of inherited wealth. That does not seem especially apposite in this instance; for although Symkin's wife came with an ample dowry ("With hire he yaf ful many a panne of bras" (*RvT*. l. 3944)), she was the illegitimate daughter of the town parson, and although she gave herself airs - "And she was proud, and peert as is a pye" (*RvT*. l. 3950) - it is evident from her anonymity that she is considered of little importance in the scheme of things.

A marriage of a couple born under androgynous, hermaphroditic Mercury is unlikely to produce many children. In an age when contraception was not freely available and in a society whose Christian ethic encouraged procreation, it might be considered consistent with the sexual disinterest of Mercury that Symkin and his wife have produced only two children nearly twenty years apart (*RvT*. ll. 3970-3971). If Chaucer is hinting that the Miller's wife is symbolized by Mercury, then she is

---

<sup>227</sup> *Picatrix*, Book III, iii, p. 96, in section on Gemini beginning on p. 95.

representative of Virgo, as her husband is of Gemini. Such Virgoan association is underpinned by earlier references to her as being the daughter of a church parson; for the sun in Virgo in a woman's horoscope can imply that her father (the sun) is associated with the church (Virgo). Further, she was raised in a nunnery (*RvT*. l. 3946), and Symkyn says that he would not have married a woman "But she were wel ynorissed and a mayde" (*RvT*. l. 3948). Virgo was the Anglo-Saxon *Maeden* and has always been associated with the wheatsheaf or the Wheat-bearing Maiden.<sup>228</sup>

John and Aleyn are from Cambridge University. They arrive at the miller's dwelling with their horse. They are clearly representative of Sagittarius, ruled by Jupiter, that sign's association with higher learning, religious faith and journeys lasting longer than a day (the definition of a long journey) and with horses (derived from the earlier symbolism of the centaur), being widely known. Sagittarius as centaur however, represents the combination of the human and animal instincts, the higher and lower natures of human beings. When the two clerks spend the night in Symkin's home it becomes a case of Jupiter moving into Gemini's house, thus Jupiter in the sign of its detriment. Lust therefore predominates over their higher faculty in the pursuit of a different kind of knowledge from that of their academic pursuits.

It follows then, that Malyne should be representative of Pisces, the remaining sign, symbolized by the fish tied together by a rope but attempting to swim in opposite directions. This represents ambivalence, the psychological or spiritual conflict between two opposing attractions, enticement away from one's commitment. Pisces is also associated with the mystery of Christianity as distinct from its more prosaic elements of Mosaic laws and Pauline puritanism represented by Virgo: the Piscean sacrificial wine,

---

<sup>228</sup> Allen (1963), p. 461.

church's holy blood, complementing the daily bread of doctrine. Malynes's peccability becomes evident through the typical Piscean problem of divided loyalties to two males (the sun in dual sign Pisces): she has been complicit in her father's duplicity yet betrays him by making a loaf of the stolen flour and giving it to her secret student lover upon his departure. Such an act of betrayal has legendary association with Pisces. As Allen puts it, "Pisces was considered of such *malignant* [my emphasis] influence in human affairs, - a dull, treacherous and phlegmatic sign".<sup>229</sup> He adds that "when the old twelve figures were turned into those of the Apostles, these [the Fish] became Saint Matthias, successor to the traitor Judas."<sup>230</sup>

The agon, the thematic conflict, is fought between the representatives of the four mutable signs, a battle of wits within the contexts of medieval town v. gown antipathy and domestic repression of sexuality. The first hint of battle is voiced by the two students who wagered their necks that "The millere sholde not stele hem half a pekke/Of corn by sleighte, ne by force hem reve" (*RvT*. ll. 4010-4011). And the student Aleyn's opening words to the miller are an enquiry after his daughter and wife, to which the miller gives no answer but diverts attention away from his family to an enquiry regarding the reason for their visit (as though he wouldn't have known) (*RvT*. l. 4025). Both students announce their intention of scrutinizing the miller grinding their meal, a barely veiled hint of insurance against the miller's sleight of hand. In turn, the miller, awake to their implication, considers that he can outwit them "For al the sleighte in hir philosophye" (*RvT*. l. 4050). Sleight of hand and sleight of philosophy neatly express the opposition of mutable signs Gemini and Sagittarius. The miller plays

---

<sup>229</sup> Allen (1963), p. 340.

<sup>230</sup> Allen (1963), p. 341.

a prank on the students, freeing their horse so that the students are absent from the mill, chasing their 'steed' for hours until they catch it near nightfall. Is it possible that Chaucer is alluding in satiric vein to Manilius' description in his *Astronomicon*, where he writes of Sagittarius:

The double Centaur different Tempers breeds,  
They break the Horse, and tame the fiery Steeds;  
... Nor is their Humor to the Fields confin'd,  
They range the Woods, and tame the savage kind...  
Quick active Motion, full of warmth and heat,  
Still pressing on, unknowing to retreat.<sup>231</sup>

Thus far the miller's wits have proven superior, giving him the confidence to disparage the clerks' philosophical studies as he accedes to their request for overnight accommodation:

Myn hous is streit, but ye han lerned art;  
Ye konne by argumentes make a place  
A myle brood of twenty foot of space.  
Let se now if this place may suffise,  
Or make it roun with speche, as is youre gise  
(*RvT*. ll. 4122-4126).

Agreeing thus far with Jeffrey Baylor that "Alan and John's university training fails them in their time of need", and that intellect fails in the *Reeve's Tale*, one might nevertheless question whether Baylor has touched upon the most salient point of the fable. Baylor infers from the selective contortions by Chaucer of "*Le meunier et les deux clerks*" that Chaucer intends the *Reeve's Tale* to have an intellectual twist. "They [the clerks] are aware beforehand of the miller's disdain for book-learning and university training and set out for the specific purpose of outwitting him. This awareness of the miller's nature focuses the reader's attention upon the battle of wits,

---

<sup>231</sup> Manilius (1953), stanza 18, p. 127.

only to show that their intellectual point of attack fails to overcome the slyness of Symkyn. In the outright conflict between the learned and unlearned, the latter is the victor."<sup>232</sup>

That viewpoint appears to me to be ingrained with prejudice as to what constitutes education; it assumes that intellect is superior to the education acquired in the process of survival, that intellect ought, for some unexpressed reason, to win out over pragmatism, but doesn't. On the contrary, Chaucer, I suggest, is not taking an anti-intellectual stance but is showing that the students are in a context where intellectual activity is inappropriate to the solution and they are outwitted by the miller, who is playing at home. Jupiter is in detriment in Gemini. But that is, literally, only half the story. Now the pace of action slows. Action moves to the bedroom. Everyone is at rest. Bedrooms, as places of privacy, retreat, seclusion, retirement and confinement like places of refuge and exile, are signified by Pisces, hence under the rulership of Jupiter. It is in that environment, the location of Mercury's detriment and Jupiter's strength, that the miller and his wife, symbolised by Mercury, are defeated by the students' secret activities. The miller is asleep, his mercurial senses numbed by alcohol - also ruled by Jupiter because of its association with the Pisces grapes of the vine. His wife's discrimination of function and order, her knowledge of the house and the orderly placement of the objects in it, lets her down. In the darkness she "groped heer and ther" (*RvT*. l. 4217), and "gropeth alwey forther with hir hond" (*RvT*. l. 4222). Her assumption is that everything is in its place, but the cradle has been moved and she mistakenly jumps to the conclusion that she has mistaken the way back and had been

---

<sup>232</sup> Jeffrey Baylor, "The Failure of the Intellect in Chaucer's *Reeve's Tale*," *ELN* (Sept..1990), pp. 17-19 (p. 17).

about to go to a clerk's bed. One might ask though, how is it that her knowledge of the layout of the house lets her down so badly? Is she in fact misled? Freud suggests there are no accidents, and it is perhaps a cause for mischievous speculation to infer from her misconception that such a 'mistaken' route would have taken her to the clerk's bed, that when she does end up in fact in the clerk's bed it is not altogether accidental. Either way, knowledge of domestic order has let her down, to the same extent that the clerks' intellectual knowledge let them down.

The association of Malyne with Pisces is delightfully subtle. The well-known connotations of *Ichthus*, the Fish, the early Christians' secret symbol and the symbol of sacrifice and penance imply that Malyne's knowledge is private or secret and transcendent. Such mystical knowledge is gained through renunciation and atonement. Malyne sacrifices her virginity (Pisces is opposed to Virgo) and performs two acts of atonement: first she discloses her secret knowledge of her father's petty crime which is tantamount to confession of complicity, compensating the students for their loss by making a cake for them from the meal they had been deprived of; secondly, by at-onement with Alan: "And shortly for to seyn, they were aton" (*RvT*. l. 4197).

The balance sheet ought to be consistent with astrological symbolism and show a profit for those symbolized by Jupiter, namely the clerks and Malyne, and that appears to have been realised too.

As for movement and change, the *Reeve's Tale* is replete with mutability. The clerks are travelling from an urban to a rural area. Their horse gallops away and the clerks have to chase it to yet another location. They find themselves short of time for the return journey and stay the night at the miller's home, a contingency for which they were not prepared. They retire to the bedroom and after a short period of rest

everyone swings into action. The cradle is moved, people change beds, the wife mistakes John's bed for her own; Alan mistakes the miller's bed for John's; the miller and Alan are rolling around on the floor, fists flying. "They walwe as doon two pigges in a poke;/And up they goon, and down agayn anon"(RvT. ll. 4278-4279), eventually the miller tripping and falling upon his sleeping wife, tired after her swyving. She erroneously concludes that it is the devil attacking her, and also mistakes her husband's bald pate for a white nightcap she believes Alan must be wearing, thus twice proving the unreliability of sense perception as a guide to reality; and thereby introducing a major philosophical topic of medieval schoolmen, which was dealt with by Aristotle in *De Anima*, namely the nature of the colour white and its reliability as a sense datum index to *qualia*. Aristotle says "for while the perception that there is white before us cannot be false, the perception that what is white is this or that may be false."<sup>233</sup> She hits her husband over the head with a staff, after having called out to the Holy Spirit to save her from the devil. And here again, perhaps Chaucer is commenting on Ockham's philosophy regarding perception; for as Peck says,

Ockham singles out two activities - apprehension and judgment - which are crucial to the process's success. The value of experience as a registrar of individual truth will be contingent upon the accuracy of the registrar's perception. We know from Chauntecleer [the *Nun's Priest's Tale*] and Januarie [the *Merchant's Tale*] that it is not always easy to see precisely what may be before our very eyes. The will can motivate, but it can also interfere, and the intellect may be weak, thus obscuring judgment. Error may lie in both the apprehension and the judgment."<sup>234</sup>

---

<sup>233</sup> Aristotle, *De Anima*, III, iii, trans. J.A.Smith, <http://swift.eng.ox.ac.uk/jdr/aristo.html>; gopher://gopher.vt.edu:10010/02/39/27 (27 Jul.1997).

<sup>234</sup> Peck (1978), pp. 748-749.

The *Reeve's Tale* is thus a catalogue of human error and the fallibility of knowledge because of mutability. The clerks are mistaken in their belief that they can outwit the miller in his own environment. The miller is mistaken in his belief that winning a battle is winning the war and in his conviction that he knows well enough the natures of the students, his wife and his daughter. The wife is mistaken in her perception of detail and belief in the order of her own little universe.

As for Malyne: she loses her innocence through simply being mis(s)-taken.



## The Cook's Tale



It would appear that most readers of the *Canterbury Tales*, when they encounter the aborted *Cook's Tale*, consider that Chaucer abandoned it because the level of storytelling had become debased. It is possible to hold that view however, whilst also considering another option: that Chaucer's concern with the thematic development of the astrological scheme suggested to him that instead of twenty-four complete *Tales*, there ought to be twenty-three and a fraction, symbolic of the twenty-three and a fraction of degrees which is the angle at which the zodiac or the ecliptic slopes in relationship to the equator. If that was Chaucer's intention, then there is no more appropriate place in the *Tales* at which to include the abbreviated tale; for the defining points of the zodiac are the solstitial points at the beginnings of Cancer and Capricorn and the equinoctial points in the initial degrees of Aries and Libra. The angle of inclination is determined, however, not by the equinoxes but by the solstitial points and instrumentally by the position of the zodiacal longitude and declination of Cancer, the first of those solstitial points following the vernal equinox.

The primary concern of the *Cook's Tale* is with 'herbergage', a warning concerning whom one takes as a lodger into one's home. Homes, accommodation, hostelry, are the referenda of the sign Cancer, a story told by a representative of Capricorn (indicated by the *General Prologue's* allusion to the cook having a mormal on his shin, a cutaneous condition affecting the leg bone, hence signifying the *melothesia* of Capricorn).

The *Tale* is not developed, and irrespective of the validity or otherwise of my hypothesis concerning the obliquity of the ecliptic, there are possibly two or three other reasons for Chaucer's having 'abandoned' it yet at the same time included it as part of the first fascicle. The first possible reason is that the *Tale's* rather seamy nature might have been considered inappropriate for a cardinal cross of the zodiac, and it is more likely that Chaucer intended it at some stage to be a second Geminian tale, thus representing the Geminian dual symbolism. But that could have resulted in a breakdown of subsequent associations of *Tales* with signs, or in the necessity to have 26 *Tales*, assuming that in the second circuit of the zodiac Chaucer would have felt obligated to repeat the treatment of Gemini with another extra tale. Instead, he appears to have devised the scheme to ensure that the *Shipman's Tale* would, on the second circuit, serve that purpose, by duplicating the theme of the *Reeve's Tale*, namely, the use of sex for the purpose of discharging a commercial debt.

Perhaps the most convincing, though brief, case for the *Cook's Tale* being associated with Cancer is one of the definitions of 'herborwe' given in the glossary to *The Riverside Chaucer*: "house, position in the zodiac".<sup>235</sup>

There is a possibility that Chaucer wished to abort the *Cook's Tale* so that the total number of *Tales* would be twenty-three and a fraction, equating to  $23\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$ , the inclination of the ecliptic to the plane of the celestial equator, i.e. the slope of the zodiac in relationship to the Earth's equator, demarcating the two tropics of Cancer and Capricorn and providing a clue for his future readers as to the astrological content of the *Tales*.

---

<sup>235</sup> Benson (1987), p. 1256.

## The Wife of Bath's Tale

Q

Readers of Chaucer's work have responded to the personality of his Wife of Bath with intensity and excitement rarely evoked by other fictional characters. She is described vividly in the *General Prologue*, but that description concentrates on her clothing and physical appearance. Chaucer might have intended us to draw some inferences regarding her character from those, but it is within her own *Prologue* that the Wife attributes her amorous and lascivious nature to astrological causes in those well-known lines:

For certes I am al Venerien  
 In feelynge, and myn herte is Marcien.  
 Venus me yaf my lust, my likerousnesse,  
 And Mars yaf me my sturdy hardynesse;  
 Myn ascendent was Taur, and Mars therinne,  
 Allas, alas! That evere love was synne.  
 I folwed ay myn inclinacioun  
 By vertu of my constellacioun;  
 That made me I koude noght withdrawe  
 My chambre of Venus from a good felawe.  
 Yet have I Martes mark upon my face,  
 And also in another privee place (*WBT*. ll. 609-620).

Commentaries on those lines have provided a comprehensive exposition of the astrology involved, ranging from the simple explanation that the ascendant is the zodiacal sign rising in the east at the time of birth, in the Wife's case Taurus, with the planet Mars rising in that sign, and the implications of that,<sup>236</sup> to a very detailed

---

<sup>236</sup> Benson (1987), Note 613, p. 870.

description of the medieval psychological implications of that component of her horoscope.<sup>237</sup>

Chaucer's allusion to Taurus is his first hint of returning to the fixed cross of the zodiac. But one might be disconcerted by the reference to Taurus instead of to Leo; for if the *Tales* are following the zodiacal sequence, then one would expect Leo, the sign following Cancer, prominent in the *Cook's Tale*, to be given prior attention. In fact however, that is what Chaucer has done, indicating the association of the Wife with Leo by telling us that she comes from Bath. That city was astrologically under the rulership of the sign Leo, as astrologer William Lilly states in *An Introduction to Astrology*.<sup>238</sup> Furthermore, because Taurus is Alison's ascendant, then the fourth house of her horoscope, the nadir, lies in Leo. The fourth house of any horoscope was thought to describe characteristics of the individual's home background, location or city.<sup>239</sup> So Chaucer tells us in at least two ways that the Wife's *Prologue* is to be associated with Leo. That does not give us a reason for supposing that the Wife herself was 'born' during that period of the year when the sun is in Leo: we have no more evidence to suggest that she is 'a Leo' than we had for supposing that the Knight was himself an Aries or the Miller a Taurus. We must not confuse the teller with the tale. But both the *Prologue* and the *Tale* are clearly associated with Leo; for the Wife herself directs our attention towards that sign in symbolic ways, as I shall shortly show.

---

<sup>237</sup> Wood (1970), pp. 176-177.

<sup>238</sup> Lilly (1927), p. 61.

<sup>239</sup> Lilly (1927), p. 30.

The twelve zodiacal signs represented to the medieval astrologer not only the physiological unity of the human body but the state and its functions too. For that reason astrologers and their enigmatic practices were regarded frequently with suspicion; for who could tell what political advantage might be gained by access to such arcane symbolism? And whether or not the subject was of intrinsic value, political power lay in how public perceptions of astrology and astrologers' claims might be manipulated for the ends of political power. The burning to death of the Italian astrologer Cecco d'Ascoli in 1327 is likely to have been a devastating blow not only to astrologers but to many of those involved in those other professions that incorporated practical and philosophical astrology, namely the professions of medicine and the church, respectively. The ostensible and publicly pronounced reason for d'Ascoli's death was his advocacy of extreme determinism, though it is more likely that it was the implication of such advocacy for others' political activities, which was the underlying reason. Leo, representing the spine and therefore the organised coordination of the human body, was metaphorically or analogously associated with the central power sources of the state and their organic functions as exhibited through the social order and displays of its dynamic creativity. Hence Leo's association with royalty, the royal court, nobility, the dominant ranks of society and the social culture resulting from their creative expression (excluding, however, governmental structure and the law).

Aquarius, the opposite sign, therefore represented the counter-culture, and the continuing association in the popular mind of such an association became evident as recently as the 1960s, when the hippie movement gave collective expression to the musical '*Hair*' - the most popular theme song of which began with the words "This is

the dawning of the Age of Aquarius". And as we shall see shortly, it is highly probable that the Wife of Bath was born an Aquarian, that is, when the sun was moving through the zodiacal sign Aquarius.

There can be little doubt that the Aquarian Wife of Bath is a cultural rebel. To show herself to be such it was necessary for her first to demarcate the assumptions of society as they are made explicit in normative cultural behaviours. She clarifies this for us by her emphasis on the Leo *motifs* of romance and desire, but there are clues implicit of such concerns and a hint of her own counter-cultural stance encapsulated brilliantly in the very first line of her *Prologue*, with the words: "*Experience, though noon auctoritee*" (*WBT*. 1.1). As an abstract noun the word 'experience' is unique among the incipits of the 49 prologues, tales and epilogues comprising the 24 *Canterbury Tales*. Twenty of the incipits begin with prepositions of time or location, and the rest comprise references to concrete nouns, apostrophe, exclamation and adjectival or adverbial phrases.

Experience is associated in astrological symbolism with Saturn, the ruler of Aquarius; for by definition it has connotations of the past and of the duration of time. The Wife then sets it in opposition to 'auctoritee', symbolised by the sun, the ruler of Leo. It is of course, a false antithesis; for just as virtue is its own reward, so experience is its own authority. There is however, a qualitative distinction between the two kinds of authority and one that is fundamental to the theme of the Wife's *Tale*, to which I shall later return, after further perusal of her *Prologue*.

The Wife persistently draws our attention to the zodiacal sign Leo immediately after her opening line about experience and authority, by repeated references to the number five. While it is possibly sheer and meaningless coincidence that the initial

letter of the word 'experience' is the fifth in the alphabet, the Wife alludes to the matter of five marriages five times in exactly fifty lines: first "Hosbondes at chirche dore I have had fyve" (*WBT*. l. 6); secondly, in her allusion to the reproof of the Samaritan: "'Thou has yhad fyve housbondes' quod he" (*WBT*. l. 17); thirdly, in her question "Why that the fifthe man/Was noon housbonde to the Samaritan?" (*WBT*. ll. 21-22); fourthly, in her expression of gratitude to God for her husbands: "Yblessed be God that I have wedded fyve!" (*WBT*. l. 44); and fifthly, in her assertion, "Of fyve husbondes scoleiynge am I" (*WBT*. l. 44). Leo is of course, the fifth zodiacal sign and associated primarily with love and desire, romance and courtship. Before dismissing this set of parallels as merely fortuitous, it is worth considering Professor Schimmel's comments regarding traditional associations of this number. Her relevant chapter is headed "*The Number Of Life And Love...5*". She writes, "Five has usually been connected with human life and with the 5 senses; it is the number of love and sometimes, of marriage, as in Plato's *Laws*, where there are 5 guests in the chapter on marriage."<sup>240</sup> Later, and of particular coincidental relevance to our knowledge of the Wife of Bath's horoscope, with its Taurus ascendant, Schimmel writes, "One can also look at the 5 in terms of astronomy. From time immemorial 5 has been regarded as the number of the goddess Ishtar and her Roman "successor," Venus."<sup>241</sup>

It is important and necessary to explore whatever astrological information is available, in order to identify Chaucer's emphatic representation of the fixed mode of the zodiac. In doing so, one might note that the Wife's *Prologue* is concerned very much with herself, with her own life and loves. In the 12 lines from the *Prologue*

---

<sup>240</sup> Schimmel (1993), p. 105.

<sup>241</sup> Schimmel (1993), p. 107.

quoted above, there are no fewer than 16 self-referential or personal possessive pronouns. In fact, 8 of those are the word 'my', a word having strong links to Taurus, the sign of acquisition and possession. Such preoccupation with the self and its affairs is not displayed to anything near the same degree by any other *Tale* teller.

Earlier, reference was made to the probability of Alison having been born with the sun in another fixed sign, Aquarius. I am gratified by some of Hamlin's research, which provides convincing evidence that the Wife of Bath's 'birth' occurred when the sun was in Aquarius, more specifically during February of the year 1342. Hamlin bases his assertion on the reasonable assumption that the following lines in the Wife's *Prologue* refer not to astrological conditions in general, but to her own horoscope:

The children of Mercurie and of Venus  
 Been in hir wirkyng ful contrarius;  
 Mercurie loveth wysdam and science,  
 And Venus loveth ryot and dispence.  
 And, for hire diverse disposicioun,  
 Ech falleth in otheres exaltacioun.  
 And thus, God woot, Mercurie is desolat  
In Pisces, wher Venus is exaltat;  
And Venus falleth ther Mercurie is reysed.  
 Therfore no womman of no clerk is preysed  
 (WBT. ll. 697-706).<sup>242</sup>

Hamlin's attempt to date the birth specifically to the 6th February and to reach an approximate time of day too are most relevant to my concern. It is not sufficient for my case, however, that Hamlin shows that the only date in the 14th century when, simultaneously, Mars was in Taurus, Venus was near or in its exaltation degree at 27 Pisces, and Mercury near its detriment degree at 15 Pisces, was February 1342. Those conditions are certainly met on the date of his choice, 6 February that year, when the

---

<sup>242</sup> Hamlin (1974-5), p. 155. Hamlin's emphasis.



sun is in Aquarius. But - the most salient point - they are not complied with very shortly after, when the sun has moved out of the fixed sign Aquarius into mutable sign Pisces. To make the point more clearly: if Mars had been rising in Taurus with Venus near 27 Pisces and Mercury near 15 Pisces after the sun had left Aquarius and moved into mutable Pisces, which it had done by 11 February, 1342, there would have been no reason at all for supposing Chaucer to have been pointing to the fixed mode of the zodiac. As it is, however, by 11 February, just five days later, whilst Mercury was still near its detriment degree, Venus had moved out of Pisces altogether and was well into the third degree of Aries, in its detriment, quite irrelevant to the hypothesized horoscope. Not only does Hamlin's hypothesis therefore indirectly lend support to my own but he provides a very strong endorsement indeed of my suggestion that the *Prologue* is concerned with the fixed mode, when he writes: "Aside from the specifically mentioned Mars in Taurus and Venus and Mercury in Pisces, the medieval reader might also have remembered... that the midheaven, descendant, and nadir would be, respectively the signs Aquarius, Scorpio and Leo."<sup>243</sup> [My emphasis].

Of course, this reciprocal support rests on what some might consider to be the rather tenuous assumption that the Wife's allusion to Venus and Mercury in Pisces is in fact a reference to her own horoscope. Were it not, then my case would be without foundation. It is therefore imperative that an assessment be made of the horoscope suggested by Hamlin as the Wife of Bath's, an assessment that is independent of

---

<sup>243</sup> Hamlin (1974-5), p. 157. Note however, that Hamlin is wrong in suggesting that the midheaven is in Aquarius; it is in Capricorn, and the lower midheaven in Cancer. He confuses the midheaven with the zenith, which is in Aquarius, which is why the nadir, the opposite point is, as he states, in Leo.

Hamlin's own; for were I simply to reiterate Hamlin's interpretation of it, the charge could be levelled that the interpretation was accepted solely because it suited my case.

Before proceeding with such an evaluation, it is necessary to issue a caveat.

Although Hamlin produces the horoscope that is supposed to represent the positions of the planets on 6 February 1342, the longitudes he gives were taken from the classic reference work, namely Tuckerman's *Planetary, Lunar and Solar Positions A. D. 2 to A.D. 1649 at Five-Day and Ten-Day Intervals* (Philadelphia: Memoirs of The Amercian Philosophical Society, Vol. 59, 1964). This will have required Hamlin to *interpolate* between dates to obtain the longitudes for 6 February, and the result is a discrepancy between those and the longitudes obtained using a modern computer. While the discrepancy is not critical with the regard to the planets' longitudes, amounting to approximately 1 degree in each case, it is a significant one regarding the moon's position, which Hamlin finds to be in 2 degrees of Pisces, whereas it was in fact at 27 degrees of Aquarius, a difference of approximately 5 degrees. I mention this discrepancy as just one of the reasons why the horoscope presented in this thesis does not replicate that illustrated in *The Chaucer Review*.<sup>244</sup> My second reason is that Hamlin has transposed the Roman numerals IX and XI in the houses of the illustrated horoscope, with the consequence that Mercury and Venus are depicted correctly in the 11th house, which is labelled house IX, and Saturn is depicted correctly in the 9th house, which is labelled house XI. My third reason is that Hamlin tries to justify placing Mars just above the horizon "and visible to the naked eye." Whilst his assertion that "it is well to remember that such sightings were the foundation of astrology's

---

<sup>244</sup> Hamlin (1974-5), p. 159.

significance to medieval man"<sup>245</sup> is a reasonable one, it is very unlikely indeed that anyone would have sighted Mars just above the horizon at the time he has chosen; for the sun is in the tenth house, near the zenith; the sunlight would be very bright indeed, and Mars would therefore have been invisible. There is therefore no value to be derived from his placing mid-Taurus in the ascendant for the reason he states. What is important is that Mars is less than 5 complete degrees above the horizon and fewer than 25 degrees below it, otherwise it would have failed to qualify as being in the ascendant, according to Claudius Ptolemy's definition of the ascendant,<sup>246</sup> repeated by Chaucer in his *Treatise on the Astrolabe* (*Astr.* 2, 4). This provides a definitive time-frame of between 9.17 a.m. and 9.50 a.m., being respectively the times on that date when the 1st degree of Taurus is rising and the 16th degree of Taurus is rising. Any degree later than 16 Taurus in the ascendant would invalidate Chaucer's description of Mars being in the ascendant; for Mars' position at 11 degrees of Taurus meant that as soon as the 17th degree of Taurus rose, Mars was higher over the horizon than 5 degrees, and had left the ascendant area for the 12th house. (It should be understood that the area above the ascendant is the 12th house, but the 5 degrees immediately above the ascendant are defined by Ptolemy as belonging to the ascendant area even though in the 12th house. This is frequently a point of confusion.) It is impossible to speculate any further regarding the correct time for which the horoscope should be erected. And as it is impossible to know for sure how accurate were Chaucer's own calculations of the planetary positions or of those in whatever tables he used, the illustrations in this thesis (Diags. 14 and 15) are the charts for the earliest and latest

---

<sup>245</sup> Hamlin (1974-5), p. 159.

<sup>246</sup> Ptolemy (1936), p. 88.

times respectively on 6 February 1342 for which it is possible to have a horoscope conform to Chaucer's requirements.<sup>247</sup>

### Wife of Bath's horoscope

#### Natal Chart

6 Feb 1342

09:17 LMT +0:00:40

London

51N30 000W10

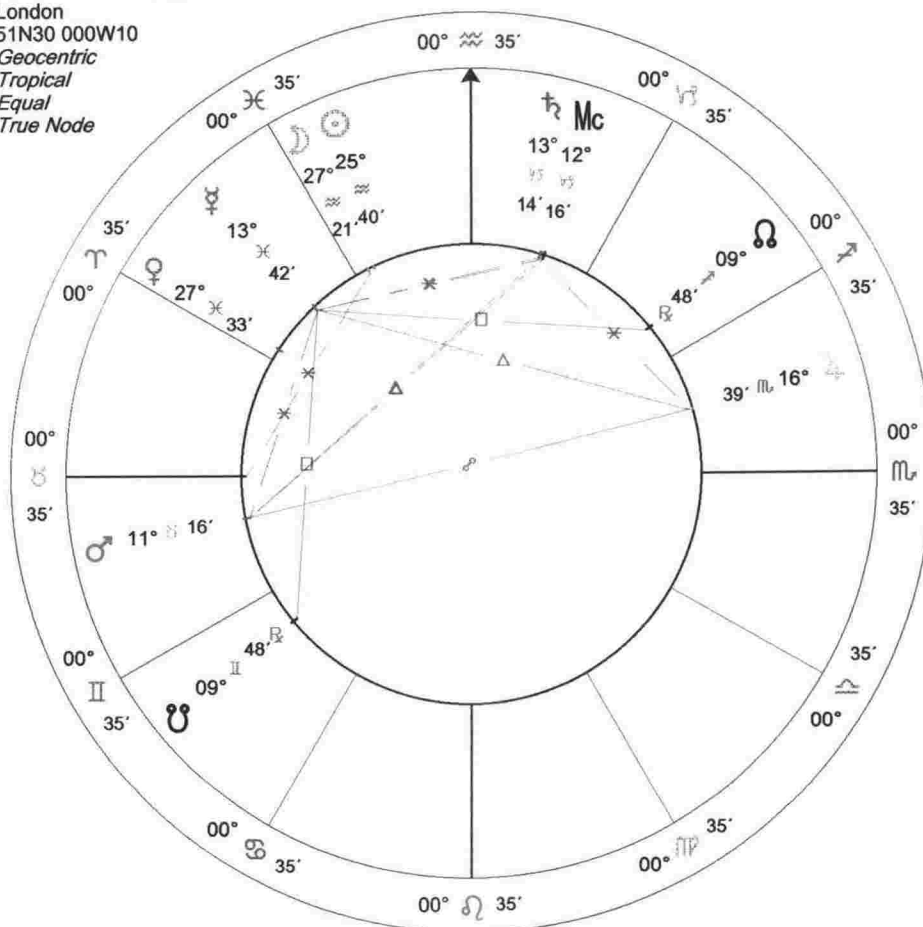
Geocentric

Tropical

Equal

True Node

Diagram 14  
Earliest possible birth-time



### KEY TO SIGNS AND SYMBOLS

♈ Aries	♎ Libra	☉ Sun	☾ Moon
♉ Taurus	♏ Scorpio	☿ Mercury	♀ Venus
♊ Gemini	♐ Sagittarius	♂ Mars	♃ Jupiter
♋ Cancer	♑ Capricorn	♄ Saturn	♊ Pars Fortunae
♌ Leo	♒ Aquarius	♊ Nth. Node	♋ Sth. Node
♍ Virgo	♓ Pisces	Mc Medium Coeli or Midheaven	

<sup>247</sup> Because of software limitations these charts are round instead of being the medieval rectangular shape.

**Wife of Bath's horoscope****Natal Chart**

6 Feb 1342

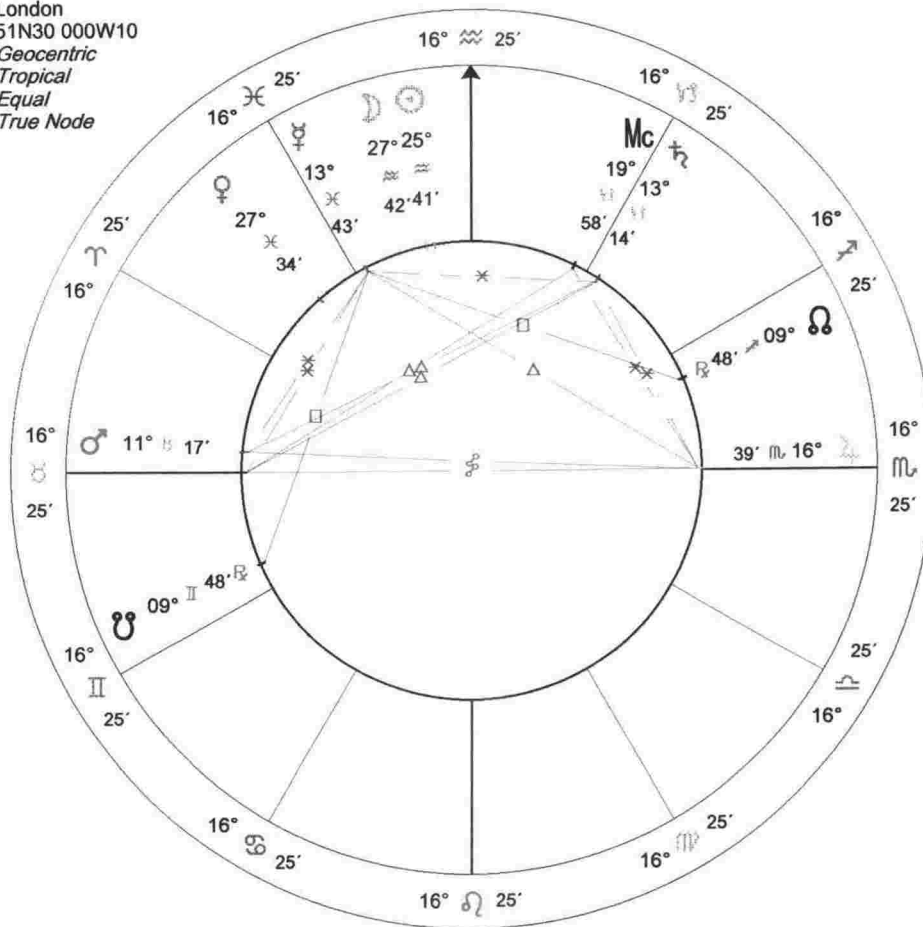
09:50 LMT +0:00:40

London

51N30 000W10

*Geocentric**Tropical**Equal**True Node***Diagram 15**

Latest possible birth-time

**KEY TO SIGNS AND SYMBOLS**

♈ Aries	♎ Libra	☉ Sun	☾ Moon
♉ Taurus	♏ Scorpio	☿ Mercury	♀ Venus
♊ Gemini	♐ Sagittarius	♂ Mars	♃ Jupiter
♋ Cancer	♑ Capricorn	♄ Saturn	☼ Pars Fortunae
♌ Leo	♒ Aquarius	♏ Nth. Node	♌ Sth. Node
♍ Virgo	♓ Pisces	Mc Medium Coeli or Midheaven	

John North's view of the astrology in the *Wife of Bath's Prologue* includes an evaluation of Hamlin's proposed horoscope but North also points to two alternative dates that he considers appropriate for the Wife's 'birth'. Both alternatives are based however, on an assumption by North that the Wife's emphasis on the importance of Venus<sup>248</sup> could possibly imply what he does describe as "a weak hypothesis",<sup>249</sup> namely that this planet was in the ascendant at her birth. North is aware that the Wife has not stated this to be the case, but investigates the possibility that not only Mars but Venus too was in the Taurus ascendant. Suggesting that 13 June 1392 provides "an answer to an astrologer's, if not a maiden's prayer,"<sup>250</sup> North concedes that the "responsibility for the Wife's character there rests largely with planets other than Mars and Venus." He adds, "[t]he scheme lacks the simplicity that she, through her repeated reference to those dominant planets, lead us to expect we shall find in the horoscope."<sup>251</sup> His second alternative is sunrise on 1 May, 1383.<sup>252</sup> Neither of North's alternatives accommodates the Piscean positions of Venus' exaltation and Mercury's detriment, his selections being based solely on the assumption that the Wife's emphatic allusions to Venus possibly imply its presence in the ascendant in Taurus. He concludes on the balance of probabilities and possibly also on the strength of his opinion that "[t]he scheme has more interesting aspects than one has any right to

---

<sup>248</sup> North (1988), p. 292.

<sup>249</sup> North (1988), p. 293.

<sup>250</sup> North (1988), p. 294.

<sup>251</sup> North (1988), p. 295.

<sup>252</sup> North (1988), p. 296.

expect",<sup>253</sup> that Hamlin's choice of 6 February 1342 is the preferable option.<sup>254</sup> North points out in a footnote<sup>255</sup> that Hamlin misrepresents the astrological aspects in that chart, an error of Hamlin's that compounds those I have earlier referred to, but which even taken together do not diminish the value of the suggested date and hypothesized chart.

North's further criticism, that he doesn't understand Hamlin's placement of the sun and moon in the tenth house, is somewhat surprising. Despite Hamlin's astonishing carelessness, he does not make the mistake of attempting to pinpoint and define the specific birthtime and ascendant degree of the putative horoscope. So, not having specified the precise midheaven and ascendant degrees, there is no point in trying to erect the Standard horoscope, whose intermediate house cusps (lines dividing the horoscope into 12 sectors) are determined by tri-secting the space between the midheaven and ascendant and that between the ascendant and lower midheaven and extending those arcs through to the opposite hemispheres of the horoscope. Tri-section of space is possible only if the coordinates are available. As they are not in this instance, Hamlin has done the only sensible thing, which is to use the sign ascending as a general base from which to mark off twelve equal divisions of 30 degrees, each 30-degree interval in this case constituting one whole house of the horoscope. The result is that the zenith, 90 degrees south of the ascendant (south is 'up' in a northern hemisphere horoscope), which here forms the cusp of the 10th house, lies in the sign Aquarius. The sun and moon each being in a later degree of that sign than is the zenith,

---

<sup>253</sup> North (1988), p. 298.

<sup>254</sup> North (1988), p. 301.

<sup>255</sup> North (1988), *footnote*, p. 298.

are together forced by this scheme to emerge in the 10th house. (Even the interpolated and mistaken lunar position of Hamlin's would place the moon in the 10th rather than the 11th, given that Hamlin selects mid-Taurus as the ascendant.) I doubt that North would be unaware of this reason and his puzzlement is therefore something of a puzzle in itself. For North to suggest that anyone at all should employ the Standard Method of horoscope construction (which his own assiduous researches 'rediscovered': see North, *Horoscopes and History*) when employing a known fallacious birth-time or none at all, is puzzling indeed.

Summing up the situation, North decides that "[o]ne of the most important things about the 1342 scheme is that it makes use of what is admittedly only a very broad hint - about the positions of Mercury and Venus - but a hint that goes straight to the heart of her [the Wife's] crusade against the frown of the cleric."<sup>256</sup> And North considers that one factor tipping the scales in favour of 1342 is that particular horoscope's suitable basis for an anniversary horoscope for the Wife's fortieth birthday preceding marriage to her fifth husband.<sup>257</sup> North appears oblivious of the fact that basing the validity of a natal chart on the validity of a solar return chart for 40 years later is dependent on the validity of astrological theory regarding a predictive technique; for if it weren't valid, there would be no point in North's trying to illustrate the validity of the selected horoscope by such a means.

My view is that North's alternatives are interesting but unnecessary attempts to accommodate the Wife's emphasis on the strength of Venus in her chart. As Taurus was her rising sign then Venus is her *ruling planet, her own significator*, regardless of

---

<sup>256</sup> North (1988), p. 302.

<sup>257</sup> North (1988), p. 302.



whatever other conditions are present. That Mars is rising in Taurus means that Venus, the ruler of Taurus, is Mars' dispositor, meaning that Venus softens Mars, assists its purpose, disposing of its own strength to some degree (and Mars in Taurus is already in the sign of its detriment). All of that remains true irrespective of the true position of Venus. There would therefore be something in it of a surprising bonus were the 1342 horoscope actually to be the one Chaucer had in mind when writing the Wife's *Prologue*. That bonus is in the form of Venus being in its exaltation, not only by sign, but, of special importance, by degree (the 27th degree of Pisces) too. That is more than an adequate reason for a medieval astrologer or anyone with a popular perception of astrology in those days to shout hooplah.

My first and perhaps least convincing point in favour of the horoscope being the Wife's is one already made regarding her tendency to be preoccupied with herself and with what is hers. Put another way, it would not be at all out of character for the Wife to have been alluding to her own horoscope rather than talking about abstract astrological configurations. Related to that point is her characteristic of misquoting or distorting patristic exegesis and authoritative works generally, including Ptolemy's *Almagest* (WBT. ll. 180-183), yet her memory serves her well regarding the astrological principles pertinent to the sign of Mercury's detriment and Venus' exaltation, referencing, if not citing, Ptolemy's *Tetrabiblos* accurately.<sup>258</sup>

Perhaps the most convincing components of the hypothesized horoscope are those of Venus in Pisces and Jupiter in Scorpio, the latter not mentioned by Hamlin. Because Taurus is her ascendant, Scorpio, the opposing sign, must be her descendant, the part of the horoscope that relates to partners, marriage and open enemies (as

---

<sup>258</sup> Ptolemy (1936), p. 31.

distinct from secret enemies, relegated to the 12th house). If Hamlin's choice of year is correct, then the Wife was born with Jupiter in Scorpio in her descendant. Jupiter being symbolic of expansion and largesse, and Scorpio being the sign associated with sensuality and passion, Alison is shown to derive enjoyment and fulfilment (Jupiter) through intensely sensual relationships, including marriage. The one major opposition aspect between the planets in her horoscope is that between the rising Mars in Taurus and the setting Jupiter in Scorpio, an opposition implying a great (Jupiter) conflagration (Mars), exhaustion of physical resources (ascendant area involved) through over-indulgence of a strong appetite (Mars in Taurus afflicted by Jupiter in Scorpio).

Venus, while exalted in Pisces, implies a lack of discrimination in the choice of partners, for Pisces is the sign opposite to Virgo, the sign of discrimination. Further, Venus in Pisces is Venus Aphrodite, not Venus Minerva. The position of Venus in Pisces is frequently associated with prostitution; it is the 'Mary Magdalene' position of Venus, the impulse to sacrifice all for love, to lose oneself in another in order to find one's own identity. It is possibly relevant that the name Mary is given to five women in the New Testament.<sup>259</sup> Significantly, whilst Pisces is the sign of Venus' exaltation, it is also the sign of the cosmos, implying universal love, of the most sublime kind. Being human, we are rarely capable of experiencing that transcendent quality, and its alternative manifestation is to express 'love' or desire indiscriminately, to 'everyone', hence the association with prostitution. That is not the only signifier of prostitution in that horoscope. Edgar Laird has drawn attention to an unequivocal statement in the late 13th century *compilatio de astrorum scientia*, written by one Leopold of Austria

---

<sup>259</sup> Schimmel (1993), pp. 109-110.

that "if a woman is born under a feminine astrological sign, such as Taurus, and Mars is in that sign, then the woman will be a whore."<sup>260</sup>

Alison is ostensibly concerned to advocate "maistrie" in marriage. But it becomes apparent in both her *Prologue* and *Tale* that her hidden agenda is somewhat more compromising. She uses *exempla* to suggest a universal generalisation that women are ready to make concessions to equality in marriage as soon as men show adequate deference to their wives:

And whan that I hadde geten unto me,  
By maistrie, al the soveraynetee,  
And that he seyde, 'Myn owene trewe wyf,  
Do as thee lust the terme of al thy lyf;  
Keep thyn honour, and keep eek myn estaat'-  
After that day we hadden never debaat.  
God helpe me so, I was to hym as kynde  
As any wyf from Denmark unto Ynde,  
And also trewe, and so was he to me  
(WBT. ll. 817-825).

And in the *Wife's Tale*, the Knight declares to his newly wedded ugly old wife, in reply to the choice she offers of having her remain foul and old but faithful and humble, or young and desirable with the risk of romantic intrigue causing domestic problems in the future:

"My lady and my love, and wyf so deere,  
Cheseth youreself which may be moost plesance  
And moost honour to yow and me also.  
I do no fors the wheither of the two,  
For as yow liketh, it suffiseth me"  
(WBT. ll. 1230-1235).

---

<sup>260</sup> Edgar Laird, "Mars In Taurus At The Nativity Of The Wife Of Bath," *ELN* (September, 1990), p.16.

In reply, his wife asks if it is thereby the case that she has mastery over him (*WBT*. ll. 1236-7). “‘Ye, certes, wyf,’ quod he, ‘I holde it best.’” Thereupon his wife declares that she will be both fair in appearance and true to him, and on revealing herself to be truly beautiful, she “obeyed hym in every thyng/That myghte doon hym plesance or likyng” (*WBT*. ll. 1255-6).

There are however, two larger, intertwined medieval philosophical issues forming the central crux of *Prologue* and *Tale*. The first is whether we are fated to act as we do because of influences from the constellation prominent at our birth. The second is whether noble birth places either a physical or moral imperative on someone to act nobly.

On the first question Alison may appear to have made explicit her own position when she states:

I folwed ay myn inclinacioun  
By vertu of my constellacioun;  
That made me I koude noght withdrawe  
My chambre of Venus from a good felawe  
(*WBT*. ll. 615-618)

Although it is tempting to infer from such a bland attempt at self-justification Alison's assumption of a fatalistic determination of her behaviour, such an inference is not forced upon us. It was (and still is) an old adage among astrologers, that the stars incline, they do not compel. And Alison has implied such a concession to free will in her use of the words “myn inclinacioun.” The *Riverside* edition interprets “inclinacioun” as “astrologically determined inclination”, a definition that might be seen by some as self-contradictory because they draw an inference of ‘strong’ determinism, another term for which is fatalism. Determinism, in its weak sense as used by, for example, social psychologists, does not imply fatalism, and Alison's use of

"inclinacioun" suggests that she is implying the weak sense. One must question of course, whether such a distinction between strong and weak determinism existed in medieval philosophy and popular understanding. It would seem safe to assume so; for people consulted astrologers with a view to selecting auspicious moments for inaugurating journeys, and given that assumption of time's changing qualities and of human freedom of choice to take advantage of its variability, it follows that the perception of astrological influences was one encompassing soft rather than hard determinism. So while Alison appears to be claiming that she had no choice ("That made me I koude noght withdrawe..."), she has already conceded that the impulse is merely that of an inclination, from which it is possible to decline. Had she said: 'I folwed my determinacioun/By vertu of my constellacioun;' there would have been no ambivalence, hence no ambiguity. It would seem justifiable therefore to infer that the Wife is simply setting up the question rather than answering it. She is both asserting and undercutting a view tacitly accepted in her time and she does so for the purpose of questioning such a generally held assumption that one's nature at birth predetermines one's future behaviour.

Having set up this problem, she then tells a tale that illustrates how a knight, born into the nobility, acts ignobly through violating a woman, but is brought to act nobly or with *gentillesse* by an arousal of compassion towards an old, ugly woman whom he has been forced to marry against his wishes as a reward to her for assistance in providing the answer to a riddle, without which he would have been put to death for his crime. The *Wife's Tale* demonstrates clearly that insight and understanding bring compassion and modify one's inclination to act according to what St. Thomas Aquinas calls one's sublunary nature or corporeal instincts. Compassion is a Christian virtue,

and the *Tale* appears to be illustrating the Thomistic solution to astrological determinism, which Aquinas expressed as allowing the spirit of Christ, which he equates to the intellect, to guide one's actions in order to overcome the influence of the stars. The *Wife's Tale* thereby also deals with the second issue, which concerns the matter of noble birth and the disposition to act nobly.

Whilst the event of the Italian astrologer d'Ascoli's death at the stake has lost significance over time, in the 14th century it was still a clear warning signal to those caught up in a central debate of the era: namely, whether one was born with one's nature imprinted upon one by the constellations, or whether one had the free will to choose to behave differently. Of considerable relevance to this debate was the tendency for some people to assume the equation of nobility with virtue. So whilst it appears, on the surface, that the *Wife of Bath's Prologue* and *Tale* are concerned primarily with the question as to who should have mastery in marriage, it could be said that an equally strong concern is about determinism and the nature of nobility, expressed through *gentillesse* or what one might otherwise call magnanimity. The Wife is questioning a tacit medieval assumption by some, though one questioned increasingly, that to be born of noble ancestry necessarily entailed that one acted virtuously.

Jean de Meung alludes to this matter in his *Roman de la Rose*, where allegorical Nature declares that if anyone wanted gentility "other than that excellent gentility which I bestow, called natural franchise ... let them win new gentility, if they

have in them the necessary process. For if they don't achieve it by themselves they will never be gentle through anyone else."<sup>261</sup>

This issue is raised in the knight's newly wedded wife's discussion concerning nobility:

But, for ye speken of swich gentillesse  
As is descended out of old richesse,  
That therfore sholden ye be gentil men,  
Swich arrogance is nat worth an hen  
(*WBT.* ll. 1109-1112).

She follows this assertion with the claim that the exemplar of nobility in action is Christ, and as Christians it is possible for us to act nobly irrespective of our parental heritage. She points out that a lord's son frequently may be found doing something shameful and villainous (*WBT.* ll. 1150-51):

For gentillesse nys but renomee  
Of thyne auncestres, for hire heigh bountee,  
Which is a strange thyng to thy persone.  
Thy gentillesse cometh fro God allone,  
Thanne comth oure verray gentillesse of grace;  
It was no thyng biquethe us with oure place  
(*WBT.* ll. 1159-1164).

The Wife's two theses concerning *maistrie* in marriage and *gentillesse* are therefore both challenges to culture and the medieval cultural norms regarding the roles of men and women and ideas concerned with nobility, the higher echelons of social power. Many have seen in the Wife an early advocate of feminist principles. We can conclude that she was, at the very least, a social rebel, a champion of the counter-culture. Culture, being the expression of society's creative powers, is represented by

---

<sup>261</sup> Jean De Meung, (continuation of Guillaume de Lorris's) *Le Roman de la Rose*, ed. and trans. F.

Lecoy (Les classiques français du moyen âge), ll. 18840-54.

the zodiacal Leo; the counter-culture therefore, as pointed out earlier, by zodiacal Aquarius. Aquarius is known through its iconography as the Water Pourer or the Water Carrier. Although deriving initially from its association with the rainy season in the lands of astrology's origins, Aquarius' connotation of bearing water was seized by the popular imagination and assumed to be represented by people who were involved practically with water, as one might recall in association with John the carpenter in the *Miller's Tale*: irrigationists, builders of aqueducts, stewards and bath attendants. In an informative article concerning the Wife's association with Bath,<sup>262</sup> Hope Weissman suggests she may herself have been associated with the stews, in which case one of her functions would have been the carrying and pouring of water, an activity obviously part of the job of the young 'virgins' who waited "beside Bathe" as depicted in illustrations accompanying Weissman's article. It may surprise some that Chaucer didn't name the Wife after Magdalene; but then, Alison is hardly an example of humility.

In the Wife's *Prologue* and *Tale* we have therefore found evidence of Chaucer's concern with the fixed grand cross of Aquarius-Leo and Taurus-Scorpio: Aquarius in her month of birth; Leo in the subject material of her *Tale*, namely mastery and nobility; Taurus in her self-reference regarding her actual birth hour and rising sign; and Scorpio in her preoccupation with sexuality and possibly an implicit reference to the placement of Jupiter in that sign in her descendant, the 7th house, the house of

---

<sup>262</sup> Hope Phyllis Weissman, "Why Chaucer's Wife is from Bath," *The Chaucer Review*, 15 (1981), pp. 11-36.



marriage and liaisons. Those four signs are the signs of power,<sup>263</sup> and it would seem that at the astrological level of her discussions, Alison is anticipating by a few hundred years the modern feminist controversy concerning abuse of sexual desire and the claim that such is a matter of power rather than of sexuality; whilst at the anagogical level she maintains what is becoming clearly Chaucer's theme, namely that astrological determinism may be overcome by allowing the influence of Christ into one's life.

With the clues provided pointing to the probability that the Wife of Bath was born with the sun in Aquarius, and the evidence favouring a Leo association for her *Prologue* and *Tale*, one notes the possibility that Chaucer is pointing us at this stage in the *Canterbury Tales* to the relationship of teller to tale via the polarity of opposing zodiacal signs. He describes such a polarity in his *Treatise On The Astrolabe* as being that of the 'nadir of [my] sonne'... "And evere as the sonne clymbith upper and upper, so goth his nadir downer and downer" (*Tr.* II, 12, p. 673.) Thus, the Wife's sun being in Aquarius, its nadir is in Leo. But one might with equal justification reverse the terminology and say that if each *Tale* is representative of the characteristics of a zodiacal sign as outlined in part so far, then the teller is at the nadir position in relationship to his or her *Tale*. There is a certain irony in this, in that frequently the teller of a tale can be perceived as expressing the very opposite traits to those which the pilgrims are being exhorted by the tale's 'sentence' to cultivate.

---

<sup>263</sup> The constellations Taurus, Leo, Scorpio and Aquarius were traditionally regarded as the foundation, or power signs, of the Zodiac, given emphasis because they contained four bright stars: Aldebaran in Taurus; Regulus in Leo; Antares in Scorpio, and Fomalhaut, believed by many to have been in Aquarius, though possibly it was in Pisces.

## The friar's Tale



The *Friar's Tale* is distinguished from the others by the relatively little attention focused upon it by scholars, an observation that might have evoked a wry smile from Chaucer; for this *Tale* is, at one level, concerned with the consequence of ignoring a little distinction: that between a curse casually uttered and one sworn with sincere intent. Perhaps it has not provoked much discussion because the narrative appears unremarkable and the plot to be a rather commonplace *exemplum* of an official or institutional representative acting dishonestly and incurring a severe penalty. But when the *Tale* is linked to the sixth zodiacal sign, Virgo, and to the mutable cross, it becomes evident that it has an intricately designed fabric woven on the loom of the hermeneutical circle<sup>264</sup> - that continual reciprocity between whole and parts by which our comprehension of meaning is enlarged. It would seem to have a dual theme: betrayal of the Word through abuse of one's official function within the system of the Christian church, leading to misguidance of those for whom one holds some spiritual responsibility; and a parallel abuse of words through their indiscriminate usage, leading to a misdirection of understanding.

With the *Friar's Tale*, Chaucer has reached the sixth zodiacal sign, Virgo. Associated in the zodiacal melothesia with the intestines, Virgo's astrological symbolism is that of discriminating between particular functions or between the functions of parts and particles within a system, irrespective of whether that system is

---

<sup>264</sup> One uses a circular loom when doing French knitting!

of natural origin or is one devised by human artifice. Our attention is thereby required to focus on the making of specific functional distinctions; dissection and analysis into components, sections, individual units, discrete bits and pieces; the letters of a word, the words of a sentence; upon the tiny; on particles and the particular, divisions into multiplicities, on sub-systems having the purpose of maintaining orderly, efficient action of a larger organic whole; upon the refinement of skills and techniques; on the service of menials, functionaries, servants and employees; the offices, officers and functionaries of the Christian church and its ministry; divisions of labour; public service, that being the administrative branches of government; Nature as manifested through taxonomic diversity and differentiation of energy; minutiae; upon cogs in machinery; on nature magic, the operations and techniques of applied knowledge including natural medicine and healing; practical crafts requiring technical competence and perception of the intricate methods required to produce detailing; on the appearances, functions and processes related to the myriad of entities that we classify and categorize in taxonomies of multifarious kinds. This detailed list of Virgoan significations is intended to assist the reader's appreciation of Virgoan concern with minutiae.

Virgo is the last of the first six signs of the zodiac and is therefore at one pole of the last binary opposition comprising Virgo and Pisces. Virgo's position just before the autumnal equinox therefore represents the *maximum differentiation* of that initially undifferentiated primary energy that springs forth unrefined at the vernal equinox. Such differentiation is perceived in the infinite variety of components comprising the material, physical world. Prompted by Virgo's manifestation in Nature's abundance, human perception of the world is consequently focused upon parts rather than upon

wholes. Perhaps the Virgo-Pisces opposition is most succinctly expressed as being symbolic of the microcosmic-macrocosmic relationship itself.

Being a mutable earth element sign, Virgo implies adaptive change occurring in material or physical elements or components. Just as the air element implies ideas, theories and idealism, the fire element the creative impulse of spirit and intellect, and the water element subconscious motivation of feeling-response emerging through beliefs, convictions, sympathetic bonding and compassionate action, so the earth element implies tangible form and practical, physical action and material motivation. Adaptation for the purpose of efficient, effective action implies intention. Medieval philosophers' concern about the problem of intention was a component of the debate about free will and determinism, and a subject of controversy. One of the claims made was that an action carried out was an expression of someone's intention to carry out that action. As we shall see, the *Friar's Tale* takes up that issue.

In the zodiacal melothesia it is at the developmental stage of adolescence that we become fully conscious of a major distinction between discrete functions in the system of the physical body and aware of the meaning of virginity and purity; for Virgo is contiguous to but precedes the second major equinox at Libra, the Balance, the sign of unity with another. Virgo therefore marks an important transitional phase in any individual's life, and it is no meaningless coincidence that Bloomfield has concluded that "the Friar's Tale...of all the tales is most clearly about crossing a fundamental threshold."<sup>265</sup> Virgo's symbolism of purity is as well-known as the association of the Virgo-Pisces opposition with Christ and salvation. Allen says that Virgo is "the oldest

---

<sup>265</sup> Morton W. Bloomfield, "The Friar's Tale as a Liminal Tale," *The Chaucer Review*, 17 (1983), pp. 286-291 (p. 291, note 7).

purely allegorical representation of innocence and virtue."<sup>266</sup> He refers also to the assertion by 13th-century philosopher Albertus Magnus, that Christ's own horoscope [ascendant sign] lay in Virgo<sup>267</sup> [an allusion that may have relevance as a source for the Wife of Bath's description of Christ as having Himself been a maid (*WBT*. l. 139)]. It is not with Christ that the *Friar's Tale* is concerned however, but with one of His servants and with a fiend, a servant of the devil. Both the summoner and the fiend are mere functionaries within their respective hierarchies, cogs in the machinery; they are 'inferiors' (an archaic term associated with Virgo, implying servants) within their respective spiritual domains. Service as a functionary is symbolized by Virgo because such service is activity carried out as a subordinate component within an organic system.

Chaucer takes up the Virgo-Pisces symbolism right from the start of the *Friar's Tale*. The first word, 'Whilom' removes the account beyond the context of defined time and reduces the truth-value of the phrase 'ther was dwellynge in my contree'. Further, "my contree" is not specified either, removing us even further from the context of time and space within which accounts acquire credibility. Instead, we are taken into the realm of potential fantasy, the domain of Pisces, boundless, formless, inchoate, anonymous.

The Friar presents his *Tale's* first character, the Archdeacon, with evident ambiguity. The Archdeacon's punishments extend to fornicators, witches, panderers, defamators, adulterers, church thieves, violators of contracts, users and simonists, lechers and those who fail to pay their full tithes. The Friar thus portrays the

---

<sup>266</sup> Allen (1963), p. 462.

<sup>267</sup> Allen (1963), p. 463.

Archdeacon as retributory, punitive and intolerant, lacking in Christian compassion and unforgiving, someone who administers the letter rather than the spirit of the Christian faith. Yet we might, dispassionately, choose to see him as merely carrying out his official duties with a Christian conscience and in censorship of those activities judged sinful by those of his faith, not excluding the Christian Fathers.

The Friar cannot be unaware of the questionable stance he himself has taken, and his audience, and Chaucer's subsequent readers too, could be somewhat disquieted by it. Once it is apparent that the Friar, as teller of this Virgo-related story, is astrologically associated with the opposing sign Pisces, the sign of ambivalence, then the Friar's apparent hypocrisy is more easily understood. Chaucer has already told us, in the *General Prologue*, that the Friar is named Huberd, and that probably has connotations of St. Hubert, the patron saint of huntsmen. Warren Ginsberg has stated, "[A]part from Madame Eglentyne, brother Huberd is the only pilgrim named in the *General Prologue*"; and "Why Chaucer so distinguished the Friar, especially in light of the fact that the name was uncommon in English records of the time, has always puzzled critics."<sup>268</sup> I suggest the following reason, connected with Chaucer's requirement to show Huberd's association with the zodiacal sign Pisces. According to the legend, Huberd experienced a vision on a Good Friday while he was hunting deer in a forest<sup>269</sup> - and Christ's sacrifice on the first Good Friday, visions, forest and deer

---

<sup>268</sup> Warren Ginsberg, "This Worthy Lymtour was Cleped Huberd: A Note on the Friar's Name," *The Chaucer Review*, 21 (1986), pp. 53-57 (p. 53).

<sup>269</sup> F.L. Cross, (ed.), *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 2nd edn., F.L. Cross and E.A. Livingstone (eds.) (London: O.U.P., 1974), p. 672.

are all symbolized by Pisces, as is any transcendent experience, place of refuge and seclusion, beast of burden or those which live in the wild.

The *Friar's Tale* is replete with Virgoan and Piscean imagery, from the emphasis on the little things: "smale tytheres" (*FrT.* l. 1312), "smale tithes" and "smal offrynge" (*FrT.* l. 1315), "purses smale" (*FrT.* l. 1350) and "wages...ful smale" (*FrT.* l. 1426), to the protean nature of the fiend, who claims that:

... whan us liketh we kan take us oon,  
Or elles make yow seme we been shape;  
Somtyme lyk a man, or lyk an ape,  
Or lyk an angel kan I ryde or go  
(*FrT.* ll. 1462-5).

Such ability to change form, as mentioned earlier, is indicative of the mutable mode of the zodiac and being a spirit, the fiend is also Piscean in nature.

Such observations are rather trivial, however; for the *Friar's Tale* proceeds at a much deeper level than is immediately apparent from the narrative. Just as the *Reeve's Tale*, our earlier instance of the mutable cross, illustrated the consequences of drawing the wrong inferences from *visual* perception, in like manner the *Friar's Tale* illustrates the consequences of drawing wrong inferences from *auditory* perception. Language is itself a system, and its two components, grammar and words, function to convey meaning and thereby are conducive to insight and understanding at the imaginative, transcendent, non-verbal level. Letters and the sounds of words are simply visual marks and auditory signals respectively, hence Geminian. Gemini is the sign of marks, not of signs. The origin of this association is simply that of the meaningless gestures and sounds made by neonates, associated with the Geminian parts of the body: the hands, arms and the lungs. Though the marks may in fact be signs, they are not so defined until they are signs *of* something or signs *to* someone, i.e. they

communicate information. The letters d-o-g are Geminian in that they are essentially apparently random shapes. Even grouped as 'dog' they remain meaningless, though stimulating curiosity in an observer. For someone to write those letters either separately or grouped, is a Geminian action, even if they are invested with personal meaning. They resemble the utterance of a baby who is hungry. But as soon as someone else perceives the meaning as a consequence either of being told, or through repetition of association with an event of some kind, then the marks or sounds become Sagittarian: significant. Whilst we today appreciate that their meanings are not intrinsic to the marks or sounds, but acquire significance through social contract, they were once believed to have intrinsic meaning and power: "words of power" being used in medieval times to effect magical ends. 'Spelling' a word is etymologically associated with the casting of spells.

But the necessary factor qualifying the meaning of a word is the context in which it is uttered. And insofar as 'meaning' meant 'being intended', it was necessary to examine not only what philosophers of language called the 'intension' (sic) of a proposition but also the intention of the utterer. The reason for that was that whilst one might infer from someone's action that he or she intended to carry out a specific action, one could not infer simply from the action alone, that the individual intended the consequences of that action. This applies equally to speech acts. The plot of the *Friar's Tale* is tied in closely not only with words and their perceived significations but also with the different consequences possible when the same words are uttered in different contexts and with different intentions, the word 'intention' in such instances having connotations not only of 'meaning' but also of 'meaning to', that is, the intensity of the intension of the proposition or declaration. Thus, running parallel to



Chaucer's concern with servants of the church and their function is his concern with words and their integrity of functioning as part of the system of grammar and meaning.

The introduction of Judas into the *Tale* alerts us to potential betrayal. Betrayal, as pointed out in this thesis at the *Reeve's Tale*, is associated with Pisces. In the *Friar's Tale* it occurs three times in quick succession by the summoner's denying his conscience: asking for instruction in crafty practices, he exhorts the yeoman: "And spareth nat for conscience ne synne" (*FrT.* l. 1422); admits "No maner conscience of that have I" (*FrT.* l. 1438) and that "Stomak ne conscience ne knowe I noon" (*FrT.* l. 1441). He thus betrays the Word of God by abuse of his office and thereby of his function as a servant of his faith. The integrity of words themselves is betrayed by an abuse of their function within the system of grammar. Let's see how these acts of betrayal run parallel to each other and how the parallelogram is constructed along the mutable cross of the zodiac.

The summoner is a thief. The Friar emphasizes that fact: "And right as Judas hadde purses smale,/And was a theef, right swich a theef was he" (*FrT.* ll. 1350-1), and again, "He was, if I shal yeven hym his laude,/A theef, and eek a somnour, and a baude." (*FrT.* ll. 1353-4). The chief source of the summoner's income is implicit blackmail and actual bribery, and because such contribute the most to his income, he works hard to ensure that his female secret informers are looked after. The Friar says, "And for that was the fruyt of al his rente,/Therefore on it he sette al his entente." (*FrT.* ll. 1373-4).

Taking a journey for the purpose of robbing a widow by deception, the summoner encounters a yeoman, who is carrying a bow and arrows - hence the Sagittarian component is introduced and with it the symbolism of direction, both

physical through the time-space dimension, and spiritual or moral because of Sagittarius' association with faith, *pietas*, religion. Their conversation is larded with lies: "Artow thanne a bailly?" (*FrT*. l. 1392) the summoner is asked. To which he replies that he is, being too ashamed of the reputation of summoners to admit to being one. Such an evasion is in itself a small betrayal of his faith, reminiscent of the disciples' refusal to admit their association with Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane.

The yeoman professes to be a bailiff too, which is also a lie, as the *Tale* later reveals, but paradoxically using words to misdirect the listener is a legitimate gambit when they are uttered by a fiend, so there is a paradoxical integrity in the fiend's subtlety. He then makes a promise to the summoner that all the gold and silver in his chest at home would be the summoner's if ever the summoner should visit him at his distant location, the identity of which he fails to disclose at this stage. The summoner's shrewdness deserts him, it would seem; for on the basis of such a specious promise he joins the stranger in making a vow of brotherhood until death. A little later the stranger reveals that his home is "far in the north contree" (*FrT*. l. 1413) and expresses the hope that he will sometime see the summoner there. (*FrT*. l. 1414). The north, as mentioned in Chapter Five of this thesis, was traditionally associated with hell.

In their subsequent interchanges the stranger makes it evident that he is in fact a fiend and that his dwelling is in hell (*FrT*. l. 1448). His purpose is to obtain whatever people will give him, he says, and he takes whatever he can, without scruple. He reminds the summoner that they share the same intention: "Look how thou rydest for the same entente,/To wyne good, thou rekkest nevere how,/Right so fare I, for ryde wolde I now/ Unto the worldes ende for a preye" (*FrT*. ll. 1452-3).

The summoner is evidently enjoying this complicity with the devil: he identifies with him occupationally and motivationally. The important constituent here is the fiend's assertion of the summoner's "entente"; for the summoner puts up no argument, and the reader is justified in drawing the inference that the summoner does indeed betray the Word; for the Word is another term for Christ, perceived in medieval Christianity as God (*Logos*) incarnate.

So, in this *exemplum*, the man whose intended function is, through service (Virgo) to set an example for those of his faith, steps out of line by resorting to chicanery: he is described as "full of jangles" (*FrT.* l. 1407) (Gemini). He may be said to be misplaced. And he leads astray those whom his superiors intend should be lead along the paths of righteousness (Sagittarius), for the purpose of their atonement and salvation (Pisces).

Words too, are part of a system, the system of grammar. One might recall that one of the functions of Gemini is that of denotation. The intended function of words is to lead the listener or reader to comprehension, by means of which, deeper transcendent insight is gained. Words have no intrinsic meaning however, and are therefore without power. They stand, devoid of context, as do individual human beings who are outside the social system, insignificant. When a word is placed in the context of a system of grammatical functions however, it acquires meaning, and its power and significance are defined by both its placement within the grammatical construction of the sentence and the context within which the sentence is expressed. This parallels the role of the summoner, a man whose role and power are meaningless outside of the religious system in which it is invested with meaning. But in the same manner as the intensional significance of a sentence is changed if a word is corrupted or misplaced by

an infringement of the rules of the grammatical system and will lead the listener or reader to misdirected faith in the information communicated, so the corrupt official in the church system seduces those over whom he has administrative jurisdiction in the diocese.

The remainder of the *Tale* takes up the question of the credibility and the efficacy of a word, which are shown to be related directly to the 'intent' with which it is expressed. It is possible that Chaucer was drawing upon the frequent references in the *Picatrix* to words and their efficacy in magic. Eugenio Garin writes:

The word, the verbum, the speech, of which *Picatrix* speaks so much, is the word which rises to the stars or to the stellar divinities or reaches the 'spirits' of things: *quia verbum in se habet nigromantie virtutem* (because the word contains in itself the power of necromancy). As the Arab text says, 'speech is the most beautiful kind of theoretical magic.'<sup>270</sup>

Upon becoming first acquainted, the summoner swears brotherhood with the fiend "by my feith!" (*FrT.* l. 1403). "Everych in ootheres hand his trouthe leith/For to be sworne bretheren til they deye" (*FrT.* ll. 1404-5). Swearing, making vows, making declarations and promises, giving one's word and taking an oath are all forms of utterance invested with special intent: there is an essential constituent of faith in the intent of the utterance, in its 'truth'. But the *Friar's Tale* has already made clear that the faith of the summoner is suspect, so that any vow made on its basis is similarly unreliable. The matter of faith or trust enters very frequently into their conversation, each declaring that he speaks truly or asking the other to do so: "...tel me feithfully/In

---

<sup>270</sup> Eugenio Garin, *Astrology in the Renaissance, The Zodiac of Life*, trans. Carolyn Jackson and June Allen (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983), p. 55.

myn office how that I may moost wyne;/And spareth nat for conscience ne synne” (*FrT.* ll. 1420-1), a rather revealing request by the deceitful summoner for truth and reliability on the part of the stranger-yeoman; “Now, by my trouthe, brother deere,” seyde he,/As I shal tellen thee a feithful tale” (*FrT.* ll. 1424-5); “I can no bettre telle, feithfully” (*FrT.* l. 1433) “Yet tel me,” quod the somonour, “feithfully” (*FrT.* l. 1504); “My trouthe wol I holde, as in this cas./For though thou were the devil Sathanas,/My trouthe wol I holde to my brother,/As I am sworn, and ech of us til oother,/For to be trewe brother in this cas” (*FrT.* ll. 1525-1529). With each request for or declaration of integrity the audience is inclined to be increasingly wary, in the same manner as today one responds inwardly to anyone who exclaims “Trust me!”.

In the 14th century giving one’s word was tantamount to swearing an oath. The association of words with the envied skills of spelling, writing and reading gave words a rare currency value. Furthermore, the verb ‘to spell’ closely intertwined both the magical act of putting a spell on someone and the grammatical act of creating a word. This magical association gave words a power believed to be inherent in their structure and utterance, a perception inherited from those who in earlier centuries had written and spoken Hebrew and who were acquainted with the *Torah*. That such a belief was current in Chaucer’s time may be inferred from the interests, two hundred and more years later, of John Dee and the writings of Henry Cornelius Agrippa, from which it is apparent that little had changed in the interim regarding such beliefs.

The summoner asks the fiend, “What maketh yow to han al this labour?” (*FrT.* l. 1473). To which the fiend replies at length, and in that part of the reply which answers the summoner’s question directly, nearly all of the sentences contain words

expressive of Virgo and Pisces and their association with service, soul, suffering, salvation and sainthood (my emphases):

But, for thou axest why **labouren** [Æ]we -  
 For somtyme we been Goddes **instrumentz** [MP]  
**And meenes to doon his comandementz** [MP],  
 Whan that hym list, upon his creatures,  
 In **divers art** [Æ] and in **diverse figures** [MP] .  
**Withouten hym we have no myght** [Æ],<sup>271</sup> certayn,  
 If that hym list to stonden ther-agayn.  
 And somtyme, **at oure prayere** [Æ], han we leve  
 Oonly **the body** [MP]and nat **the soule greve** [Æ];  
 Witnesse on Job, whom that we diden wo.  
 And somtyme han we myght of bothe two -  
 That is to seyn, of **soule and body eke** [Æ MP].  
 And somtyme be we **suffred** [Æ]for to seke  
 Upon a man and doon **his soule unreste** [Æ]  
 And nat his **body** [MP], and al is for the beste.  
 Whan he withstandeth oure temptacioun,  
 It is a cause of his **savacioun** [Æ],  
 Al be it that it was nat oure **entente** [MP]  
 He sholde **be sauf** [Æ], but that we wolde hym hente.  
 And somtyme be we **servant** [MP]unto man,  
 As to the erchebisshop Seint Dunstan,  
 And to the **apostles** [Æ] **servant** [MP] eek was I  
 (FrT. ll.1482-1503).

Again the concern with intention has been raised, preparing the audience for the climax to the *Tale*, which has been long in coming. (But *amplificatio* through detailed preliminaries is typical of the Virgoan method of working, an attempt to make explicit every detail necessary in order to perfect comprehension, and it is Chaucer's skill that he employs this Virgoan style of writing to illustrate a principle of Virgo.)

When a carter, whose cart has stuck in the mud curses to hell his horse and cart and their load, and the summoner exhorts the fiend to take them all, the *Tale's* concern with the significance of the word 'intention' is made explicit. "Nay," quod the devel, "God woot, never a deel!/It is nat his entente, trust me weel"(FrT. l. 1556). When the

<sup>271</sup> Implying spiritual dependency, a Piscean connotation.

carter has freed his horse and cart and has thanked God and St. Eligius for their assistance, the fiend remarks, "The carl spak oo thing, but he thoghte another" (*FrT.* l. 1568). Chaucer thus reveals the problem concerning inference of intention: the split between private thought and public action; also the relevance of context to meaning in its sense of intention and its relationship to intended consequence. Raising the issue, as Chaucer has done, has not, of course, solved its problem. The fiend's statement that "The carl spak oo thing, but he thoghte another" is not true. The carter expressed his thoughts twice, and on each separate occasion thought something different. The real explanation is that on each occasion the intention differed: on the first occasion the carter was ambivalent; on the second he was not. With that lesson in mind, the summoner ought to have been prepared for the fatal incident that ensues when he and the fiend visit the widow whom the summoner attempts to defraud. When, upon her knees, she curses the summoner to hell, the fiend asks, "Now, Mabely, myn owene mooder deere,/Is this youre wyl in ernest that ye seye?" (*FrT.* ll. 1626-7), she replies in earnest that it is, unless the summoner repents. The summoner asserts that he has no such intention, whereupon the fiend assures the summoner, "Thou shalt with me to helle yet tonyght", reminiscent of Christ's words to the thief upon the cross: "To day shalt thou be with me in paradise."<sup>272</sup>

The *Friar's Tale* terminates, characteristically somewhat at length, with the Friar trying to tie up any loose ends and to ensure that his listeners have not missed the point, straining to compensate rather verbosely for his own sins of omission and commission, exhorting the pilgrims to penance, no doubt impelled to some extent by his anxious anticipation of imminent revenge when the summoner tells his tale about

---

<sup>272</sup> Luke, 23:43

friars. He asks his audience to so dispose their hearts as to withstand the fiend's attempts to enthrall and bind them. Enthralment and bondage, being situations of confinement and restriction, are undoubtedly Piscean, and this Pisces Friar, who appears to have been affected by the cathartic effect of his own tale, is displaying his occupational obligations as a servant in the Christian ministry (Virgo), appealing to the pilgrims:

Watcheth and preyeth Jhesu for his grace  
 So kepe us from the temptour Sathanas  
 (*FrT.* ll. 1654-5).

Morton Bloomfield writes: "The basic lesson of the *Friar's Tale* is that man must act charitably if he wishes to avoid damnation."<sup>273</sup> It is hardly surprising that a tale with charity as its central message should be told by a Pisces friar or that he should employ the cold, mercurial, Virgoan side of the Christian Church to illustrate its point and use the scaffolding of the Gemini-Sagittarius principles of denotation and connotation respectively, upon which to construct the dualistic structure leading either to finding one's faith or losing one's way.

---

<sup>273</sup> Bloomfield (1983), p. 289.



## The Summoner's Tale



"God loveth a cheerful giver" -2 Cor. 9:7

The *Summoner's Tale* brings us to the seventh zodiacal sign, Libra. Its teller ought therefore to be described by the opposing sign Aries, and Chaucer displays his knowledge of both medical astrology and medieval physiognomical beliefs in his description of the Summoner in the *General Prologue*. Of that description perhaps no part is more vividly recalled by the memory than these words:

A SOMONOUR was ther with us in that place,  
 That hadde a fyr-reed cherubynnes face,  
 For saucefleem he was, with eyen narwe.  
 As hoot he was and lecherous as a sparwe,  
 With scalled browse blake and piled berd.  
 Of his visage children were afered.  
 Ther nas quyk-silver, lytarge, ne brymstoon,  
 Boras, ceruce, ne oille of tartre noon,  
 Ne oynement that wolde clense and byte,  
 That hym myghte helpen of his wheelkes white,  
 Nor of the knobbes sittynge on his chekes.  
 Wel loved he garleek, oynons, and eek lekes,  
 And for to drynken strong wyn, reed as blood;  
 Thanne wolde he speke and crie as he were wood  
 (GP. ll. 623-636).

Chaucer is telling us that the Summoner's temperament is choleric, that the man is ruled by Mars. The latter fact offers us a choice of Aries or Scorpio as the Summoner's ascendant. But the fiery red face and the emphasis on the head throughout the passage point clearly to Aries as the Summoner's rising sign. Laurel Braswell-Means, in an excellent article, details comprehensively the significance of the description. She writes:

But if we put aside biblical iconography for the moment and focus upon the astrological, there is a more obvious source for the Summoner's fiery-red face - Mars, both the planet, governed by certain properties, and the personification as the god of war. Mars, who rules the choleric, has very specific connotations for judicial astrology and consequently within physiognomical theory. His face is depicted in medieval illustrations as red ... Furthermore, Mars' domicile is in the zodiacal sign Aries, also hot and dry in complexion or temperament. As the first sign, Aries governs the head, the top or first part of the body, a fact established through the notion of melothesia or the system of determining zodiacal and planetary influence upon the parts and organs as well as veins of the body. Ruled by this sign as the ascendant at birth, a subject would acquire a natural weakness for disorders of the head and face.<sup>274</sup>

Having established that the teller of the *Tale* is associated with Aries, it is now necessary to illustrate the *Tale's* essentially Libran nature and the relationship to the cardinal cross of the zodiac involving also the signs Aries, Cancer and Capricorn. The *Tale* is one filled with sound, the sound of the friar's voice, the sound of anger and the sound of rushing wind in the insubstantial form of a fart. Sound is a disturbance of the air, a movement of air, and Libra is the cardinal air sign of the zodiac. Libra, ruled by Venus, is a sign of idealism, of reason and desire for perfection. Being an air element sign, it represents theoretical consideration and evaluation of situations from the perspective of the ideal. Its symbolic association with (the scales of) justice rather than with the letter of the law reflects its concern with the less pragmatic dimension of the judicial system and the underlying aspiration to have conflict resolved on the basis of equality under the law and that of fairness, equity, balance. The association of Libra

---

<sup>274</sup> Laurel Braswell-Means, "A New Look at an Old Patient: Chaucer's Summoner and Medieval Physiognomia," *The Chaucer Review*, 25 (1991), pp. 266-275 (p. 272).

with music, art and aesthetic harmony results from the ideal of unity and of the integration of elements, whether those of light or sound, in a balanced concord. The emphasis is on peace, love and conciliation. Libra is the sign of the sun's fall and of Saturn's exaltation, Venus' dignity and Mars' detriment. As we shall see, the *Summoner's Tale* comprehensively encompasses all of those components as well as coping with the Cancer-Capricorn contribution.

The *Tale* begins with a friar visiting a parishioner Thomas, who is apparently sick and lying on a couch. In a long and precious monologue, like a rushing wind, the friar reveals himself to be an empty vessel, a man of words and not of deeds. Claiming to be a man of "litel sustenance" whose spirit is nurtured by The Bible (*SumT.* ll. 1844-5), he nevertheless suggests to Thomas' wife that a roast pig's head wouldn't go amiss for a meal. His concern is for appearances, how he believes others will perceive him to be, and so he is keen to present himself in a good light. Awareness of others' perspectives is an expression of the Libran function of the Aries-Libran binary opposition representing self-consciousness/other-consciousness. This relates to a problem of Aristotle's metaphysics, inherited from Plato. Aristotle's view is that "[i]ndividuals cannot be known in their own individuality: only a shared form is knowable (even if the form is only potentially shared)."<sup>275</sup> For example: I see the form of Bob, and recognise that as Bob, but the form of Bob is in my mind, so how do I know Bob other than as the form of which I am aware and which he presents to me? I cannot know Bob as an individual-in-himself independently of my contribution to his form. Hence only a shared form is knowable. In the *Summoner's Tale* the emphasis is

---

<sup>275</sup> Anthony Kenny (ed.), *The Oxford Illustrated History Of Western Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1994), p. 35.

on the Libran half of that equation: how does one appear to be in the view of others? Desiring to make a good impression he resorts to continual defensive self-justification, but the ideals he expresses are continually undercut by actions that contradict his ideals. Though he professes to be of superior spiritual stature and therefore in God's good grace, he lacks ordinary social grace and humility. Although having just arrived at Thomas' home, where Thomas is sick, he makes no bones about his expectations of hospitality: "And fro the bench he droof away the cat/And leyde adoun his potente and his hat,/And eek his scrippe, and sette hym softe adoun" (*SumT.* ll. 1775-7). His lack of grace manifests itself in behaviour that is negatively Libran, which is to say being both ingratiating and lecherous when he greets Thomas' wife: "And hire embraceth in his armes narwe,/And kiste hire sweete, and chirketh as a sparwe/With his lyppes" (*SumT.* ll. 1803-5). Negative Libran traits are a counterfeit of that sign's positive manifestation, the natural courtesy and grace that derive from genuine altruism.

His concern to appear perfect in the performance of his obligations emerges when Thomas reminds him that it is more than two weeks since he has seen the friar. The friar replies that he has sorely laboured on Thomas' behalf: "'God woot,' quod he, 'laboured I have ful soore,/And specially for thy savacion/Have I seyde many a precious orison'" (*SumT.* ll. 1784-5). Unable to tolerate the implication that he has been remiss in his duties, when he hears that since his previous visit Thomas' wife has borne the loss of her child, he claims to have witnessed, in a vision, the passing of the child and "I saugh hym born to blisse/In myn avision, so God me wisse!" (*SumT.* ll. 1857-8). What other outcome could there be? Inevitably, he and two other church officials rose and sang the *Te Deum*, with many a tear funnelling down his cheek. The picture is

perfect. It is, ideally, what ought to have occurred. And as the friar points out, "Our Lord Jhesu, as hooly write devyseth,/Yaf us ensample of fastyng and preyer" (*SumT.* ll. 1904-5). It is, as he says, an example set by someone who was, by all accounts, perfect. But the friar cannot admit that he and his brethren find it impossible, or even just rather difficult, to follow the example. Instead he claims:

Therefore we mendynantz, we sely freres,  
 Been wedded to povert and continence,  
 To charite, humblesse, and abstinence,  
 To persecucioun for rightwisnesse,  
 To wepyng, misericorde, and clenness.  
 And therefore may ye se that oure preyers-  
 I speke of us, we mendynantz, we freres-  
 Been to the hye God moore acceptable  
 Than youres, with youre feestes at the table  
 (*SumT.* ll. 1906-1914).

Had he paused for a moment he would no doubt have begun tucking in to the roast pork. But his sound continues, "But herkne now, Thomas, what I shal seyn" (*SumT.* l. 1918).

Libra being the sign of the sun's fall, it is associated primarily with the fall of man through the corruption or degradation of the spirit, not of the flesh. St. Augustine, in his discussion of the Fall in *De Civitate Dei* (Book 14), is concerned, as is the friar in the *Summoner's Tale*, with the soul and body. The friar's argument is that the body's sin of gluttony corrupts the soul:

Whoso wol preye, he moot faste and be clene,  
 And fatte his soule, and make his body lene.  
 We fare as seith th'apostle; clooth and foode  
 Suffisen us, though they be nat ful goode.  
 The clenness and the fastyng of us freres  
 Maketh that Crist accepteth oure preyer  
 (*SumT.* ll. 1879-1884).

But this actually reverses St. Augustine's declaration that it is not the weakness of the flesh that makes the soul sinful but rather that the sinful soul corrupts the flesh.<sup>276</sup> Again, the friar reveals his incapability of accepting that anything so pure as the soul could be the cause of any degeneration; it had to be, for him, the other way around. The flesh, he appears to think, is anything but ideal. The friar's disparagement of the body is an attempt to distance himself aesthetically from Thomas' sickness. Such 'distancing' is characteristic of the air element; for it is associated astrologically with the ideal as against the real.

It is with Thomas' anger however, that the friar is chiefly concerned, and he opposes the Aries-Mars ire by the Libran-Venus counsel of perfection and the intolerance of shortfalls from that state of grace. It is natural that as a Libran type, he should oppose the characteristic for which Aries was notorious. His argument against anger is a long diatribe, which, except for the isolated instance of the word 'ire' in line 1834, begins at line 1981 and continues for 108 lines in which the words ire (ll. 1981, 1993, 2003, 2005, 2009, 2010, 2089) and 'irous' (ll. 2014, 2016, 2017, 2043, 2063, 2079 and 2086) altogether appear 15 times. Astrologically, anger is associated with not only the planet Mars, but the sign it rules. Richard Hinckley Allen writes: "Among astrologers Aries was a dreaded sign indicating passionate temper and bodily hurt, and thus it fitly formed the House of Mars..."<sup>277</sup>.

Thomas is not deceived by the friar's dissembling and refuses to part with any of his remaining assets. He does however, suggest a form of payment on condition that the friar guarantees to divide it *equally* among his brethren at the convent (*SumT.* ll.

---

<sup>276</sup> St. Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, Bk. 14, 3.

<sup>277</sup> Allen (1963), p. 79.

2131-2136). The act of dividing the payment might be seen, for two reasons, as Chaucer's subtle direction of our attention to the sign Libra: first, because "[m]edieval currencies derived originally from the *libra* (livre or pound) of pure silver from which were struck 240 silver pennies, later established as twelve pennies to the shilling or sous and 20 shillings or sous to the pound or livre";<sup>278</sup> secondly, because of the likely pun on the Arab word "*fardar*", related to an ancient astrological concept of the cycle of Mighty *Fardars*. *Fardars* were cycles based on the conjunctions of Jupiter and Saturn, from which were inferred major future events affecting the rise and fall of religious movements, dynasties, the fates and fortunes of nations and their rulers. Jupiter forms a conjunction with Saturn once every 20 years and the conjunctions progress through the zodiac, but not in a sequence of contiguous signs. A "Mighty *Fardar*", however, is a cycle of 360 years, and marks the movement of the Jupiter-Saturn conjunction from one triplicity (element), to a position in the next triplicity. One such cycle of Mighty *Fardars* began, according to Kennedy and Pingree, in the year -3380.<sup>279</sup> This was the one, the 121st mean conjunction (marking the transfer of the Jupiter-Saturn conjunction from the triplicity of air to that of water), which was associated by the Arab astrologer Abu'Mashar (787-886) with the Great Deluge, which he dated as having occurred in -3101.<sup>280</sup> In Masha'allah's *Astrological History*

---

<sup>278</sup> Tuchman (1995), p. xxii.

<sup>279</sup> E.S. Kennedy and David Pingree (ed. and trans.), *The Astrological History of Masha'allah*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard Univ. Press, 1971), p. 99.

<sup>280</sup> Kennedy and Pingree (1971), p. 188. See also D. Pingree, "The Thousands of Abu Ma'shar," *Studies of the Warburg Institute*, 30 (1968), pp. 40-42 and 60 n. 1. The birth of Christ is year -1 (p. 72).

one finds the astrological supposition on which the link between the conjunction and the Great Flood is based:

So if you want to know the kind of misfortune and torment, look at the shift of the conjunctions from one triplicity to another unto the lot of the transit, in whatever sign it takes place, and if it takes place in a fiery sign, the misfortunes would be from fire. But if in a water sign, the misfortune will be from water... <sup>281</sup>.

The Deluge is supposed to have occurred as a consequence of the conjunction taking place in the water sign Cancer, a sign having relevance, as we shall see later, to the disappearance of the rocks related in the *Franklin's Tale*.

Tester describes four sorts of *fardarat*:<sup>282</sup> the 'mighty *Fardar*' of 360 solar years; the big *fardar* of 78 years; the middle *fardar* of 75 years; and the small *fardar*, also of 75 years but divided into nine *fardariyat*. Each type of *fardarat* is divided in different ways, none of which needs concern us here. Chaucer's sense of humour is shown blowing in the wind when, in the *Summoner's Tale*, the Friar has to divide the fart into twelve *equal* parts:

Lat brynge a cartwheel heere into this halle;  
But looke that it have his spokes alle -  
Twelve spokes hath a cartwheel communly.  
And bryng me thanne twelve freres. Woot ye why?  
For thrittene is a covent, as I gesse.  
Youre confessour heere, for his worthynesse,  
Shal parfourne up the nombre of his covent.  
Thanne shal they knele down, by oon assent,  
And to every spokes ende, in this manere,  
Ful sadly leye his nose shal a frere  
(*SumT.* ll. 2255-2264).

---

<sup>281</sup> Kennedy and Pingree (1971), p. 43, para. 18.

<sup>282</sup> Tester (1987), pp. 166-167.



Bearing in mind that the zodiacal circle is 360 degrees, each twelfth equal division of that would equate to exactly one zodiacal sign. The sign of dividing any one object into equal portions is Libra - the sign of equity, equality and balance. Such a solution Chaucer presents, ironically, as appealing to the Libran sense of fairness and ideal of equity at the same time as it must offend the Libran sensibility and good taste. Here the *Tale* becomes an ironic comment on aesthetic distancing; for Thomas' fart is launched as a direct, physical broadside, typical of Aries, on the friar's aesthetic pretensions.

Patrick Gallagher identifies the tension between the humane and the ascetic as "an essential part of medieval Christianity" which "often takes the ostensible form of a conflict between body and soul", though he adds that a more complex dialectic is involved, in which various elements modify and alter each other. His perception of the interrelations between body and soul sees these "opposites participate in the more inclusive polarity of self and otherness, by which are meant all the gradations of subjectivity and objectivity, from the most subjective conscious experience [Aries] to that which most differs from the self - what the theologians call the totally other [Libra]."<sup>283</sup> Chaucer has thereby brought us back to confront once again the phenomenological problem of self and otherness, which was first encountered in the *Knight's Tale* and the conflict between Arcite (Aries) and Palamon (Libra).

The problem of dividing the fart into twelve equal divisions is solved by adopting the principles of Capricorn and Cancer. The lord's squire suggests that the friar bring a cartwheel with its twelve spokes into an assembly of the covent (co-vent possibly being a pun), and that each of the friars put his nose to an outlet. The solution,

---

<sup>283</sup> Patrick J. Gallacher, "The Summoner's Tale and Medieval Attitudes Towards Sickness," *The Chaucer Review*, 21 (1986), pp. 200-212 (p. 201).

which makes use of *ars-metrik* (possibly another pun) is resolved by the Capricornian functions of regulation through structuring and control, measurement, establishing and defining order through geometrizing. Saturn, as ruler of Capricorn, and exalted in Libra, is thus given an appropriate role, being associated with geometry as Durer's *Melancolia I* suggests. The cartwheel itself, however, is associated with Cancer, as are all 'forms' that assimilate substances and act as 'containers', by retaining them. Any 'mirroring' of the world or the cosmos, through the preservation of its pattern, any established pattern that is preserved, a genetic blueprint for example, a map, facsimile or chart, a horoscope map or representation of the zodiac, either of which is a facsimile of a moment in time, is symbolized by Cancer, as are all 'conveyors' such as carriers and caravans, and containers such as cans, cannisters, casks, cabs, cauls, cars and carts, all of which 'assimilate' their contents, as the breast does a mother's milk and the stomach does food (Cancer's melothesia being the breasts, stomach, womb).

A '*carte*', in French, is a chart or map, and in medieval times such charts, in the form of *rotae*, were popular mnemonic devices for remembering those several classifications and lists that typified some aspects of scholastic education. Among such *rotae* was one depicting the twelve winds. Robert Hasenfratz alludes to book IV of Vincent of Beauvais's *Speculum Naturale* as being a likely direct source for the Wheel of the Twelve Winds that was in turn a probable source of inspiration for the cartwheel.<sup>284</sup> He writes, "A quick perusal of the three English manuscripts which contain the wheel of the winds diagram confirms that they all occur among chapters of astrological/meteorological interest, based on a combination of Bede, Isidore, Pliny

---

<sup>284</sup> Robert Hasenfratz, "The Science of Flatulence: Possible Sources for the Summoner's Tale," *The Chaucer Review*, 30 (1996), pp. 241-261(p. 245).

and other sources."<sup>285</sup> Later, referring to the *Walters Cosmography* as another likely source, he writes, "The wheel of the winds is the second diagram (*fol.1v*), preceded by a representation of another twelve-spoked wheel, the zodiac circle (*fol.1r*)."<sup>286</sup>

Hasenfratz discusses in detail how the lord's squire's condition for the distribution of the fart reflects the *Speculum Naturale's* concern with the topic of how the wind can interfere with the production of sound,<sup>287</sup> while Phillip Pulsiano in another article alludes to the diagram found in the eleventh-century English manuscript, British Library, *Harley 3667*, which shows a wheel, with its twelve spokes carefully delineated, on each of which is the name of a particular wind and upon which, terminating each spoke, is the figure of a head, out of the mouths of which are lines in green ink indicating the blowing wind. Pulsiano writes, "It is not difficult to imagine the wind blowing *in* instead of out of the mouth...All of the elements found in the scene in the *Summoner's Tale* are here: the twelve-spoked wheel, the twelve figures at the end of each spoke, each fittingly drawn with mouth open and wind represented, and at the center a possible thirteenth figure occupying the hub."<sup>288</sup>

The *Summoner's Tale* is thus not only a parody of the cardinal air element's aesthetic distancing of self, and of the scientific concern with the physics of sound, but it also reflects the *Canterbury Tales'* universal concern with humanity, comprising the twelve typologies and the *Tales'* underlying zodiacal structure. One might suspect,

---

<sup>285</sup> Hasenfratz (1996), p. 247.

<sup>286</sup> Hasenfratz (1996), p. 248.

<sup>287</sup> Hasenfratz (1996), p. 251.

<sup>288</sup> Phillip Pulsiano, "The Twelve-Spoked Wheel of *The Summoner's Tale*," *The Chaucer Review*, 29 (1995), pp. 387-388.

regarding this latter point, that Chaucer is directing our attention to what appears to be a significant discrepancy: there are twelve winds, twelve spokes, but there are twenty-four *Canterbury Tales*. That should remind us, yet again, of the relevance of *The Treatise On The Astrolabe*, where Chaucer writes:

Thou must first considere that the sonne arisith not alwey  
verrey est, but som tyme by northe the est and sometyme  
by south the est. Sothly the sonne arisith nevere moo  
verrey est in oure orisonte, but he be in the heved of Aries  
or Libra. Now is this orisonte departed in 24 parties by  
thin azimutes in significacioun of 24 parties of the world;...  
(*Astr.* 2. 31. 1-9).

A hint, one might well conclude, that if we are to discover the relationship between the *Canterbury Tales* and their astrological basis, it is to azimuthal divisions of the heavens we must look. There could be no better place in the *Canterbury Tales* to suggest this than at the *Tale* that is placed at the autumnal equinox, Libra, balancing the first hint of the zodiacal structure of the *Tales* given at the spring equinox, Aries, in the *Knight's Tale* where Theseus constructs his theatre based on the zodiacal framework.

## The Clerk's Tale

ᄡ

Few can be in any doubt that one of the chief human character traits illustrated in the *Clerk's Tale* is constancy. The word implies consistency of attitude and behaviour, exemplified by Griselda's faithfulness to her sworn word in response to Walter's question as to whether she "be redy with good herte/To al my lust, and that I frely may,/As me best thynketh, do yow laughe or smerte,/ And nevere ye to grucche it, nyght ne day?" (*CIT.* ll. 351-354). Such constancy is without doubt implied by the fixed mode of the zodiac, and at this eighth *Tale* Chaucer has reached Scorpio, the fixed water sign of the zodiac.

Scorpio, ruled by Mars, is a water element sign, one which has implications of fecundity, deep feelings, undercurrents of passion and intensity of emotion, persistence in attitude but an unrevealing nature that is characterized by aggressive (Mars) feelings (water), manifesting itself through jealousy, suspicion, wariness, covert activities, sometimes treachery and secret motivation. Of Scorpio, William Lilly writes: "It is a cold, watery, nocturnal, phlegmatic, northern, feminine sign; of the watery triplicity; the house and joy of Mars; usually it represents subtle, deceitful men."<sup>289</sup> This proclivity for covert, secretive action is implied in the melothesiac association of Scorpio with the genitalia and sexual activities, symbolizing the private and the hidden.

There is probably no better example of Scorpio in action, from all of the *Tales*, than Walter's treatment of Griselda, which some have labelled sadistic. And Griselda

---

<sup>289</sup> Lilly (1972) p. 63.

portrays the fidelity and consistency of that opposite fixed sign, Taurus, with her practical, down-to-earth common sense, docility, slowness to anger, stability and refusal to let her social elevation induce any headiness or change in her disposition:

He waiteth if by word or contenance  
That she to hym was changed of corage,  
But nevere koude he fynde variance.  
She was ay oon in herte and in visage,  
And ay the forther that she was in age,  
The moore trewe, if that it were possible,  
She was to hym in love, and moore penyble  
(*CIT.* ll. 708-714).

In contrast to Walter's Scorpio secrecy, Griselda's nature is evident and visible (Taurus). But in view of the claim that Chaucer is dealing with the modal crosses and not simply binary oppositions, it is necessary to point out that the two other fixed signs, Leo and Aquarius, are amply catered for in the *Tale*. Leo's association with sovereignty, and Aquarius' with the principle of communal activity, groups, consensus or democratic power-sharing are introduced early. First, Walter's dealings with his people demonstrate the checks and balances between the rights of the state and the '*droit de seigneur*', so to speak. The *demos*, Aquarius, is prepared to have Walter be their lord provided that he lives up to their expectations regarding their own welfare and concedes to the consensus view that he should marry and have an heir to safeguard the people's future. So resentful and anxious are his people concerning his lack of concern on this point, "That flokmeele on a day they to hym wente" (*CIT.* l. 86) and a representative persuades Walter to promise to marry and in fact he set a date for the ceremony. This illustrates the Leo-Aquarius principle of centralized power maintaining balance with distributed or democratized power.

There is more than one instance of such 'equilibrium' between the two principles. The representative appeals to Walter: "Boweth youre nekke under that blisful yok/Of soveraynetee, noght of servyse,/Which that men clepe spousaille or wedlok"(*CIT.* ll. 113-115). These lines, with an emphasis on sovereignty, not only allude to the sign Leo but constitute a key passage marking the conflict of theme with that of the *Wife of Bath's Tale*. Alison's Leo tale had advocated wives' sovereignty; the Clerk's Scorpio tale brings in its Leo component with its suggestion of sovereignty for the husband. The two signs Leo and Scorpio are 'square' to each other; that is, in quartile aspect or mutual affliction. This conflict between the *Wife of Bath* and the Clerk is too well known to Chaucer readers to require further allusion at this point, other than to recall that many scholars, prompted by Kittredge,<sup>290</sup> have identified these two *Tales* as part of a so-called 'marriage group' devised by Chaucer. But as many of the *Tales* were ascribed to their pilgrim-tellers long after those tales had been written, there is no firm evidence that any such group as a 'marriage group' exists other than in the perceptions of those who wish to construct one. But it is quite evident that the *Clerk's Tale* proposes sovereignty for husbands and that the *Wife of Bath's Tale* does so for wives. As we shall see later, it is possible to interpret this *Wife's Tale-Clerk's Tale* conflict differently.

Yet another instance, somewhat contrived by Walter, but nonetheless illustrative of the Leo-Aquarius principles regarding power, is his persuasion of Griselda that the people dislike their marriage: "'Wyf,' quod this markys, 'ye han herd

---

<sup>290</sup> George Lyman Kittredge, *Chaucer and his Poetry* (1915; Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1960 reprint), p. 147.

er this/My peple sikly berth oure mariage” (*CIT.* ll. 624-5). Ostensibly representing their views to her, he says,

Now sey they thus: ‘Whan Walter is agon,  
Thanne shal the blood of Janicle succede  
And been oure lord, for oother have we noon.’  
Swiche wordes seith my peple, out of drede.  
Wel oughte I of swich murmur taken heede,  
For certainly I drede swich sentence,  
Though they nat pleyn speke in myn audience.

I wolde lyve in pees, if that I myghte;  
Wherefore I am disposed outrely,  
As I his suster servede by nyghte,  
Right so thenke I to serve hym pryvely  
(*CIT.* ll. 631-641).

And later, when telling Griselda that she must lose her daughter, he absolves himself from blame: “Nat as I wolde, but as my peple leste” (*CIT.* l. 490).

It would seem, given Griselda’s long-suffering patience, that she herself bears the whole of the fixed cross. First, she foregoes her own desires (afflicted Leo): “And heere I swere that nevere willyngly,/In werk ne thocht, I nyl yow disobeye,/For to be deed, though me were looth to deye” (*CIT.* ll. 362-4). The sign Leo, as a component of the fixed cross, is implicitly afflicted - that is the nature of the cross - and so Griselda, who is ‘carrying’ this cross, experiences the consequences entailed by such affliction. When the Leo component is afflicted, personal desire for power and mastery is frustrated or denied. However few personal desires Griselda might have made explicit, and whatever she may privately desire, fulfilment of them is preempted by Walter’s treatment of her.

Secondly, she loses her offspring, apparently by death, and is certainly victimized by the persistent deceit and treachery of a husband who reveals nothing and acts in secret complicity. “Soone after this, a furlong wey or two,/He prively hath toold



al his entente/Unto a man, and to his wyf hym sente" (*CIT.* ll. 516-8). He tempts Griselda three times to betray his trust, twice when he removes her two children and once when he pretends to be about to marry another woman (afflicted Taurus). When Taurus is afflicted, one is deprived of one's security and possessions, of whatever one values, prizes or treasures. "He of his crueel purpos nolde stente;/To tempte his wyf was set al his entente" (*CIT.* ll. 734-5.). The three temptations may recall the three denials of Christ by Peter before the high priests.<sup>291</sup> Peter, whose name in Greek, *Petros*, means 'a rock', is also symbolized by Taurus. But unlike Peter, Griselda remains faithful to her lord. Walter, as a Scorpio, is secretive, subtle and a threat to Griselda's security and possessions, hence she is victimised by the representative of the opposing sign to her own.

Thirdly, she is taken out of her social class, elevated to a social level above her peers and is reminded from time to time by her husband that she owes such privilege to him (afflicted Aquarius):

"Grisilde," quod he, "that day  
That I yow took out of youre povere array,  
And putte yow in estaat of heigh noblesse -  
Ye have nat that forgeten, as I gesse?

"I seye, Grisilde, this present dignitee,  
In which that I have put yow, as I trowe,  
Maketh yow nat foryetful for to be  
That I yow took in povre estaat ful lowe"  
(*CIT.* ll. 466-473).

One's sense of belonging to one's social class is the Aquarian component in the fixed cross. To be removed from it and required to socialise with those who are not one's peers, then made to acquire the hallmarks of a different social rank, and then to be

---

<sup>291</sup> Mark, 14:68; 70; 71; 72. John, 18: 17; 25; 27.

returned to her own social level is for Griselda a considerable challenge, yet one she copes with very successfully. If it were not to be considered by the listener to be a source of stress and personal pain for Griselda, however, there would have been no point in including such a train of events in the *Tale*. Thus Griselda experiences the afflicted Aquarian component of the fixed cross.

And fourthly, if Walter can remove her children from her and apparently kill them, then would it not be possible, she might wonder, for him to dispose of her too (afflicted Scorpio). The possibility of death by the hand of her husband or his agent must have appeared as a distinct possibility under the circumstances. And although Walter doesn't kill her, he reduces her to a state of personal poverty lower than that in which she came to him: she is sent back to her father wearing only her original smock, deteriorated with the passage of time. Tragedy and loss of possessions through a partner's actions are symbolized astrologically by afflicted Scorpio. Thus Griselda would appear to have been born under the fixed cross.

She is deprived of the one most prized possession she could have, namely a voice in her own interest (afflicted Taurus):

Ther may no thyng, God so my soule save,  
 Liken to yow that may displese me;  
 Ne I desire no thyng for to have,  
 No drede for to leese, save oonly yee.  
 This wyl is in myn herte, and ay shal be;  
 No lengthe of tyme or deeth may this deface,  
 Ne chaunge my corage to another place  
 (CIT. ll. 505-511).

But her stability is reiterated:

"Whan I first cam to yow, right so," quod she,  
 "Lefte I my wyl and al my libertee,  
 And took youre clothynge; wherfore I yow preye,  
 Dooth youre plesaunce; I wol youre lust obeye.

"And certes, if I hadde prescience

Youre wyl to knowe, er ye youre lust me tolde,  
 I wolde it doon withouten necligence;  
 But now I woot youre lust, and what ye wolde,  
 Al your plesance ferme and stable I holde;  
 For wiste I that my deeth wolde do yow ese,  
 Right gladly wolde I dyen, yow to plese (*CIT.* ll. 655-665).

She has no possessions of her own or basic personal physical security (afflicted Taurus).

The fixity of Taurus is matched by that of Scorpio, but whereas that of Taurus is maintenance of the status quo, that of Scorpio is maintenance through cyclical, repetitive, persistent, transformative change, characterized by degeneration followed by regeneration, a tearing-down followed by a building-up, renewal. The destructive, annihilative action of Scorpio has the ultimate purpose of metamorphosis, replacement, rebirth. An overall perspective of *The Clerk's Tale* reveals this fundamental regenerative process of Scorpio explicitly. From the start Walter tears down, attempts to destroy that which he has established, by testing Griselda: "He hadde assayed hire ynogh bfore" (*CIT.* l. 456). Finding no evidence by which to judge her adversely, he persists, such persistence also being characteristic of the regenerative power of Scorpio that motivates continuity: "what neede it/Hire for to tempte, and alwey moore and moore,/Though som men preise it for a subtil wit?" (*CIT.* ll. 457-9), asks the Clerk, in an aside to his own *Tale*. Later, following the repeat offence, Walter having separated Griselda from her second child, the Clerk comments:

But ther been folk of swich condicion  
 That whan they have a certein purpos take,  
 They kan nat stynte of hire entencion,  
 But, right as they were bounden to that stake,  
 They wol nat of that firste purpos slake.  
 Right so this markys fulliche hath purposed  
 To tempte his wyf as he was first disposed  
 (*CIT.* ll. 701-707).

The most destructive action, one that would seem to threaten the very foundation of his marriage, is his purporting to marry another woman, replace Griselda and found a new dynasty. In fact however, the secret implementation of his plan is the start of the regenerative process, the fruition of his activity, even though it is also the culmination of his testing of Griselda. After sending Griselda back to her early home, he recalls her from her father's house, ostensibly to assist his new young wife to settle in. But then he reunites her with her children and tells her that their own marriage is all that he wants. And now begins that building-up process again: "Ful many a yeer in heigh prosperitee/Lyven thise two in concord and in reste" (*CIT.* ll. 1128-1129). The Scorpio reproductive process finishes the *Tale*, as their own children marry successfully (*CIT.* ll. 1130-1138) and it would seem that Walter's people, whose collective will initiated the process, may feel assured of their own future well-being.

Earlier, I referred to an alternative interpretation of the conflict between *The Wife of Bath's Tale* and *The Clerk's Tale*. John A. Alford argues that "the conflict between the Wife and the Clerk is not personal but historical. It is rooted in the recurrent tension between two modes of discourse, rhetorical and philosophical." I find Alford's discussion rather persuasive and it reveals another level at which *The Clerk's Tale* (and of course, the Wife's) may be understood. In brief, the Wife uses rhetoric, which Alford describes as "a knack" (*empeiria*), which leads "merely to belief"; the Clerk uses dialectic, which Alford calls an art (*techne*), "a system of philosophical enquiry that leads to knowledge;..."<sup>292</sup> Alford alludes to *Sophismata*, "an extremely

---

<sup>292</sup> John A. Alford, "The Wife of Bath Versus the Clerk of Oxford: What their Rivalry Means," *The Chaucer Review*, 21 (1986), pp. 108-132 (p. 110).

important branch of medieval logic."<sup>293</sup> The purpose of sophisms is, according to Oxford logician John Murdoch, "to discover the absolute extremes."<sup>294</sup> The logician's purpose "is to test the validity of a proposition by pushing it to the limits. Griselda has sworn an oath before Walter: 'I swere that nevere willyngly,/In werk ne thoght, I nyl yow disobeye' (*CIT.* ll. 362-3). This is the given. It is then subjected to a series of increasingly more difficult tests."<sup>295</sup> By contrast with the Wife's appeal to "experience", a rhetorical device, the Clerk's sophism "permits a valued moral principle to work itself out logically in "a possible world" so as to reveal its absolute limits - and perhaps also our own."<sup>296</sup>

Inquiry, investigation, probing, research, trying to discover some underlying truth, penetration below the surface, are Scorpio activities, and if successful, lead to 'truth', that is, to Aquarius, 'universals', the next fixed sign, in the way that scientific research leads to the formulation of universal laws, fixed generalizations. They challenge and test the consistency of a proposition or the material fabric and internal stability of an argument (Taurus). Rhetoric is, by contrast, a dressing up in words, stylistic flourish and a stream of words, a performance, and somewhat exaggerated display (Leo), which, on the basis of subjective, individual desire, tests or challenges claims of 'universals' (Aquarius). Walter's attempt to push Griselda to the limits may

---

<sup>293</sup> Alford (1986), p. 126.

<sup>294</sup> John Murdoch, "Mathesis in Philosophiam, Scholasticam Introducta: The Rise and Development of the Application of Mathematics in Fourteenth Century Philosophy and Theology," *Arts libéraux*, p. 233, cited in Alford (1986), p. 126.

<sup>295</sup> Alford (1986), p. 127.

<sup>296</sup> Alford (1986), p. 127.

therefore be seen as a metaphorical representation of the Scorpio search for an underlying immutable truth that could be described as Wisdom, and in Griselda, he found her. Perhaps she should have been named Sophia.

## The Merchant's Tale



It is evident from the *General Prologue* that the Merchant is represented by the mercurial sign Gemini. The reference to selling and to exchange, to bargains, commerce and to his wits are all Gemini referenda: "His resons he spak ful solempnely/Sownynge alwey th'encrees of his wynning"(GP. ll. 274-5); "Wel koude he in eschaunge sheeldes selle./This worthy man ful wel his wit bisette:/Ther wiste no wight that he was in dette,/So estatly was he of his governaunce/With his bargaynes and with his chevyssaunce" (GP. ll. 278-282). The astrologer Lilly, in his description of Gemini says that its quality and property indicates someone "of excellent understanding, and judicious in worldly affairs",<sup>297</sup> whilst Chevalier and Gheerbrant, in reference to Gemini say that it is "predominantly the sign of human contact, interplay, communication and the interfaces of the social environment".

The *Merchant's Tale* is therefore associated with the ninth zodiacal sign, Sagittarius, and Chaucer is concerned once again with the mutable cross of the zodiac involving Gemini, Virgo, Sagittarius and Pisces. We have seen in our previous two encounters with this mode of the zodiac that Chaucer has used it to illustrate problems with perception as sources of knowledge: the *Reeve's Tale* at Gemini with mistaken visual perception; the *Friar's Tale* at Virgo with mistaken auditory perception. In the *Merchant's Tale* he shows that whilst visual perception might be accurate, it might not present information that is in accord with auditory perception. Sagittarius' association

---

<sup>297</sup> Lilly (1927), p. 59.

with projection is thus employed in a light-hearted manner to illustrate how our inclination to project significance into what we see and hear may lead to folly.

Sagittarius, a mutable, fire element sign, ruled by Jupiter, is traditionally associated with faith, religious ceremony, the conventional 'wisdom' or widely held opinions and views that are generally agreed upon, policy, hegemonic assumptions, education and the understanding and dissemination of other people's ideas, advice and teachings. The principle of Sagittarius being projection, it is associated with physical projection, as in travel, pilgrimages, exploration; with intellectual projection as in speculative conjecture concerning the meaning and significance of ideas and phenomena; and with spiritual projection, as in prayer and having faith in something beyond one's direct sensory perception. This projective implication of Sagittarius is symbolized in the zodiacal melothesia by the upper part of the lower limbs, the thighs, the 'extensors', by means of which one is able to stride forth beyond the confines of one's immediate environment, to go beyond the given, to cover the ground, as teachers often describe the transmission of knowledge. Sagittarius also has symbolic association with the Centaur, a mythical creature comprising half man, half beast, referring to humankind's internal conflict between the spiritual aspirations and the animal instincts.

Chaucer usually provides, early in a tale, a clue to the astrological sign with which a character is to be associated by his or her behaviour or personality traits. January is introduced to us as a very prosperous man - "he lyved in great prosperitee" (*MerT.* l. 1247) - which has connotations of Jupiter's abundance, that planet ruling Sagittarius. January, we are told, is praying to God that he might experience once what he describes as Gods' gift, namely marriage. But January is also described as a



rather lecherous fellow who “folwed ay his bodily delyt/On wommen, ther as was his appetyt”(MerT. ll. 1249-50).

January appears early in the text then as a mixture of piety and lechery, typifying the Centaur. And the first paragraph ends with the words, “Thus seyde this olde knyght, that was so wys” (MerT. l. 1266). This is the first pointer to Sagittarian *sapientia*, ironical as it is. As for haste, despite his age, January is described as having “swich a greet corage...to been a wedded man/That day and nyght he dooth al that he kan/T’espian where he myghte wedded be” (MerT. ll. 1254-57). He announces his intention to his friends, confesses to having lived a dissipated life to date - “I have my body folily despended” (MerT. l. 1403) - typical of the fiery, combusive, choleric element. But, he says, “Blessed be God that it shal be amended!/For I wol be, certeyn, a wedded man,/And that anoon in al the haste I kan” (MerT. ll. 1404-1406). Asking them to make plans for his wedding, he reiterates the urgency: “I prey yow, shapeth for my mariage/Al sodeynly, for I wol nat abyde;/And I wol fonde t’espian on my syde,/To whom I may be wedded hastily” (MerT. ll. 1408-1410).

Sagittarius’ projective significance implies movement forward in time and space, hence futurity, often associated with predictive inference or prophecy. Linguistically, it has association with words implying future intention such as “I will” or “I shall” and their negatives, and also with the subjunctive and conditional tenses: “I may” and “I would” or “I should.” January follows his statement of intention with a remarkable concatenation of future conditional statements: he won’t marry an old widow because “with hem sholde I nevere lyve in reste”(MerT. l. 1426). If he were unhappy in his marriage, “Thanne sholde I lede my lyf in avoutrye” (MerT. l. 1435). If he were married to an old woman and unhappy, “Ne children sholde I none upon hire

geten" (*MerT.* l. 1437). He would rather beasts ate him than "That myn heritage sholde falle/In straunge hand,..." (*MerT.* ll. 1439-40).

The sagacity for which Sagittarius was renowned manifests itself in the dispensation of gratuitous advice, a continuation of the frequency of "shoulds": "Man sholde wedde" (*MerT.* l. 1442); "man sholde take a wyf" (*MerT.* l. 1445); "...they sholde leccherye eschue" (*MerT.* l. 1451), and "eche of hem sholde helpen oother" (*MerT.* l. 1453).

Perhaps not surprisingly, Chaucer introduces January's two brothers, Placebo and Justinus, representing the opposite sign, Gemini. Helen Cooper describes them as January's friends,<sup>298</sup> but lines 1475 and 1478 make it clear that they are his brothers. This is an important consideration, because Gemini is symbolic of brothers, whereas friends are represented zodiacally by Aquarius. Line 1474 "Bitwixen freendes in disputisoun," gives more force to the words "his bretheren two" in line 1475. And lines 1478 and 1479, "Placebo seyde, 'O Januarie, brother,/Ful litel nede hadde ye, my lord so deere'" compounded very shortly afterwards by 'Myn owene deere brother and my lord' (*MerT.* l. 1488) seems to further reinforce the implication that Justinus and Placebo are January's brothers. Although Chaucer's use of the genitive case is rather constricting, his verbal facility would surely have enabled him, had he intended to convey the suggestion that Placebo and Justinus were among those referred to as friends, to write something like 'Ther fil a stryf bitwixe two of his bretheren' rather than "Ther fil a stryf bitwixe his bretheren two." The words "his bretheren two" seem to distinguish Placebo and Justinus as a pair having a special relationship to him. There is of course, another possibility: that those two are brother-knights. If that is the case,

---

<sup>298</sup> Cooper (1983), p. 141,

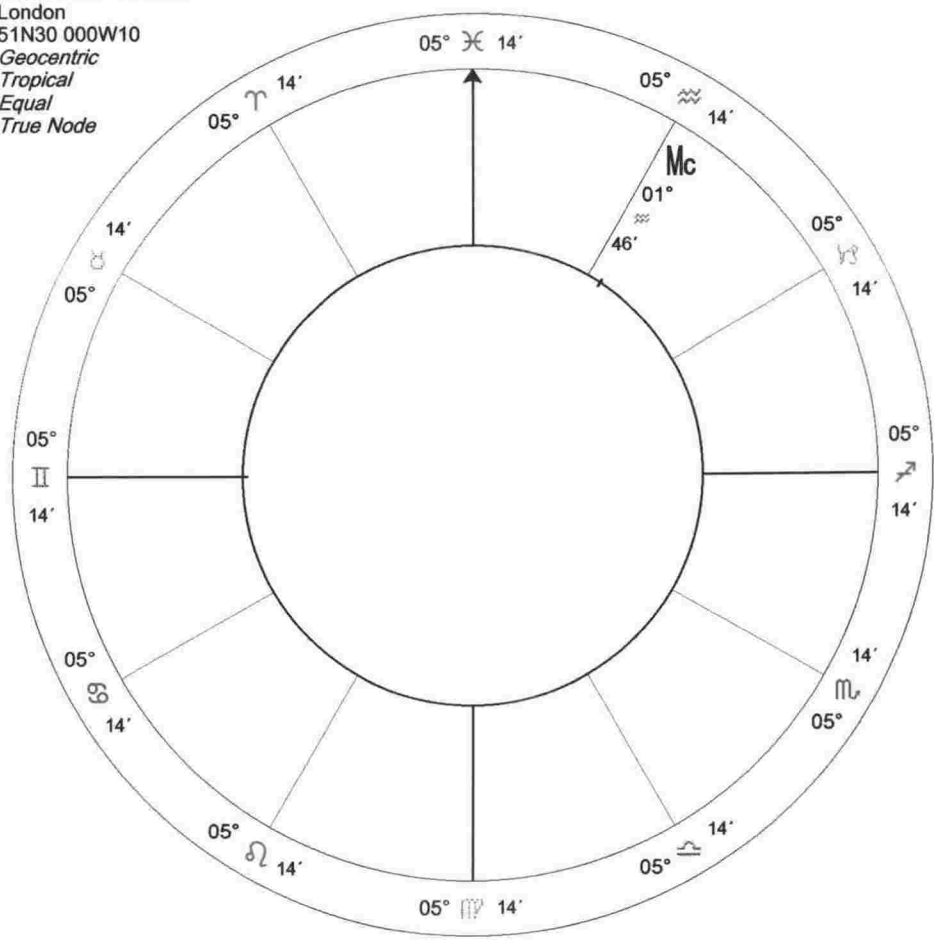
then they fall under the dominion of Gemini too; for the status of brother in that case is the same as it would be were they blood-brothers.

Placebo addresses his brother January in language that actually identifies Sagittarius: "But that ye been so ful of sapience" (*MerT.* l. 1481). Despite the controversy, January implements his intention and decides upon a local girl for his bride. Again he is in haste: "His freendes sente he to, at his instaunce,/And preyed hem to doon hym that pleasaunce,/That hastily they wolden to hym come;/He wolde abregge hir labour, alle and some" (*MerT.* ll. 1611-1614).

January has chosen a young woman named Mayus. Here Chaucer introduces a little puzzle. Mayus is associated with *Maius*, the Latin for 'major' and also the name of the month of May. January's intended bride is named, however, with the masculine nominative form of the word. This suggests that Chaucer is alluding to the zodiacal sign associated with the month of May, namely Gemini; for that sign is masculine. I can think of no other reason why Chaucer would have given May a masculine gender. Any puzzlement as to why Chaucer would want to give Gemini any significance at all in relationship to January's bride, May, is resolved once it is realized that when Sagittarius is in the *ascendant* at any location, the opposite sign, Gemini, is in the *descendant*, i.e. on the cusp of the 7th house of the horoscope, or to put it another way, setting in the west.

Gemini rises, Sagittarius sets  
Natal Chart  
18 Apr 1387  
06:00 LMT +0:00:40  
London  
51N30 000W10  
Geocentric  
Tropical  
Equal  
True Node

Diagram 16



That area of the horoscope, the descendant, locates the marriage partner.

Sagittarius' bride, May, is therefore astrologically represented by the month well known to be associated with Gemini, and vice versa. Furthermore, the well-known duality of Gemini is essential to the story; for Gemini women need two of everything: alternatives to turn to. This 'alternation' of Gemini has been earlier depicted in the *Tale*, by January's brothers Justinus and Placebo, one being strict and moral, the other being easy-going and ingratiating. January's young wife May is to exemplify the duality

of the sign by ensuring that she has two lovers: her husband, and the younger man, Damian.

Damian is a squire in January's service, described as wise, discreet, amenable, proper and successful. As a servant he is astrologically associated with Virgo, also ruled by Mercury. He engages in the kinds of activity associated with Virgo: "He kembeth hym, he preyneth hym and pyketh" (*MerT.* l. 2011). Virgo was also associated with working animals and pets, especially with the kinds of farm animals that work and provide a service, such as farm dogs and mousing cats. Chaucer's description aptly clinches Damian's association with Virgo: "And eek to Januarie he gooth as lowe/As evere dide a dogge for the bowe". The *Riverside* edition's footnote pertinent to that says: "dog trained to hunt with an archer".<sup>299</sup> That sums up perfectly the relationship of Damian (Virgo) to January (Sagittarius).

January has constructed a walled garden (*MerT.* l. 2029), and such private enclosures, retreats and places for privacy and meditation are symbolized by Pisces. Pisces is the sign of Mercury's detriment and fall. Chaucer hints at what is to come: when January loses his eyesight, he becomes jealous "[l]est that his wyf sholde falle in som folye" (*MerT.* l. 2074).

Chaucer returns to his mutable mode theme regarding the fallibility of perception:

O Januarie, what myghte it thee availle,  
Thogh thou myghtest se as fer as shippes saille?  
For as good is blynd deceyved be  
As to be deceyved whan a man may se  
(*MerT.* ll. 2107-2110).

---

<sup>299</sup> Benson (1987), p. 163, footnote 2014.

It is astrologically appropriate too, that May and Damian, both ruled by Mercury, communicate their intentions by writing letters and by hand signals: "But nathelees, by writyng to and fro/And privee signes wiste he what she mente,/And she knew eek the fyn of his entente" (*MerT.* ll. 2104-2106). When May later signals Damian that the moment for their tryst is opportune, Chaucer's description is replete with Gemini-Sagittarius reference:

And with that word she saugh wher Damyan  
Sat in the bussh, and coughen she bigan,  
And with hir fynger signes made she  
That Damyan sholde clymbe upon a tree  
That charged was with fruyt, and up he wente.  
For verrailly he knew al hire entente,  
And every signe that she koude make,  
Wel bet than Januarie, hir owene make,  
For in a lettre she hadde toold hym al  
Of this matere,...

(*MerT.* ll. 2207-2216).

January discovers his wife and Damian making love in the tree but in response to January's challenge and protestation May tells him that in order for his blindness to be cured it was necessary for her to struggle with a man upon a tree. When January contradicts her, pointing out that more than a struggle had occurred, she replies, "Ye maze, maze, goode sire" (*MerT.* l. 2387). She further suggests that when someone recovers sight it is like someone waking up, and:

He may nat sodeynly wel taken keep  
Upon a thyng, ne seen it parfitly,  
Til that he be adawed verrailly.  
Right so a man that longe hath blynd ybe,  
Ne may nat sodeynly so wel yse,  
First whan his sighte is newe come ageyn,  
As he that hath a day or two yseyn.  
Til that youre sighte ysatled be a while  
Ther may ful many a sighte you bigile.  
Beth war, I prey yow, for by hevene kyng,  
Ful many a man weneth to seen a thyng,  
And it is al another than it semeth.  
He that mysconceyveth, he mysdemeth (*MerT.* ll. 2398-2410).

January, who had actually seen the truth of the situation, allows himself to be beguiled by mercurial trickery. His faith and trust in May have been restored; for it is the nature of Sagittarius to be positive, optimistic and trusting. But he has also surrendered to the Sagittarian inclination to shoot off at a tangent and allow himself to be distracted from the truth on the basis of what he hears. Chaucer has illustrated yet again the shifting sands of mutability affecting the evidence of our senses upon which we make claims regarding knowledge and truth.

## The Man of Law's Tale



One of the intriguing problems confronting anyone who ventures to establish Chaucer's intentions regarding the ordering of his *Canterbury Tales* is the placement of the *Man of Law's Tale*. The *Ellesmere* manuscript places it after the *Cook's* and before the *Wife of Bath's*. In terms of the zodiacal order, that would place it at Leo, where the *Wife of Bath's* is placed at present, thereby shifting every subsequent *Tale* one sign further on in the zodiacal sequence. Alternatively, were the *Cook's Tale* to be eliminated and the *Man of Law's Tale* to replace it, then the zodiacal sequence and associations as outlined so far would be maintained, but there would be only 11 *Tales* and 12 signs in the first sequence of associations; and the associations would break down after the *Merchant's Tale*; for the *Squire's Tale* does not fit Capricorn; nor does the *Franklin's* fit Aquarius. This thesis suggests therefore that the aborted *Cook's Tale* and the order as outlined so far be retained, and that the *Man of Law's Tale* follow the *Merchant's*. This places the *Man of Law's Tale* at the zodiacal stage of Capricorn, the sign diametrically opposed to its placement by the *Ellesmere* manuscript. If it were not to be placed where the *Cook's Tale* is located in the sequence, that is, at Cancer, then in terms of its astrological associations its placement after the *Merchant's* and before the *Squire's* is the only location suitable for it, that is, at the diametrically opposite sign, Capricorn; for the astrological referenda are tied evidently to the Cancer-Capricorn binary opposition.

There are, however, more reasons for placing the *Man of Law's Tale* at Capricorn than a simple astrological rationalisation. First, there are no links between



the *Tales* which determine the placement of the *Man of Law's Tale*. It is the only *Tale* that is clearly free of association with any fragment and therefore capable of being moved independently. Secondly, although it was shown earlier that Chaucer probably intended the Man of Law to tell the first *Tale*, there is no evidence to suggest that the *Man of Law's Tale* with which we are familiar was the tale Chaucer originally intended to be told first. Thirdly, many early manuscripts show the *Man of Law's Tale* to be followed by the *Squire's*.<sup>300</sup> The placement I have suggested above would endorse that relationship. Fourthly, in the *Merchant's Tale*, advisers to January argue throughout the day the pros and cons of marriage, and later in the *Tale* a blind man is healed by May; in the *Man of Law's*, the Sultan's advisers also argue, "casten up and doun" (*MLT*. 1. 212) about the Sultan's proposed marriage, and later in the *Tale* a blind man is healed by Custance. The first healing is brought about by a pagan god; the second is brought about by the Christian God. The contiguity of those events raises the probability of the contiguity of the *Tales*, particularly in the light of Chaucer's earlier technique of having characters 'quit' each other's *Tales*. And perhaps the most forceful concluding two reasons are the fact that if the *Man of Law's Tale* is placed at Capricorn, then the *Man of Law* himself and Custance are described by Cancer. In medieval times, according to John North,<sup>301</sup> the sign Cancer was associated with Christ's work on Earth (because the sun was perceived as being closer to the Earth during its transit of Cancer) and Capricorn was associated with the anti-Christ (because the sun was perceived as being at its furthest distance from Earth during its

---

<sup>300</sup> Benson (1987), p. 10. Helen Cooper points out, however, that "the Merchant's endlink and the Squire's headlink always occur together regardless of which tales they connect (Cooper (1983) p. 61).

<sup>301</sup> North (1988), p. 131.

transit of that sign). One of the *Man of Law's Tale's* chief characters is representative of the anti-Christ. And finally, in the second zodiacal sequence, as we shall see, this Cancer-Capricorn opposition is associated with the *Prioress' Tale*, and that too is associated with the Christ-anti-Christ theme, in that instance the Jews, associated for hundreds of years with Capricorn, being regarded as the anti-Christ. The Capricorn-Cancer opposition will become very much in evidence as its symbolism is explored.<sup>302</sup>

As mentioned in the section on the *Knight's Tale*, the cardinal solstitial opposition is related to the axis of genetic descent and identity: Capricorn chiefly with one's public identity, status, patrimony, father (or sometimes mother), title, reputation, social prestige, honour; with that which is dominant, set on high, the government, God; Cancer with one's private identity, ancestors, family, mother (or sometimes father) heritage, nationality, home, cultural background and immediate kinship or 'one's kind'

---

<sup>302</sup> Were I forced to concede a different order from that which I have claimed to be the case, then it would be to replace the *Cook's* by the *Man of Law's Tale*, at Cancer, giving both Leo and Virgo the *Wife of Bath's*, which would parallel the second circuit's association of Chaucer with the Leo and Virgo *Tales* of Sir Thopas and Melibee respectively. There is an appealing reason for associating the *Wife of Bath's Tale* with both Leo and Virgo: the Sphinx is thought to represent, on Earth, the boundary-marker of the constellations Leo and Virgo, the body of a lion with the head of a woman, and the Sphinx is associated with the asking of a riddle, failure to answer which was punishable by death. The *Wife of Bath's Tale* has as its central feature the riddle to be answered by the knight, failure resulting in his death. Unfortunately, such a rearrangement of the zodiacal sequence with the *Tales* would force the association of the Friar's with Libra, the Summoner's with Scorpio, the Clerk's with Sagittarius, and the Merchant's with Capricorn, but retain the desirable association of the Squire's with Aquarius, and the Franklin's with Pisces.

and those traditions one assimilates and which contribute to one's sense of belonging and one's self-image.

In the zodiacal *melothesia*, Capricorn is associated with the knees and skeletal structure of the body. The knees are the part of the skeletal structure that support one's body, enabling one to stand upright, and are associated with natural dignity and pride; for bending the knee is a sign of humility, whilst one's status and 'standing' are demeaned if one's knees and skeletal structure buckle. Chevalier and Gheerbrant write:

The Bambara call the knee 'the knob of the head's staff' and locate the seat of political power in it.... They agree in this with very many ancient traditions which make the knee 'the main seat of bodily strength... symbol of man's authority and power in society'. ... Pliny the Elder noted the religious nature of the knees as symbols of power.<sup>303</sup>

Cancer's *melothesiatic* association with the cheeks, stomach, breasts, womb, buttocks, the 'containers' and 'carriers' of the body, the 'corpus', has already been described. The association of the sign of the crab with the public perception of its walking sideways has not been alluded to earlier, but an oblique approach or indirect reference to situations and people are the psychological equivalents. The assimilatory and replicatory processes or pattern-preserving activity of Cancer are derived from its relationship to the inheritance mechanism, the 'likenesses' and 'semblances' enabling a child to 're-semble' its ancestors. The Capricorn part of the axis of descent is associated with the maintenance of order, control, structure, regulating and checking the assimilation of content and the replicatory process of Cancer, defining space by establishing borders, limits; and Cancer is associated with examples, types, replicas,

---

<sup>303</sup> Chevalier and Gheerbrant (1996), p. 573.

while Capricorn is associated with the rules and regulations, laws, formulae, set procedures, structures and 'controls' to which those Cancer 'forms' must 'conform' and by which they must be regulated if they are to maintain semblances, preserve the established patterns, follow the precedents. Such association of Capricorn with the establishment of order has been illustrated in two earlier Tales: the *Knight's* and the *Summoner's*.

Helen Cooper describes the *Man of Law's Tale* as "a story that insists throughout on the providential control of events." She says that in this Tale "there is no room for chance or accident or final injustice."<sup>304</sup> It is clearly then, a tale related, like the *Knight's Tale*, to the high thematic implications of the cardinal cross of the zodiac.

Custance is introduced to us as a woman of "heigh beautee, withoute pride" (*MLT.* ll. 162), and someone in whom "[h]umbleness hath slayn in hire al tirannye" (*MLT.* l. 165). Such qualities are the negation of Capricorn's concern for status and public acknowledgement of one's merit, hinting instead at Cancer. And this is underpinned by the description: "She is mirour of alle curteisye;/Hir herte is verray chambre of hoolynesse;/Hir hand, ministre of fredam for almesse" (*MLT.* ll. 166-8). The words "*mirour*", "*chambre*" and "*hand*" are all allusions to Cancer; for a mirror 'reflects' or presents a likeness, an image; a chamber is a container or room; and the hand, as a part of the body, is associated with Cancer because of its association with catching, receiving and holding, assimilating and retaining. (This differentiates the association of 'hand' as a 'hired hand', implicative of 'a' subordinate part of the body

---

<sup>304</sup> Cooper (1983), p. 122.

that can be coopted into providing a service, and hence associated, as is any 'part' of the body perceived simply as a 'part', with Virgo, from that of 'the' hand as a defined part of the body with its own specific function.)

The Sultan is a Mohammedan, and therefore representative of a faith opposed to Christianity, and astrologically associated with Capricorn. Custance's first conversation is with her father, but one notices how oblique is the language she uses:

"Fader," she seyde, "thy wrecched child Custance,  
Thy yonge doghter fostred up so softe,  
And ye, my mooder, my soverayn plesance  
Over alle thyng, out-taken Crist on-lofte,  
Custance youre child hire recomandeth ofte  
Unto youre grace, for I shal to Surrye,  
Ne shal I nevere seen yow moore with ye.

"Allas, unto the Barbre nacioun  
I moste anoon, syn that it is youre wille;  
But Crist, that starf for our redempcioun  
So yeve me grace his heestes to fulfille!  
I, wrecche womman, no fors though I spille!  
Wommen are born to thraldom and penance,  
And to been under mannes governance"  
(*MLT*. ll. 274-287).

Such indirectness, the use of the third person, typifies the oblique approach of Cancer to a topic that is painful, one about which there is considerable sensitivity and which might be a source of contention; for the cardinal water sign, ruled by the moon, has connotations of emotional vulnerability that is protected by the adoption of a hard shell of an apparent lack of emotion. And it is evident throughout the *Tale* that Custance has adopted this self-protective shell, which hides her emotional pain; for her language is stilted, restrained, constrained by her desire to emulate her Master, Christ, in the endurance of her suffering. The pathos we are supposed to feel in response to the tale of Custance is induced not by Custance herself but by the events that occur to her as related by the narrator, who employs the Cancerean emotionalism to coax,

cajole or goad us into such a reaction. Instead of telling us simply that the day has come for Custance's departure, the Man of Law adopts a declamatory style: "The day is comen of hir departynge;/I seye, the woful day fatal is come" (*MLT.* ll. 260-1). There follows a long commentary about the condition of Custance's horoscope, despite the fact that the electional chart for the journey is unknown, the dramatic effect of the commentary being to induce in the pilgrims an exaggerated concern and unease because of human fear of the unknown. The use of exclamation and apostrophe is typical of Cancer: forceful emotion: "Allas, unto the Barbre nacioun" (*MLT.* l. 281); "O firste moevyng! Cruel firmament" (*MLT.* l. 295); "Infortunat ascendent tortuous,/Of which the lord is helpees falle, allas" (*MLT.* ll. 312-3); "Imprudent Emperour of Rome, allas!" (*MLT.* l. 309). At last, "[t]o shippe is brought this woful faire mayde", at line 316, no fewer than 55 lines after we are first told that the day has come for her departure. The intervening lines are replete with Cancerean and lunar imagery: Custance, "that was with sorwe al overcome,/Ful pale arist" (*MLT.* ll. 364-5); "Fader," she seyde, "thy wrecched child Custance,/The yonge doghter fostred up so softe,/And ye, my mooder, my soverayn plesance" (*MLT.* ll. 274-5); "O fieble moone, unhappy been thy paas!/Thou knytttest thee ther thou art nat receyved" (*MLT.* l. 307) - this being a reference not only to the moon but a metaphorical allusion to Custance herself, directing us to associate her with the moon, the ruler of Cancer. Finally, she is brought to the ship, another Cancerean image. We are told that she "peyneth hire to make good contenance" (*MLT.* l. 320), again trying to set an example, and following one herself. The Sultan's mother's Moslem faith identifies her as representing the anti-Christ and, opposed to Custance, opposed to Christ. It is not insignificant that in referring to Custance she says, "Thogh she a font-ful water with hire lede" (*MLT.* l.

357). This identification of Custance with a font reveals the woman's conscious acknowledgment of Custance as a Christian, the font being a symbol of baptism. But the iconographical font may well be Chaucer's codification of the zodiacal sign Cancer both alchemically and astrologically. The font is analogous to a bath, frequently used by alchemists, and representing purification and regeneration, "rebirth as a new being or elevation to a higher order." More importantly, it is possibly a hint by Chaucer that this *Tale* is associated with the cardinal cross of the zodiac, for, as Chevalier and Gheerbrant point out, "Fonts are generally set upon a central pillar which acts as a plinth and which symbolizes the World axis around which changing existences revolve. In other instances it rests upon four columns, recalling the four cardinal points and the totality of the universe..."<sup>305</sup>.

The narrator exercises little restraint in his denunciation of the Sultan's mother. She is compared to Semiramus; to Satan, associated with Saturn, the ruler of Capricorn. She arranges for the slaying of everyone at a feast she has arranged, but Custance is saved. She is placed in a boat and set adrift on the open sea. But she is saved from drowning. The explanation given by the Man of Law is rhetorical: "Who saved Danyel in the horrible cave?" (*MLT*. l. 473) and "Who kepte Jonas in the fisshes mawe?" (*MLT*. l. 486). Such 'explanations' obviate the need for chance or fortune to have intervened: God alone, divine Providence, is in control, a Capricornian explanation - everything happens according to law.

One might recall that an earlier Capricorn-Cancer tale, the Cook's, advised the listener regarding herbergage, to the effect that one should be wary about whom one takes into one's home. This lesson is reversed in the *Man of Law's Tale*; for the

---

<sup>305</sup> Chevalier and Gheerbrant (1996), p. 307.

slaying of the Christian guests by the Sultan's wife suggests that we should be wary about whose home we are taken into.

Cancerean imagery persists throughout the *Tale* but as a vehicle for Providential law, just as Custance herself is a vessel for Providential truth even if her own actions tend to lack compassion or concern for others.

Having converted to Christianity her rescuer's wife, healed a blind man and then converted the Constable of Northumberland himself, Custance is wooed by a knight. The knight introduces the Aries component of the cardinal cross. The temptation of Custance by the knight posits human desire in conflict with Christian virtue, an Aries-Cancer conflict, with disciplined asceticism or denial (Capricorn) and marriage (Libra) being the other interstices. Failing in his purpose of making love to Custance, the knight murders Hermengyld, the Constable's wife, by cutting her throat (an action mirrored, it will be seen, in the *Prioress' Tale*) and leaves the bloody knife by the sleeping Custance. When this is discovered and perceived as evidence suggesting Custance's guilt, she is placed on trial, and subjected to perjury, which introduces the Libran component, that sign being associated, as commonly known, with the scales of justice. Libra represents judgment, other people's opinions or 'views', literal or metaphorical. At the trial however, God saves her by another miracle, striking the knight dead, and converting to Christianity all the witnesses. There follows the marriage of Custance to Alla, another Libran element, that sign being representative of marriage, unification, integration with another, and so she becomes queen.

Shortly thereafter Custance becomes a mother, the ultimate fulfilment of the Cancerean icon. The news is conveyed by messenger to her husband Alla, who is



fighting a campaign against the Scots. Unfortunate as she is with mothers-in-law, Custance is again victimized, this time by Alla's mother, Donegild, yet another Capricorn figure. (The reason for that is the astrological axis of descent: Custance being Cancer, her father is represented by Capricorn, and so her husband's father is represented by Cancer, hence his mother by Capricorn.) God's intervention repeatedly and aptly prevents Custance from suffering the ultimate fate of a scape-goat, a role usually reserved for the sign opposite to Custance's, namely Capricorn. and as Robert Dawson says, "[i]nterspersed with the lamentations over the impossibility of finding justice in the court, the Man of Law has provided an abundance of concrete details suggesting exactly the opposite..."<sup>306</sup>

An Emperoures doghter stant allone;  
 She hath no wight to whom to make hir mone.  
 O blood roial, that stondest in this drede,  
 Fer been thy freendes at thy grete nede!  
 (MLT. ll. 654-657)

Yet immediately afterward we are told that "This Alla kyng hath swich compassioun,/As gentil herte is fulfild of pitee"(MLT. ll. 659-660), that the knight has to swear to Custance's guilt on a sacred book. The knight is killed by God's hand and everyone is repentant of their prejudice. The Cancer-Capricorn opposition is thus neatly balanced and in fact the four components of the cardinal cross are clearly illustrated: the reference to Custance being an emperor's daughter and to her royal blood alludes to her heritage and an appeal for support is made to queens, duchesses and all the ladies (Cancer), and the knight (Aries) is required to swear on the book as

---

<sup>306</sup> Robert B. Dawson, "Custance In Context: Rethinking The Protagonist Of The Man of Law's Tale," *The Chaucer Review*, 26 (1992), pp. 293-308 (p. 305).

means of judicial process (Libra), commits perjury and is struck down by the hand of God (Capricorn).

The climax of the *Tale* is a virtual crucifixion, another example of the grand cross. Betrayed for the third time, Custance sees herself in the image of the Madonna. Contrary to her stated reluctance to compare the Madonna's loss to her own plight, ("Thanne is ther no comparison bitwene/Thy wo and any wo man may sustene" (*MLT.* ll. 846-7), one cannot but suspect that she is in fact making the comparison. There is a very little interval between her address to Mary: "Thou sawe thy child yslayn bifore thyne yen,/And yet now lyveth my litel child, parfay!" (*MLT.* ll. 848-9) and the one to her child: "O litel child, allas! What is thy gilt,/That nevere wroghtest synne as yet, pardee?/Why wil thyn harde fader han thee spilt?" (*MLT.* ll. 855-857). Is there not in fact the suggestion of a comparison between the Madonna's misfortune and her own in that? And may that not be a somewhat oblique yet histrionic emotional blackmailing of God? Histrionics, play-acting and emotional blackmail tend to be the hallmarks of Cancer to a greater extent than of any other sign, being a cardinal water element sign in which the unconscious plays such a major part in motivation.

Once more she is placed in a ship, yet again a vessel within a vessel, a fact that points up the Cancerean principle of replication and recalls the fact that the *Tale* is itself replicatory. Custance is sent on a journey, rejected and betrayed, metaphorically crucified but survives and is victorious, usually having converted non-Christians to the Christian faith. The *Tale* is thus replicatory in two ways: first, by replicating Christ's own history: he came on a mission, sent by his Father; he was rejected and despised; subjected to considerable discomfort including the agony of crucifixion, but emerged victorious through the Resurrection, with conversions of many to what became

subsequently the Christian faith. Custance, in addition to having assimilated Christian virtues, duplicates Christ's life-pattern, but then subsequently replicates it almost identically in two subsequent sequences. The established pattern is thus preserved, fulfilling her Cancerean role.

TABLE 6

CHRIST	CUSTANCE	CUSTANCE	CUSTANCE
<i>The Nativity</i>	<i>Arrives in Syria</i>	<i>Arrives Northumberland</i>	<i>Marries</i>
<i>The birth welcomed by Magi whose gifts include myrrh, symbol of tragedy</i>	<i>Given royal welcome but includes Sultan's evil mother who portends tragedy</i>	<i>Welcomed by Constable</i>	<i>Great celebrations but includes ill-willed mother-in-law</i>
<i>Christ converts populace</i>	<i>Converts to Christianity</i>	<i>Constable and wife converted to Christianity</i>	<i>Conceives child</i>
<i>Last Supper, Temptation and Betrayal</i>	<i>Christians slain</i>	<i>Tempted by knight</i>	<i>Bears son</i>
	<i>Custance betrayed</i>	<i>Betrayed by knight</i>	<i>Betrayed by Donegild</i>
<i>Put on trial</i>	<i>Put to sea</i>	<i>Put on trial</i>	<i>Put to sea</i>
<i>Crucifixion</i>	<i>Exposed to elements</i>	<i>Perjured by knight</i>	<i>Exposed to elements</i>
<i>Resurrection</i>	<i>Saved from drowning</i>	<i>Saved by God</i>	<i>Rescued by father</i>
<i>Victorious</i>	<i>Victorious</i>	<i>Victorious</i>	<i>Victorious</i>

Throughout the pattern of events God continually intervenes: He saves her at the feast; He kills the knight and saves her at her trial; He twice saves her from the sea; He saves her child from death; it is His will - the "sonde" of Christ. Yet early in the *Tale* we are told:

Paraventure in thilke large book  
 Which that men clepe the hevene ywriten was  
 With sterres, whan that he his birthe took,  
 That he for love sholde han his deeth, allas!  
 For in the sterres, clerer than is glas,  
 Is writen, God woot, whoso koude it rede,  
 The deeth of every man, withouten drede  
 (MLT. ll. 190-196).

The *Tale* thus, at this stage, appears to postulate a predetermined fate, and the Sultan's death as a consequence of his marriage fulfils the prediction. Yet his marriage is a consequence of human will. Fate, ruled by Capricorn, is perceived as an outcome of human desire. When Custance sets out on her initial journey, however, the Man of Law bemoans the fact that no astrologer has been consulted to draw up a more auspicious election chart for her voyage (*MLT*. l. 310). The two-part inference we are forced to draw from this is that first, the condition of the stars at the time Custance sets sail is so bad as to predict an unfortunate outcome of the journey (*MLT*. ll. 300-301) - an implication that might have been perceived by some as fulfilled. But secondly, that had it been possible to draw up an electional horoscope for the journey, either through choosing a time when the planets were moving into favourable relationships to their positions in Custance's natal chart, if that had been known, or simply through choosing a more auspicious planetary configuration under which to set sail, then her 'fate' might have been better (*MLT*. ll. 311-315). Thereby determinism is distinguished from fate; for it is assumed that one may intervene to modify the otherwise fated course of events.

It is at this point that Chaucer presents, in a nutshell, the cases both for and against astrology. By doing so he holds up a mirror to the great contemporary debate that raged throughout Christendom, a debate which had begun in earnest with Augustine (354-430) and was to continue for nearly a millenium and a half with Moses ben Maimon (Maimonides:1135-1204), Robert Grosseteste (c.1175-1253), Albertus Magnus (c.1200-80), Thomas Aquinas (1225-74), Nichole Oresme (1320-82), Coluccio Salutati (1331-1406), Giovanni Pontano (1429-1503), Marsilio Ficino (1433-99), Pico della Mirandola (1463-94), and Giordano Bruno (1548-1600) among its

chief participants. It was a debate never clearly resolved, though the position taken by Aquinas appears to be the one that Chaucer is reiterating in the theme of this *Tale*.

Aquinas suggested that human beings are without doubt subject to the influence of the stars, as are also the weather, crops and human health. As long as human beings allowed their corporeal instincts, their 'sublunary nature', to govern them so that they followed the line of least resistance, then they would continue to be subject to the cosmic influences: "*Plures hominum sequuntur passiones quae sunt motus sensitivi appetitus, ad quod cooperare possunt corpora caelestia; pauci autem sunt sapientes qui huiusmodi passiones resistant.*"<sup>307</sup> (Most human beings follow their passions which are motions of the sensuous appetite with which the heavenly bodies can cooperate; few there are indeed who have the wisdom to resist such passions.) But, claimed Aquinas, if we allowed Christ, to which he equated the light of the intellect, to guide us, then we freed ourselves from the law of necessity and exercised our God-given free will to determine our own actions.

The Man of Law appears to be suggesting the general belief prevailing was that without a horoscope Custance would be subject to astrological fatalism and vulnerable to the adverse astrological pattern under which she set sail; and that had she an election chart available she could have, by astrological means, averted such an adverse fate. But his *Tale* then proceeds to illustrate Custance's victory, not once but three times, over adversity, *without* such a horoscope and she experiences such triumphs therefore not because of a horoscope but *despite* the astrological conditions and solely because she has followed Aquinas' prescription and allied her will to the will of God through Christian grace. It is possibly of no small significance that the events of

---

<sup>307</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, pars prima, quaestio 115, articulae 3 et 4.

Custance's life occur on land, then at sea, on land, then at sea, on land, then at sea and then finally on land. Is Chaucer throwing us a strong hint at the iconography of Capricorn, comprising the fish's tail with the goat's horns, which symbolized the end of the dry season and the beginning of the wet season? Capricorn was traditionally the first of the three water constellations of the ancient zodiac. Custance's life is very much 'at sea', both literally and metaphorically, and hence apparently subject to the whims and moods of the ocean, as one might expect of a Crab. But despite the impression one receives, it is also apparent that God is in control and that order prevails despite appearances, suggesting that even though our life patterns might resemble those of the oceans, calm or chaotic, alternately placid and turbulent, we are simply not cognizant of or we forget the order that maintains their tidal ebb and flow.

Despite Chaucer's representation of Aquinas' position, the poet doesn't decide the issue of astrology, free will and determinism himself, but presents the dilemma unresolved. We are told that no natal chart is available for Custance (*MLT*. 1. 315), so we cannot know if in the end she had fulfilled the life pattern it would have predicted. One might suspect that she had done, if only because, being representative of Cancer, her life pattern would have replicated the stellar map that replicated the heavens when she was born (Gk. *hora skopein* = picture of the hour). That might be the suggestion Chaucer is making when the Sultan is killed by his mother's supporters after he has married Custance, fulfilling his preordained destiny. But it must be pointed out that the Sultan's decision to marry Custance was made prior to his conversion to Christianity even though he had become a Christian by the time of his marriage. It may well therefore be Chaucer's contention that non-Christians are subject to stellar determinism and that they may believe themselves capable of modifying their fate by

astrological means, but that the only guarantee of doing so is to become a Christian and thereby provide, as did Custance, the medium for God's intervention in the form of Providence.

## The Squire's Tale



**"Sic profluit urna" - Manilius.**

The *Squire's Tale*, which in our sequence should fall at Aquarius in the zodiacal circle, is one of the more enigmatic of *The Canterbury Tales*, seeming alternately to promise much but deliver little and to promise little but deliver too much. Few claim to understand it - and some of those who do, see it as a reflection of the Knight's "yonge sonne's" immaturity and leave it at that. If, however, it is correlated with Aquarius, the fixed air element sign of the zodiac, then the *Tale* reveals, unexpectedly, a consistent Aquarian typology but also some distinctly Piscean narrational elements. It becomes apparent that the *Squire's Tale* and the next, the *Franklin's Tale*, form one unit under Aquarius and Pisces. The reason for that is probably the wave nature of Aquarius, and Pisces' symbolism of the sea. As we shall see later, in the second zodiacal circuit, the signs lying opposite to Aquarius and Pisces, namely Leo and Virgo respectively, are associated with the *Tale of Sir Thopas* and the *Tale of Melibee* respectively, which may also be treated as one unit, like two halves of a whole: *Sir Thopas* being "all solaas" and *Melibee* "all sentence", reflecting Chaucer's two underlying *topoi* in *The Canterbury Tales*.

Earlier *Tales* have referred to the medieval association of Aquarius with the legs and ankles. (The inclusion of the circulatory system is post-Harvey). The leg is symbolically associated with the principle of association. Chevalier and Gheerbrant describe its symbolism thus: "The limb for walking, the leg is a symbol of social bonding. It allows individuals to approach one another, promotes contact and removes



separation and therefore derives its importance from the social order."<sup>308</sup>

Understanding the symbolic referenda of Aquarius, one must recall also the astrological implication of the fixed mode and the air element in combination. The air element takes the *melothesia* of Aquarius into the mental realm of ideas and idealism, into the domain of issues, principles, knowledge and communication. So the fixity of the sign and its association with the legs implies uniting with others and 'taking a stand' on certain *issues*; maintaining one's position on principle; adhering to the rubric; holding fixed ideas; making claims about universal and stable truths, hence about whatever is the contemporary 'science'. (Today it is claimed that knowledge is socially constructed.)

But the fact that we have two legs rather than one, when combined with the fixity of the sign, enables any one metaphorically to maintain one's position and, by so doing, simultaneously 'step out of line'. By refusing to 'budge' mentally, or to join with the crowd in consensus decision-making, refusing to subsume individual identity within that of the group, association, assembly, species or conglomerate of which one is a part, by emphasizing idiosyncrasy and individual freedom, one proclaims one's uniqueness.

At the same time, *such distinction of individuality loses definition unless situated within a class*, whether that class comprises the human species or the assembly of our peers, and whether that class is composed of those with whom we can potentially be compared on the basis of commonality or of difference. Aquarius' association with collectives, assemblies, aggregates, species and classes is metonymically related to its principle of 'universalizing'...distributing energy along

---

<sup>308</sup> Chevalier and Gheerbrant (1996), p. 594.

specific wave lengths. Given that, in one sense, 'everything is vibration', then whatever 'oscillates' at an identical 'frequency' manifests at the same level, sharing identical defining characteristics, forming a 'comm-unity'. That is the 'wave' principle of the universe, comprising light wave/particles (a principle of which Chaucer was not, one might safely assume, aware.) Thus the Aquarian association with waves: a wave or gust of wind is an individual, unique manifestation within the general flow of air of which it is a part; a wave at sea is similarly an individual, unique manifestation differentiating itself within the general flow of water; and both are simultaneously dependent upon and independent of the mass or class of which they are both a part and from which they are apart.

The understanding of Aquarius and its wave-like iconography and of its relationship to Pisces and its association with the sea, is fundamental to understanding the *Squire's Tale* and its astrological coding.

The most evident quality of waves is their rise and fall, their amplitude along the sinusoidal curve of frequency. They reach a pitch, then fall away. As the waves of the sea roll towards the beach, their distant swelling seems the promise of a booming, crashing crescendo on the shore, but is frequently dispelled, resulting in a gentle roll and frothy-tongued lick of a beach, then a strange and quiet calm. And then another wave, intent on making up lost ground, but its surging surf is soothed along the way as it retreats within the body of its matrix, the ocean. Then what appears to be a gentle rise suddenly surges along the beach or makes a surprising splash among the rocks. Isn't that the *Squire's Tale*? Pregnant with promises but promises still-born; yet with an incoming full tide that, even while it enfolds the receding, retreating wave, threatens

to engulf everyone and has to be stayed, by the Franklin, like some strangely successful King Canute, preventing the flood.

"The astronomers' symbol for the sign Aquarius (  $\approx$  ), showing undulating lines of waves, is said to have been the hieroglyph for Water, the title of Aquarius in the Nile country."<sup>309</sup> Aratos too called Aquarius "the Water" and Cicero referred to it as "Aqua". Manilius' *Poeticon Astronomicum* shows Pisces receiving water from the Urn. Dante combined the two fish of Pisces in his *Celeste Lasca*, and linked the two signs, saying that here and in Aquarius geomancers saw their Fortuna Major. North too, comments on a connection between the two signs: [Skeat] "had found that a reference to 'Maggior Fortuna' (*Purg.* xix. 4) was commonly understood as indicating a group of six stars - all easily identifiable - towards the end of Aquarius and the beginning of Pisces. Benvenuto da Imola had said as much in the mid-1370s, showing as he did so a knowledge of geomantic conventions. Other commentators had followed suit."<sup>310</sup> Allen writes, "Geomancy is divination by points in the ground, or pebbles arranged in certain figures, which have peculiar names. Among these is the figure called Fortuna Major, which...can also be formed out of some of the last stars in Aquarius and some of the first in Pisces."<sup>311</sup> Allen also says that there is a "sprinkling of indistinct stars between the Fishes and the Whale that Riccioli said was *effusio Aquarii*, the designation for the Stream from the Urn".<sup>312</sup> Yet Aquarius belongs to the airy triplicity, the other two signs being Gemini and Libra. But air resembles the sea in

---

<sup>309</sup> Allen (1963), p. 49.

<sup>310</sup> North (1988), pp. 239-40.

<sup>311</sup> Allen (1963), pp. 48-49.

<sup>312</sup> Allen (1963), p. 342.



He with a manly voys seide his message,  
 After the forme used in his langage,  
 Withouten vice of silable or of lettre;  
 And for his tale sholde seme the bettre,  
 Accordant to his wordes was his cheere,  
 As techeth art of speche hem that it leere.  
 Al be that I kan nat sowne his stile,  
 Ne kan nat clymben over so heigh a style,  
 Yet seye I this, as to commune entente:  
 Thus muche amounteth al that evere he mente,  
 If it so be that I have it in mynde

(*SqT.* ll. 99-109).

Heere is the revel and the jolitee  
 That is nat able a dul man to devyse  
 (*SqT.* ll. 278-279).

Who koude telle you the forme of daunces

.....

No man but Launcelot, and he is deed.  
 Therfore I passe of al this lustiheed;  
 I sey namoore, but in this jolynesse  
 I lete hem til men to the soper dresse  
 (*SqT.* ll. 283, 287-290).

It then appears that we are to be given some respite:

The knotte why that every tale is toold,  
 If it be taried til that lust be coold  
 Of hem that han if after herkned yoore,  
 The savour passeth ever lenger the moore,  
 For fulsomnesse of his prolixitee;  
 And by the same resoun, thyketh me,  
 I sholde to the knotte condescende,  
 And maken of hir walkyng soone an ende  
 (*SqT.* ll. 401-407).

But it is not to be. His prolixity continues, as he relates the story of Canacee's conversation with the love-sick bird. This prevalent concern with melancholy is also a typical allusion to Aquarius, the ruler of which is Saturn. Edmund Spenser was to illustrate that in *The Shepheard's Calendar, Januarie Eclogue*, stanza 5 in which Colin

is presented as the lover afflicted with the lover's melancholy, which affects not only the shepherd Colin, but his flock too. In the *Squire's Tale*, however, not only is the hawk melancholy but she has been betrayed too, and betrayal, as noted with reference to other *Tales*, is a Piscean motif.

The Squire proclaims his intention of withdrawing:

Thus lete I Canacee hir hauk kepyng;  
I wol namoore as now speke of hir ryng  
Til it come eft to purpos for to seyn...  
(*SqT.* ll. 651-653).

Another wave surges forth however, with the promise (or threat) of subsequent engulfment:

First wol I telle yow of Cambyuskan,  
That in his tyme many a citee wan;  
And after wol I speke of Algarsif,  
How that he wan Theodora to his wif,  
For whom ful ofte in greet peril he was,  
Ne hadde he ben holpen by the steede of bras;  
And after wol I speke of Cambalo,  
That faught in lystes with the bretheren two  
For Canacee er that he myghte hire wynne.  
And ther I lefte I wol ayeyn bigynne  
(*SqT.* ll. 661-670).

Fortunately, the Franklin interrupts politely and we breathe a sign of relief.

Manilius ended his lines on Aquarius with "*Sic profluit urna*" - "And so the urn flows on", to which Spence adds "Which seems to have been a proverbial expression among the antients, taken from the ceaseless flowing of this urn; and which might be not inapplicable now, when certain ladies are telling a story; or certain lawyers are pleading."<sup>314</sup>

---

<sup>314</sup> Spence, cited in Allen (1963), p. 50.

We have seen earlier that Leo is associated with the monarchy, aristocracy, autocracy, centralized power. Aquarius, the opposing sign, is therefore associated with collective authority, the democratic sharing of power and hence with social activities, corporate cooperation, and with the synthesis of energy distributed through team, board, group and committee activities. Just as Leo relates to individual performance and egocentric consciousness, so Aquarius relates to social performance (as in a choir, for example), and social-class consciousness. The legs, with which the sign is associated in the zodiacal melothesia, are a symbol of social bonding.<sup>315</sup> The Squire, who as teller of the *Tale*, is a Leo type, displays ineptitude in a group situation in which he is the youngest and has no scope for demonstration of personal prowess at those skills he has mastered; nor dominance and rulership. The Canterbury pilgrims have equal chances of being successful in the game of story-telling. Being a Leo, the Squire opts for rhetoric, which was shown in the discussion of the *Clerk's Tale* to be associated with that zodiacal sign. But his immaturity and desire to make an impression incline him to both overplay the rules of rhetoric, and to resort to language as a means of emphasizing his social superiority, compensating for the inadequacy he feels in this particular social context. The result is that he adopts a detached, self-conscious concern for style and stylistic effect. Referring to the "strange knyght, that cam thus sodeynly" to the Cambyuskan's feast, the Squire says:-

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

---

<sup>315</sup> Chevalier and Gheerbrant (1996), p. 594.

Yet seye I this, as to commune entente:  
 Thus muche amounteth al that evere he mente,  
 If it so be that I have it in mynde  
 (*SqT.* ll. 99-109).

Chaucer portrays the Aquarian class-consciousness that emerges in the Squire's condescending attitude to the subject of his own *Tale*. Describing the people's reactions to the magical gifts brought to Cambyuskan and his daughter by the knight, the Squire says: "Of sondry doutes thus they jangle and trete,/As lewed peple demeth comunly/Of thynges that been maad moore subtilly/Than they kan in hir lewednesse comprehende;/They demen gladly to the badder end" (*SqT.* ll. 220-224). As Brown and Butcher put it: "Despite a calculated modesty of tone, however, the Squire is not beyond a condescension or even arrogance which emphasizes the social distance between the *gentil* and the lewd and, by implication, between the *gentils* and all other social groups. If anything, his calculated self-effacement implies a superiority. His whole tale and its attitude to narrative promote an uneasy relationship with his audience of fellow-pilgrims as well as with a wider audience..."<sup>316</sup> What could better illustrate the Leo-Aquarian tension?

It is at the level of meta-narrative, that is, in the context of the *Canterbury Tales* as a unit, that Chaucer's *Squire's Tale* again illustrates the principle of Aquarius; for the *Tale* itself is eccentric, does not conform, even as a romance, to the 'class' or 'set' of the *Canterbury Tales*. It has no identifiable source; it is concerned with the exotic; if allowed to continue it would have exceeded even the *Wife of Bath's Prologue* and *Tale* in length; it is apparently episodic and disjointed; it appears to be what Stanley Kahrl describes as "one of Chaucer's rare attempts at a more or less

---

<sup>316</sup> Brown and Butcher (1991), p. 67.



original plot".<sup>317</sup> The *Squire's Tale* must therefore be perceived as associated with both Aquarius and with Pisces insofar as it is linked, by a common concern with rhetoric, gentillesse, class and class barriers and their transcending, to the *Franklin's Tale*. Brown and Butcher suggest that it "may be that the *Squire's Tale* should be regarded as a complete section in a pair of explorations of similar arguments taken from subtly different social positions across the divide of gentility."<sup>318</sup>

It is a tale set in exotic circumstance and replete with unusual objects: "This Cambyuskan, of which I have yow toold,/In roial vestiment sit on his deys,/With diademe, ful heighe in his paleys,/And halt his feeste so solempne and so ryche/That in this world ne was ther noon it lyche" (*SqT.* ll. 58-62). Exoticism and unusualness are terms implicative of the unconventional, the extraordinary, the innovative, and hence also of Aquarius' association with that which is unique and individualistic, non-conformist. One may recall the Wife of Bath and her Aquarian individualism advocating a social philosophy counter to the prevailing orthodoxy. The multiplicity of objects and descriptions of them amounts to a virtual encyclopaedia, again implying a concern with a universe, but not with the cosmos. The objects are magical, strange; examples of 'scientific' principles at work, but not realistic, not 'grounded' in the world: they exist at that stratum of reality with which Aquarius is concerned, the air, in the realm of the mind, in the imagination: "That in this world ne was ther noon it lyche" (*SqT.* l. 62).

---

<sup>317</sup> Stanley J. Kahrl, "Chaucer's *Squire's Tale* and the Decline of Chivalry," *The Chaucer Review*, 7 (1972-3), pp. 194-209 (p. 195).

<sup>318</sup> Brown and Butcher (1991), p. 65.

The first part of the tale told by the Squire maintains a consistent concern with the air element: the horse flies through the air, "lyk the Pegasee,/The hors that hadde wynges for to flee" (*SqT.* ll. 207-208), a constellation outside of the ecliptic but aligned directly with Aquarius. It is compared with "an egle whan hym list to soore" (*SqT.* l. 123), another constellation (Aquila) almost aligned with Aquarius and next to Pegasus, as the names are in the text. The mirror that enables Cambyuskan to preview misfortune and the treachery of lovers is an inventive and scientifically impossible use of the science of optics; and the ring enables Canacee to understand the language of the birds: "Ther is no fowel that fleeth under the hevene/That she ne shal wel understonde his stevene" (*SqT.* l. 149-150). The sound of language itself, as distinct from the mere shapes and appearances of words (Gemini) and their significations (Sagittarius), is Aquarian; for it is a disturbance of air waves. As a sub-class of the class *Aves* those that fly are associated with the air element for the obvious reason: they use the air waves. But many birds use the waves of the sea upon which to float. The *Tale* is chiefly about a bird and as birds' natural elements are both the air and water it seems appropriate that the *Squire's Tale* is combining the referenda of both Aquarius and Pisces. And again, at one level, the four gifts represent respectively the four fixed zodiacal signs, the mirror in which lovers may be seen, with Taurus, ruled by Venus; the ring, having connotations of Solomon's ring, with Leo, ruled by Sol; the sword, which both wounds and heals with regenerative, transformative Scorpio, ruled by Mars; and the magical horse with Aquarius (compared with Pegasus and also with Aquila, the Eagle: "Or, if yow lyst to fleen as hye in the air/As dooth an egle whan hym list to soore,/This same steede shal bere yow evere moore" (*SqT.* ll. 122-124)). Yet on another level, because the power of the sword is to heal, that is, to make whole, it

restates the Aquarian principle of unity, of holism, but it does so by magical (Piscean) means. The magical horse flies (Aquarius) but as a horse, is, like all horses, ruled by Jupiter and Pisces; and its creator, says the knight, "knew ful many a seel and many a bond" (*SqT.* l. 131). That is a reference to the magical practice of 'sealing and binding' (as distinct from 'loosening'), and comes within the province of Pisces. The mirror is "Naturelly, by composiciouns/Of anglis and of slye reflexiouns" (*SqT.* ll. 229-230), (Aquarius), but its magic gives one the power to transcend time and space (Pisces). The ring, being symbolic, like the zodiac, of the classes comprising the universe (Aquarius), enables Canacee to transcend (Pisces) the barriers and divisions of species. The sword which makes whole (Aquarius) depends upon Cambyuskan's "grace" before it can perform its healing function: "And what man that is wounded with the strook/Shal never be hool til that yow list, of grace,/To stroke hym with the plat in thilke place/There he is hurt" (*SqT.* ll. 160-163). This *coup de grace*, one might say, evidently requires the compassion and forgiveness, the 'gentillesse' of Pisces for the two-edged sword to fulfil its magical function. The people speculate as to the means by which the gifts were created, and their explanations are given in terms of scientific principles (Aquarius) and the magic of illusion (Pisces).

The major part of the *Tale* is concerned with Canacee and her conversation with a bird in a park. Canacee rises early in the morning, "[a]nd in a trench forth in the park gooth she" (*SqT.* l. 392). Then we are told that "The vapour which that fro the erthe glood/Made the sonne to seme rody and brood" (*SqT.* l. 393). This mist is, of course, an amalgam of the elements air and water, Aquarius and Pisces.<sup>319</sup> The more

---

<sup>319</sup> We should remember that the sun, which in this *Tale* has been identified as moving through the fourth degree of the *sign* Aries, is therefore in the *constellation* Pisces. As we have seen before, there

significant fact is that Canacee is in a park in which she hears birds singing and "right anon she wiste what they mente/Right by hir song, and knew al hire entente"(SqT. ll. 399-400). Chaucer scholars may recall his *Parliament of Fowls*, and North has identified the park in that poem as an allegory of the sign Aquarius. Having explored in considerable detail the astronomical allusions to the fixed stars in that poem, he writes:

This is a very remarkable confirmation of the thesis that the zodiacal sign of Aquarius is the analogue of the park, and that the term of twelve degrees at the entry to the sign of Pisces corresponds to the temple in which Venus is found...On the surface, which was doubtless as much as the ordinary reader was meant to see, this poem is a trilateral vision of the love of heaven, of heaven's ministry through Nature, and of Nature's part in the mutual love of human beings - and birds. Beneath this apparently limpid surface, that is so utterly different in character from the turbulence of *The Squire's Tale*, there runs, nevertheless, the same kind of hidden obsession with the heavens.<sup>320</sup>

North's choice of word, "turbulence", is of course, descriptive usually of a condition of air or water. And it is highly probable that the reason for Chaucer's "obsession with the heavens" in these two poems, the *Squire's Tale* and the *Parliament of Fowls*, is Chaucer's awareness of the historical fact that Aquarius was the sign associated with "the heavens". It was associated with astronomy, which was

---

is no correspondence between this sequence of signs' correspondences with the 24 *Tales*, and the astronomical cameos that represent various characters that play their parts in the *Tales* themselves, viz. the character Januarie and the correlation of the *Merchant's Tale* with Sagittarius. Although Januarie is a saturnine figure and depicts the characteristics of Saturn, the *Tale* as a whole is exemplary of Sagittarian-Geminian interplay. As North has shown, all the astronomical configurations relate only to the early months of the year, suggesting that Chaucer obtained much of his information from *The Fasti*.

<sup>320</sup> North (1988), p. 365.

itself under the dominion of the muse Urania, and later, when the planet Uranus was discovered by Sir William Herschel in 1781, astrologers were to give to Aquarius the co-rulership of Uranus along with its long-established 'ruler', Saturn. Furthermore, 'parliaments' and 'birds' are astrologically associated with Aquarius and with a deft touch Chaucer's picks up their symbolic representation from his *Parliament of Fowls* and places them appropriately in the *Squire's Tale*.

Canacee's stroll to the park in the *Squire's Tale* is preceded by a dream: "And in hire sleep, right for impressioun/Of hire mirour, she hadde a visioun" (*SqT*. ll. 371-372). This parallels Chaucer's use of the *Somnium Scipionis* in *The Parliament of Fowls*:

But fynally my spirit at the laste,  
For wery of my labour al the day,  
Tok reste, that made me to slepe faste;  
And in my slep I mette, as that I lay,  
How Affrican, ryght in the selve aray  
That Scipion hym say byfore that tyde,  
Was come and stod right at my beddes syde  
(*PF*. ll. 92-98).

Shortly afterward:

This forseide Affrican me hente anon  
And forth whith hym unto a gate broughte,  
Ryght of a park walled with grene ston  
(*PF*. ll. 120-122).

On one side of the gate appear the words:

Thorgh me men gon into that blysful place  
Of hertes hele and dedly woundes cure;  
Thorgh me men gon unto the welle of grace  
(*PF*. ll. 127-129).

In this poem, the garden is filled with birds, conversing about love, and the poem is a dedication to St. Valentine's Day. It is possible that Chaucer believed St. Valentine's Feast Day was 3rd May.<sup>321</sup> Valentine's Day was also associated with the legend that on that date birds chose their mates for the coming year. In the *Squire's Tale* Canacee's encounter with the love-sick hawk, betrayed by her lover, occurs in the *Tale* associated with Aquarius, the solar month containing St. Valentine's Day. And in the same manner that Canacee employs Piscean transcendence in the *Squire's Tale*, so the magical qualities of the park in *The Parliament of Fowls* are depicted. There thus appear adequate reasons for perceiving a parallelism in the two poems. Such parallelism justifies, I think, drawing the conclusion that Chaucer is using the same park, with its Aquarian association, in both the *Squire's Tale* and in his *Parliament of Fowls*.

There is a distinctive Piscean 'flavour' to Canacee's conversation with the hawk:

For love of God, as dooth youreselven grace,  
Or what may been youre help? For west nor est  
Ne saugh I nevere er now no bryd ne beest  
That ferede with hymself so pitously.  
Ye sle me with youre sorwe verrailly,  
I have of yow so greet compassioun  
(*Sq. T.* ll. 458-463).

The hawk falls to the ground and swoons, but Canacee takes her into her lap and after she recovers the hawk says:

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.

<sup>321</sup> Henry Ansgar Kelly, *Chaucer and the Cult of St. Valentine*. Davis Medieval Texts and Studies, Vol. 5 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1986), p. 84.

I se wel that ye han of my distresse  
 Compassion, my faire Canacee,  
 Of verray wommanly benignytee  
 That Nature in youre principles hath set  
 (*Sq. T.* ll. 479-487).

She describes her former lover, the tercelet, in Piscean terms of 'seeming', duplicity and charm, feigning and pretence; and her love of him as entailing personal sacrifice:

And many a yeer his service to me feyned,  
 Til that myn herte, to pitous and to nyce,  
 Al innocent of his crouded malice,  
 Forfered of his deeth, as thoughte me,  
 Upon his othes and his seuretee,  
 Graunted hym love, upon this condicioun,  
 That everemoore myn honour and renoun  
 Were saved, bothe privee and apert;  
 This is to seyn, that after his desert,  
 I yaf hym al myn herte and al my thoght -  
 God woot and he, that ootherwise noght -  
 And took his herte in chaunge of myn for ay  
 (*Sq. T.* ll. 524-535).

She loves him "for the trouthe I demed in his herte" (*Sq. T.* l. 563) and their relationship lasts a little longer than a year or two and then the tercelet sorrowfully takes his leave of her. She believes he will return and trusts in his reason for going:

And resoun wolde eek that he moste go  
 For his honour, as ofte it happeth so,  
 That I made vertu of necessitee,  
 And took it wel, syn that it moste be  
 (*Sq. T.* ll. 591-594).

Alas, the tercelet falls in love with a kyte, and deserts the hawk, who is heartbroken, understandably! But as with all Piscean romances, there is a hint of everything turning out all right in the end and of everyone living happily ever after:

Thus lete I Canacee hir hauk kepyng;  
 I wol namoore as now speke of hir ryng

Til it come eft to purpos for to seyn  
How that this faucon gat hire love ageyn  
Repentant, as the storie telleth us,...  
(*Sq.T.* ll. 651-655).

Repentance is such a fitting end.



## The Franklin's Tale



The *Franklin's Tale* contains much astrology, which, until the publication of John North's *Chaucer's Universe* in 1988, had been criticised for having raised "a cloud of meaningless astrological dust."<sup>322</sup> In fact, however, the astrology and astronomy in the *Tale* are precise and authentic, drawing on an astonishing wealth of knowledge, covering the fields of geomancy, magic, meteorology, Arabic and Indian astronomical knowledge, and their relationships to contemporary astromancy. Some of the problems require a certain erudition for their solution, of a kind which North typifies in his research. But none of the information is "above the comprehension of most mortals"<sup>323</sup> any more than it was beyond the powers of the Franklin, as I intend to show.

It ought to be evident by now that Pisces, the twelfth zodiacal sign, relevant to this, the twelfth *Tale*, is representative of the feet. As distinct from the legs and ankles that enable us to stand, the feet enable us to walk. Because we have two feet, it is possible to try to walk in two different directions, but such an effort would prevent us from moving anywhere. That is neatly summed up in the symbolism of the two fishes, facing in opposite directions but tied together. Ambivalence is the psychological keynote, and the paralysis of will that results has connotations of restriction, self-imprisonment, confusion and guilt. The latter is implied because action taken is

---

<sup>322</sup> North (1988), p. 439.

<sup>323</sup> A.E. Luengo, "Magic and illusion in The Franklin's Tale," *JEGP*, 77 (1978), pp. 1-16 (p. 15).

accompanied by a sense of having made the wrong choice or of having betrayed the alternative commitment.

Because the feet enable us to walk out of existing conditions and into new situations, Pisces is associated with resignation, withdrawal, retreat, escape, avoidance, evasion, transcendence and flight. These are not merely synonyms, but indications of the wide diversity of nuance and symbolic implications this particular zodiacal sign must accommodate, as must each of the other signs, because every possible activity of human beings is zodiacally signified. Thus 'resignation', although it can mean the same as 'withdrawal', may differ from it, in that one might resign oneself to a situation about which one can do nothing to change. That too, is Piscean in that it suggests the acceptance of a circumstance one finds problematic or limiting, one which one 'suffers', perhaps the most pertinent Piscean verb of all.

Because the feet are at the very lowest part of the body, they also symbolise humility and service in the interests of all the other signs comprising the world, hence self-sacrifice and humility, labour and slavery, bondage and servitude. Again, although 'slavery', 'bondage' and 'servitude' may appear to be a list of synonyms not really broadening our understanding of Pisces, each term has a separate etymology and it could be seen as a fault of our modern usage that we fail today to use the words with attention to their subtle distinctions. Having devalued the currency, as it were, we are accustomed to people describing themselves as 'slaves' when they really mean they are under-paid or undervalued. In earlier times the word had a rather more ominous definition. 'Bondage', in the Middle Ages, could imply being the victim of a spell, two functions of which were purportedly 'binding and loosening'. 'Servitude' implies a degree of humility and subservience, and has a more spiritual connotation than slavery.

All of these express various nuances of the Piscean motif. But such Piscean connotations also imply commitment, confinement, confession or admission, contrition and empathy or 'under'-standing.

Being placed opposite to Virgo, Pisces represents opposite qualities to those of Virgo, so that whereas Virgo represents discrimination of particular functions, Pisces represents a lack of discrimination of particulars and instead, consciousness of the whole, cosmic consciousness, hence transcendent insight. Unlike the analytical function of Virgo, Pisces is receptive, absorbed, in the sense of being immersed, seeking at-onement. Hence it represents compassion and forgiveness. Because it is the sign contiguous to Aquarius but at a stage further in the sequence, it represents movement beyond - or transcendence of - classes, groups, associations, species, and the dissolution of boundaries and class distinctions. Its placement before Aries implies preparation, gestation, pregnancy, the pre-lapsarian state, the Garden of Eden in which Adam and Eve are in a state of innocence, the collective unconscious, the state prior to individuated consciousness (Aries) brought about by eating the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. It is a mutable mode, water element sign, the combination having connotations therefore of a movement of the water, both physically and metaphorically. In its physical sense, it represents the tidal movement of the sea; in its metaphorical one, it indicates an outflowing of feeling, commonly called emotion.

The *Franklin's Tale* is predominantly Piscean, though there are traces of Aquarius apparent. The sea again plays a part in the *Tale*. It begins with a Piscean motif:

Ther was a knyght that loved and dide 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.  
 For she was oon the faireste under sonne,

And eek therto comen of so heigh kynrede  
 That wel unnethes dorste this knyght, for drede,  
 Telle hire his wo, his peyne, and his distresse.  
 But atte laste she, for his worthynesse,  
 And namely for his meke obeysaunce,  
 Hath swich a pitee caught of his penaunce  
 That pryvely she fil of his accord  
 To take hym for hir housbonde and hir lord...  
 (*FranT.* ll. 730-742).

She marries the knight and he commits himself to her service, saying that he will obey her except that in order not to bring shame on his status, he wishes to retain nominal sovereignty. She thanks him saying,

Sire, sith of your gentillesse  
 Ye profre me to have so large a reyne,  
 Ne wolde nevere God bitwixe us tweyne,  
 As in my gilt, were outhur werre or stryf.  
 Sire, I wol be youre humble trewe wyf -  
 Have heer my trouthe - til that myn herte breste  
 (*FranT.* ll. 754-759).

In these opening lines Chaucer refers to psychological pain, service, labour, distress, meek obedience, penance, obedience, humbleness, gentillesse, guilt and the avowal of a troth, i.e. commitment, all Piscean terms. The Franklin then continues as commentator, with a brief comment to the Pilgrims regarding the Wife of Bath's advocacy of maistrie in marriage:

Whan maistrie comth, the God of Love anon  
 Beteth his wynges, and farewel, he is gon!  
 Love is a thyng as any spirit free.  
 Wommen, of kynde, desiren libertee,  
 And nat to been constreyned as a thral;  
 And so doon men, if I sooth seyen shal  
 (*FranT.* ll. 765-770).

There is an interesting mix of Aquarian and Piscean terminology. The God of Love takes the form of a bird, possibly a dove, though that would be Libran if God is

intended to represent peace; but if the bird has connotations of the soul then the symbolism is Piscean. The desire for liberty is Aquarian, but the phrase "constreyned as a thral" is a further Piscean allusion. The Franklin continues in Piscean vein:

Looke who that is moost pacient in love,  
 He is at his advantage al above.  
 Pacience is an heigh vertu, certeyn,  
 For it venquisseth, as thise clerkes seyn,  
 Thynges that rigour sholde nevere atteyne.  
 For every word men may nat chide or pleyne.  
 Lerneth to suffre, or elles, so moot I goon,  
 Ye shul it lerne, wher so ye wole or noon  
 (*FranT.* ll. 771-778).

Learn to be patient, says the Franklin, or you will have to learn to suffer, a play on the Latin verb '*patior*' - to suffer, from which our word patience derives.

The knight Arveragus and his wife live happily for over a year, then Arveragus goes to Britain to seek honour in his profession, staying there two years. Dorigen indulges herself in Piscean traits: "For his absence wepeth she and siketh,/As doon thise noble wyves whan hem liketh./ She moorneth, waketh, wayleth,fasteth, pleyneeth;/Desir of his presence hire so destreyneth/That all this wyde world she sette at noghte" (*FranT.* ll. 817-821). Gradually however, Dorigen, reassured by Arveragus' letters home and the comfort of her friends, begins to emerge from her "derke fantasye" (*FranT.* l. 844) - a Piscean private, psychological retreat - and she accedes to their request to socialise again. Unfortunately, she lives near the sea, and when walking with friends on a high bank sees ships and barges that remind her of her husband's absence and promised return. And she becomes anxious about the "grisly rokkes blake" (*FranT.* l. 859) that his ship would be required to pass: "But wolde God that alle thise rokkes blake/Were sonken into helle for his sake!/Thise rokkes sleen myn herte for the feere" (*FranT.* ll. 891-893). Her friends entertain her and try to distract

her from her morbidity by taking recreation in a garden: "And craft of mannes hand so curiously/Arrayed hadde this gardyn, trewely,/That nevere was ther garden of swich prys/But if it were the verray paradys"(*FranT.* ll. 909-912). Gardens, if places of retreat or sanctuary (usually walled) and known in the Middle Ages as 'garths', are symbolized by Pisces, as are all places of refuge.

A young squire named Aurelius falls in love with Dorigen. He is described as "fressher ... and jolyer of array/As to my doom, than is the month of May" (*FranT.* ll. 927-928), and as "This lusty squier, servant to Venus" (*FranT.* l. 937). Such descriptions suggests that Aurelius has a Sagittarian ascendant, ruled by Jupiter, "jolyer of array ... than is the month of May." May is associated with Gemini, hence with Mercury, not Venus. It is therefore probable that Aurelius is intended to typify someone born with Venus in Pisces, a sign ruled by Jupiter but the one in which Venus is exalted. The description "servant to Venus" and the fact that Venus in Pisces is symbolic of secret love reinforce that inference. And it is affirmed strongly by the description of his secret love for Dorigen: Aurelius

Hadde loved hire best of any creature  
Two yeer and more as was his aventure,  
But nevere dorste he tellen hire his grevaunce.  
Withouten coppe he drank al his penaunce.

.....  
How that he dorste nat his sorwe telle,  
But langwissheth as a furye dooth in helle  
(*FranT.* ll. 939-42, 949-50).

The reference to a fury in hell is possibly a reminder to the listener that Pisces, the twelfth sign, is associated with the twelfth house of the horoscope. The eleventh house, analogous to Aquarius, was labelled '*agathos daimon*' - the good spirit; the twelfth was '*kakos daimon*' - the evil spirit. The twelfth house might not have been

'the derkest hous' but it was certainly regarded as a place of imprisonment, exile, excommunication and disability, a state of psychic bondage as much as of physical confinement. It was the house of secrets and treachery, hidden enemies and self-undoing.

When Aurelius addresses Dorigen and confesses his love for her, she initially rejects his advances:

But now, Aurelie, I knowe youre entent,  
By thilke God that yaf me soule and lyf,  
Ne shal I nevere been an untrewe wyf  
In word ne werk, as fer as I have wit;  
I wol been his to whom that I am knyht.  
Taak this for fynal answeere as of me  
(*FranT.* ll. 982-986).

All of which appears surprisingly definite for the subject of a Pisces tale. Manilius, who warned us that Aquarius is "Not sordid, but inclin'd to be profuse;" cautions us also that Pisces are "of Pleasure fond, engage/In Love, are quick, but changing with their Age."<sup>324</sup>

Despite her avowal that the reply she gave to Aurelius was Dorigen's "final answer", she immediately proposes that she will love Aurelius "best of any man" if he manages to remove "all the rockkes, stoon by stoon" (*FranT.* l. 993). Then, although the Franklin describes her vow as playing with Aurelius, she declares, "Have heer my trouthe, in al that evere I kan" (*FranT.* l. 998). A little over a year earlier she had said to Arveragus, "Have heer my trouthe - til that myn herte breste" (*FranT.* l. 759). If that has not yet demonstrated Piscean duplicity and betrayal, it has ostensibly, to say the least, set the scene for so doing. Dorigen claims to believe that she knows the

---

<sup>324</sup> Manilius (1953), p. 128.

removal of the rocks will never come about, yet earlier she has prayed to God that the rocks would sink to hell for her husband's sake. The fourteenth century was one in which hagiographical miracles were being continually related, so one might question either her Christian faith or her motive for suggesting to Aurelius that he remove them; for he might possibly have served as a vehicle for Providence. Given the Christian faith which Dorigen was evidently imbued might one not suspect that there was a subconscious expectation or at least a faint hope that somehow Aurelius would accomplish the feat? She certainly wished the feat to be accomplished somehow, for her husband's sake.

Aurelius is not, however, a man of faith. "Madame," quod he, "this were an imposible!/Thanne moot I dye of sodeyn deth horrible" (*FranT.* ll. 1009-1010).

Aurelius appeals instead to pagan gods, first to Apollo, that at the next full moon - that is, at the next opposition between the sun and moon that occurs when the moon is in Aquarius and the sun is in Leo - a great flood tide would engulf the rocks. Further, that for two years the moon should maintain its opposition to the sun, so that the high tide, five fathoms in height, would cover the highest rock in Armorik Briteyne for that duration.

Here is another reversion to the Aquarian content and to the fixed cross of the zodiac, comprising Taurus, Leo, Scorpio and Aquarius. The request is made during the sun's passage through Taurus - we are told that it is 6 May. The request is for the rocks (Taurus: fixed mode earth element sign) to be hidden by the stabilization of water (Scorpio: invisibility and fixed mode water element sign), and that this should occur in the sun's Leo period (fixed mode fire element sign) with the moon in the sign



of Aquarius, the water-pourer, traditionally associated with floods (fixed mode air element sign), as we saw in the *Miller's Tale*.

It is fitting that if such a phenomenon were to occur, it should be via the agency of pagan gods rather than the Christian God; for Arveragus' motive is adultery. And being the action of pagan gods, it is necessary that the phenomenon occur by magic rather than by a Christian miracle.

Arveragus returns safely from his mission, however, and feasts and dances for two years with Dorigen, whose price is still, as yet, beyond rubies. Aurelius pines away for those two years, but his brother, who feels sorry for him, whilst considering ways of helping Aurelius, remembers a former acquaintance who, at university, had taken up an interest in astrology:

He hym remembred that, upon a day,  
 At Orliens in studie a book he say  
 Of magyk natureel, which his felawe,  
 That was that tyme a bacheler of lawe,  
 Al were he ther to lerne another craft,  
 Hadde prively upon his desk ylaft;  
 Which book spak muchel of the operaciouns  
 Touchyng the eighte and twenty mansiouns  
 That longen to the moone, and swich folye  
 As in our dayes is nat worth a flye -  
 For hooly chirches feith in oure bileve  
 Ne suffreth noon illusioun us to greve  
 (*FranT.* ll. 1123-1134).

Some commentators have taken line 1132 to indicate Chaucer's attitude to astrology as a whole, whereas he is actually condemning 'lunar mansion' astrology. Lunar astrology was associated with magical practices; solar astrology with more acceptable ones. The lunar mansions were divisions of the ecliptic based on either 27 or 28 divisions of the cycle of the moon through the month, depending on the cultural aetiology from which the accessible sources were derived, Chinese, Indian or Arabian.

North has dealt extensively with this topic in his *Chaucer's Universe*. It is likely that Chaucer would have encountered vestiges of all three astrological cultures through his Latin and Arabic sources, especially in treatises on geomancy.

North provides a very erudite explanation as to how the Franklin (and by implication Chaucer, of course) acquired knowledge of the magical beliefs relevant to the 28 mansions of the moon. North's chief contention is that Chaucer had access to a work of Georgius Antiochenus of the eleventh century.<sup>325</sup> He says that it is now rare "but was perhaps not always so, for it was translated into Castilian as one of the Alfonsine books, and in any case its rarity has to be judged against its relatively poor chance of survival within the orbit of the western Church."<sup>326</sup> North argues that none of the alternative sources provide such a probable link between the name Hermes Balenus, to be found in both Chaucer's *The House of Fame*, and the treatise by Antiochenus on magical practices. He says,

The treatise is a book of instruction in the art of achieving desired ends: for the most part it is vague as to what these might be, but the cure of sickness is one that is named. This aim is meant to be fulfilled by the making of images in various forms, often written, sometimes in mystical alphabets, engraved, modelled, and so on, often with a strong hint of 'exorsicacions' and 'fumygacions', that is, with the conjuring of spirits, and the use of incense...More to the point: there is a great deal of attention paid to the ascendant and the placing of the planets at the moment of creation of the image, and many different possibilities are catalogued.<sup>327</sup>

---

<sup>325</sup> North (1988), p. 252.

<sup>326</sup> North (1988), pp. 252-253.

<sup>327</sup> North (1988), p. 253.

North then admits blandly that there is no mention of the lunar mansions in *The House of Fame* or in the treatise by Antiochenus, "whereas a work said to be by 'Girgith' does survive, perhaps only in a single copy, relating the lunar mansions to the practice of magic."<sup>328</sup> North suggests that Chaucer had seen this likely sole surviving copy at Canterbury, for a reason he doesn't make very clear: "One may be reasonably sure that there was once a copy of this work in - of all places - Canterbury, for after the prologue, the main text is said to begin with the words 'Ego Girgith, filia artis volo vobis dicere...', and this seems to be a treatise to which the medieval catalogue of St. Augustine's Abbey refers...I have a feeling that Chaucer had seen at least this work by 'Girgith', and that it was in his thoughts when he made the Franklin speak of folly that was not worth a fly."<sup>329</sup>

North says that his reason for suspecting that Chaucer had in mind one of the two manuscripts by Girgith existing in *his* time, is "admittedly rather weak"<sup>330</sup> and that the evidence "that Chaucer knew the treatise ascribed to Girgith and availed himself of it is very slender"<sup>331</sup>. But he concludes: "That the Franklin was meant to have some such text as Girgith's in mind, however, is beyond all reasonable doubt."<sup>332</sup>

I have paraphrased and quoted North extensively because it would be insulting to pass lightly by his scholarship in making my alternative suggestion. The main purpose of North's research regarding the Franklin's allusions to the association of the

---

<sup>328</sup> North (1988), p. 254.

<sup>329</sup> North (1988), p. 254.

<sup>330</sup> North (1988), p. 437.

<sup>331</sup> North (1988), p. 439.

<sup>332</sup> North (1988), p. 439.

28 lunar mansions and the practice of magic was to find not only a source but one that linked the two to the clerk's removal of the rocks. He has limited success, finding one at the eighth mansion, called *nazra* which "has to do with seas and waters", which North says could not be more fitting.

I am a little surprised that nowhere does North mention *Picatrix*, possibly the most obvious source of information regarding the lunar mansions' association with medieval magical practice. I realise that there is no knowledge of any manuscript of the *Picatrix* existing before the 15th century<sup>333</sup> and perhaps that is North's reason for not having given it consideration. But the *Picatrix* appears to have been put together, as a compilation of *Hermetica*, in Spain between 1047 and 1051.<sup>334</sup> Frances Yates describes it as "an extremely comprehensive treatise on sympathetic and astral magic"<sup>335</sup> which in the 15th century was a most influential work and one that appears to have spread throughout Renaissance Europe. It was well known in the Italian Renaissance. And Ibn Khaldun, who refutes ritual magic and talismans, and who described the *Picatrix* as the most complete and best written treatise on magic<sup>336</sup>, died as early as 1406, only six years after Chaucer's death. Considering North's supposition that Chaucer might have accessed the somewhat more recondite manuscript because of its association with the Alphonsine papers, I consider it equally if not slightly more probable that he knew of the *Picatrix*, translated into Spanish, possibly by Yehuda ben

---

<sup>333</sup> Lynn Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 1923-41), 8 vols., II, pp. 822-824.

<sup>334</sup> Garin (1983), p. 47.

<sup>335</sup> Yates (1964), p. 49.

<sup>336</sup> Garin (1983), pp. 46-47.

Moshe in 1256, and into Latin soon after that, the translation ordered by Alfonso X (the Wise), King of Castile 1252-1284, responsible also for the *Alphonsine Tables*. Evidence is slight, but as tangible as and possibly a little more germane to the *Franklin's Tale* than North's suggested manuscript, as I shall show.

*Picatrix* not only names the 28 lunar mansions but specifies the purposes associated with each. The 1256 Latin translation, a copy of which is in the British Library,<sup>337</sup> lists them. To ascertain which lunar mansion was employed by the Franklin, it is a simple task to inspect the position of the moon on the date on which the magical feat was performed, most probably Christmas Day, 1387. In Chaucer's time the sun entered Capricorn on December 13,<sup>338</sup> that being the date of the winter solstice. By December 25, the sun would be 12 degrees into Capricorn, so it is a relatively easy matter to find a Christmas Day when the moon was to move through 12 degrees Cancer, forming the full moon.

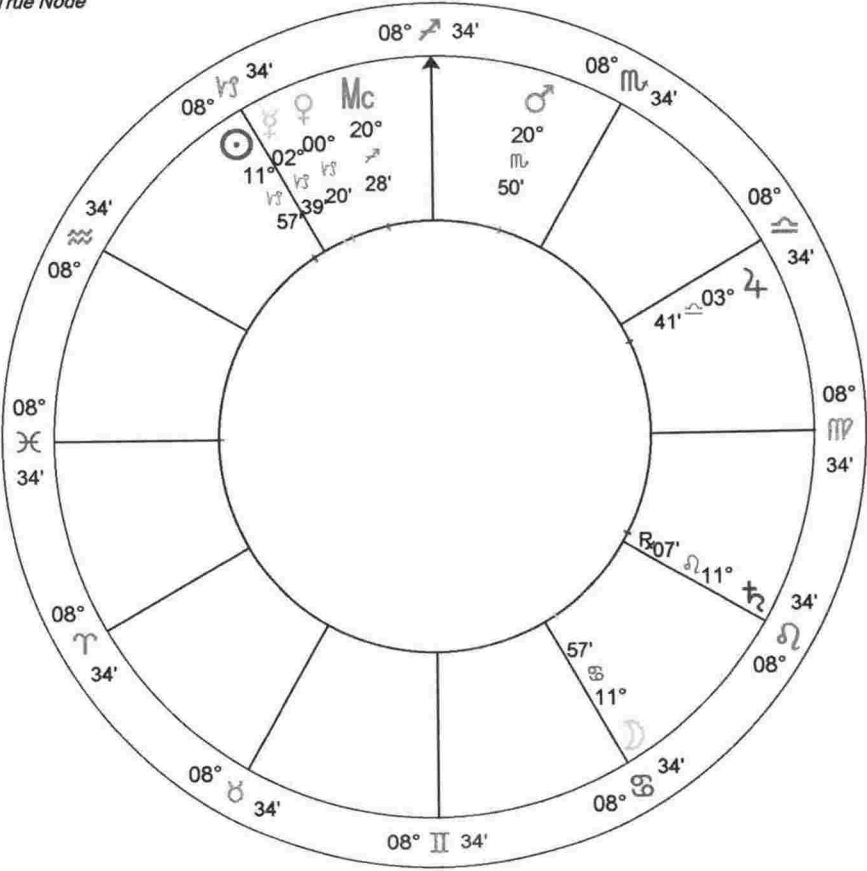
---

<sup>337</sup> BL. MS Sloane 1305.

<sup>338</sup> Benson (1987), p. 184, footnote to line 1248.

Transits 25 Dec 1387  
Natal Chart  
25 Dec 1387  
10:32 LMT +0:12  
Brittany, France  
48N00 003W00  
Geocentric  
Tropical  
Equal  
True Node

Diagram 17  
Removal of rocks  
Time of full moon



The chart shows the moon in Cancer lying opposite the sun in Capricorn, where both are about to enter the 12th degrees of those signs, on Christmas Day, 1387 at Brittany, a date suggested by North as the most probable one to meet the astronomical criteria of the *Franklin's Tale*. If one concurs with North that the date on which the magical feat is performed is 25 December, 1387, then we are confronted by a discrepancy of which North appears oblivious. He says that the moon "was at a

longitude of about  $102^\circ$ , when in opposition to the Sun on 25 December 1387."<sup>339</sup>

That is correct as the chart above shows: the moon is just about to enter 12 degrees of Cancer, exactly in opposition to the sun just about to enter 12 degrees Capricorn.

Allowing 30 degrees per sign, one counts 30 degrees for Aries, then for Taurus, then for Gemini, and 12 for Cancer, totalling 102. As the diagrammatic representation is produced by a modern software programme, it shows that lunar longitude in the

*Alphonsine Tables* (which North considers Chaucer to have used<sup>340</sup>) is quite accurate, and so there is so far no divergence between North's and my findings. North says that we notice that "in 1387...true opposition occurred, according to these figures, about two hours earlier than noon"<sup>341</sup> - my finding is 10.32 a.m. Local Mean Time; that would be 10.44 a.m. Greenwich Mean Time if one were to refer to the time reference employed by North.<sup>342</sup>

But as North points out, line 1287 of the *Franklin's Tale* meant that the moon was on the *horizon* at that time of the Clerk's magical operations.<sup>343</sup> And for the moon to be on the horizon on Christmas Day, 1387, the time would have to be around sunset; for a full moon is an opposition of the sun and moon. We know that it is the eastern and not the western horizon that is meant, because line 1287 refers to the 'arisyng of his Moone.' It doesn't matter whether Chaucer was using the latitude of Penmarch or Orleans or London; as North says, "there is less than half an hour at

---

<sup>339</sup> North (1988), p. 438.

<sup>340</sup> North (1988), p. 432.

<sup>341</sup> North (1988), p. 433.

<sup>342</sup> North (1988), p. 433.

<sup>343</sup> North (1988), p. 434.

stake, on this account, and the placing of the planets in the appropriate astrological houses turns out not to be affected.”<sup>344</sup> So while it is true that the moon was approaching 12 degrees of Cancer at the time of the full moon, and at that time “was almost exactly at a longitude of eight twenty-eighths of 360°”, described by North as being “at the head of the eighth mansion”<sup>345</sup>, *nazra*, “which has to do with seas and waters”,<sup>346</sup> it is in fact, at that degree, actually in the *ninth* mansion of the moon. Another disconcerting discrepancy is that at moonrise, the critical moment, the sun had moved from its 10.32 a.m. position to its sunset position and the moon, rising on the eastern horizon, had passed from 12 degrees of Cancer to 15 degrees 21 minutes of Cancer and would lie even further inside the ninth lunar mansion, certainly too far away from the eighth mansion for it and its intended function to be relevant.

But my chief reason for questioning North’s claim, and the one I believe points to the *Picatrix* as being Chaucer’s likely source for his information regarding the lunar mansions, is that the moon rising in 15 degrees 21 minutes of Cancer is unlikely to have been where North says it is: neither at the head of the eighth lunar mansion nor in the ninth; it is very probably in the seventh. My reason for stating that is that the Clerk *calculates the amount of precession* that has accrued since the Vernal Point and the traditional beginning of the first lunar mansion, the star *Alnath*, were conjoined. The Franklin tells us so in so many words, as he describes Aurelius’ and his brother’s visit to the Clerk and the Clerk’s activities, for which he charges them one thousand pounds.

---

<sup>344</sup> North (1988), pp. 434–435.

<sup>345</sup> North (1988), pp. 438–439.

<sup>346</sup> North (1988), p. 438.



He knew ful wel how fer Alnath was shove  
 Fro the heed of thilke fixe Aries above,  
 That in the ninthe speere considered is;  
 Ful subtilly he kalkuled al this.  
 Whan he hadde founde his first mansioun,  
 He knew the remenaunt by proporcioun,  
 And knew the arisyng of his moone weel,  
 And in whos face, and terme, and everydeel;  
 And knew ful weel the moones mansioun  
 Acordaunt to his operacioun,  
 And knew also his othere observaunces  
 For swiche illusiouns and swiche meschaunces  
 As hethen folk useden in thilke dayes  
 (FranT. ll. 1280-1293).

That amount of accrued precession is thought to have been about 25 degrees, and as North says, "if the first mansion had begun at longitude  $25^{\circ}$ , the seventh would have begun at  $102;07^{\circ}$ , and have ended at  $114;58^{\circ}$ ."<sup>347</sup> As we have seen, the moon is at  $105;21^{\circ}$  at the time it is on the eastern horizon, so it would lie in the hypothetical 7th mansion (not to be confused with a 'house' of the horoscope). And the *Picatrix* states that the purpose of the 7th lunar mansion is that sailors might go safely on the water: "*Septima mansio dicitur Aldirah. Et incipit a gradu 17 minuto 8 secundo 36 Geminorum, et terminatur in fine eiusdem. In ista mansione facias ymagines ad augendas mercaciones et earum lucra ut ad bonum vadant, et ad augendas messes, et ut salubriter vadant navigantes in aqua [my emphasis], et ad ponendas amicitias inter amicos et socios, et ad expellendas muscas ut non ingrediantur quo volueris, et ad destruenda magisteria; et erit bona ad eundum coram rege vel alta quacumque*

---

<sup>347</sup> North (1988), p. 156.

*persona, et ad faciendum inclinare regiam benevolenciam vel alterius domini quocumque volueris.*"<sup>348</sup>

The 8th, incidentally, is for going safely on a journey, bringing friendship, strengthening prisons and expelling mice and bugs: "*et ad expellendum mures et cimices ex quocumque loco volueris.*"<sup>349</sup> North's finding that the moon is at the head of the 8th lunar mansion is, he concedes, dependent on precession *not* having been taken into account: "It is a curious fact that the Moon, at the moment in question, was almost exactly at a longitude of eight twenty-eighths of 360°, that is, at the head of the eighth mansion when no account is taken of the precessional movement of the eighth sphere."<sup>350</sup> In view of the fact that the Clerk is stated to take precession into account, even though we are not told specifically how much, the result is that on the balance of probability, the Moon is more likely to be in the 7th than the 8th lunar mansion.

The calculation of the lunar mansions is simple. Each mansion is one twenty-eighth of 360°, i.e. 12°51' of longitude. The 'head' or beginning of the first mansion is either at the Vernal Point, 0° Aries, the first mansion covering the area from 0° to

---

<sup>348</sup> Picatrix (1986), p. 10, para. 8. Translation reads: The seventh house is called Aldirah. And it begins at 17 degrees 8 minutes 36 seconds of Gemini, and is completed at the end of that sign. In this house you make images to improve businesses and their wealth so that they flourish quickly, and to increase fruitful harvests, and in order that sailors might go safely and profitably on the water, and to kindle friendship between allies and associates, and to drive away flies so that they don't enter where you don't wish them to, and to ruin governors; and it will be good to enter into the presence of the king or of whatever exalted person, and to make the benevolence of the king or of some other lord incline wheresoever you wish.

<sup>349</sup> Picatrix (1986), p. 10, para.9.

<sup>350</sup> North (1988), pp. 438-439.

12°51' of that sign; or, if precession is taken into account, then beginning in Chaucer's time most likely at 25° Aries, the first mansion covering the area from 25° Aries to 7° 51' of Taurus.

The following Table (7) shows the Lunar Mansions with *precession not taken into account* and with *precession taken into account*.

TABLE 7

Precession not taken into account			First zodiacal degree of mansion (to nearest whole degree)
Mansion No.	Begins at	Ends at	
First	0 Aries	12 Aries 51	0
Second	12 Aries 51	25 Aries 42	13
Third	25 Aries 42	8 Taurus 33	26
Fourth	8 Taurus 33	21 Taurus 24	39
Fifth	21 Taurus 24	3 Gemini 15	51
Sixth	3 Gemini 15	16 Gemini 06	63
Seventh	16 Gemini 06	28 Gemini 57	76
Eighth	28 Gemini 57	11 Cancer 48	89
Ninth	11 Cancer 48	24 Cancer 39	102

Precession taken into account			First zodiacal degree of mansion (to nearest whole degree)
Mansion No.	Begins at	Ends at	
First	25 Aries 00	7 Taurus 51	25
Second	7 Taurus 51	20 Taurus 42	38
Third	20 Taurus 42	3 Gemini 33	51
Fourth	3 Gemini 33	16 Gemini 24	64
Fifth	16 Gemini 24	29 Gemini 15	76
Sixth	29 Gemini 15	12 Cancer 06	89
Seventh	12 Cancer 06	24 Cancer 57	102*
Eighth	24 Cancer 57	7 Leo 48	115

\*Moon on horizon is at 105°

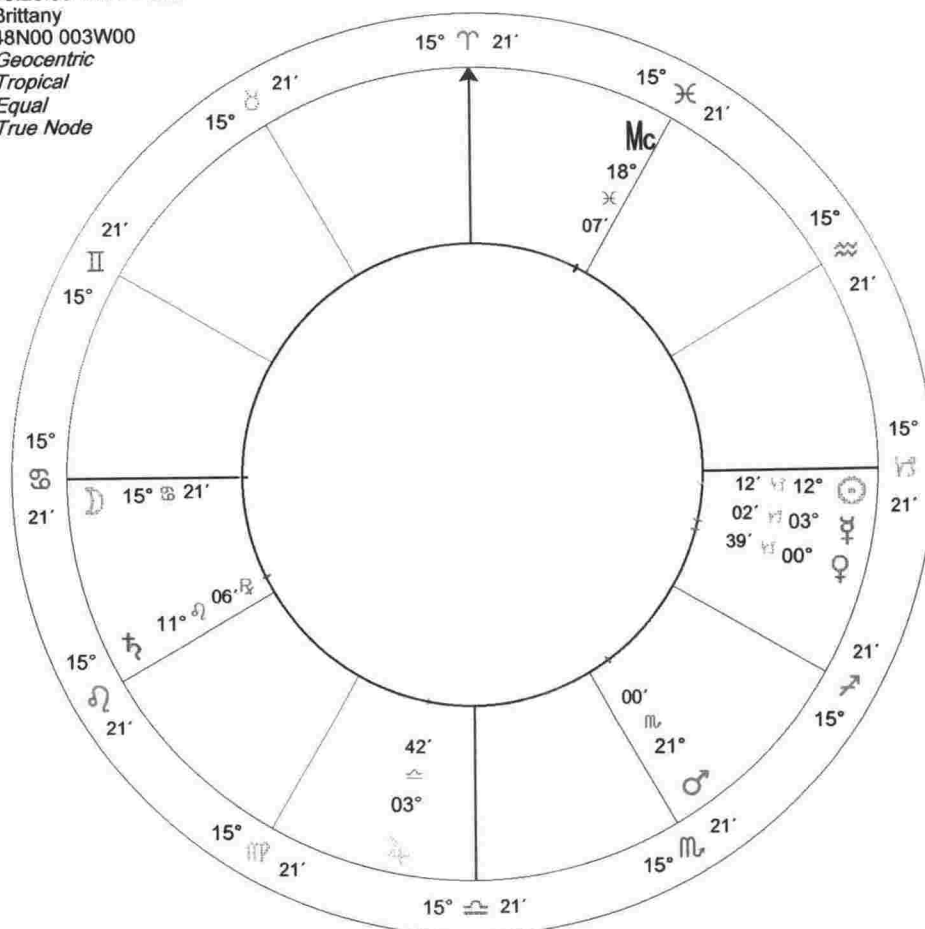
**Transits 25 Dec 1387****Natal Chart**

25 Dec 1387

16:28:50 LMT +0:12

Brittany

48N00 003W00

*Geocentric**Tropical**Equal**True Node***Diagram 18**  
Removal of rocks  
Time of rising moon

The astrological importance of this lunar-rising map for Christmas Night 1387 should not be underestimated. The ascendant is in Cancer - one of the water signs of the zodiac, containing the moon dignified in its own sign, just past the full, but part of a Grand Trine in water formed by the moon at 15 degrees Cancer, the Midheaven at 18 degrees Pisces and the planet Mars at 21 degrees of Scorpio. North refers to the fact that at the significant moment “every single planet is below the horizon”, a fact he describes as “surprising”<sup>351</sup>. But the essential outcome of the enterprise is ‘invisibility’,

<sup>351</sup> North (1988), p. 435.

and astrological principles entail that the astrological maps 're-present' the situation: that they reflect the current state of affairs. Ensuring the placement of the planets below the horizon, when the horizon is occupied by the water element sign of Cancer, is most appropriate - the planets symbolising the rocks, and Cancer in the ascendant symbolizing the rising water. All their powers are subordinated to that of the rising moon, but a moon which, despite its presence in the degree of Jupiter's exaltation, is in a sign traditionally associated with invisibility. Cancer, the smallest of the zodiacal constellations contains the fewest large magnitude stars, its *lucida* is only 4th magnitude, it was called "the dark sign" and according to Allen "quaintly described as "black and without eyes."<sup>352</sup> Two of the stars in Cancer are the *Asini*, the 'Ovoi', or Asses, of Ptolemy and the Greeks, but one is reluctant to infer from that a Chaucerian irony, commenting on the personalities of Aurelius and his brother. Possibly of some relevance is the fact that Berössös once claimed that the earth was to be submerged when all the planets met in Cancer,<sup>353</sup> and one might recall that in my discussion of the Mighty Fardars (see the section on the *Summoner's Tale*), I alluded to the belief that the Great Deluge had occurred as a consequence of the Jupiter-Saturn conjunction having shifted from the air to the watery triplicity and that the flooding was attributed to the conjunction having taken place in the watery sign Cancer.

But it seems to me that the most relevant associations of Cancer, more particularly that of its nebula *Praesepe*, are those of mischief and blindness<sup>354</sup>. The sign carried over its ancient symbolism. Manilius too, alludes to this association:

---

<sup>352</sup> Allen (1963), p. 109.

<sup>353</sup> Allen (1963), p. 108.

<sup>354</sup> Allen (1963), p. 113.

"When rousing Cancer riseth veild in Clouds,/I' th' Skies as deeply hid as in the Floods,/The Moon resembling when depriv'd of Light;/The Births are Blind, and wish in vain for sight:"<sup>355</sup> Darkness and blindness thus contribute to the illusion of the rocks' disappearance.

The result anyway, is that the rocks seem to have disappeared, and it is likely that in view of the astrological factors that have been shown to be relevant, Dorigen is somehow blind to their presence. If it is an illusion created by magic, then she is under a kind of spell or 'binding', a Piscean condition. Aware of her conflicting promises made under oath to both Arveragus and Aurelius, she is now in a Piscean double-bind, a state of ambivalence. She confesses to her husband, and accedes to his order to meet Aurelius and pay her moral debt. Both the confession and a moral debt are Piscean referenda. In obeying Arveragus, Dorigen actually submits to his sovereignty, which he had foresworn at the start of the *Tale*, and her will is subordinated to his. He actually cries as he directs her to honour her obligation, and his distress is a striking parallel to that of the tercelet in the *Squire's Tale*. Tears are obviously Piscean, being moving water or water that is produced by emotion.

Dorigen's and Arveragus' commitment to honour her vow moves Aurelius to free her from her obligation, an act of *gentillesse*, but he is aware of his own debt of a thousand pounds to the Clerk of Orleans for the astrological work he performed, most of which was incurred by the time-consuming process of calculating precession. He decides to honour the debt because the Clerk was successful despite the ultimate outcome of the arrangement. The Clerk hears the story of Arveragus' and Aurelius' decisions and is inspired by their integrity to free Aurelius from his debt too. Thus a

---

<sup>355</sup> Manilius (1953), Bk.IV, stanza 25, p. 136.

'loosening' of all bonds and bondage has taken place, materially and psychologically, and Arveragus and Dorigen live happily for some considerable time after.

With regard to the mutable cross involving Gemini-Virgo-Sagittarius and Pisces, the *Franklin's Tale* is concerned, as were the *Reeve's*, *Friar's* and *Merchant's* respectively, with the matter of epistemological issues and sensory perception (in this case, sight), as unreliable guides to truth - 'trouthe' being a word used frequently in both the *Squire's* and the *Franklin's Tales*. Dorigen is obviously a Piscean: her demeanour, her irresolution and the fact that she was involved simultaneously with two men - a legendary problem for Pisces women according to popular astrology - endorse that opinion. Arveragus appears to be Piscean too: he weeps. Aurelius is likely to be Sagittarian: he is described by the characteristics of Jupiter: he is jolly, benevolent and he keeps faith with his creditor. Furthermore, Sagittarius and Pisces are signs square to each other: a relationship between Pisces Dorigen and Sagittarian Aurelius was unlikely to be without problems. It is quite evidently one that is formed between the components of a mutable cross; their relationship, such as it was, being continually changing. But Aurelius is certainly not the mercurial opportunist his brother might well be, probably born under Gemini. The magician-clerk is undoubtedly Virgoan: he practises what is actually identified in the *Tale* as 'natural' magic, a craft with which Virgo was associated by tradition, usually described as 'nature magic' on account of Virgo's association with Ceres.

One might choose to see Dorigen as something of a victim. Representing Pisces, her suffering is undoubted, but she is in tied in this double-bind by fear and by illusion. The magician is playing a game with her; for his magic is described by the word "pleye" (*FranT.* l. 1141). Modern astrologers attribute the 'rulership' of Pisces



to Neptune, which, they say, when negative, symbolises 'representations' such as mirages, silhouettes, camouflage, acting, cosmetics, pretence, illusion and artifice. Pisces itself is associated with 'moving beyond', being 'taken out of oneself', transported by the vehicles of inspiration and imagination. The section of the *Franklin's Tale* in which the magician entertains Aurelius and his brother, and demonstrates his ability at creating illusions, abounds in visual imagery and emphasises the faculty of sight (the words italicized by me), by which Dorigen is later to be misled:

He *shewed* hym, er he wente to sopeer,  
 Forestes, parkes ful of wilde deer;  
 Ther *saugh* he hertes with hir hornes hye,  
 The gretteste that evere were *seyn with ye*.  
 He *saugh* of hem an hondred slayn with houndes,  
 And somme with arwes blede of bittre woundes.  
 He *saugh*, whan voyded were thise wilde deer,  
 Thise fauconers upon a fair ryver,  
 That with hir haukes han the heron slayn.  
 Tho *saugh* he knyghtes justyng in a playn;  
 And after this he dide hym swich plesaunce  
 That he hym *shewed* his lady on a daunce,  
 On which hymself he daunced, as hym thoughte.  
 And whan this maister that this magyk wroughte  
 Saugh it was tyme, he clapte his handes two,  
 And farwel! Al oure revel was ago.  
 And yet remoeved they nevere out of the hous,  
 Whil they *saugh al this sighte* merveillous,  
 But in his studie, ther as his bookes be,  
 They seten stille, and no wight but they thre  
 (*FranT.* ll. 1189-1208).

The key to the illusion is, of course, the three words "as hym thoughte". These provide the evidence that Dorigen is later to be played with, that she is to be deprived of her own sound judgment by the conviction, one urged internally by fervent hope, that the rocks have been made to disappear. As Sandra McEntire quite astutely points out, "[i]n their game of creating illusions, the clerks and squire take from the woman the foundation of her experience: what she can see with her own eyes. What the men

intend the woman to see, not what really exists, or the meaning of this existence, is the new agenda."<sup>356</sup> McEntire also makes the point that although Aurelius fails to seduce Dorigen by his words and expressed desire, he does so "not merely by the illusion itself, but also by reducing her words to his interpretation."<sup>357</sup> Even so, Dorigen is as much a victim of her own being as she is of Aurelius' motivation. Consider the Pisces nature as described by Chevalier and Gheerbrant:

The underlying fabric of the Piscean type is woven from an extremely pliable psyche. In their inner world, knots are untied, cohesive forces baffled and shapes blurred. There reigns an impressionistic atmosphere, conducive to the amorphous, the relaxed, emotional dilation and inflation by means of which the individual can escape from self to become interfused with the awareness of qualities surpassing the self, but enveloping it and making it part of a far wider structure.<sup>358</sup>

A problem posed by this mutable cross is one of the relativity of virtue according to the perception and interpretation of a situation. Dorigen, described as a virtuous woman, perceives her future happiness with Arveragus being dependent on the eradication of the rocks. In fact however, her future happiness with Arveragus becomes dependent on the rocks not being eradicated, at least not by Aurelius. Aurelius perceives his future happiness being dependent on Dorigen but it in fact becomes dependent on Arveragus and his readiness to release Dorigen from her marriage vows and ultimately upon his own readiness to release Dorigen from her equally strong vow to him; and later to remain true to his own word regarding payment

---

<sup>356</sup> Sandra J. McEntire, "Illusion and Interpretation in the *Franklin's Tale*," *The Chaucer Review*, 31(1996), pp. 145-163 (p. 150).

<sup>357</sup> McEntire (1996), p. 152.

<sup>358</sup> Chevalier and Gheerbrant (1996), p. 757.

of his debt to the clerk. Arveragus perceives his future happiness being dependent on Dorigen keeping her initial troth but in fact it becomes dependent on his readiness to let her rescind it. The clerk might have perceived his happiness being dependent on receiving a thousand pounds, but it in fact is found through releasing Aurelius from his debt. Each one's happiness is eventually gained through an act of honour and integrity bringing reciprocal 'gentillesse' from those in whose interest they have displayed it. Such virtue is underscored by the significance of Pisces' association with the foot, which, according to Chevalier and Gheerbrant, "is a symbol of the strength of the soul since it is the basis of the upright stance characteristic of human beings."<sup>359</sup>

Negative Geminian opportunism, the Virgoan practice of magical crafts, the lust of the Centaur, and the Piscean psychological prison have all been transcended by everyone acting according to a higher principle. By following the Thomistic admonition to let their actions be governed by the spirit of Christ or a higher benevolence, Dorigen and Arveragus, Aurelius and the clerk rise above pagan magic, the potentially adulterous dilemma, the payment of purchasing an illusion, and the inevitable guilt that all may have felt through compromising collectively the law written in their hearts. Lunar magic is thus shown to be an inducement to betray the solar logos; lunar magic belongs to the world of sensory illusion; solar magic is the magic of acting according to our higher self, when the transcendent spirit will not beat its wings and depart but remain within and bring inward peace.

---

<sup>359</sup> Chevalier and Gheerbrant (1996), p. 400.

## Chapter Seven

### The Canterbury Tales

#### The Second Circuit

*King Khalid asked: "What is it after putrefaction?"  
 Morienus replied: "It is then made that by which the great  
 creator most high completes the required composition.  
 And know that this operation must be done twice, and two  
 compositions must be completed, one after the other, and  
 when the second has been completed, the whole operation  
 is ended."*

#### The Physician's Tale

γ

The relatively brief *Physician's Tale* is a succinct account of a knight and his daughter, Virginia, to whom her father requests she sacrifice her life by his hand instead of losing her virginity to a corrupt judge, as a consequence of a travesty of justice he himself has suffered. The Physician appends a moral caveat at the end, but one that seems to have missed the point of the tale he tells. This *Tale* neatly accommodates the cardinal cross of the zodiac: Aries-Libra and Cancer-Capricorn, in what must be the most economical of plots. It is possible that Chaucer also considered the stars comprising Astraea, traditionally associated with the constellation Virgo, the Greek *Dike* (divinity of Justice), Roman *Justitia*, as relevant; for as Allen says, ancient thought connected the Virgin Astraea with Libra and Justice.<sup>360</sup> Allen writes that

---

<sup>360</sup> Allen (1963), p. 272.

Astraea is "the oldest purely allegorical representation of innocence and virtue, a legend first found in Hesiod and given in full by Aratos, who recounts it as the longest of his histories of the constellations, in his *Phainomena*."<sup>361</sup> The association of Astraea with both Virgo and Libra is thus apparent, and our attention is directed to this by Chaucer's naming the heroine of this Libran *Tale*, "Virginia".

Virginius, a knight (Aries, ruled by Mars, associated with soldiers), has a very beautiful young daughter, Virginia (Cancer: eldest daughter, the feminine sign lying on the fourth house, relating to the first child), who, while visiting the temple with her mother, is seen and desired by a judge (Libra, associated with the scales of justice), named Appius. The judge is intent on ravishing Virginia "[a]s for to make hire with hir body synne" (*PhyT*. l. 138). He enlists the help of a local churl, Claudius, who has a reputation "for subtil and for boold" (*PhyT*. l. 141). Under threat of death should he reveal Appius' nefarious plans to anyone, Claudius is given "yiftes precieuse and deere" (*PhyT*. l. 148). Claudius makes a false accusation that Virginia is not the knight's daughter but Claudius' own servant and that she was taken when young and is being held illegally by Virginius. At the court where Appius presides, Virginius is given no opportunity to put his defence: "This cursed juge wolde no thyng tarie,/Ne heere a word moore of Virginius,/But yaf his juggement" (*PhyT*. ll. 196-198). Virginia is to be made a ward of court and to be brought to the judge. Her father, realising the judge's intention, decides his daughter's virginity is more important than her life, and tells her so:

O doghter, which that art my laste wo,  
And in my lyf my laste joye also,  
O gemme of chastitee, in pacience  
Take thou thy death, for this is my sentence.

---

<sup>361</sup> Allen (1963), p. 462.

For love, and nat for hate, thou most be deed;  
 My pitous hand moot smyten of thyn heed  
 (*PhyT.* ll. 221-226).

Virginia asks for a moment to reflect upon the injustice of the situation, quoting the Biblical Jephtha's daughter's request for a similar few minutes in which to do the same before her death. She then faints, but upon recovering consciousness asks that her father kill with considerate gentleness:

"Blissed be God that I shal dye a mayde!  
 Yif me my death, er that I have a shame;  
 Dooth with youre child your wyl, a Goddes name!"  
 And with that word she preyed hym ful ofte  
 That with his swerd he wolde smyte softe  
 (*PhyT.* ll. 248-252).

What is the problem of the astrological crux presented in this *Tale* by the cardinal cross of Aries, Cancer, Libra and Capricorn? The four foci are innocence (Aries - the lamb); justice and grace (Libra); fostering and protection (Cancer) and law and order (Capricorn). All of these appear to be in mutual conflict. Appius, the judge, for example, displays a careful concern for legal procedure and the appropriate protocols, thus fulfilling the Capricornian dimension of the law, which is to say that the formalities are observed correctly. He says, in response to Claudius presenting his bill, "Of this, in his absence,/I may nat yeve diffyntyf sentence./Lat do hym calle, and I wol gladly heere" (*Phy.T.* ll. 171-173). The presentation of the bill by Claudius is supposed to result, according to Hornsby,<sup>362</sup> in equitable remedies, but as we know, the result in the *Physician's Tale* is anything but equitable. Virginius is not given time to present his case to prove his innocence. By cutting short Virginius' testimony and not hearing witnesses in Virginius' favour, Appius is enabled to pronounce a verdict that is correct

---

<sup>362</sup> Joseph Allen Hornsby, *Chaucer and the Law* (Norman, Oklahoma: Pilgrim, 1988), p. 157.

- given the only testimony allowed:- that of Claudius and an initial, unsupported refutation by Virginius. So a correct legal procedure (Capricorn) expedited by motive of desire (Aries) results in a verdict (Libra) of custody (Cancer). Further, Virginius' own innocence is confounded (afflicted Aries) by a travesty of justice (afflicted Libra) resulting in a misapplication of guardianship and protection by a parent (afflicted Cancer) and disorder contrary to the understanding of the divine law (afflicted Capricorn) that says that whilst sin or crime is punishable, virtue is rewarded.

After decapitating his daughter, the knight takes her head to the judge, who raises his eyebrows at this questionable act and tells the knight that he must be hanged. But immediately no fewer than a thousand people protest. Their collective opinion is that Virginius has been wrongly convicted and that Apius is a lecherous miscreant, and they "caste hym in a prisoun right anon" (*PhyT.* l. 268) where he hangs himself.

Claudius the churl, whom the crowd would like to hang, is instead released on account of Virginius' plea for clemency, and is exiled instead. The Physician admonishes the pilgrims "Beth war, for no man woot whom God wol smyte/In no degree, ne in which manere wyse" (*PhyT.* ll. 278-279). It is evident then, that the 'fate' of the characters in the *Tale* is intended to be perceived as being the hand of God administering divine law, which, as we saw in the *Merchant's Tale* of Custance, is represented zodiacally by Capricorn.

Chaucer appears in this *Tale* to be playing with the zodiacal sign principles, having each character reverse the sign functions exactly. The knight (Aries) reverses his role and acts as judge, sentencing his daughter and eventually mitigating the verdict of the people regarding the fate of Claudius. The judge (Libra) acts on the basis of self-centred lechery, resembling Arcite's attitude to Emelye in the *Knight's Tale*, where

Arcite represented Aries. Perhaps that is why Chaucer describes Appius three times in only eight lines as a "false judge" (*PhyT*. ll. 154-161). Parental care and protection, symbolized by Cancer, in this *Tale* take the shape of a cold and merciless act by a controlling father, the hallmarks of Saturn and Capricorn. And God's law, normally represented by Capricorn, appears to have lost its intrinsic ordering principle and to have operated fortuitously, in the nature of Cancer, whims being ruled by the moon.

Even the Physician himself seems to behave out of character, not resembling his depiction in the *General Prologue*, where he is presented as being grounded in astronomy and astrology and natural magic (*GP*. ll. 411-421); although knowing "but litel on the Bible" (*GP*. l. 438) he was well versed in all the traditional medical authorities and was "a verray, parfit praktisour" (*GP*. l. 422), an echo of the character of the Knight, who was "a verray, parfit gentil knyght" (*GP*. l. 72). At no point in the telling of the *Tale*, however, does the Physician allude to any of his special knowledge or interests. However, one commentator suggests that there is evidence to suggest that the Physician is a clerk taking holy orders.<sup>363</sup> He certainly assumes the role of a preacher:

Beth war, for no man woot whom God wol smyte  
 In no degree, ne in which manere wyse;  
 The worm of conscience may agryse  
 Of wikked lyf, though it so pryvee be  
 That no man woot therof but God and he.  
 For be he lewed man, or ellis lered,  
 He noot how soone that he shal been afered.  
 Therfore I rede yow this conseil take:  
 Forsaketh synne, er synne yow forsake  
 (*PhyT*. ll. 278-286).

<sup>363</sup> Huling E. Ussery, "Chaucer's Physician: Medicine and Literature in Fourteenth-Century

England," TSE Monograph, *Tulane Studies in English*, 19 (Tulane, New Orleans: 1971), pp. 120-121.



All of which appears both to both ignore and include Virginia's innocence of mind and body, to be indiscriminately encompassing of both a girl described as a thousand times more virtuous than her beauty (*PhyT.* ll. 39-40) and a judge of whom "[t]hey wisten wel that he was lecherus" (*PhyT.* l. 266).

Lee Ramsey makes the interesting point that Chaucer has gone so far to arouse sympathy for Virginia and her father that Appius loses something of the emphasis that is given to him by the version of the tale that Chaucer was following. As a consequence both Virginius and his daughter are thrown into relatively sharper focus than they are in Chaucer's source.<sup>364</sup> From an astrological perspective this suggests that the characters in the *Tale* may be depicting a balancing of forces that are strong and equal and implicative of misfortune. The clue may well be provided by the earlier-mentioned thrice-repeated description: "false juge". If, as seems to be the case, the judge is typified by the sign Libra, then it is likely that the sun (authority) will be in Libra (the scales), but Venus, the planetary ruler of Libra, will be in the sign of its fall, assuming the word 'false' to be a Chaucerian pun. If that is the case, then Venus will be in the sign Virgo. Virginius the knight, one assumes, is signified by Aries. But he is unable to function properly as a father, putting an unhealthy emphasis on protection of his daughter and committing a deed whose nature is the opposite of the nurture he is obliged to provide. It is likely that his ruling planet, Mars, is similarly in its 'fall', namely in the sign Cancer. Cancer is the sign of parenting, but with Mars in it, there is a threat of danger from a parent. Virginia is his child and will therefore be represented by a planet in the 5th house of the horoscope. As a beautiful young woman who

---

<sup>364</sup> Lee C. Ramsey, "'The Sentence of it Sooth Is': Chaucer's *Physician's Tale*," *The Chaucer Review*, 6 (1971-2), pp. 185-197.

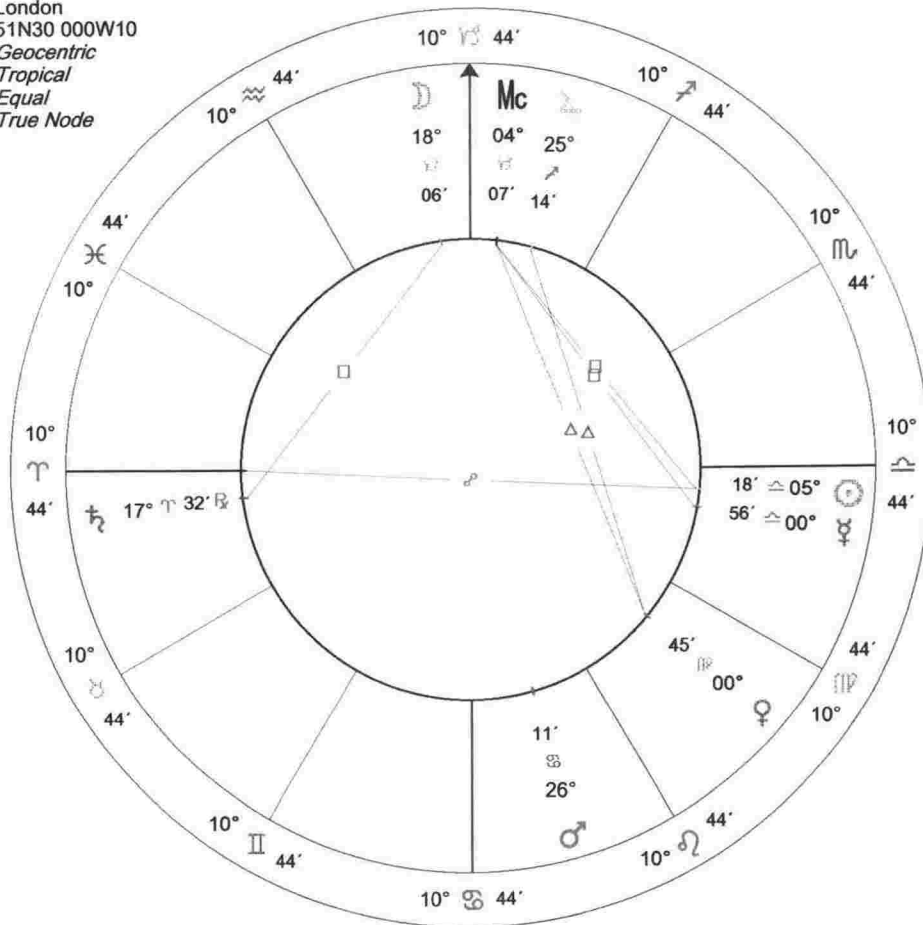
celebrates her virginity (by comparison with Jeptha's daughter, who bewailed hers) she is likely to be symbolised by Venus (beauty) in Virgo (virtue and virginity). Finally, God Himself doesn't come out entirely blameless in this *Tale*. As Geometer of the Universe, God is symbolised by Capricorn, and Saturn, the 'lord' of Capricorn is thus the architect of God's will, as well as of fate. It might well be that God has simply suspended action, and is letting fate work out its own inevitability. Saturn is having the effect of bringing about the fall of everyone: Appius, Claudius, Virginius and Virginia. It is thus highly probable that Saturn is also in the sign of its fall, namely Aries. One might be reminded of the tragedy of Romeo and Juliet and the stellar cross under which it was implied that their fate was decreed. The 'end of an affair (any matter)' is represented by planets in the 4th house and its ruler.

The question that immediately presents itself is whether in Chaucer's life-time there actually occurred a planetary configuration that comprised the sun in its fall in Libra, Venus in its fall in Virgo, Mars in its fall in Cancer, and Saturn in its fall in Aries, simultaneously; together with a suitable planet in the 5th house representing the character of Virginia, and also with suitable planets either in the 4th house or ruling it, appropriate for such a disastrous outcome. Such a combination must be unique in anyone's life-time, but the planets all moved into such a combination on 20 September, 1379, the only time in Chaucer's complete lifetime when such conditions were met. Diagram 19 (below) shows the picture. One wonders what the odds must be of such a simultaneous occurrence of such horrendous implications, especially as the chief signifiers afflict each other by planetary aspect too. Any one interested in astrological configurations could hardly fail to notice this one, and it would not have been necessary for Chaucer to have been studying astrology in 1379 for it to have

made an impact. It would be only natural for him, upon taking up the study of astrology, to have reviewed the transits of planets through his own natal chart since his birth, if only for the purpose of evaluating the validity of their purported significance.

**Virginia and the Judge**  
**Natal Chart**  
 20 Sep 1379  
 17:49 LMT +0:00:40  
 London  
 51N30 00W10  
*Geocentric*  
*Tropical*  
*Equal*  
*True Node*

**Diagram 19**  
 Cardinal grand cross



**Note: House positions of the planets are identical in Porphyry, Alchabitius and Equal houses systems for this hypothetical chart.**

This diagram shows the ascendant in Aries (♈) with the knight's ruling planet, Mars (♂) in its fall in the sign Cancer (♋); the sun having just set in the house of justice, the seventh, in the sign of its fall, Libra (♎), and the ruler of Libra, Venus (♀), in the sign of its fall, Virgo (♍). Virginia as the knight's child is shown also by Venus

(beauty) in Virgo (virtue and virginity) in the 5th house of the horoscope, the house representing one's own children generally, that is, collectively. As his eldest daughter, Virginia is represented by the moon, the planet ruling Cancer, which is the sign on the fourth house (eldest child, in this case, feminine, because Cancer, a feminine sign is on the cusp of the house, as mentioned above), and by the planet Mars, which is placed in the sign Cancer, the sign of its fall, in the fourth house. The moon is in Capricorn, which is the sign of its detriment, Capricorn ( $\text{♑}$ ), in severe aspect of opposition from Mars, her father (Mars rules the Aries ascendant); and in square or quartile aspect from Saturn, symbol of God and fate. Saturn ( $\text{♄}$ ) as the ruler of either God or Fate, is also in the sign of its fall, Aries ( $\text{♈}$ ). The 'end of the affair', meaning the outcome (fourth house concern), is signified all too clearly by the presence of Mars in its fall in the 4th house, and, with Cancer being the sign on the cusp of that house, its ruler, the moon. As we have already seen, the moon is in its detriment and severely afflicted by Mars and Saturn. To have the moon in detriment in severe affliction by the lesser infortune (Mars) and the greater infortune, Saturn, is a most tragic configuration.

Astrological grand crosses are formed when any planets, with perhaps the sun or moon, form a four-cornered square, with each of four planets being approximately 90 degrees from its contiguous components of the cross. They are not particularly rare. But to have a grand cross comprising four bodies all in their respective signs of fall is exceedingly rare and would have been the stimulus of great wonder to those interested in astrology. Only someone with Chaucer's knowledge of astrology would be capable of appreciating just how ominous and rare such a configuration would be, more than sufficient to induce a grimace from even the most sceptical of opponents of astrology; and how much rarer indeed would be such a coincidence of astrological-astronomical

realities with a fictional plot such as the *Physician's Tale*. Doubtless Chaucer found the *Physician's Tale* to be superbly appropriate to such a configuration, one which, by contrast with the purely imagined and astronomically impossible fixed grand cross claimed to have been employed by Shakespeare for his great romantic tragedy,<sup>365</sup> was actually real and visible and implicative of the kind of horrible activity the *Physician's Tale* recounts.

A cardinal sign grand cross is powerful enough, but when it occupies the 'angles' of the horoscope (ascendant, descendant, fourth and tenth houses), it is at its most powerful, and suggests that the areas of life affected by the tragedy it portends will be those vulnerable to public exposure. The ascendant itself suggests that events occurring in one's immediate environment are involved. The descendant suggests that other people will be evaluating the part one plays in the events and will be passing judgment. The tenth house, being that of one's public reputation, is also the house of verdicts, because the tenth house is the fourth house of the seventh house, and the fourth house symbolises outcomes. So the outcome of a seventh house judgment is perceived to be symbolised by the condition of the tenth house, which, as we have seen, in the Physician's knight's chart, has an afflicted moon in detriment riding high therein. And the fourth house of the chart, the last of the angular houses, represents the family fortunes, domestic life and one's fitting into the locality, one's contentment or compatibility with one's town or city. The knight's Mars, in its fall in Cancer, sitting in

---

<sup>365</sup> Maureen Johnson, "What's In A Name?": *Astrology and Onomastics in "Romeo and Juliet"*, Ph.D. Diss. Princeton, 1984. Johnson proposes a grand cross comprising Venus in Taurus, Mercury in Leo, Mars in Scorpio and Saturn in Aquarius as the configuration afflicting Romeo and Juliet, but such a configuration is astronomically impossible at any time.

the fourth house of the horoscope, suggests that his location is one in which he will experience or cause violence. He would have done well to relocate. But then there might have been no *Tale* to tell!

## The Pardoner's Tale



In the Middle Ages one of the categories of sin was the sins of the mouth.<sup>366</sup> These included gluttony, drunkenness and swearing. The first among sins was in fact gluttony (not pride, as Gregory the Great asserted centuries later). Yeager also points out that there existed "sins of the tongue,"<sup>367</sup> too, among which are lying, back-biting or idle complaint and, of course, blasphemy. The mouth and throat are associated astrologically, as we saw in the discussion of the *Miller's Tale*, with the second zodiacal sign, Taurus, a fixed mode, earth element sign. The sign is associated with oral functions and lies opposite Scorpio, associated with excretory ones. Those oral activities are eating, drinking, vocalisation in song (Taurus is ruled by Venus, and Venus, not Mercury, rules song), sucking, spitting and kissing. The chain of such metonymies begins with the baby's oral reflex and gustatory instinct, which, because of their early association with the acquisition of whatever gives physical comfort and sensual gratification, is extended, with maturation, to include physical caressing and the acquisition and possession of material resources, including, of course, food and money.

---

<sup>366</sup> R.F. Yeager, "Aspects of Gluttony in Chaucer and Gower," *Studies in Philology*, 81 (1984), pp. 42-55.

<sup>367</sup> Yeager (1984), p. 49.

The Scorpio metonymies of excretory functions are extended to sexual activities, productivity in general and all degenerative and regenerative cyclical processes, such as fertilisation and procreation, together with transformative, metamorphic, healing, recuperative and eliminatory activities, including sleep and death, investment of physical and material resources, and profit and loss.

The *Pardoner's Tale*, second in the second circuit of the zodiac, lies parallel to the *Miller's Tale* and parallels that *Tale's* emphasis on the physical and sexual dimensions of the Taurus-Scorpio opposition. The main subjects of the *Pardoner's Tale*, however, are the sins of the mouth, the acquisition of material wealth, avarice; the physical body of Christ and the transubstantiation of the eucharist; and secrets, death and burial.

It is probably no meaningless coincidence, as far as the astrological level of the *Tale* is concerned, that it is told in an ale-house, where the pilgrims have stopped for a drink. It is the tavern that is described as the "devele's temple" (*PardT.* l. 470). The *Tale* begins with a strong emphasis on gluttony and swearing. In Flanders, relates the Pardoner, there was a company of young folk, whose loose living included rioting, gambling, visiting prostitutes and taverns, and while dancing and playing at dice day and night they "eten also and drynken over hir myght" (*PardT.* l. 468). Furthermore, "hir othes ben so grete and so dampnable/That it is grisly for to heere hem swere" (*PardT.* ll. 472-473).

All the tavern vices have a connection with the eucharistic sacrifice, as Miller and Bosse explain. They comment, "The Pardoner himself implies the contrast between physical food (the end of which is death) and the spiritual food of the eucharist (which leads to salvation) by citing Paul's warning, "Mete unto wombe, and wombe eek unto



mete,/Shal God destroyen bothe" (*PardT.* ll. 522-523) and by alluding to transubstantiation, the inverted turning of 'substance into accident' (*PardT.* l. 539) in his diatribe against cooks."<sup>368</sup> Taurus being a fixed earth element sign suggests, too, that through its association with the mouth and oral expression, the oaths and songs will be what is commonly referred to as 'earthy'. The attitudes of those strongly Taurean by nature tend to be what they call pragmatic, but they are also inclined to define and therefore perceive reality in only material terms. Brown and Butcher refer to the rioters' "obdurate sinfulness"<sup>369</sup> - obduracy being symptomatic of a fixed mode grand cross of the zodiac, which also implies an incorrigible disposition to act self-destructively. Further, Brown and Butcher describe the rioters' outlook as materialistic "not only in the sense of being avaricious but also in the limitation of their perception to the physical and tangible."<sup>370</sup> Although Brown and Butcher embrace astrological referenda in general and Saturn in particular in their book, it is in one sense fortuitous and in another perhaps an inevitable manifestation of a combination of sensitivity to literary texture and subconscious resonance to astrological symbolism, that those authors should identify so precisely the characteristics of Taurus in their choice of the words "physical" and "tangible". Their unconscious perception of the qualities of the fixed mode of the zodiac as being applicable to the rioters' actions also

---

<sup>368</sup> Clarence H. Miller and Roberta Bux Bosse, "Chaucer's Pardoner and the Mass," *The Chaucer Review*, 6 (1971-72), pp. 171-184 (p. 177).

<sup>369</sup> Brown and Butcher (1991), p. 130.

<sup>370</sup> Brown and Butcher (1991), p. 130.

emerges when they write, "The rioters are irredeemably devoted to vice (*PardT.* ll. 831-4) and incapable of repentance (*PardT.* l. 850)." <sup>371</sup>

Being essentially a Taurean tale, the *Pardoner's Tale* is replete with the iconography pertinent to that sign:

"And right anon thanne come tombesteres  
Fetys and smale, and yonge frutesteres,  
Syngeres with harpes, baudes, wafereres,  
Whiche been the verray develes officeres  
To kyndle and blowe the fyr of lecherye,  
That is annexed unto gluttonye"  
(*PardT.* ll. 477-482).

Gluttony and lechery comprise the binary opposition of Taurus and Scorpio, an opposition repeatedly emphasized in this *Tale*, but summed up succinctly by the Pardoner's dictum: *Radix malorum est Cupiditas* (The love of money (Taurus) is the root of evil (Scorpio)). <sup>372</sup>

For whil that Adam fasted, as I rede,  
He was in Paradys; and whan that he  
Eat of the fryt deffended on the tree,  
Anon he was outcast to wo and peyne.  
O glotonye, on thee wel oghte us pleyne!  
O, wiste a man how manye maladyes  
Folwen of excesse and of glotonyes,  
He wolde been the moore mesurable  
Of his diete, sittynge at his table.

---

<sup>371</sup> Brown and Butcher (1991), p. 151.

<sup>372</sup> The association of Scorpio with evil has a long history, originating as far back as astrology's Chaldean and Babylonian origins: see Michael Baigent, *From the Omens of Babylon* (Penguin: London, 1994), p. 100. Tamsyn Barton writes: "Scorpio recalled the passage where Christ was given authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and thus refers to the Devil" (Barton, 1994), p. 71. Barton also cites a version of a magical papyrus which sets out appropriate times for different sorts of spells, according to which, when the moon is in Scorpio it is an appropriate time for "anything inflicting evil" (Barton, 1994), p. 194.

Allas, the shorte throte, the tendre mouth,  
 Maketh that est and west and north and south,  
 In erthe, in eir, in water, men to swynke  
 To gete a glotoun deyntee mele and drynke  
 (*PardT.* ll. 508-520).

The Taurus-Scorpio opposition is reiterated with vivid metaphor:

Mete unto wombe, and wombe eek unto mete,  
 Shal God destroyen bothe," as Paulus seith.  
 Allas, a foul thyng is it, by my feith,  
 To saye this word and fouler is the dede,  
 Whan man so drynketh of this white and rede  
 That of his throte he maketh his pryvee  
 Thurgh thilke cursed superfluitee  
 (*PardT.* ll. 522-528).

And again,

O wombe! O bely! O stynkyng cod,  
 Fulfilled of dong and of corrupcioun!  
 At either ende of thee foul is the soun  
 (*PardT.* ll. 534-536).

Wine is a lecherous thing, the Pardoner tells the pilgrims at the ale-house where they have paused for him to take refreshment. Further,

Thy tonge is lost, and al thyn honeste cure,  
 For dronkenesse is verray sepulture  
 Of mannes wit and his discrecioun.  
 In whom that drynke hath dominacioun  
 He kan no conseil kepe  
 (*PardT.* ll. 557-561).

The association of Scorpio with lechery would appear to have derived from its ancient relationship with the scorpion, though Lucinda Rumsey reverses that point. She writes:

A final but more tenuous source of the link between the scorpion and lechery may be its use as an astrological symbol. The popular tradition which allots each zodiacal sign to a part of the human anatomy makes Scorpio govern the genitalia, and the sign is associated with both death and fertility, since its month, October, is both the end and the beginning of the growing season....Mediaeval science

makes use of the phallic aspect of the scorpion to accord it fertile as well as destructive power, which may be considered to strengthen its link with sexuality, even if only by showing that the phallic connotations of the Scorpion were recognized.<sup>373</sup>

George Pace refers to Chaucer's brief list of zodiacal ascriptions to the anatomy and physiology of the human body and his promise to elaborate on it in the non-eventuating Part V of the *Treatise on the Astrolabe*, and adds, "Actually, Chaucer never returned to the physiological significance of the signs, but a miniature in the Brussels MS of the *Astrolabe* leaves little doubt as to the meaning of his 'and so furth.' The miniature depicts a naked human figure with the signs arranged on the parts of the body governed by them. A scorpion is placed over the organs of generation, and a gloss in the margin states: 'Scorpio... has power, outside the body, over the genitalia, and also over the privy parts of the testicles, the bladder, and the anus, even to the thigh.'" Pace later suggests that this *melothesiatic* association, together with Ecclesiasticus 26:10 ("As a yoke of oxen is moved to and fro, so also is a wicked woman; he that hath hold of her is as he that taketh hold of a scorpion") "leads to a specifically medieval development of the scorpion as a symbol, a development which occurs as a result of the animalization of the sins... In due course certain animals came to symbolize sins, especially the seven deadly sins. The sin symbolized by the scorpion was lechery."<sup>374</sup>

---

<sup>373</sup> Lucinda Rumsey, "The Scorpion of Lechery and Ancrene Wisse," *Medium Aevum*, 61 (1992), pp. 48-58 (p. 53).

<sup>374</sup> George B. Pace, "The Scorpion of Chaucer's *Merchant's Tale*," *Modern Language Quarterly*, 26 (1965), pp. 369-374, p. 371.

After citing a number of historical examples of gluttonous persons, the Pardoner turns his attention to a subject related to the next zodiacal sign of the fixed cross, Leo, namely gambling: "Hasard is verray mooder of lesynges,/And of deceite, and cursed forswerynges" (*PardT.* ll. 591-592). The Leo-Aquarius opposition is illustrated clearly in the tension between the noble and the community to which he is, implicitly by honour, obliged to maintain a good reputation:

...and forthermo,  
It is repreeve and contrarie of honour  
For to ben holde a commune hasardour.  
And ever the hyer he is of estaat,  
The moore is he yholden desolaat.  
If that a prynce useth hasardrye,  
In alle governaunce and policye  
He is, as by commune opinioun,  
Yholde the lasse in reputacioun  
(*PardT.* ll. 594-602).

Amplifying the point of social prohibition he alludes to Stilbon, who was sent as ambassador to Corinth. Upon Stilbon's arrival there, he found all "the gretteste that were of that lond,/Pleyynge atte hasard" (*PardT.* ll. 607-608). He returned home and advised his people not to form an alliance with gamblers. Finally, before beginning his tale, the Pardoner turns to swearing, another sin of the mouth: "Gret sweryng is a thyng abhominable,/And fals sweryng is yet more reprevable" (*PardT.* ll. 631-632). Idle swearing, he adds, is a curse (*PardT.* l. 638).

The Aquarius 'grouping' principle is emphasized by the anonymity of the three rioters: they are referred to simply by common nouns and adjectives so that even when distinguished individually they are simultaneously identified as a member of a group: hence, "the proudeste" (*PardT.* l. 716), "the worste" (*PardT.* l. 716), "the yongeste" (*PardT.* l. 804). Even the corpse that passes by is representative of Everyman - a most apt Aquarian collective noun. This collective implication of Aquarius is further

underscored by reference to their playing musical instruments. In the discussion of the *Squire's Tale*, Aquarius was described as a principle expressed through 'classes' or collectivities in which individual members of the class subsumed their identities within that of the group as a whole for the purpose of cooperative action, but at the same time each component of that class or group seeks to maintain its own idiosyncracies, the definition of such uniqueness being possible only within a collective context. In the *Pardoner's Tale*, the three rioters are presented as a group, endeavouring to act cooperatively and collectively in playing musical instruments. But as Robert Boenig puts it: "Musicians playing together must cooperate ... To perform music of Chaucer's generation with an ensemble composed of harp, lute and gittern is to set up a musical paradox: attempted cooperation with inherent competition undermining the artistic success - a description of the whole careers of the Pardoner's rioters." He continues, "When the *Pardoner's Tale* opens, the three protagonists are undifferentiated, like a ballade played by the wrong instruments: they gamble, drink, whore, and revel together. They decide, in apparent cooperation, to seek out the false thief Death and slay him. After their encounter with the mysterious Old Man, they do indeed find Death under the oak tree up the crooked path - but only after they split into individuals whose inherent competition turns open and murderous: the young poisoner set against those who would ambush him. We therefore have irony here: attempted concord with inherent rivalry".<sup>375</sup>

Even at the anagogical level of the *Tale*, the fixed zodiacal cross emerges. The bread and wine, as many commentators, including Brown and Butcher (1991) and

---

<sup>375</sup> Robert Boenig, "Musical Irony in the *Pardoner's Tale*," *The Chaucer Review*, 24 (1970), pp. 253-258 (p. 257).

Janet Adelman (1973)<sup>376</sup> have pointed out, are allegories and parodies of the eucharistic bread and wine, symbols of the body and blood of Christ. The flesh of the body, its substance and mass, all that which is not skeletal, are represented by Taurus, symbolic of the accumulation of substance and the physical, consolidated constitution of that which exists, literally its mass. And in early times Taurus was regarded as the sign of physical life itself, being at the opposite pole from Scorpio, the sign of physical death. Meller and Bosse write, "Treasure in the spiritual sense is clearly the soul, the life of the spirit, and the giver of it is God, not Fortune, as this "worst" asserts, making it clear that his allegiance is to the ruler of this world rather than to the ruler of eternity."<sup>377</sup> And D.W. Robertson suggests that:

The three sins may...be seen as a progression along the road to spiritual death: (1) the submission of the spirit to the flesh in gluttony, foreshadowed, as the pardoner suggests, by the sin of Adam and Eve, (2) the submission to Fortune implied by gambling, and (3) the denial of Christ, which is the "spiritual" implication of violating the Second Commandment. Hence the three sins reflect the old pattern of temptations of the flesh, the world and the Devil, for submission to Fortune is submission to the world, and the denial of Christ is the ultimate aim of the Devil's temptation.<sup>378</sup>

That last sentence of Robertson's captures all four points of the fixed zodiacal cross: the temptations of the flesh (Taurus), the world (Leo) and the Devil (Scorpio) as the implied experiences of the three rioters (Aquarius).

---

<sup>376</sup> Janet Adelman, "That We May Leere Som Wit", in Dewey R. Faulkner (ed.), *The Pardoner's Tale: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1973), p. 100.

<sup>377</sup> Miller and Bux Bosse (1971-2), p. 182.

<sup>378</sup> Robertson Jnr. (1963), p. 333.

At the narrative level, the three rioters encounter an Old Man, the literal identity of whom has been a subject of continuing discussion. Whoever he might be intended to represent, he acts as an anchoring bollard for the *Tale* and is clearly a Saturn-archetype, possibly a personification of Chronos, of Time:

For I ne kan nat fynde  
A man, though that I walked into Ynde,  
Neither in citee ne in no village,  
That wolde chaunge his youthe for myn age;  
And therfore moot I han myn age stille,  
As long tyme as it is Goddes wille  
(*PardT.* ll. 721-726).

The old man directs the three rioters, who are seeking Death that they might kill him (thus perceiving Death as a physical being, a typically Taurean perception of things), to an oak tree under which they find eight bushels of gold coins. The number eight was associated with Saturn, and with Scorpio, the eighth sign of the zodiac, symbolic of death. The rioters immediately stop looking for death; but unknown to them they have found it.

The acquisitive and possessive aspect of Taurus now makes itself evident. The rioters have found not a document, not a person, not a new idea or phenomenon, but something material, valuable and desirable: money, in the form of that best-known Taurean word - treasure. (In political astrology Taurus represents the Treasury). Immediately the possessive impulse comes to the fore - they claim it as their own, as a gift of Fortune. By definition a gift of fortune was required by law to have been a fortuitous discovery. It had not to be sought deliberately nor acquired by scheme or plot or of course, illegal means. And in medieval times, were anyone to display signs of living beyond his or her evident means, prosecution might well follow. Convincing other people that one's fortune had been acquired by happenstance might, however, be



quite a difficult task, hence the rioters' need for secrecy, their decision to transport and harbour it covertly. Ownership however, was staked immediately: "This tresor hath Fortune unto us yiven" (*PardT.* l. 779), says the worst of the rioters. "For wel ye woot that al this gold is oures" (*PardT.* l. 786), but although they regard it as theirs it must be carried away at night because "Men wolde seyn that we were theves stronge, / And for oure owene tresor doon us honge" (*PardT.* ll. 789-790). One may now perceive the dynamics of the fixed cross of the zodiac in the operation of the conspiracy of friends (*PardT.* ll. 696-698, 702-704) (Aquarius), whose actions are directed towards the acquisition of money (*PardT.* ll. 776-790) (Taurus), for the pleasure of the power it gives (*PardT.* ll. 780-781) (Leo), but necessitating a resort to stealth and subterfuge (*PardT.* ll. 791-792) (Scorpio). Note the Taurus and Scorpio words in the following lines:

This tresor (♈) hath Fortune unto us yiven (♎)  
 In myrthe and joliftee oure lyf to lyven,  
 And lightly as it comth, so wol we spende (♎).  
 Ey, Goddes precious dignitee! Who wende  
 To-day that we sholde han (♈) so fair a grace?  
 But myghte this gold be caried fro this place  
 Hoom to myn hous, or elles unto youres -  
 For wel ye woot that al this gold is oures-(♈)  
 Thanne were we in heigh felicitee.  
 But trewely, by daye (♈) it may nat bee.  
 Men wolde seyn that we were theves stronge,  
 And for oure owene tresor (♈) doon us honge.  
 This tresor (♈) moste ycaried be by nyghte (♎)  
 As wisely and as slyly(♎) as it myghte  
 (*PardT.* ll. 779-792).

Again, the Taurus-Scorpio opposition is manifested in the carrying of treasure (Taurus) by night (Scorpio), making the material apparently immaterial, a physical metaphor reversing the process whereby Christ's spiritual body (the bread) becomes material in the Christian worshipper (transubstantiation). The youngest of the three

rioters goes to town to bring back bread and wine and during his absence his two friends plot his death, possibly an echo of the preparation for the Last Supper, before which Judas plotted Christ's death in return for money. The youngest, while on his errand, decides to poison the wine and upon his return he is killed by one of the rioters, who drink the poisoned wine and so also find death. The closing lines of the *Tale* proper sum up the situation with yet another agglomeration of the signs comprising the fixed cross:

For right as they hadde cast his deeth bifoore,  
 Right so they han hym slayn, and that anon.  
 And whan that this was doon, thus spak that oon:  
 "Now lat us sitte and drynke, and make us merie,  
 And afterward we wol his body berie."  
 And with that word it happed hym, par cas,  
 To take the botel ther the poyson was,  
 And drank, and yaf his felawe drynke also,  
 For which anon they storven bothe two  
 (*PardT.* ll. 880-888).

(One notes with amused interest the line number by which the three rioters have all died, namely line 888.) They are together in a group (Aquarius); they kill one of their number, thus committing homicide (Scorpio); drink the wine (Taurus) but select the poisoned bottle "par cas" (*PardT.* l. 885), that is, by chance (Leo) and so die by the means with which they had chosen to live.

# The Shipman's Tale

## II

From its standing start - "A merchant whilom dwelled at Seint-Denys" (*ShipT.*

l. 1), the *Shipman's Tale*, a burlesque of sex and economics, sprints lightly to its finishing line - a little past the bed-post. No-one pauses along the way to describe the scenery or pass comment on the weather. The *Tale's* kaleidoscopic flow and fast-flickering pace exemplify the mutability of time and context, while its plethora of tokens and dialogue are emblematic of the zodiacal sign Gemini. It might be significant that the *Tale* begins with a merchant; the *Merchant's Tale* was linked to Sagittarius, the sign diametrically opposite Gemini, the two *Tales* thereby forming a binary opposition in the mutable mode of the zodiac. One might suspect that Chaucer hoped his audience would make that connection when he linked line 9 of the *Shipman's Tale* to line 1315 of the *Merchant's*. In the *Merchant's Tale* lands and land rights, rent, pasture and furniture, all except one's wife, are described as gifts of Fortune "[t]hat passen as a shadwe upon a wal" (*MerT.* l. 1315). The Shipman, by comparison, disparages those kinds of ephemeral events such as feasts and dances which incur expenditure for nothing in return of lasting value: "Swich salutaciouns and contenaunces/Passen as dooth a shadwe upon the wal..." (*ShipT.* l. 9). A shadow typifies mutability, being ephemeral and flexible. One might also perceive similar qualities in the motion of a hare, a curious reference to that creature occurring early in the *Tale* where the priest refers to married men "that lye and dare/As in a fourme sit a wery hare,/Were al forstraught with houndes grete and smale" (*ShipT.* ll. 103-105). The word "forstraught" means more than "distraught" and applies to the state of the

hare facing dismemberment by the hounds. It is used as a simile by Chaucer to allude to the state of husbands faced with marital responsibilities of various kinds, as well as to the *Shipman's Tale's* dismemberment of a union which occurs in the temporary but nonetheless real fragmentation of the merchant and his wife, two who had earlier become one flesh by virtue of their marriage.<sup>379</sup> The hare is an inspired example also, however, of the capacity of Chaucer to write at more than one level of significance and to provide helpful clues for the astrologically-minded listener, for the constellation known as the Hare rises when Gemini rises, as Manilius points out.<sup>380</sup>

The opening lines, in particular "The sely housbonde, algate he moot paye,/He moot us clothe, and he moot us arraye" (*ShipT.* ll. 11-12), have created some uncertainty in commentators regarding the gender of the *Tale's* purported teller. Benson for example, says that it "still contains indications that its narrator is a woman"<sup>381</sup>, and Ganim refers to its ambiguous opening "which seems to be in a female voice"<sup>382</sup>. It is believed that Chaucer reassigned the *Tale* from the Wife of Bath to the Shipman. Because the *Tale* falls at the Gemini stage of the astrological cycle, its teller would be characterised by the opposing sign, Sagittarius. The *General Prologue* provides an appropriate sketch: the Shipman has a beard (usually associated with the fire element), he has travelled widely, a well-known Sagittarian activity, and further, he

---

<sup>379</sup> John P. Hermann, "Dismemberment, Dissemination, Discourse: Sign and Symbol In *The Shipman's Tale*," *The Chaucer Review*, 19 (1985), pp. 302-337.

<sup>380</sup> Manilius (1953), Book V, p. 153.

<sup>381</sup> Benson (1987), p. 15.

<sup>382</sup> John M. Ganim, "Double Entry in Chaucer's *Shipman's Tale*: Chaucer and Bookkeeping before Pacioli," *The Chaucer Review*, 30 (1996), pp. 294-305 (p. 302).

hails from Dartmouth, Devonshire, which, in the Middle Ages, was a fairly prominent town in the south-south-west of England (Devon and Cornwall), which geographical direction was associated with Sagittarius.<sup>383</sup> Today, six hundred years after Chaucer was writing, Dartmouth is the home of the Royal Naval Training College, the town continuing to produce great shipmen.

One might wonder why Chaucer chose to allot the *Tale* to the Shipman at the Gemini stage of the solar cycle; there is nothing in the symbolism of Gemini that evokes an immediate association. But in classical times that constellation was frequently represented by two stars over a ship;<sup>384</sup> the *Acts of the Apostles* records that the sign Gemini was the figurehead of the ship in which St. Paul sailed from the island of Melita;<sup>385</sup> and a line in Ovid's *Fasti*: "*Utile sollicitare sidus utrumque rati*", was translated by Chaucer's friend Gower (referring to the Gemini) as "A welcome couple to a vexed barge"<sup>386</sup> and rendered by Riley as "the pair form a Constellation

---

<sup>383</sup> The geographical directions are easily worked out: the cardinal signs Aries, Cancer, Libra and Capricorn are respectively east, north, west and south, and the signs in between take the conventional compass directions accordingly: Sagittarius lies between Libra and Capricorn and so must be part of the order: west (Libra); south-west (Scorpio); south-south-west (Sagittarius) and south (Capricorn).

<sup>384</sup> Allen (1963), p. 225.

<sup>385</sup> Acts 28:11 reads: "And after three months we departed in a ship of Alexandria, which had wintered in the isle, whose sign was Castor and Pollux."

<sup>386</sup> Allen (1963), p. 225.

serviceable to the tossed bark."<sup>387</sup> [The word *ratis* means "a bark, boat or vessel."<sup>388</sup>.]

The Homeric *Hymn to Castor and Pollux* reads, in part:

Ye wild-eyed muses! sing the Twins of Jove,  
 .....  
 .....mild Pollux, void of blame,  
 And steed subduing Castor, heirs of fame.  
 These are the Powers who earth-born mortals save  
 And ships, whose flight is swift along the wave.  
 When wintry tempests o'er the savage sea  
 Are raging, and the sailors tremblingly  
 Call on the Twins of Jove with prayer and vow,  
 Gathered in fear upon the lofty prow,  
 .....  
 (Shelley, *Hymns of Homer: To Castor and Pollux*, ll. 1-11).

Chaucer, being a Christian, is likely to have been acquainted with the depiction of the Twins as Adam and Eve walking in the garden, and in the *Shipman's Tale* it is in a garden that the merchant's wife meets and, in the opinion of John McGalliard, initiates the seduction of the monk Daun John,<sup>389</sup> who is holidaying at her and her merchant-husband's home. Unlike Eve, however, she does not offer the monk an apple but hints of sexual favours in return for his lending her one hundred franks. In fact it is not a loan, because she has already complained to the monk that her husband is not only sexually inadequate but also miserly with money. She implicitly holds no expectation of being able to return the hundred franks to the monk and so what is ostensibly a loan - "Lene me this somme, or elles moot I deye./Daun John, I seye, lene

<sup>387</sup> Ovid, *The Fasti*, Book V, ed. and trans. Henry T. Riley, *The Fasti, Tristia, Pontic Epistles*, (London: H. G. Bone, 1851), p. 208.

<sup>388</sup> Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary* (first edn., 1879; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), p. 1528.

<sup>389</sup> John McGalliard, "Characterization in Chaucer's *Shipman's Tale*," *Philological Quarterly*, 54 (1975), pp. 1-18.

me thise hundred frankes" (*ShipT.* ll. 186-187) - is in fact a barter, a commercial transaction and offer of prostitution. That becomes evident immediately:

Pardee, I wol nat faille yow my thanks,  
If that yow list to doon that I yow praye.  
For at a certeyn day I wol yow paye,  
And doon to yow what plesance and service  
That I may doon, right as yow list devise  
(*ShipT.* ll. 188-192).

Acts of barter are of the nature of Geminian exchange. Sex has become currency, a mercurial word deriving from the Latin '*currere*' - to run. The monk, who happens to be on her wavelength, signals his understanding by both verbal and physical tokens of recognition: he tells her that he feels such pity for her plight that when her husband has gone to Flanders he, the monk, will relieve her of her problem: and he will bring her a hundred franks. "And with that word he caughte hire by the flankes,/And hire embraceth harde, and kiste hire ofte" (*ShipT.* ll. 202-203). Here is possibly another parallel linking the *Shipman's* with the *Merchant's Tale*: lines 1823 and 1948 of the *Merchant's* reading respectively: "He lulleth hire; he kisseth hire ful ofte;" and "He taketh hire, and kisseth hire ful ofte," though whether Chaucer intends us to find a resemblance between May and the merchant's nameless wife or one between Januarius and the monk, is difficult to determine. Probably the former, as both women have many personality traits in common: they are opportunistic, flirtatious and duplicitous; and the merchant's wife is as alert as was May in displaying the quick-witted Geminian ability to provide a ready answer when challenged by her husband, as we shall see later in the *Shipman's Tale*.

The monk and the merchant's wife separate while she calls on her husband to come and eat with them. He is in his counting house 'doing his books', as today's

vernacular has it. John Ganim makes the point that Chaucer's lifetime saw the introduction and development of double-entry bookkeeping, the impact of which, he suggests, was "no less radical than the impact of computer technology on modern commercial transactions."<sup>390</sup> He believes that this system of account-keeping "must have struck the technologically aware but in many ways traditional poet as a profound symptom of a disturbing modernity, as well as a useful and sophisticated tool."<sup>391</sup> Double-entry bookkeeping would certainly be appropriate for a Geminian tale. Ganim sees even the outline of the plot of the *Shipman's Tale* resembling a system of accounts. Of course, if the merchant is using double-entry bookkeeping, then Chaucer is again playing with a pun, very subtly, as he did with the Geminian *Reeve's Tale*. The double entry of the merchant's bookkeeping exercise would anticipate his wife's experience of double entry, by the monk and by her husband, respectively.

Women born when the sun is moving through Gemini, Sagittarius, Capricorn and Pisces, which are known as dual signs of the zodiac,<sup>392</sup> are said to have two lovers because the sun in their horoscope represents males in their lives (though it may represent their sons just as easily as their fathers and husbands). Chaucer is consistent in using this symbolism: in the *Reeve's Tale* (Gemini), the Miller's wife had both a student and her husband; in the *Merchant's Tale* (Sagittarius), May had Januarius and Damian; in the *Man of Law's Tale* (Capricorn), Custance had the Sultan and then Alla; in the *Franklyn's Tale* (Pisces), Dorigen had Arveragus and said she was prepared to have the other man who loved her, Aurelius; and here in the *Shipman's Tale* the wife

---

<sup>390</sup> Ganim (1996), p. 295.

<sup>391</sup> Ganim (1996), p. 295.

<sup>392</sup> Manilius (1953), Bk. II, p. 71.



has both her husband and the monk. It might be argued that in a tale assigned to Taurus, which is not a double sign of the zodiac, namely the *Miller's Tale*, Alison had both her husband and Nicholas and that in a tale assigned to Leo, the Wife of Bath had five husbands. However, Alison of the *Miller's Tale* has three potential lovers including Absolon, and Alison the Wife of Bath's five husbands also exceed two. The point about dual signs of the zodiac is that they mean precisely that: duos. In the *Knight's Tale*, assigned to Aries, not a dual sign, but where Emily most certainly has two *suitors*, Arcite and Palamon, the salient point is that only *one* of them *can* be her lover, which is the crux of the *Tale*. There are no other *Tales* in which lovers play a part, so Chaucer maintains precisely the symbolism of dual signs. The alignment of the 'duos' with the dual zodiacal signs and with only those signs points not only to the likelihood of Chaucer's having the astrological schema in mind when writing the *Tales* but is quite strong evidence, I suggest, in support of the ordering of their sequence as proposed in this thesis and which supports therefore, with just one exception, the *Man of Law's Tale*, that order in the *Ellesmere* manuscript.

One might suspect, not without foundation I think, that Chaucer's punning would actually have begun somehow with the title of the *Tale*. The reader might recall that in the earlier Gemini-assigned *Tale*, the *Reeve's*, the word 'reeve' was found to have derived from the Anglo-Saxon verb '*reven*', meaning 'to rip off' - a term one might consider with regard to Inland Revenue departments. If, as shown, Chaucer punned with the first Geminian type *Tale*, then he most assuredly would do so with the second. As we have seen above, the word '*ratis*' means 'ship'. It is certainly possible that Chaucer would have seen that the word most closely resembling '*ratis*' is '*ratio*',

one meaning of which is "a reckoning, account, computation",<sup>393</sup> and another is "A business matter, transaction, business; also, a matter, affair."<sup>394</sup> We might note too, that *ratis* can mean also 'a float'<sup>395</sup> and that the merchant in the *Shipman's Tale* receives a 'float' in the form of shields to ensure that he doesn't suffer loss in his financial transaction due to international currency exchange rates (no pun intended), and is thus able to keep his household financially afloat by profiting from them. Perhaps the most delightful possibility, one possibly considered by Chaucer, lies in the fact that Gemini is the sign associated with neighbours (those with whom one has fleeting and transient contact), and with words (identifiers, denotations) themselves. And the words *rationarium*, meaning a book of accounts<sup>396</sup>, and *ratis* are, literally, neighbours in a Latin dictionary. It is unlikely, of course, that really comprehensive Latin dictionaries existed in Chaucer's time, partly due to the shortage of paper and the rather fatiguing process involved in compiling them, of trying to ascertain what words meant without dictionaries to which to refer! But Chaucer certainly learnt Latin, and anyone who learns a foreign language is almost sure to keep a 'vocab.' notebook or its medieval equivalent; perhaps a 'crib'. Anyway, translating the classical works would undoubtedly have required Chaucer to have learned the Latin for 'ship' and that for 'account', 'business' or 'affair'. If he were to have made such a vocabulary list, then those two Latin words would have been next to each other, but furthermore, there are two other words that are also neighbours in such a Latin list, namely '*maritatus*',

---

<sup>393</sup> Lewis and Short (1987), p. 1526.

<sup>394</sup> Lewis and Short (1987), p. 1525.

<sup>395</sup> Lewis and Short (1987), p. 1527.

<sup>396</sup> Lewis and Short (1987), p. 1527.

which belongs to '*marito*', meaning "to wed, marry, give in marriage to a man",<sup>397</sup> associated with which is the passive '*maritari*', "to be coupled, i.e. to have a mate;" and the word '*maritimus*', meaning "of or belonging to the sea",<sup>398</sup> used as such as in "*homines maritimi*, seamen, mariners." What could be more appropriate and delightfully whimsical than *two sets* of neighbour-words comprising the major subjects in a Gemini-assigned story? This is of course, to a considerable extent speculative, but if it occurred to this writer, then it is surely much more likely that it would strike Chaucer's poetic fancy; for words were his vocation and he was by no means averse to playing with them.

Punning in the *Shipman's Tale* might be seen to occur again with the monk's approach to the merchant as "cosyn" ("And for as muchel as this goode man,/And eek this monk of which that I bigan,/Were bothe two yborn in o village,/The monk hym claymeth as for cosynage" (*ShipT.* ll. 33-36)), though the pun does not become evident until later, when by a devious trick the monk ensures that the merchant is a victim of cozenage. However, although the pun may become apparent to us, it might not have been one intended by Chaucer; for the word 'cosynage' did not, as far as is known, have its meaning of cheating and trickery or deceptive practice, in the English language of Chaucer's time.<sup>399</sup> There is a possibility however (see previous footnote), that such

---

<sup>397</sup> Lewis and Short (1987), p. 1114.

<sup>398</sup> Lewis and Short (1987), p. 1114.

<sup>399</sup> The *OED* says that the earliest trace of the word 'cozen' appears to be in the derivative 'cousoner' in Awdelay's *Fraternitie of Vacaboundes*, 1561. It also says that the word has generally been associated with 'cousin' and compared with Fr. 'cousiner', explained by Cotgrave, 1611, as 'to clayme kindred for advantage, or particular ends; as he, who to save charges in travelling, goes from

was implied in the French language around the 14th century. The cozenage occurs when the merchant goes on his journey to Bruges. The monk has asked the merchant to lend him one hundred franks, the identical sum the merchant's wife asked the monk to give to her. During the merchant's absence the monk visits the wife, gives her the hundred franks borrowed from her husband, and she

acorded with daun John  
That for thise hundred franks he sholde al nyght  
Have hire in his armes bolt upright;  
And this acord parfourned was indede.  
In myrthe al nyght a bisy lyf they lede  
Til it was day, that daun John wente his way,  
And bad the maynee "Farewel, have good day!"  
(*ShipT.* ll. 314-320).

Punning continues when the wife finds herself in a predicament in which she invites her husband to "score" her defaults of debt-repayment upon her "taille" - a pun on tally. The word "score" is derived from Old Norse and equivalent to the Old English verb "scieran" meaning "to cut". The wife thus invites her husband to expunge the debt by cutting the tally of payments upon her "taille" - and thus he becomes a tally-clerk, "scoring" on his wife's body, which becomes a writing-pad upon which he leaves his mark with his own pen, possibly a fractional pun.

David Abraham says that critical opinion "generally has been against admitting to Chaucer more than a few actual puns in the whole body of his work."<sup>400</sup> But he

---

house to house, as cosin to the owner of everie one"; by Littré as 'faire le parasite sous prétexte de cousinage'. From this it is not far, comments the *OED*, to a transitive sense 'to cheat, beguile, under pretext of cousinship'.

<sup>400</sup> David H. Abraham, "Cosyn and Cosynage: Pun and Structure in the *Shipman's Tale*," *The Chaucer Review*, 11 (1976-7), pp. 319-327 (p. 319).

goes on to say that "the puns here are so central to the development of the tale that they determine the structure of the tale in their own structural pattern of multiple, distinct, and ironically reversed meanings."<sup>401</sup> Seen in that light, the evident emphasis on puns in both the *Reeve's* and the *Shipman's* tales strongly suggests that the 'coincidence' of Gemini in the zodiacal sequence being the sign aligned with both those *Tales* is a meaningful one that lends support to this thesis.

Of what relevance then to the *Shipman's Tale* are the remaining signs of the mutable cross? In the Middle Ages merchants were generally signified by Gemini, because of the rulership of Mercury. In this *Tale*, however, it is likely that Chaucer is suggesting that the merchant's wife is Geminian. I suggest this because she behaves like a merchant: she strikes a commercial bargain in an opportunistic fashion. She is flirtatious and duplicitous; she is also the parental figure or disciplinarian of the little maid (Virgo): "A mayde child cam in hire compaignye,/Which as hir list she may governe and gye" (*ShipT.* ll. 95-96), and thus the wife holds a tenth-house relationship to the child, implying the wife's being of the sign Gemini, which holds a tenth-house relationship to Virgo. The tenth house of all horoscopes refers to those in superior status to oneself. When Virgo rises, Gemini is at the tenth house and so, irrespective of where the signs might lie in any specific horoscope, they always maintain their 'fixed' distance apart and their zodiacal order, and so Gemini is always in a tenth-house relationship to Virgo. Turning that around then, because a little maid is symbolised by Virgo, it follows that the one in charge of her, her guardian or superior, being represented by the sign that holds a tenth-house relationship to her, must be symbolized by Gemini. Further, the wife is described as being as "jolif as a pye"

---

<sup>401</sup> Abraham (1976-7), p. 326.

(*ShipT.* l. 209) and magpies are known for their Geminian habit of acquiring bangles and baubles or whatever sparkles and catches their eye; and she is very quick to seize the main chance.

The merchant, being her husband, is thereby representative of the opposite sign, Sagittarius. He is certainly not, despite his wife's accusation, miserly with money or hospitality: "This noble marchaunt heeld a worthy hous,/For which he hadde alday so greet repair/For his largesse, ..."(*ShipT.* ll. 20-22); and in response to the monk's request for a loan he says, "My gold is youre, whan that it yow leste,/And nat oonly my gold, but my chaffare./Take what yow list; God shilde that ye spare" (*ShipT.* ll. 284-286). Sagittarius' principle is that of projection, dissemination, out-reach; it is expansive, hasty and impetuous, being of the fire element. Impulsive generosity, rather than parsimony, is typical of Sagittarius. Furthermore, he engages in another activity with which Sagittarius is associated, namely long distance travel, and commercially he deals also in 'futures' trading. If he is in fact representative of Sagittarius, and his wife of Gemini, then Chaucer is repeating the relationship of Sagittarian Januarius and Geminian May, of the *Merchant's Tale*. The Merchant is in fact compared with Januarius of the *Merchant's Tale* by more direct implication: both men are described as wise (*Merchant's Tale* l. 1266; *Shipman's Tale* l. 2), though both turn out to be foolish or at least naive, in that they allow themselves to be cuckolded. (It is generally held by popular astrology that opposing signs such as Gemini and Sagittarius are ill-matched, and that signs 'trine' to each other are more likely to be compatible.)

However, Manilius, referring to Gemini writes,

And when the Centaur sets the Twins arise.  
Yet though in Site oppos'd these rowl above,  
Yet joyn'd by Nature or by Sex they love:  
Thus Males to Males strict Leagues of Friendship bind,

And Female Signs to their own Sex are kind.<sup>402</sup>

The monk is Piscean, being thought to have been a cellarer.<sup>403</sup> Pisces was associated with grapes and wine, as well as with the labourers in the vineyards; opposite to Virgo, associated with the wheatsheaf and bread: hence the bread and wine, Virgo-Pisces opposition. Furthermore, the monk invites secret confession from the Merchant's wife (*ShipT.* ll. 129-130) as well as betraying both the relationship with the merchant and in the end with the wife; for he leaves her to cope with the consequences of his explanation to the Merchant that he has repaid the Merchant's loan by giving the hundred franks to his wife (*ShipT.* ll. 356-359).

Virgo is introduced almost incidentally and without apparent consequence, in the form of the aforementioned little maid who accompanies the wife when she is first encountered in the *Tale* (*ShipT.* l. 95) strolling in the garden. However, it is likely that the Virgoan element is once again of more relevance to the matter of the characters' intentions.

Earlier in this thesis, at the *Friar's Tale*, it was shown how Virgo related to the matter of the intention of acts, including speech acts. This matter is brought to clear focus again in the *Shipman's Tale*. Another Sagittarian component would seem to be the matter of time and timing. The symbolism of Sagittarius, the arrow vector (♐), represents the arrow of time,<sup>404</sup> particularly its apparent movement forward towards a

---

<sup>402</sup> Manilius (1953), Book II, stanza 25, p. 71.

<sup>403</sup> Benson (1987), p. 204, footnote 65.

<sup>404</sup> This is a different quality of time from that represented by Saturn, that being the sense of duration, the awareness of age and ageing, of history and the past.

goal or destination; and it is also symbolic of geographical territorial extension, that is, the territory covered by the arrow in its flight. Lawrence notes the swift movement of the *Tale*, which "consists largely of dialogue"<sup>405</sup> - also an obviously Geminian activity. Just as the principle of Virgo is expressed through the intention underlying an action, and lies in binary opposition to Pisces, whose principle is expressed through vows, oaths and declarations of commitment, loans, obligations, bonds and the like, so likewise the Geminian process of commercial exchange exists in binary opposition to the passage and pressure of time and that of geographical context; for the profitability of the Merchant's deal is dependent upon the value of the franks at any particular location.

So, just as oaths, swearing fealties and commitments (Pisces) have to take into account (i.e. consider) and accommodate the intentions (Virgo) of those subordinating themselves to the force of sanctity of a vow (Pisces), so those engaging in commercial exchanges and financial transactions in particular (Gemini) are aware of having to take into account and accommodate the continuing passage and relentless pressure of time (Sagittarius) as well as the signifiers of time and place (Sagittarius) that give legitimacy to the deals. Intentions (Virgo) are supposedly 'framed' within the transcendent understanding of the nature of a vow (Pisces), informed by generally shared significations (Sagittarius) that are signed by the participants (Gemini). As for commitment, the most serious vows and obligations implied in this *Tale* are, of course, those undertaken in the Merchant's and his wife's marriage ceremony.

In the *Shipman's Tale* all of those specific components mentioned above break down. As George Keiser puts it: "For them [the characters in the *Tale*] oaths, bonds,

---

<sup>405</sup> William W. Lawrence, "Chaucer's *Shipman's Tale*," *Speculum*, 33 (1958), pp. 56-57.



pledges, and promises are to be taken seriously only when these involve an exchange of money or goods. Nowhere else in Chaucer's writings do we find characters so caught up in buying and selling, so preoccupied with "rekenynges" and "taillynge," and so confined by time and the limitations it imposes. Repeatedly, the tale makes clear that time constantly presses them as they go about making and meeting obligations that are always business-like in nature and hoping as a result to increase their sensual gratifications."<sup>406</sup> And John Hermann comments with similar implications: "The free play of signifiers is privileged in the *Shipman's Tale*, rather than the monogamy of signifier/signified linked in a stable bond. This promiscuity of the sign is associated with the desire for money, which brings about a sundering of signification in its religious and political dimensions."<sup>407</sup> Hermann perceives the characters undoing what he calls "the myth of unity implicit in the traditional symbolism of marriage, until sexuality finally becomes a sign of money - the sign, that is, of yet another sign."<sup>408</sup> The characters appear to have very little recognition of, or concern for, the underlying significance of what they say and do. In his preoccupation with time and space, the Merchant is oblivious of those spiritual matters that transcend both time and space, the eternal verities as they are called. Judgments and decisions are made very much according to expediency, and whenever any of the characters refers to God or any matter of religious significance, such allusions tend to be accompanied by irreverent

---

<sup>406</sup> George R. Keiser, "Language and Meaning in Chaucer's *Shipman's Tale*," *The Chaucer Review*, 12 (Winter, 1978), p. 148.

<sup>407</sup> John P. Hermann, "Dismemberment, Dissemination, Discourse: Sign and Symbol in the *Shipman's Tale*," *The Chaucer Review*, 19 (1985), pp. 302-337 (p. 314).

<sup>408</sup> Hermann (1985), p. 314.

activity and a forgetfulness of the spiritual implications inherent in their observances, the characters appearing to be afflicted by a kind of spiritual blindness. An example of this is the priest's and wife's attitude to commitment. Hermann writes: "The circulation of vows in the tale is ... homologus [sic] to the circulation of money among the characters. Just as money is a sign which serves as an exchangeable equivalent for some quantity of goods, both conventionally as well as in terms of the actual gold value of shield or frank, vows are signs of a commitment to live according to the terms of an agreement. Such performatives have an exchange value in terms of the rules governing their use."<sup>409</sup>

My suggestions about the astrological sign characteristics can be supported by reference to a modern astrological text with regard to the kinds of generalisations astrologers regard as being typical of Gemini, Sagittarius and Pisces. Because the symbolism of sun, moon and planets has not changed down through the centuries, that of the zodiacal signs is likely to be as repetitive and static even if the astronomical positions of the signs have changed due to precession. Therefore a modern perception, though written in contemporary psychological terminology, is as relevant to astrological and literary typologies of characters in the 14th-century *Tales* as it is to any modern author's depiction of them.

A prominent astrologian (a theorist about astrological principles, as distinct from an astrologer, who puts such theories into practice) in the United States, Marc Edmund Jones, writes this of the wife's likely sign, Gemini: "The Gemini individual - in the case where this sign is rising or contains the sun, moon or an unusual concentration of planets - is the personal epitome of the air and common [mutable] characteristics...

---

<sup>409</sup> Hermann (1985), p. 321.

He sets the pace for business in general, and in the most conventional dress is the merchant or trader, the executive or promoter. He insists upon knowing everyone by name, and upon having their telephone numbers. He is inclined to be casual, however, and to see no more in an acquaintance than what he can call to life within himself, or for himself, through the given relationship."<sup>410</sup> And Dr. Karen Hamaker-Zondag, a modern Dutch astrologer, writes of this sign: "The inconstancy observed here, in emotions, ideas and occupations, is a reaction to the Taurus phase."<sup>411</sup> This is apparent in the wife's claim: "In al the reawme of France is ther no wyf/That lasse lust hath to that sory pley./ For I may synge 'allas and weylawey/That I was born,' but to no wight," quod she,/ "Dar I nat telle how that it stant with me"(ShipT. ll. 116-120). But a little later she pours out her heart to the monk, addressing him as "My deere love," and complaining

O my daun John,  
Ful lief were me this conseil for to hyde,  
But out it moot; I may namoore abyde.  
Myn housbonde is to me the worste man  
That evere was sith that the world bigan.  
But sith I am a wyf, it sit nat me  
To tellen no wight of oure privetee,  
Neither abedde ne in noon oother place;  
God shilde I sholde it tellen, for his grace!  
A wyf ne shal nat seyn of hir housbonde  
But al honour, as I kan understonde;  
Save unto yow thus muche I tellen shal:  
As helpe me God, he is noght worth at al  
In no degree the value of a flye.  
But yet me greveth moost his nygardye  
(ShipT. ll. 158-172).

---

<sup>410</sup> Jones (1969), p. 178.

<sup>411</sup> Karen Hamaker-Zondag, *Astro-Psychology: Astrological Symbolism and the Human Psyche: The traditional wisdom of astrology examined in the light of Jungian Psychology*, (Wellingborough: Aquarian Press, 1980), p. 93.

Hamaker-Zondag continues: "The tendency to be impersonal makes someone of this type step light-heartedly over things of value to which the Bull with all his jealousy and possessiveness would hold tight...So much attention is paid to the outside world and so much interest is bestowed upon it that the inner world is left in a state of considerable passivity - values are sought in the immediate environment."<sup>412</sup>

Displaying the skittishness of a new-born lamb, the Merchant's wife has told the monk that if he lends her the one hundred franks she will give to him whatever he wants as payment and that should she fail to repay him according to his wishes then may God punish her severely (*ShipT.* ll. 190-194). She then flits away "as jolif as a pye" (*ShipT.* l. 209), and turns her attention to the cooks and their preparation for a meal for the men. She is oblivious, it would seem, of the irony of calling down God's punishment upon her own head should she fail to engage in the adultery that she has implied in her offer to the monk. Expediency reigns, and the priest presents the environmental opportunity offering itself as the means of resolving her immediate problem. Within a few days after indulging the monk's desires, however, she tells her husband that she defies "the false monk, daun John" (*ShipT.* l. 402), excusing herself from having spent on a dress the one hundred franks given to her by the monk, intended for her husband, claiming that she believed "That he hadde yeve it me bycause of yow/To doon therwith myn honour and my prow" (*ShipT.* ll. 407-408), that is to say, in repayment for the Merchant's hospitality, and spent upon clothing in order to maintain her attractive appearance for her husband's sake.

---

<sup>412</sup> Hamaker-Zondag (1980), p. 93.

Of the merchant's sign, Jones writes: "Sagittarius shows the basic identity of self in its utter obliviousness to the abstract rights of anything other than itself, but in its most direct acceptance of all human expression in real equality. Here is where the native grasps his opportunities for relationships which will amplify and reproduce the traits and potentialities of particular significance in his own economy."<sup>413</sup> And, "The Sagittarius individual - in the case where this sign is rising or contains the sun, moon or an unusual concentration of planets - is the personal epitome of the fire and common [mutable] characteristics...He is affability personified, possessing an exceptional ease in social contact and a fine sense of sportsmanship or superficial fair play."<sup>414</sup> One recalls the Merchant's reply to daun John's request for gold: "Paye it agayn whan it lith in youre ese;/After my myght ful fayn wolde I yow plese" (*ShipT.* ll. 291-292). Jones continues: "However, he has no sustained or deeper interest in the people with whom he deals, but reacts to them as fellow-participants in the various situations in which he is active...i.e. convenient contributors to common effort in a manifestation of life and its functions."<sup>415</sup> Before the Merchant leaves his counting house, he tells his wife that they must keep up appearances, create the impression of being wealthy to assist them in the success of his business:

We may wel make chiere and good visage,  
And dryve forth the world as it may be,  
And kepen oure estaat in pryvetee,  
Til we be deed, or elles that we pleye  
A pilgrymage, or goon out of the weye.  
And therfore have I greet necessitee  
Upon this queynte world t'avyse me,  
For everemoore we moote stonde in drede

---

<sup>413</sup> Jones (1969), p. 162.

<sup>414</sup> Jones (1969), p. 163.

<sup>415</sup> Jones (1969), p. 163.

Of hap and fortune in oure chapmanhede  
(*ShipT.* ll. 230-238).

He beseeches her "As be to every wight buxom and meke,/And for to kepe oure good be curious,/And honestly governe wel oure hous./Thou hast ynought, in every maner wise,/That to a thrifty houshold may suffise./Thee lakketh noon array ne no vitaille;/Of silver in thy purs shaltow nat faille" (*ShipT.* ll. 242-248). Then, having returned home, he tells his wife that he must be away again to Paris, "To borwe of certeine freendes that he hadde/A certeyn frankes; and somme with him he ladde" (*ShipT.* ll. 333-334).

Jones's description continues: "He is perhaps the easiest of all the types with whom to have casual touch, but most disappointing to those more interested in enduring ties. He simply dismisses the existence of anyone who will not cooperate in the special manifestations of his own identity... but in consequence harbors no ill-will and is in no wise revengeful. When others are cooperative his manner is smooth, friendly and even affectionate, and he can be the most completely at ease or naturally and directly human of all twelve types, and so often the most popular.... at his worst he is unmoral rather than degenerate. His sense of obligation simply does not go beyond his own convenience."<sup>416</sup> When the Merchant discovers that his wife has not told him of the repayment of the loan, we are told that he is "a litel wrooth" (*ShipT.* l. 383) with his wife, but chides her gently, "I prey thee, wyf, ne do nammore so;/Telle me alwey, er that I fro thee go,/If any dettour hath in myn absence/Ypayed thee, lest thurgh thy necligence/I myghte hym axe a thing that he hath payed" (*ShipT.* ll. 395-399).

Following his wife's 'explanation' we are told that "This marchant saugh ther was no

---

<sup>416</sup> Jones (1969), p. 163.

remedie,/And for to chide it nere but folie,/Sith that the thyng may nat amended be”  
(*ShipT.* ll. 427-429). And he forgives her immediately.

Of the monk's sign Jones writes: “The Pisces individual - in the case where this sign is rising or contains the sun, moon or an unusual concentration of planets - is the personal epitome of the water and common [mutable] characteristics. The Pisces native is utterly sure of himself, ultimately, because of his great power of adjustment to others in superficial things, together with his ability to enter into the actual feeling of those about him.”<sup>417</sup> (Note that in the *Tale* the monk is quick to sense the wife's mood and needs, and he stares at her as though assimilating her feelings and attitude - see line 124: “This monk bigan upon this wyf to stare”.) Jones continues: “However, he has purposes of his own in any move he makes, and his very proprietary fondness for his fellows depends upon the degree they are willing to accept the general wholeness in which he has oriented his life...He is seldom interested in particular individuals, only in what they mean to him in the terms of a very practical cooperation, but he yet attempts to enfold everyone in his circle of special friends. When encountered in this extremely opportunistic expression of the wholeness in which he lives, he may seem selfish, but he will share everything he has with those who become part of his private universe. He is exceedingly responsive to suggestion, of revealing a complete acquiescence and non-resistance, but only in the consummation of something he has made real within himself through some process of his highly creative imagination.”<sup>418</sup>

I think that the striking appropriateness of these quotations from Jones would hardly be lost on Chaucer were he in a position to read them.

---

<sup>417</sup> Jones (1969), p. 170.

<sup>418</sup> Jones (1969), p. 170.

## The Prioress's Tale



Following the *Shipman's Tale*, a brief hiatus in the form of a short address by the Host to the Shipman and to the lady Prioress, contains the line: "Draweth no monkes moore unto youre in" (*ShipT.* l. 442) This advice "not to entertain monks in one's private house"<sup>419</sup> resembles the advice regarding *herbergage* given by the Cook's reference to Solomon's: "Ne bryng nat every man into thyn house" (*Cook's Prologue* l. 4331). The *Cooks' Prologue* intervenes between the Gemini-assigned *Reeve's Tale* and the *Cook's* Cancerean tale. The advice is therefore parallel to the 'murie wordes of the Hoost to the Shipman and the lady Prioress', which intervene between their respective Geminian and Cancer tales. The advice regarding *herbergage* following both the *Reeve's* and the *Shipman's* is further evidence supporting a double-round zodiacal scheme for the *Tales*.

Moving from the *Shipman's* to the *Prioress's Tale* is like leaving a busy brothel for the silent sanctuary of a nearby church. The Prioress's theme is martyrdom and it tells the story of a small boy, a Christian, who passes twice daily through a Jewish street on his way to school. As he walks along the street he sings an anthem to the Virgin Mary, an act that is viewed by the Jews as contrary to their law. The little boy is attacked, has his throat slit; he is flung into a sewer but he doesn't die. Instead, he continues to sing the sacred song. He is visited by the Virgin Mary who places a grain on his tongue, telling him that when it is his time to die the grain will be removed but

---

<sup>419</sup> Beverly Boyd (ed.), *The Prioress's Tale*, The Variorum Edition, Vol. II, Part 20 (Norman and London: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1987), p. 115.



she will not forsake him. The Jews responsible for the murder are caught and put to death. The local abbot and the boy's mother remove his body and it is raised to an altar, after which the abbot removes the grain, and the boy's soul ascends to heaven. Undoubtedly this is a tale intended to arouse pathos, and it is possibly no meaningless coincidence that Chaucer aligns it with Cancer, a water element sign of the zodiac. When one considers the other tales of pathos, namely the Clerk's tale of Griselda, aligned with Scorpio, and the Franklyn's tale of Dorigen, aligned with Pisces, one might be struck by the coincidence of each with a water element sign.<sup>420</sup> That comment imposes an obligation to demonstrate the association of the *Prioress's Tale* with the zodiacal sign Cancer, a task not so very difficult.

First, if it is associated with Cancer, then it falls in direct opposition to the *Man of Law's Tale* at Capricorn, a tale that tells of a Christian woman, Custance, who is made a martyr by the people of a nation representative of the anti-Christ. One of the principles of Cancer is that of 'mirroring', and a mirror 'reflects' that to which it is set in opposition. (If however, the Ellesmere order is correct, then both the *Man of Law's* and the *Prioress's Tale* are aligned with Cancer, to which I would have no objection, the second 'replicating' the first.)

Secondly, the *Tale* is the sixteenth in the *Canterbury Tales*' sequence, possibly significant because the number 16 was regarded as "a number of perfect measure and

---

<sup>420</sup> One might ask why it is that the *Man of Law's Tale* of Custance is assigned to the earth element sign Capricorn instead of to Cancer as it is in the *Ellesmere Manuscript* order. The point just made would certainly lend support to its placement there, and I would have no objection were it not necessary then to omit the *Cook's* altogether and accept a gap at Capricorn.

wholeness".<sup>421</sup> Further, the number 16 reduces to 7 (1+6), and the *Tale* is preceded by a *Prologue* of 5 verses comprising 7 lines each, the *Tale* itself comprising 29 7-line stanzas. The total of 34 stanzas altogether is also implicative of the sacred number 7 (3+4). Both the number 16 and the number 34 were associated with the planet Jupiter and its 'magic square';<sup>422</sup> and Jupiter was the planet medieval astrologers thought of as being 'exalted' in the zodiacal sign Cancer as well as being the symbol of religious faith. The magic square of Jupiter comprised 16 fields, the numerical lines of which total 34 when added horizontally or vertically or diagonally, as shown below.<sup>423</sup>

16	3	2	13
5	10	11	8
9	6	7	12
4	15	14	1

Thirdly, the number 7, according to the Pseudo-Hippocrates, was "the dispenser of life and is the source for all change, for the moon itself changes its phases every 7 days."<sup>424</sup> The moon is the 'ruler' of the sign Cancer. Schimmel says that "[g]iven the importance of the 7 in Christian tradition it is not surprising that the Catholic mass is arranged in its 7 parts according to old numerological principles", and that "[t]he 7 joys and 7 sorrows of Mary fit well into the heptadic rhythm. Thus one finds in Renaissance music a number of motets with 7 voices," she adds, "which are

---

<sup>421</sup> Schimmel (1993), p. 216.

<sup>422</sup> Schimmel (1993), pp. 30-31.

<sup>423</sup> Schimmel (1993), pp. 31-32.

<sup>424</sup> Schimmel (1993), p. 129.

usually devoted to the Virgin or else allude to the 7 gifts of the Holy Spirit."<sup>425</sup> The Prioress, self-named Madame Eglentyne, not only recites and alludes to various passages from the Canonical Office and Mass, but as Marie Padgett Hamilton notes, "The *Prioress' Tale* and *Prologue* taken together, either quote or refer to all the chief portions of the Mass for 28 December, Childermas or the Feast of the Holy Innocents."<sup>426</sup> The significance of that date will be explained later in this chapter.

The little boy in the *Tale* is 7 years old, an interesting age at which one makes the transition from a state of innocence or unknowing to one of reasoning and culpability. The 'litel clergeon' makes this transition in the *Tale*, when he decides that instead of merely repeating the words of the song he doesn't understand, he is going to learn them and their meaning before Christmas, thereby disobeying his teachers despite his acknowledgment that he is likely to be beaten for doing so. In breaking a school rule he incurs more than the penalty he envisages; for his ritualistic act infringes upon Jewish sensibilities, and for that act he is sacrificed.

As for the 5 stanzas preceding the *Tale* proper: "Five is the human soul. Just as mankind is comprised of both good and evil, so the five is the first number made up of even and odd." (The first number, the monad, is not regarded as odd, but as the source from which all numbers derive.) Thus wrote Schiller in his drama *Piccolomini*,

---

<sup>425</sup> Schimmel (1993), p. 135.

<sup>426</sup> Marie Padgett Hamilton, "Echoes of Childermas in the Tale of the Prioress," *Modern Language Review*, 34 (1939), pp. 1-8. Rpt. with revisions in Edward Wagenknecht, ed., *Chaucer: Modern Essays in Criticism* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1959), pp. 88-97, reference here to this version, cited in Sister Nicholas Maltman, O.P., "The Divine Granary, Or The End Of The Prioress's 'Greyn'," *The Chaucer Review*, 17 (1982-1983), pp. 163-170 (p. 163).

Professor Schimmel tells us.<sup>427</sup> The number 29 is possibly a hint that this *Tale*, like the *Canterbury Tales* themselves, is concerned in some way with St. Thomas Becket.

Fourthly, the sign Cancer is associated with mothers, no doubt because of its association with the breasts. With regard to Cancer, Chevalier and Gheerbrant write:

... this fourth sign may be identified with Jung's maternal archetype and all the qualities which this implies: the large enfolding, sheltering, preserving, nourishing, protecting and fostering of what is small. Principle of the generation and conservation of life which comprises everything from the womb to Mother Earth herself: the depths, the abyss, wells, caverns, caves, pouches, pots, shelters, houses, towns....<sup>428</sup>

and Boyd observes the emphasis throughout the *Prioress's Tale* on maternity.<sup>429</sup> The word 'mother' occurs fourteen times in the *Tale*, among which the Virgin Mary is referred to as Christ's mother no fewer than eleven times<sup>430</sup> in the twenty-nine stanzas of the tale proper. There is a strong evocation of pathos through the concentration on maternal suffering in the three stanzas between lines 586 and 606. And the song the child sings throughout the *Tale* is *O Alma redemptoris mater* (*PrT*. l. 641).

Fifthly, Chaucer signifies its association with Cancer in the first stanza of the *Prioress's Prologue* by using Cancerean referenda: "But by the mouth of children thy bountee/Parfourned is, for on the brest soukyng/Sometyme shewen they thyn

---

<sup>427</sup> Schimmel (1993), p. 105.

<sup>428</sup> Chevalier and Gheerbrant (1996), p. 150.

<sup>429</sup> Beverly Boyd (ed.), *The Prioress's Tale*, The Variorum Edition (Norman, Ok. and London: Oklahoma Univ. Press, 1987), Vol. 2, p. 122.

<sup>430</sup> The Virgin Mary is referred to as Christ's mother in lines 506, 510, 538, 550, 556, 597, 619, 654, 656, 678 and 690.

heriynge" (*PrT.* ll. 457-459). Babies and breasts are traditionally Cancerean, but furthermore, the Prioress redefines her own identity:

My konnyng is so wayk, O blisful Queene,  
 For to declare thy grete worthynesse  
 That I ne may the weighte nat susteene;  
 But as a child of twelf month oold, or lesse,  
 That kan unnethes any word expresse,  
 Right so far I, and therfore I yow preye,  
 Gydeth my song that I shal of yow seye  
 (*PrT.* ll. 481-487).

One's self-concept, private identity, how one sees oneself, are represented by Cancer, which symbolises the summation of all past experience in that it represents one's present location, 'where one is at, right now', one's place in the scheme of things, one's habitat or the ground of one's being, the platform on which one rests. Cancer being the sign of assimilation, it represents one's sense of 'likeness to' or awareness of kinship, semblance and resemblance. The Prioress compares herself with an infant and confesses, through the *topos* of inexpressibility, that she is like a baby "That kan unnethes any word expresse" (*PrT.* l. 485). Inexpressibility is symbolised clearly by the 'holding in' sign of Cancer, comprising two facing concave claws, the sign being renowned for its inclination to be 'self-contained'. The verbal signs of the *Prioress's Tale* have referentiality and significance for her in the context of her own moral battle and struggle with sin. She requests the Virgin Mary's guidance as she replicates herself through the little boy's singing his song, one whose words he does not understand but which he has learned by rote. As noted in earlier chapters, Cancer is the principle of replication; and by metonymical link, Cancer also represents learning by rote.

Sixthly, there is a well recognized anti-Semitic element throughout the *Tale*, one from which Chaucer distances himself clearly by twice using the phrase "quod she" (*PrT*. ll. 454, 581). Perhaps there is an implicit criticism in his distancing himself from her *Tale* by a means he displays in no other, but his inclusion of the *Tale* is possibly more a matter of maintaining consistency in his representation of the people of his time than the means of expressing personal beliefs about the Jews, to whom he is likely to express the same tolerance as he shows towards everyone else. The sign associated with the Jews is that of which the planet Saturn is ruler, namely Capricorn. Cancer, being the binary opposite, is thus the sign of anti-Semitism, as it is also of bias and prejudice, being the sign of 'unreason'.

Seventhly and finally, the *Tale* has a clear association with St. Nicholas, the patron saint of children and of the city of Lincoln, the Anglo-Saxon name of which was Nic(h)ole, a name still used in Chaucer's time. Sumner Ferris claims that the *Prioress's Tale* was a political poem written for a specific event and addressed to "men of dignitee" in Lincoln Minster on March 26, 1387,<sup>431</sup> the occasion of the visit of King Richard II and Queen Anne to the city. In support of that he refers to the opening lines, beginning "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...". These lines are part of a translation of Psalm 8, he says, but "whereas the Bible reads, "Ex ore infantium et lactentium" ("Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings"), Chaucer speaks of "men of dignitee," who are not mentioned in the psalm,

---

<sup>431</sup> Sumner Ferris, "Chaucer at Lincoln (1387): *The Prioress's Tale* as a Political Poem," *The Chaucer Review*, 15 (1980-81), pp. 295-321(p. 296).

before the “children,” who are.”<sup>432</sup> The whole *Tale*, he claims, could be recited in 15 minutes and would be suited to such an official occasion. He further argues that the *Tale* was the means of Richard II winning over John Buckingham, Bishop of Lincoln, albeit temporarily, against Thomas, Duke of Gloucester, one of Richard’s uncles, who had seized control of the government from the nineteen-year-old king in 1386.<sup>433</sup> Men of dignity are represented astrologically by the sign Capricorn, which is analogous to the upper meridian or midheaven. As I have written elsewhere, “When we look at the Zenith or the Midheaven of a horoscope and its astrological connotations of a parent, employer, the government, one’s ‘superiors’ or those in senior status to us, we are looking at our symbolic perception of social height. From the moment we are born we have to ‘look up’ to our parents, those in control of us; we learn or used to learn of ‘God on high’; we speak of ‘higher’ authority; we place our senior executives on the higher floors of buildings; we talk of having ‘higher’ social status.”<sup>434</sup> Ferris infers from the poem’s hagiographical components, namely the Blessed Virgin herself, St. Nicolas (l. 1704), St. John the Evangelist (l. 1772), and St. Hugh of Lincoln (l. 1874), and St. John the Baptist (who is referred to symbolically, as Ferris makes clearly evident),<sup>435</sup> the possibility of the *Tale* being related to Lincoln. It is the final stanza of the *Tale*, he claims, “that turns the possibility into a probability and urges the consideration of them all in a Lincoln context:”

---

<sup>432</sup> Ferris (1980-81), p. 295.

<sup>433</sup> Ferris (1980-81), p. 296.

<sup>434</sup> Garth Carpenter, “Horizontal/Vertical Metaphors and the Meaning of the Asc., MC and Zenith Axes,” *Réalta, The Journal of the Irish Astrological Association*, 2 (1995), pp. 35-41 (p. 39).

<sup>435</sup> Ferris (1980-81), pp. 298-299.

O yonge Hugh of Lyncoln, slayn also  
 With cursed Jews, as it is notable,  
 For it is but a litel while ago,  
 Preye eek for us, we synful folk unstable,  
 That, of his mercy, God so merciable  
 On us his grete mercy multiplie  
 For reverence of his mooder Marie

(*PrT.* ll. 684-690).

The story of the slaying of Hugh of Lincoln by the Jews is history in Chaucer's time, but so was Jewish occupation of any part of England, their expulsion having occurred in 1290. Here is, possibly, another reason for associating Cancer with the *Tale*; for it rests on a vague historical basis rather than on a sound, objectively determined one, and history is itself Cancerean, being a 'recording' and hence metaphorical preservation of past events. The relevance of Hugh, who in Chaucer's time was not a national martyr but a local one, is therefore to the city of Lincoln, but it prefigures the martyrdom of the 'litel clergeon' of the *Prioress's Tale*, which itself is reminiscent of the crucifixion of Christ. John Archer points out that the premise of anti-Judaism "is stated quite succinctly by Boethius in a work entitled *De Fide Catholica*: 'Et quia sanam doctrinam Iudaeorum populus non ferebat, eum inlata manu crucis supplicio peremerunt.'<sup>436</sup> ('And because the people of the Jews would not bear sound doctrine they laid hands upon Him [Christ] and slew Him and crucified Him.')."<sup>437</sup> The litel clergeon's death, which is the murder of an innocent child, is both an act of imitating the death of Christ and reminiscent of the Massacre of the

<sup>436</sup> *The Theological Tractates*, trans. H. F. Stewart and E. K. Rand (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard Univ. Press, 1918), pp. 66-67.

<sup>437</sup> John Archer, "The Structure of Anti-Semitism in the *Prioress's Tale*," *The Chaucer Review*, 19 (1984-1985), pp. 46-54 (pp. 46-47).



Innocents. It is therefore a means by which Chaucer is able to accommodate the birth of Christ - for the Innocents were slain by Herod in fear of Christ's mission in Judea - and Christ's death; for Christ died in turn for the human race. The accommodation of Christ's birth brings in the relevance of Cancer, which contains the stars known as The Crib or Manger and the Asses; and His death at Pontius Pilate's hand, while innocent, is death as a scapegoat, hence accommodated by Capricorn. The crucifixion itself, being represented by cardinal signs of the zodiac, is a reflection of the conflict between the Old Law and the New Dispensation, and Chaucer contains this within the narrative of the *Tale* through the irony of the Prioress's advocacy of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, at that time and even today a popular misunderstanding of Jewish law, when Christ's new law was one of Christian forgiveness of sins.

The cardinal zodiacal signs Cancer and Capricorn are given a major emphasis by reference to various feast days through the year. John Buckingham was installed as Bishop of Lincoln on 25 June, 1363, when the sun was in the zodiacal sign Cancer in Chaucer's era, that date being the morrow of the Feast of St. John the Baptist. The Feast of Christmas, which had replaced the mythraic and pagan Feast of the Sol Invictus, celebrated on 25 December, the date by which the little boy intends learning the words of the hymn, is a date on which the sun is in Capricorn and in opposition to its position in Cancer on 25 June; and the *Tale* is also associated with the Feast of the Innocents, 28 December, whilst the sun is still in Capricorn. The Feast of Hugh of Lincoln is June 29, with the sun in Cancer; and the Feast of St. Thomas Becket is 29 December, with the sun again directly in opposition, in Capricorn. Thus the Cancer-Capricorn binary opposition is stressed and depicts the major tension posited in the

*Tale*, namely that between the Christian culture and the Jewish law, an opposition on which this chapter is to elaborate.

The Capricorn-Cancer opposition is analogous to the upper and lower meridians or midheavens of the horoscope, and represents symbolically the upright human frame of skeletal structure (Capricorn) and corpus (Cancer), respectively. It is also analogous to heaven and earth, and those signs were seen by the ancients to contain the entrance and exit respectively via which souls entered and departed from this planet. Connotations of 'up' (height) and 'down' (depth) are implicit too, in their southern and northern declinations, facts with which Chaucer was well acquainted. Edward Condren makes the interesting point that "from the Prioress's point of view downward movement calls for disapproval because it produces corporeal things. Food stains, excrement, perhaps blood too, are all associated with downward movement. Even the "litel scole of Cristen folk" is described as "Doun at the ferther ende" (*PrT*. ll. 495-496). Upward movement deserves praise because it produces incorporeal things like song and spirit. The direction of movement, as much as the locale, gives meaning to the *Tale*'s conclusion."<sup>438</sup> As I have written in the earlier-mentioned article, referring to the symbolism of the lower midheaven, analogous to Cancer: "When we look at the Nadir or lower Midheaven of a horoscope and its astrological connotations of a parent, home, base, our ancestry, our genealogical heritage, we are looking at our symbolic perception of social depth. From the moment we are born we are 'grounded' in some manner by our parents: they provide us with the 'ground' of our being, they provide the foundation on which our lives rest, and nurture or fail to nurture the

---

<sup>438</sup> Edward I. Condren, "The Prioress: A Legend of Spirit, A Life of Flesh," *The Chaucer Review*, 23 (1989), pp. 209-210.

'roots' we have established in our domestic and cultural territory. We are told to 'grow up,' which is possible only if we are 'down' to begin with. As children we become aware of the fact that we are looked down to by those taller than ourselves; that 'down' is in some way less desirable than 'up.' We knock people down; we 'fall down'; we feel 'down to it' or we are 'down and out' or run down. We may feel 'put down' or experience a 'downer' or feel ground down. Down has distinctly negative connotations."<sup>439</sup>

Maltman tells us that the significance of the 'greyn' placed on the child's tongue becomes evident only when the crucial link between the *Prioress's Tale* and the *Sarum Breviary* is examined. In the *Sarum Breviary* are found connections between the Feast of Holy Innocents and the *Tale* of the Prioress, as well as between the children of Bethlehem murdered by Herod and the little boy murdered by the Jews, as well as a link with the martyrdom of Thomas of Canterbury, which falls on December 29, the day following the Feast of the Innocents. She writes, "Because second vespers of Holy Innocents takes precedence over first vespers of Thomas, there is a second vespers of Holy Innocents, a commemoration of Thomas in the form of a procession to his altar. Sung during the procession was the following responsory and versicle:

R *Jacet granum oppressum palea, justus caesus  
pravorum franea, Caelum domo commutans lutea.*

V *Cadit custos vitis in vinea: dux in castris, cultor in  
area. Caelum.*

[*Brev. Sarum* 1.ccxlv]

[R The grain lies crushed from the chaff, the just man is  
felled by the sword of sinners, changing his house of clay  
for heaven.

V The keeper of the grapevine dies in the vineyard, the  
leader in the camp, the husbandman on the threshing  
floor.]"

---

<sup>439</sup> Carpenter (1995), p. 39

She continues: "When the procession reaches the altar of Thomas of Canterbury, the rubric directs that those in surplices standing around the altar may, if they wish, join in the singing of the prosa *Clangat pastor*. A further rubric directs that the choir respond at the end of each verse after the letter A is sounded. The response to this particular prosa is a line from the *Jacet granum* given above: *Caelum domo commutans lutea* [Changing his house of clay for heaven]."<sup>440</sup> What could be more apposite for the zodiacal sign Cancer than the house of clay as a reference to the human body; or more succinct expression of the departure of the soul from the body to heaven through the Cancer-Capricorn gates regarded as the street free and open at both ends?

When one examines the Feast Days of the Saints referred to in the *Tale* an intriguing pattern emerges. If the *Tale* was indeed written for the royal visit to Lincoln Minster on 26 March, 1387 (and Sumner Ferris makes a very convincing case that it was so), then bearing in mind that the sun entered Aries on 12 March that year, its position on the date of the royal visit was in the middle of Aries. The Feast of Hugh of Lincoln is on June 29, and in 1387 the sun entered Cancer on 14 June, with the result that on June 29 it had reached the middle of that sign. The Feast of Holy Innocents occurs on December 28, and in 1387 the sun entered Capricorn around sunset on 13 December. By December 28 it was in the middle of Capricorn and that year on 29 December also, the Feast of Thomas Becket, the sun was still moving through 15 degrees of Capricorn. Thus three cardinal signs are highlighted by axes linking the

---

<sup>440</sup> Maltman (1982-83), p. 164.

middle of Cancer with the middle of Capricorn; and a transverse axis beginning near the middle of Aries. So the transverse axis, if extended, would emerge in Libra.

Chaucer provides three points of the cardinal cross associated with the crucifixion. One must ask therefore, two questions: what is the significance of a three-armed cross? And what is there in the *Tale* that has a Libran reference? One answer to the first question is that a three-armed cross is known as the *Tau* cross and had astronomical significance for the Jews, a matter that will be explained very shortly. Another answer is that the three-armed cross is significant in alchemy. And the answer to the second question, concerning Libran significance, is the altar upon which the "litel clergeon" is raised at the end of the *Tale*. The constellation Libra was known in ancient times as the Altar<sup>441</sup>. But those times were long past, in astrology's origins. And that seems to me to be Chaucer's clue to his covert code. The saints whose Feast Days have been noted were Christian, their dates celebrated in the Christian church calendar. And they provide only 3 axes of the cardinal grand cross of the zodiac that symbolizes Christ's crucifixion. An inference one might draw from this is that Chaucer is alluding to a stage of history or a state of humankind before the crucifixion, one which, as we have seen, was lived under the Old Law.

If one consults the Jewish calendar for its feast days, one is struck immediately by the fact that it is an astronomically-based year that starts in August-September when the sun, in the Middle Ages, was in Libra. It is not the sun alone, however, which is the basis of the Jewish calendar, but the sun-moon relationship. The years are numbered according to the sun but the months according to the moon. Each new year begins with the month *Tishri*, which starts at the time of the New Moon in the period August-

---

<sup>441</sup> Allen (1963), p. 273.

September, and lasts for the 29.5 days (synodic lunar cycle) at the time of sun-moon conjunction, known to the Jews as *molad*. (The day is one of 24 hours of equal length and begins at sunset.) So *Tishri I* is *Rosh Ha-Shanah*, that is, New Year's Day. But it rarely starts with the *molad* because there are four obstacles or considerations, called *dehiyyot*, that may cause a postponement of the first day of the month. Each *dehiyyah* defers *Rosh Ha-Shanah* by a day, and combined *dehiyyot* may cause a postponement of 2 days. First *Tishri* never falls on a Sunday, Wednesday or Friday. In 1387 the *molad* occurred on 13 September, which was a Friday, causing a postponement of one day. So 1st *Tishri* or *Rosh Hashanah* fell on Saturday 14 September 1387 (Jewish Year 5148: Julian day number 2227916), that is, beginning, as is the custom for Jewish day-starts, on Friday at sundown and lasting through to sundown on the Saturday. By a stroke of irony that would doubtless have appealed to Chaucer, September 14 is, as Nicholas of Lynn's *Kalendarium* shows, the day of the exaltation of the holy cross: "*Exaltacio Sancte Crucis*."<sup>442</sup> Furthermore, in 1387, being 1st *Tishri*, it was the beginning of the ten days of penance, meditation on one's own and others' sins, leading up to the Day of Atonement, *Yom Kippur*, which in this case would have been on 23 September, beginning at sundown on 22nd and lasting through to sundown on the 23rd. And on that day, the sun was moving through 8 degrees of Libra. As by now the reader will be aware, Libra is the sign of the sun's fall. What could be more apposite than to have the cardinal cross of the crucifixion implied but not actually completed, remaining a Tau cross, by the sun's position on the Jewish Day of Atonement, when in 1387 that fell in 8 degrees of Libra, the seventh sign of the zodiac and that associated by Dante, for historical reasons, with the crucifixion and the 'fall'

---

<sup>442</sup> Nicholas of Lynn (1980), p. 112.

of the Son? Whether there is a further coincidence in that 8 is the number associated with Saturn, and that the *Monk's Tale* at Libra, which is concerned with the fall of the great, comprises stanzas of 8 lines each, is a matter for conjecture. How perspicacious of Chaucer to use the Jewish Calendar of Feast-days, knowing that the Jewish year is based on astronomical factors, giving a cosmic dimension to a *Tale* that begins with a metaphysical prologue!

There is an irony here that may or may not have been intended by Chaucer. Allen has it that Libra was unknown to the Jews and its place was indicated by their letter *Tau*.<sup>443</sup> If that was indeed the case, then the irony is that Christ was crucified not on the kind of cross one usually envisages, with the transverse lateral in the centre of the upright, but rather on the ancient *Tau* cross. The placement of the sun at 8 degrees of Libra doesn't extend the axis of the cross from 13 degrees of Aries, the position of the sun found earlier to have coincided with the Feast of John the Baptist. But that actually reinforces Chaucer's astronomical conception; for the Jewish Feast is a moveable one from year to year. So the cardinal grand cross of the crucifixion is balanced perfectly.

It doesn't end there. Earlier in this chapter, mention was made of the line from the *Jacet Granum: Caelum domo commutans lutea* [Changing his house of clay for heaven]. One may recall that the pilgrims are travelling along an ancient road from London to Canterbury. One of the roads along which pilgrims travelled was Watling Street, which ran from Chester through London, to Dover, to which Chaucer alludes in the *Hous of Fame*, when he refers to our galaxy:

‘Now,’ quod he thoo, ‘cast up thyn yē.  
Se yonder, loo, the Galaxie,

---

<sup>443</sup> Allen (1963), p. 273.

Which men clepeth the Milky Wey,  
 For hit ys whit, (and somme, parfey,  
 Kallen hyt Watlynge Strete)'  
 (HF. ll. 935-939).

Allen comments, "Whereever this idea of a road was held in early times it seems to have referred to the Milky Way as traveled by the departing souls of illustrious men, who, Manilius wrote, were "*loos'd from the ignoble Chain/Of Clay, and sent to their own Heaven again*", to those stars that were regarded not only as the homes of such, but often as the very souls themselves physically shining in the skies, as, metaphorically, they had upon the earth."<sup>444</sup> Are there not too many coincidences for the whole scheme to be anything less than a beautiful cosmic picture perfectly conceived and dramatised by Chaucer's poetic perception?

---

<sup>444</sup> Allen (1963), p. 480.



## The Tale of Sir Thopas

Ω

It is tempting to take an easy approach to this *Tale*, suggesting that because Leo's ruler is the sun and the sun is associated with the colour yellow, there is an obvious association between Chaucer's choice of name for the hero of his *Tale of Sir Thopas* and the zodiacal sign Leo. Topaz was once associated with the colour green as well as with yellow, but in view of the later reference to Thopas's berd being "lyk saffroun" (*Thop.* l. 730) it is likely that Chaucer intended us to infer that his knight is associated with the popular perception of the topaz as gold, and thereby with its Leo association. And Conley too, concludes "that Chaucer thought of the *topazius* as yellow - or golden - just as readers for generations have known all along." He adds that in heraldry, "the tincture gold was also called *topazius*."<sup>445</sup> Dolores Cullen suggests that the knight Thopas is so named because carrying a topaz was advised by the well-known medieval astrologer Michael Scot as a protective device against incurring adverse consequences of lechery.<sup>446</sup> But the text describes Sir Thopas as "chaast and no lechour,/And sweete as is the brembul flour/That bereth the rede hepe" (*Thop.* ll. 745-747). Whether or not Chaucer's listeners were supposed to draw the conclusion that Sir Thopas was pure and chaste because of his name, or to observe that, despite his name, his thoughts about the fairy queen are anything but pure, is a matter of individual supposition.

---

<sup>445</sup> Conley (1976), p. 49.

<sup>446</sup> Dolores L. Cullen, "Chaucer's *The Tale Of Sir Thopas*," *Explicator*, 32 (1974), art. 35.

There are spiritual connotations too, in the name Thopas and its association with the topaz. Several scholars have suggested that the main connotation of the topaz was that of chastity, but Conley finds the evidence supporting such an observation very weak.<sup>447</sup> He claims that the jewel's renown is reflected in its spiritual associations. Aside from its well-known inclusion among the precious stones in Aaron's breastplate,<sup>448</sup> it was also connected with the Apocalyptic foundation of the New Jerusalem.<sup>449</sup> His argument is that the "superlative reputation of the *topazius* with its various contexts - lapidarial, biblical, exegetical, heraldic and, above all, chivalric - was evidently primary."<sup>450</sup> Perhaps of no mean significance was John of Ruysbroek's reference to the risen Christ (the Sol Invictus), as "*praeclarissimus topazius noster*."<sup>451</sup> And Conley writes that "medieval scholars specify that the surprising brightness of the *topazius* is manifested in sunlight."<sup>452</sup> One might recall the association of Leo with kingship, and of course Christ was regarded as a king. The medieval Alexander Neckham wrote that the *topazius* "*fertur regius esse lapis*"<sup>453</sup> (is said to be the king's stone), and one of Chaucer's contemporaries, Honoré Bonet writes: "the most ancient

---

<sup>447</sup> Conley (1976), pp. 52-53.

<sup>448</sup> Exodus 28:17 and 39:10.

<sup>449</sup> Apocalypse 21:19-20.

<sup>450</sup> Conley (1976), p. 60.

<sup>451</sup> *In tabernaculum foederis commentarii*, c. xlii, p. 123.

<sup>452</sup> Conley (1976), p. 57.

<sup>453</sup> "*De laudibus divinae sapientiae*," in Neckam, Alexandri, *De naturis rerum*, ed. Thomas Wright (London: Rolls Series, 1863), VI, 1, p. 196.

laws ordered that no man but a prince should bear this colour," which is "the noblest in the world."<sup>454</sup>

Leo, the fifth sign, has evident connections with the aristocracy, with royalty and with political and social power. Craig Berry's description of Sir Thopas as "an upwardly mobile petty aristocrat who is hoping to become less petty" and who "most likely" serves as Chaucer's means of satirising "those who seek to climb the social ladder by marrying well"<sup>455</sup> is certainly consistent with the parody of the leonine nature of the hero of the *Tale*.

It is of some interest that the search for the power of authority is the theme in both the *Wife's Tale* and the *Tale of Sir Thopas*; for both are aligned with this fifth zodiacal sign. These are not the only parallels, of course. The *Wife of Bath's Tale* is concerned with a lecherous knight who encounters the fairy queen as he rides off in search of an answer to the riddle, an answer on which his life depends. Sir Thopas rejects human women as candidates for his wife - "For in this world no womman is/Worthy to be my make/ In towne" (*Thop.* ll. 791-793) - and, suffering from love-angst, aspires to make a match with a "queen of Fayerye", - an "elf-queene" - of whom he has dreamed (*Thop.* ll. 787-788).

The sign Leo has perhaps less immediately evident association with play, but play is the demonstration of superiority to whatever challenges one's competence, whether it emerges in the simple act of skipping rope without tripping, winning marbles, building facsimiles of vehicles with Lego blocks, or imitating adult roles

---

<sup>454</sup> Bonet, Honoré, *The Tree of Battles*, trans. G.W. Coopland (Liverpool, 1949), p. 209.

<sup>455</sup> Craig A. Berry, "Borrowed Armor/Free Grace: The Quest for Authority in *The Faerie Queene* 1 and Chaucer's *Tale of Sir Thopas*," *Studies in Philology*, 91 (1994), p. 157.

through the pretence of being in charge of imagined situations. Nearly all play is directed towards mastering a challenge of some kind, real or imagined, and is most evident in the behaviour of children, though power play is indulged in by adults too, in their business games. Children's play frequently parodies adult behaviour; and adults' power-plays are frequently developments of children's games.

The *Tale of Thopas* is one told by pilgrim Chaucer himself. And it is a bit of fun, a display on poet Chaucer's part, as he manipulates his pilgrim *doppelganger* in a performance over which he has complete control, irrespective of whether he is intending, as poet, to illustrate execrable poetry excellently, or simply to let Chaucer the pilgrim give a poor show. Chaucer is playing, and play can be the coordinated expression and display of personal power and creative art.

Ann Haskell has made a very good case for Sir Thopas being a puppet<sup>456</sup> and it is certainly obvious that Chaucer manipulates him like Punch in a Punch and Judy show, a quick, impromptu display of show-off behaviour, an exhibition of self-indulgence by Chaucer the pilgrim, displaying Chaucer the poet's awareness that Leo is the sign of pleasurable self-indulgence. It is introduced with the *Prologue* written, almost predictably, in rime royal, a style usually reserved for addressing the nobility; it is a minstrel-romance seen by some to parody an "old-fashioned genre".<sup>457</sup>

Those are commonplace observations. Personally, I suspect that Chaucer has hoodwinked many of us by the style of the *Tale*. We are misled, I think, by either its execrable form and language or by its inordinate excellence as an example of his

---

<sup>456</sup> Ann S. Haskell, "Sir Thopas: the Puppet's Puppet," *The Chaucer Review*, 9 (1974-75), pp. 253-261.

<sup>457</sup> Benson (1987), p.17.

contemporaries' bad writing in this genre. Alan Gaylord is not so seduced, however; he sees it as Chaucer illustrating the creative art of language to achieve specific effects,<sup>458</sup> and I shall return to that later. In the meantime, perhaps one should consider the *Tale* as a covert clue to something more profound than its surface appearance permits us to see, although what follows here is highly conjectural and in one sense, playful. It might perhaps be seen by the reader as an example of how not to approach Chaucer seriously. But at this stage in the *Tales*, Chaucer wanted us to laugh. Well, it seems that way, we might suppose.

Several factors appear to have escaped close analysis. The first of these is the invitation of Chaucer to his audience: "Listeth, lords, in good entent" (*Thop.* l. 1) - an invitation to pay very close attention to what he is about to relate - irreconcilable with the tone and quality of the *Tale* that follows, with its tail-rhymes and its approach to a modern limerick or burlesque. But such an invitation *is* consistent with the fact that Chaucer has carried over his rime royal from the *Prioress's Tale* with its aura of sanctity, and that unique means of linking two *Tales* hints at an underlying seriousness of purpose belied by the manner of expression. The invitation may therefore be to listen to that silent language of what is not voiced.

The second factor is Chaucer's avowed intent to "telle verrayment/Of myrthe and of solas." (*Thop.* ll. 2-3.) There is no problem with mirth, even if his audience finds the *Tale* to be straining for humour. In the Corpus Christi College (Oxford) manuscript (198) of *The Canterbury Tales*, however, the opening lines of the *Thopas* read:

---

<sup>458</sup> Alan T. Gaylord, "The Moment of Sir Thopas: Towards a New Look at Chaucer's Language,"

*The Chaucer Review*, 16 (1981-82), pp. 311-329.

"Listeth lordes in good entent./And I wol telle verrayment/Of miracle and solace."<sup>459</sup>

The word "miracle" may be more significant than appears likely, as I hope to show. As for 'solas': most scholars are aware that it means both providing comfort or solace, and also pleasure, entertainment and delight. Eugen Lerch traces the evolution of the Latin '*solacium*' into the "kernel" word '*solata*' of the western medieval tradition in *Cultura Neolatina*, the word having undergone a transformation or developmental progression from its early meaning of 'comfort' to one of 'joy'.<sup>460</sup> But there is a third meaning of the word which may seem irrelevant at first sight: it is the name of a substance used in the preparation of material by cloth-makers. It is, one infers, a kind of surface dressing. The apparent irrelevance of that particular meaning of '*solas*' may diminish somewhat when one finds the *Tale* to be divided into three 'fits' or portions, a 'fit' traditionally being a number of stanzas in a musical work. But another meaning of the word is the piece of thread used by tapestry-makers and cloth-makers to mark off one day's completed work. So there are two possible references to cloth-making. That doubtless recalls to mind the fact that the Wife of Bath was a cloth-maker, a worker in the woollen industry, another factor perhaps hinting at the alignment of the two *Tales*.

The third factor is Chaucer's locating the *Tale* in Flanders, more particularly in Poperyng, which the *Riverside* edition tells us is noted for its cloth (and its pears).<sup>461</sup> If, as the *Riverside* suggests, this place was selected "for its comic-sounding name and commonplace associations"<sup>462</sup> then cloth-making is emphasized yet again. Maybe this

---

<sup>459</sup> Alan T. Gaylord, "The "Miracle" of Sir Thopas," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 6 (1984), p. 81.

<sup>460</sup> Cited in Carolyn Chiappelli, "Chaucer's Use of Solas," *Comitatus*, II (1971), p. 91.

<sup>461</sup> Benson (1987), p. 213, note 720.

<sup>462</sup> Lawrence, *PMLA* 50:86, cited in Benson (1987), p. 918, note 720.

agglomeration of references to cloth-making is a suggestion to the reader to look very closely at the warp and the weft of the text, its fabrication.

The most evident fact about the 'fits' comprising the *Tale* is that there are three of them. If one alludes to the association of 'fit' with fabric-making, then the implication is that three days' work is taking place. The first 'fit' occurs after the *Prologue* and line 21 (711); the second 'fit' after line 142 (832), and the third 'fit' after line 200 (890). Considering that Chaucer places the *Tale of Sir Thopas* immediately following the *Prioress's Tale* and its concern with the crucifixion, added to which is the trailing link between the two by the continuation of the rime royal, it is possible that the three days subtly alluded to here are the three days Christ spent in the tomb before the ascension, a commonplace medieval typology. For the moment it is necessary to put this suggestion on the back burner and to look at another possible interpretation of the three 'fits'; but these two interpretations are not mutually exclusive, and they may in fact necessarily complement each other.

Examination of the 'fits' shows an interesting ratio. The first 'fit' consists of eighteen stanzas; the second 'fit' consists of nine stanzas, and the third 'fit' of four and a half. Each of the last two stanzas is half the length of the one preceding, so the last stanza is one quarter the length of the first. One might ask what there is that could be made of cloth, which is in three parts, which holds such proportions. And one of the answers is a doll, a miniature representation of a human being, with the legs eighteen inches long, the torso nine inches and the head four and a half inches. The total length is thirty-one and a half inches, the size of a very large cloth doll, possibly one used as a puppet.

One can find textual evidence to support such a conjecture in addition to that which has already been mentioned. The description of Thopas is detailed and vivid: "Whit was his face as payndemayn" (*Thop.* l. 725) says pilgrim Chaucer. "Payndemayn" says the *Riverside*, is a "fine white bread."<sup>463</sup> Then we are told that he has "lippes rede as rose" (*Thop.* l. 726), and further, that his complexion is "lyk scarlet in grayn" (*Thop.* l. 727), meaning "like deep-dyed scarlet cloth". How much more apt could such a description be were it in fact of cloth dyed a deep scarlet? The nearest approach to a human complexion resembling such a description is surely that of a clown-like figure? Chaucer tells us more: "His heer, his berd was lyk saffroun" (*Thop.* l. 730). If Thopas is a doll, then he is certainly a fine specimen, with Cordovan leather shoes, brown stockings from Bruges and an expensive silk robe. The word 'doll' is derived from the name Dorothy, part of which is d'oro, meaning golden, the whole name meaning 'gift of God.' But another word having religious associations with 'doll' is 'idolatry'. Consider a child's first encounter with Christ: usually a doll lying in a replica of a crib, dressed in dolls' clothing, with a painted face and straw-coloured hair. As a young medieval child grew up, perceptions of Christ would be those of statues and painted figures on glass which resembled the statues - they may well have seemed to be images of the statues rather than representations of a formerly living human-being whom one has never actually encountered in the flesh.

As to Biblical accounts of Christ - he is presented as a baby lying in a manger in swaddling clothes - just as he is represented by the doll in the crib at Christmas time; and he is described at the time of the crucifixion variously as being stripped and then dressed, by the Romans, in a scarlet robe or a purple robe, depending on which of the

---

<sup>463</sup> Benson (1987), p. 213, note 725.



gospels one reads. After the crucifixion Christ is placed in a sepulchre wrapped in linen and with a napkin placed around his head. Consider Christ's treatment: he is removed from one location, undressed and dressed in clothing that is the choice of his persecutors; nailed to a cross, brought down, undressed and redressed, put into a small chamber and left alone for three days. Compare that with the treatment of a doll by a child. Dolls are dressed and undressed. They may be beaten or 'abused', accused of crimes that are the projections of a child's guilt, punished and then finally placed in a doll's house. The doll, being a mental construct, is often required to 'act out' a mediating role that enables parents and children to forgive each other, just as Christ, a mental construct of the Jews and Romans, mediated the sins of humanity, enabling them to receive God's grace and forgive one another.

Whilst the doll is in the doll's house, it is in the land of the non-living. It isn't dead, because it has never been alive. But it is treated as though it were. Similarly Christ, in the sepulchre, was dead, because, according to the scriptures, he descended into hell,<sup>464</sup> rose again and appeared to his followers. So he wasn't alive; for he had been crucified and is reported to have "given up the ghost". The sepulchre, like the doll's house, is a place between the land of the living and the land of the dead.

The *Tale of Sir Thopas* is not, of course, the tale of Christ's passion. The *Tale* simply illustrates a parallel between the manner in which Sir Thopas is treated by Chaucer the pilgrim as a doll, and the way in which Christ was treated as a doll by us all, who were as Jewish as the Jews. More than that, however, Chaucer the poet is

---

<sup>464</sup> 1 Peter 3:18-20. Note, however, that this is meagre evidence for such an event, and it is more likely that the belief in medieval times of Christ's descent into hell was popularised by the 13th-century *Legenda Aurea* of Jacobus de Voragine. See *The Golden Legend of Jacobus de Voragine*, translated from the Latin by Granger Ryan and Helmut Ripperger (New York et al: Longmans, Green and Co., 1941), pp. 221-223.

anticipating Marshal McLuhan's "the medium is the message" by making the *Tale* itself a doll, a play-thing that is both a creation and creator of action, taking whatever shape the poet wishes it to take. Alan Gaylord alludes to "the recreative capacity of the verse to make itself its own amusement."<sup>465</sup> Chaucer is thereby enabling the *Tale*, that is, language, to perform, to make meaning, to display its own power as a dynamic creative force however weak and 'undynamic' might be the language expressed by Sir Thopas himself. We don't blame the playwright for poor language skills when one of the characters in a play displays linguistic ineptitude, if this is consistent with the dramatic function of the character. This seeming paradox is an example of Chaucer's superb skill, the very essence of *Leo* and its association with human art and artifice.

The analogy of the *Tale* with a doll is vividly illustrated by the physical appearance of the *Tale* in four manuscripts of the *Canterbury Tales*: the *Hengwrt*, *Ellesmere*, *Cambridge Dd.4.24*, and *Cambridge Gf.4.27*. Judith Tschann writes: ... "the scribes have designed or laid out the tale apparently...to indicate its verse form, tail-rhyme stanzas with occasional bob-lines."<sup>466</sup> She points out that the scribes chose a design for the tale which reflected their judgment and understanding of the text, calling attention to the skill of the poet who was so good at being so bad. "It seems fitting that, of all the pilgrims' tales, Chaucer's should receive this special visual treatment"<sup>467</sup> she writes, adding "...the layout seems to add yet another possibility for reading and interpreting the text. The tale is then a kind of punctuation poem, one that

---

<sup>465</sup> Gaylord (1981-2), p. 319.

<sup>466</sup> Judith Tschann, "The Layout of Sir Thopas in the *Ellesmere*, *Hengwrt*, *Cambridge Dd. 4. 24*, and *Cambridge Gg. 4. 27* Manuscripts," *The Chaucer Review*, 20 (1985), pp. 1-13 (p. 1).

<sup>467</sup> Tschann (1985), p. 7.

can be read in different ways depending on how one points it or otherwise indicates the relationship between syntactic units". She concludes "The two- or even three-way layout of Sir Thopas adds to the fun for a reader of this docile, malleable poem, whose parts can so easily and inconsequentially be rearranged."<sup>468</sup> What can be more docile, malleable and rearranged than a doll?

It was rather a puzzle to me that the Host interrupts Chaucer's with the charge of his having engaged in "drasty speche" (*Thop.* l. 923) with "drasty rymyng" (*Thop.* l. 930) not worth a turd. Then I recalled that Christ, for Christians, is the Word incarnate, and so during the period of his three days in the sepulchre, the Word was buried, apparently dead, lifeless, incapable of creative action, barren and rotting. Is there not here a parallel between Christ's state in the tomb and the state of the English language in Chaucer's time? Being out of my depth here, I have to call heavily upon Alan Gaylord for support. He argues that when Chaucer was writing he was doing so in a situation "where the closest thing to a literary standard would have been the Lollard-disseminated Central Midlands dialect"<sup>469</sup> and at a time when "there was no clearly recognizable standard to give him identity"<sup>470</sup> and which "gave him nothing congenial for putting language into poetry."<sup>471</sup> He would have used Latin in his profession as a civil servant, and Anglo-Norman if he had had legal training. "But when it came time to publish literature in English, there was little to draw upon."<sup>472</sup> So

---

<sup>468</sup> Tschann (1985), p. 10.

<sup>469</sup> Gaylord (1981-82), p. 321.

<sup>470</sup> Gaylord (1981-82), p. 321.

<sup>471</sup> Gaylord (1981-82), p. 321.

<sup>472</sup> Gaylord (1981-82), p. 321.

Chaucer "had to devise a written speech in verse that would look or sound enough like what was spoken to seem authentic. To start with, there was his city: in taking up its dialect, Chaucer would have no precedent, no literary models, no literary traditions, and no encouragement other than the vitality, tolerance, variety, and liberality of that speech which was, yet, hardly a language - at least in the sense a poet could inherit - at all."<sup>473</sup> Chaucer's native tongue was therefore, writes Gaylord, poverty-stricken as a literary resource.<sup>474</sup>

We see the result in *Thopas*: "a series of elegant and witty thefts, so artfully arranged that we would not know how to return them to their original owners. In his achieved mastery, then, Chaucer the translator gathers "sources" as Rumpel-stiltskin gathered straw. Translation becomes transformation, Chaucer an artifex."<sup>475</sup> With regard to the *Tale of Sir Thopas*, Gaylord writes: "If it is an artifice, if it is reflexive and delighted with its own sport, it is not allowed to settle anything or even prevail. It comes at a moment when the Poet is suddenly exposed to direct gaze, a situation inimical to one who prefers indirections. Escape seems the only solution, and Geoffrey climbs up on his rocking horse and disappears from sober view. He is at last hauled out in the middle of a fitt and thrust rudely into prose, where we may see him, if not in the way we might wish. There, presumably, poetry dies, while meaning lives."<sup>476</sup> The metaphor of the crucifixion and the risen Christ can hardly be missed.

---

<sup>473</sup> Gaylord (1981-82), p. 321.

<sup>474</sup> Gaylord (1981-82), p. 322.

<sup>475</sup> Gaylord (1981-82), pp. 323-324.

<sup>476</sup> Gaylord (1981-82), pp. 325-326.

There remains the matter of the fixed cross of the zodiac, but Chaucer has left out nothing in this *Tale*. Aquarius the opposing sign is amply catered for in the quirky, rebellious style of the *Tale* itself, as it 'steps out of line' literally, in the 'bobs', the nine-line stanzas breaking free of the Leo-ordered six-line format. The refusal of the pilgrim to conform to the model is typical of the Aquarian mode of self-expression.

And again, as with the Squire's Aquarian tale, birds play a significant role:

The briddes synge, it is no nay,  
 The sparhawk and the papejay,  
 That joye it was to heere;  
 The thrustelcok made eek hir lay,  
 The wodedowve upon the spray  
 She sang ful loude and cleere  
 (*Thop.* ll. 766-771).

Aquarius is fixed air, indicative of the tendency to abstraction, to build castles in the air, to conceptualize ideal friendships and models of society and social unity. The air element represents detachment from the physical plane, and fixity tends to consolidate the individual's attitudes and self-expression created by perverse and unrealistic perceptions of the environment and of human beings.

Whilst Sir Thopas falls in "love longynge" (*Thop.* l. 772), the object of his affection is a creation of his mind, an idealisation of woman, an elf-queen. Not only is she not real, but no earthly real physical woman can compare with her in Sir Thopas' mind, and so he rejects human femininity.

For in this world no womman is  
 Worthy to be my make in towne,  
 Alle othere womman I forsake,  
 And to an elf-queen I me take  
 By dale and eek by downe  
 (*Thop.* ll. 792-796).

Aquarius, being the sign opposed to Leo, and ruled by Saturn, is cold and dry and represents a relative lack of the Leo virtues of nobility, spiritual vitality, desire and courage. Chaucer depicts such anti-hero traits by undercutting the Leo traits the narrative would otherwise suggest Sir Thopas might display:

Sire Thopas eek so wery was  
 For prikyng on the softe gras,  
 So fiers was his corage,  
 That down he leyde him in that plas  
 To make his steede som solas,  
 And yaf hym good forage  
 (*Thop.* ll. 778-783).

His words are never mother to the deed, typifying the Aquarian inclination to pay lip-service to ideals. Despite the impetuosity with which he challenges Sir Oliphant to a duel (*Thop.* l. 821), he runs away when the giant hurls stones at him (*Thop.* l. 830), and the duel is never actually fought. Instead, Chaucer treats us to a Taurean feast of wine and meed, spiced ginger, licorice and sugared cumin (*Thop.* ll. 851-856). The *Tale's* concern with material fabric, preservatives such as "lycorys and the cetewale,/And many a clowe-gylofre;/And notemuge to putte in ale" (*Thop.* ll. 761-763); and with the cost, quality and composition of his clothing: "[h]is shoon of cordewane,/Of Brugges were his hosen broun,/His robe was of syklatoun,/That coste many a jane" (*Thop.* ll. 732-735), adequately accommodate the Taurean elements.

Sir Thopas fails miserably to live up to his name, following the line of least resistance by indulging the Aquarian opposition. He resolves the tension created by the Scorpio Sir Oliphant (giants belong to the realm of the unknown, and Sir Oliphant exhibits the martial traits associated with that sign (*Thop.* l. 813)). Sir Thopas eats and drinks (Taurus) and dresses in excessive finery (*Thop.* ll. 857-880) (Leo), for a battle that doesn't eventuate.

Is the narrative then not a reverse allegory of the life of Christ? Born in humble circumstance, Christ faces up to the challenges of Satan (Scorpio) on the mountain, is a social realist (Taurus), and as a consequence of his courage and nobility when attacked by his enemies, is proclaimed king (Leo) by others, having faced up to the most arduous of battles and emerging, like the jewel topaz, as the light of the world.

Why did Chaucer terminate the *Tale* so quickly? Perhaps because, consistent with the sign Leo's association with play, Chaucer would doubtless have found it amusing to cut short his playing with the doll, just as thousands of children the world over have their play interrupted in order to attend to lessons. And the next *Tale*, that of Melibeus, is a lesson in lessons.

## The Tale of Melibee

mp

The first of the only two *Canterbury Tales* told in prose is the *Tale of Melibeus*. It falls at the Virgo stage of the zodiacal circuit, the second prose *Tale*, that of the parson, being diametrically opposite, at the sign Pisces. The *Tale of Melibeus* is told by someone Piscean (possibly Chaucer's persona for the pilgrimage); the *Parson's Tale* is told by a Virgoan parson. Virgo is the sign associated with service as a functionary, whether for a government (the civil service) or the church (the ministry); and also with functional and logical analysis, entailing the making of fine distinctions, as compared with Pisces' transcendence of such differentiation. The outstanding feature of this *Tale* is the super-abundance of words and sentences and analysis of them as a means of clarifying the distinction between apparent implication and alternative inferences.

Melibeus is a rich young man with a wife, Prudence, and daughter, Sophie. One day while Melibeus is amusing himself in a nearby field, his house is entered by three former enemies, who beat his wife and wound his daughter in her feet, hands, ears, nose and mouth, leave Sophie for dead and depart.

Melibeus is naturally grief-stricken, but his prolonged weeping upsets his wife, who counsels moderation, citing Ovid's *Remedy of Love*, where he says, "He is a fool that destourbeth the mooder to weepen in the deeth of hire child til she have wept hir fille as for a certeine tyme,/ and thanne shal man doon his diligence with amyable wordes hire to reconforte, and preyen hire of hir wepyng for to stynte" (*Mel.* ll. 977-978). For that reason Prudence tolerates her husband's tears for a certain period and



then at an opportune moment she asks him why he is making himself look foolish - it was not appropriate for a wise man to carry on in such a manner. His daughter, by the grace of God, would recover, so he ought not, as though she were dead, to demoralise himself.

After an argument in which both resort to citing authorities to endorse their respective attitudes, Melibeus assembles the local population in order to solicit their views about the event that has occurred, and to obtain their advice as to whether he should avenge his family by declaring war on the criminals responsible for the assaults. The majority of the people favour his making war, but when he reveals this to Prudence she engages in a prolonged, didactic and very logical dissertation counselling against such a course of action. To that, Melibeus replies, "I se wel that the word of Salomon is sooth. He seith that 'words that been spoken discreetly by ordinaunce been honeycombes, for they yeven swetnesse to the body'" (*Mel.* l. 1103). He tells Prudence that because of her sweet words and her wisdom and truth he will let her advice govern him in everything. Thus encouraged, Prudence indulges another bout of directive counselling, directing him this time as to the criteria Melibeus should employ in choosing counsellors. Melibeus masochistically replies, "Dame"[quod he], "as yet into this tyme ye han wel and covenantly taught me as in general how I shal governe me in the chesyng and in the withholdynge of my conseilours./But now wolde I fayn that ye wolde condescende in especial/ and telle me how liketh yow, or what semeth yow, byoure conseilours that we han chosen inoure present nede" (*Mel.* ll. 1233-1235). Perhaps Prudence detects a slightly miffed tone in Melibeus' request; for she says, "My lord" [quod she] "I biseke yow in al humblesse that ye wol nat wilfully replie agayn my resouns, ne distempere youre herte, thogh I speke thyng that you displese./For God

woot that, as in myn entente, I speke it for youre beste, for youre honour, and for youre profite eke" (*Mel.* ll. 1236-1237). Note the Virgoan concern with motivation. Then she lists all his errors, mistakes of judgment, one by one. Melibeus manages to interrupt, admitting his mistakes and conceding that he is ready to change his counsellors as she suggests.

There follows a dialogue in which Prudence quotes St. Paul the Apostle, Christ, the prophet David, Catoun, Piers Alfonce, Solomon, Seneca and Ovid, displaying a considerable feat of memory. Whatever Melibeus replies, Prudence has a ready retort for him, the wisdom of which is, alas, undeniable. The woman has a wit and memory one wouldn't believe, were they not evidenced in so much black and white and black and white. Tullius is her latest authority: Tullius says this; Tullius says that; Tullius puts it this way; Tullius calls it that. 'Tullius' is, of course, Cicero, whose full name was Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 BC). One might better appreciate Melibeus' wife's fondness for Tullius if one recalls that Cicero's earliest work on rhetoric was the *De inventione*, which is concerned with the first part of the rhetoric, *inventio*, the composing of the subject matter of a speech.

It is following Tullius' definition of 'virtue' in *De inventione* as "a habit of mind in harmony with reason and the order of nature" that one encounters his statement that virtue has four parts: Prudence, Justice, Fortitude, and Temperance.<sup>477</sup> He then further subdivides each of these four main virtues, such that Prudence is described as follows: "Prudence is the knowledge of what is good, what is bad and what is neither good nor bad. Its parts are memory, intelligence, foresight (*memoria*,

---

<sup>477</sup> Cicero, *De inventione*, 2. 53. 159, trans. John F. Tinkler (1995): <http://english->

[www.hss.cmu.edu/rhetoric/genres-of-rhetoric.html#virtue](http://www.hss.cmu.edu/rhetoric/genres-of-rhetoric.html#virtue) (25 Jul. 1997).

*intelligentia, providentia*).<sup>478</sup> Memory is the faculty by which the mind recalls what has happened. Intelligence is the faculty by which it ascertains what is. Foresight is the faculty by which it is seen that something is going to occur before it occurs."<sup>479</sup> That definition of the three parts of Prudence are quoted by both Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas in their respective *Summae*, to which Chaucer had access.

Melibeus' wife Prudence, in counselling her husband, demonstrates the three parts of her essential nature and in so doing ensures that the structure of the *Tale* is an integral part of its message. Further, she draws attention to her own functional efficiency as well as to categorization, both being representative of the mutable earth element sign Virgo, the sign of practical wisdom.

If Prudence represents Virgo, then her husband, represents the opposite sign Pisces. As we know, Pisces is a mutable water element sign, and Melibeus' excess of tears when moved by the wounding of Sophie, his daughter, typifies the movement of water and the compassion of Pisces. Pisces is also symbolic of *Sophia*, wisdom, and many scholars have pointed out that Melibeus weeps for the wounding of his own wisdom which has been assaulted by the three enemies of the soul, namely the world, the flesh and the devil.

Throughout Prudence's prolonged peroration, it becomes clear that Melibeus is an ignoramus, a fool, incompetent, oblivious, lacking insight, devoid of understanding, a nincompoop and simpleton. His wife doesn't say so in so many words, but so many words carry the implication with unmistakable clarity. Furthermore, he is culpable because of his name, she says. "Melibee", she reminds him,

---

<sup>478</sup> Cicero (1995), 2.53.160.

<sup>479</sup> Cicero (1995), 2.53.160.

means "a man that drynketh hony! Thou hast ydronke so muchel hony of sweete temporeel riches, and delices and honours of this world/ that thou art drunken and has forgeten Jhesu Crist thy creatour" (*Mel.* ll. 1410-1412). Melibeus has not honoured and revered Christ as he ought to have done, and the three enemies of mankind - that is to say, the flesh, the devil and the world, have been allowed to enter his heart by the windows of the body. She then says "and [thou] hast nat defended thyself suffisantly agayns hire assautes and hire temptaciouns, so that they han wounded thy soule in fyve places; this is to seyn, the deedly synnes that been entred into thyn herte by thy fyve wittes. /And in the same manere oure Lord Crist hath woold and suffred that thy three enemys been entered into thyn house by the wyndowes/ and han ywounded thy doghter in the forseyde manere" (*Mel.* ll. 1423-1426).

It is at this point that Prudence has touched upon the most salient feature of the *Tale*: the fyve wyttes. The 'gate' or 'window' imagery was fairly well established in vernacular homiletic literature of the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries and so by Chaucer's time was something of a cliché. The first work showing a concern with the five senses was the *Ancrene Wisse* (c.1215-21), and John Gower, in his *Confessio Amantis*, has the Lover begin his confession with the Five Senses. The allegorization of the five senses occurs frequently in religious writings. One instance, found in Alain de Lille's *Anticlaudianus* is of five horses driving Prudence's coach heavenwards. But perhaps the most popular one was that of man's body as a building besieged by enemies, the origin of which lies in ancient classical texts; or in the *Bible*, for example: "For death is come up into our windows, and is entered into our palaces, to cut off the children from without, and the young men from the streets."<sup>480</sup>

---

<sup>480</sup> Jeremiah, 9:21

By now one needs no reminding that the detailed functions of the parts of the body, like any taxonomic categorization, express the zodiacal sign Virgo. With the Virgo-Pisces opposition again so clearly indicated, it is evident that, as with the *Friar's Tale* and its concerns, Chaucer is again writing of the mutable mode of the zodiac and yet again is concerned with its symbolism of sense-data and words as source of knowledge. The two remaining signs of this mutable mode, Gemini and Sagittarius are implicit throughout the *Tale* in the dynamic tension between signifier and signified, which provides the literary context within which the interchanges between Prudence and Melibeus perform a mediating role. Examples are numerous, consisting chiefly of Melibeus's recital of proverbs and Prudence's explication of them. Melibeus, ruled by Jupiter, draws intuitive and broad, general inferences from proverbs, using them as maxims upon which he intends to act, and thus interprets (Pisces) the Gemini-Sagittarius opposition of denotatory-connotative functioning in the broadest sense (Jupiter) as his motivation for action (Virgo). Prudence, ruled by Mercury, employs a Virgoan practical common-sense analysis of the Gemini-Sagittarius opposition and the result is an insightful, compassionate resolution of dilemmas (Pisces).

It is appropriate here to examine one of the problems that comprise the perceptual modes distinguishing Melibeus's and Prudence's ways of looking at the world via *sententiae*. If one selects a proverb at random from those with which most of us are no doubt acquainted, - for example that which says "Too many cooks spoil the broth" - one is confronted by a simple statement that contains an ambiguity: is this a synthetic statement making an empirical observation about the state of the culinary act of broth-making in general; or is it an implicitly analytical statement, a tautology, in that in this case the subject is defined by the predicate? In other words, does this

alternative suppose that "too many cooks" is defined as the number (of cooks) by which any singular instance of broth is spoiled? The answer resolving the ambiguity must be inferred not merely from the context within which the statement is made, but also from the meta-context of the category to which the statement belongs, in this case the category 'proverbial statements'. Whether I read the statement as a synthetic statement about the state of broth-making in general, or as an analytic statement by which "too many cooks" is defined as the number by which broth is, in any instance, spoiled, the meaning is inferred from the context of the assumed category 'culinary arts'. But if I am told that the statement is a proverb, then the category 'culinary arts' may be the context according to which the statement acquires literal meaning, but it is the meta-context of proverb that directs us to the signification of the 'meta-meaning', that is, the relevant analogy. If we are oblivious of the context 'proverb', then although we might understand the simple statement made by the proverb, we may fail to comprehend its relevance and hence its meaning, within the situational context in which it is made. Thus, were one to find that too many individuals contributing to the management of a bridge-building engineering project had resulted in confusion concerning the objectives and the means of achieving them with the ultimate consequence of the bridge collapsing, and one were to comment "Too many cooks spoil the broth", those ignorant of the category 'proverb' within which that statement is made might wonder what one meant because they would have interpreted the statement according to the category 'culinary arts.' Proverbs then, derive their meaning less from the specific context within which they are uttered and more precisely from the general context of analogy. Analogies are rarely capable of withstanding logical analysis, that being the means by which Prudence examines them. Because analogies

are general, they are Sagittarian, and appeal to the Jupiter-ruled Piscean Melibeus. Prudence, being of a Virgoan nature, will have none of this. Mercury, her ruling planet, is both exalted and dignified in Virgo, as well as being the ruler of Gemini, and is consequently in detriment in both Sagittarius and Pisces. She must, by force of temperament, analyse and dissect those proverbial generalisations, and she does so relentlessly, with great success.

Melibeus says at first that he will not take Prudence's advice because "alle womman been wikke" (*Mel.* l. 1057), basing this observation on Solomon's statement that of a thousand men he found one good man but never found a good woman. Therefore, concludes Melibeus, were he to allow himself to be governed by Prudence's counsel, everyone would consider him a fool, changing the natural order of things as ordained. Even a superficial examination of the purported logic of Melibeus's broad and general conclusion from his initial premise reveals the fallacy that Prudence is quick to exploit in her analytical method: "And though that Salomon seith that he ne foond nevere womman good, it folweth nat therfore that alle wommen ben wikke./For though that he ne foond no good womman, certes, many another man hath founden many a womman ful good and trewe./Or elles, per aventure, the entente of Salomon was this: that, as in sovereyn bounte, he foond no womman -/ this is to seyn, that ther is no wight that hath sovereyn bountee save God alone, as he hymself recordeth in hys Evaungelie./For ther nys no creature so good that hym ne wanteth somewhat of the perfeccioun of God, that is his makere" (*Mel.* ll. 1076-1080).

One can hardly miss Prudence's implication that, given that latter criterion, there is no good man either.

Melibeus eventually concedes to be ruled by Prudence's advice. Given an inch she takes a yard, and says, "Now, sire," [quod Dame Prudence] "and syn ye vouche sauf to been governed by my conseil, I wol enforme yow how ye shul governe yourself in chesyng of youre conseilours" (*Mel.* l. 1115). And she does so, as one might expect, in great detail. Melibeus is convinced by her arguments and places himself under her jurisdiction with regard to whether he should go to war or peace. Prudence asks herself how she can best bring his good will to good effect in the interest of peace (*Mel.* ll. 1726-1727), and after Melibeus's enemies are assembled he tells them that they are forgiven. Melibeus is thereby, as a consequence of Prudence fulfilling her logical Virgoan function, able to fulfill his Piscean one, summed up aptly in his closing words to his enemies: "Wherfore I receyve yow to my grace/and foryeve yow outrely alle the offenses, injuries, and wronges that ye have doon agayn me and myne,/ to this effect and to this ende, that God of his endelees mercy/ wole at the tyme of oure diyng foryeven us oure giltes that we han trespassed to hym in this wrecched world./For doutelees, if we be sory and repentant of the synnes and giltes which we han trespassed in the sighte of oure Lord God,/ he is so free and so merciable/ that he wole foryeven us oure giltes/ and bryngen us to the blisse that nevere hath ende" (*Mel.* ll. 1181-1188).



## The Monk's Tale



The *Monk's Tale* merits citing as the most vivid illustration of Chaucer's understanding and use of the zodiacal principles and for depicting clearly and succinctly the basis of this thesis through a brilliant exposition of the cardinal cross. This is achieved not only in the narrative of the *Tale*, but in the carefully and cleverly devised subtle inter-relationships of teller, tale, structure and theme.

At its most superficial level, the *Tale* is a prolonged series of very short anecdotes in which the Monk relates the downfall of great men and a woman (Zenobia). Without exception, those referred to in the verses who rose to great height and were cast down by the wheel of fortune are solar archetypes, the sun being the symbol of the ego, of power and authority.

Astrologically, the ascending sign, irrespective of which one it is, is analogous to Aries, the sun's 'exaltation', and may be seen to equate to the rising side of the wheel of *Fortuna*. This is frequently alluded to by the commonplace expression "one's star is rising". The descending, opposite sign is analogous to Libra, the sun's fall, and may be thought to equate to the descending side of the wheel of *Fortuna*. On the wheel of *Fortuna* the label *regnabo* (I will reign) is often found rising on the left; the label *regno* (I am reigning) is frequently found at the zenith; the label *regnavi* (I have reigned) is often shown at the descendant axis of the wheel; and the words "*sum sine regno*" (I have no kingdom) are found at its lowest point, equivalent to the nadir. The

*Tale* presents in each anecdote the sequence of rise and fall, though the *emphasis* throughout the *Monk's Tale* lies on the *fall*, not the rise to power.

The wheel of *Fortuna* was firmly established in medieval consciousness by its representation in the second book of Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*.<sup>481</sup> *Fortuna* herself was frequently depicted signifying her instability, sometimes by two faces, one smiling and one glowering; or with one eye weeping and the other gleaming. Sometimes she appears blindfolded, but unlike representations of *Justitia*, she holds no scales, maybe suggesting that she is impartial in her administration of *injustice*. There would appear, at first, little else to say about the *Monk's Tale*, insofar as every example given by the monk implicitly or explicitly reiterates the warning that one should never take one's good fortune for granted and that we are all subject to fluctuating fortune. The cardinal cross of the zodiac is implicit in the rising, the zenith, setting and nadir of our fortunes, and yet again Chaucer has chosen the cardinal mode of the zodiac with which to call attention to those metaphysical philosophical issues of fate, providence, fortune and destiny, as he has earlier with the *Knight's*, the *Man of Law's*, the *Physician's*, and the *Prioress's* tales.

Somewhat intriguing, given that Chaucer doesn't use numbers and names arbitrarily, is the selection of seventeen examples of the fall of the great. Seventeen is not a number corresponding to any notable astronomical feature. But the number seventeen was perceived in medieval times as representing the combination of the ten commandments and the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, *lex et gratia*, Law [10] and Grace [7].<sup>482</sup> The tenth sign of the zodiac is Capricorn (law) and the seventh sign of

<sup>481</sup> Boethius, *The Consolation Of Philosophy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), II, pp. 54-77.

<sup>482</sup> Schimmel (1993), p. 221.

the zodiac is Libra (grace), the two sign principles being administered in human lives through the astrological 'action' of their ruling planets, respectively Saturn and Venus. Chevalier and Gheerbrant write: "Seventeen stands for the very foundation of the theory of balance and should be regarded as the law of equilibrium in all things."<sup>483</sup> Posidonius (c.135-51 BC), the Stoic philosopher, postulated 17 faculties of the individual soul.

Libra, the zodiacal sign with which the *Monk's Tale* is aligned, according to the schema outlined in this thesis, has its most obvious association with justice, and therefore with judgment. I have little doubt that Chaucer was drawing our attention to the Day of Atonement, the most solemn festival in the Jewish religious calendar, Yom Kippur, which was celebrated on the 10th day of the 7th month, Tishri, "as a day of judgment. On this day God passes judgment on the past deeds of every individual and decrees who shall live and who shall die during the ensuing year. The judgment process actually begins ten days before Yom Kippur, on the first day of Tishri, or Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, and reaches its culmination on Yom Kippur."<sup>484</sup> Another of the cardinal signs, Capricorn, is implied too, because the priest presented one of two goats, the scapegoat, to God, a goat that was sacrificed, bearing upon itself, and thus expiating, all the sins of the community. We encountered Tishri and Yom Kippur in connection with Libra when considering the *Prioress's Tale*.

The magic square built around the number 5 (the number of man as microcosm) produces 17 in its lower left corner (total of numbers in bold script) and

---

<sup>483</sup> Chevalier and Gheerbrant (1996), p. 866.

<sup>484</sup> Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan (eds.), *The Oxford Companion to the Bible* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1993), p.156.

28 ( total of the numbers in *italic script*), as the total of the remaining numbers, as the diagram below shows:<sup>485</sup>

4 9 2

3 5 7

8 1 6

It is possible, as I shall show in the chapter concerning *The Canon's Yeoman's Tale*, that the number 17 has alchemical significance in *The Monk's Tale*, but that is another story. Twenty-eight, as we have seen earlier, is the number of lunar mansions in pagan astrology, with which Chaucer was evidently very familiar. Given that hint of Chaucer's concern here with the fluctuating fortunes associated with the moon's symbolism, it is possibly significant that the sum of each of the remaining lines in the magic square (above), total 15 ( $4+9+2=15$  and  $2+7+6=15$ ), a number having association with the moon, according to Schimmel, who writes: "Fifteen represents the zenith of lunar power, and its relation to the moon can be deduced from the name of an old German measure called *Mandel*, "little moon, part of a moon," which consisted of 15 items such as eggs or other small things."<sup>486</sup>

There are hints here of the greater significance of the *Monk's Tale*, I think, as being more meaningfully integrated into the overall schema of the *Canterbury Tales* than has hitherto been appreciated. I suggest that because the *Monk's Tale* occurs at Libra and is interrupted by the Knight, Chaucer is drawing our attention to the Aries-

---

<sup>485</sup> Schimmel (1993), p. 220.

<sup>486</sup> Schimmel (1993), p. 213.

Libra interchange. Let us consider a number of components of the astrological schema once again.

First, it is one of binary oppositions, the archetypal one being that of Aries-Libra. Aries-Libra is symbolic of existence-non-existence, coming into being - going out of existence, awareness of self - awareness of other. It represents thesis and antithesis, and is analogous to the rising and falling, the pulsating rhythm of being and non-being. So, whilst Aries represents that which is, Libra represents that which is opposed to existence, the threat, the opposition, the rival, enemy, competitor; and their interaction is one of continuous adjustment and compromise, a 'taking into account' of each other.

Secondly, the astrological conception is at base, one of macrocosm-microcosm, the larger represented in the smaller. Chaucer sets out the major themes of his *Tales* in the *Knight's Tale*, a grand, metaphysical design in which Theseus's theatre represents in miniature the greater astronomical schema that the *Tales* are to illustrate. The Knight, therefore, might be seen as Chaucer's architect and his *Tale* as depicting the architectonics of Chaucer's temple, the whole work. But the sign of architects and of architecture is Libra, whose symbolism of balance and unity represents the integration of perspectives, of relationships, in a microcosmic representation (the idea on paper) of what is to be built. In one sense, then, the Knight and the Monk can be seen to be rivals because the Knight (representing Libra) has received Chaucer's proxy to carry out what is essentially Libra's function, one attempted by the Monk, who is representative of the opposing sign, Aries. Their main difference is that the *Knight's Tale* depicts an altogether broader perspective on life and a concern to present a balanced picture of fate and fortune - the Knight, remember, is himself a representative

of Libra. The Monk, however, shows only the victims of *Fortuna*, among which there are no triumphs of the human spirit over her injustice. In doing so, the Monk illustrates the antithesis of Libra, namely Aries.

Then again, the Monk, in telling of the rise and fall of seventeen characters, is concerning himself with the third component of the astrological conception underlying the *Canterbury Tales*: the medieval symbiosis of the pagan-astrological and the Christian philosophies. One might conclude, then, that the Monk represents a kind of rival to Chaucer. He is a competitor in story-telling. So, because this agent of the Christian church poses a challenge to the Knight, whose *Tale* is representative of the pagan gods and astrology, as Chaucer's 'agent', the Knight takes the initiative of interrupting the Monk, his rival by proxy. By so doing he maintains the Aries-Libra interaction. It is a very neat way of managing the dichotomy between Aries paganism and the Christian grace that Libra had come to symbolize. One might perceive a paradox here, in that the Knight (Libra) is recounting a 'pagan' tale, the Christian monk (Aries) relating a series of Christian tragedies. This inversion parallels the one perceived in the Physician's Tale, where the Knight (Aries) acted as judge and jury and hence performed a Libran role, whilst the Judge (Libra) acted in a rapacious, aggressive and impulsive manner typical of Aries. Why Chaucer is reversing these roles across the axis of Aries and Libra is as much a mystery to me as it undoubtedly will be to the reader. Yet he is undoubtedly doing that. The next question that arises is how the binary opposition of Cancer-Capricorn is represented and how that squares with the Aries-Libra opposition.

It is not those relatively superficial components of the *Tale* outlined above which best exemplify Chaucer's depiction of the cardinal signs, but elements somewhat

subtler. One might recall that the Monk or what he represents, has been insulted, either implicitly or directly at various times along the pilgrimage, by the Host, the Knight and the Prioress. As Jahan Ramazani observes, the Monk has not reacted at any time to those insults.<sup>487</sup> This is quite unnatural for a representative of Aries, so one might imagine that he is seething with suppressed anger. Ramazani writes: "Despite his calm exterior, the Tales suggest that the Monk is violent in temper... There is further evidence of the Monk's suppressed aggressivity in the Prologue to the Monk's Tale" and later, "One object of the Monk's aggression is his audience, despite the silence with which he endures their insults." And "Some portion of the Monk's aggression is directed toward specific members of the audience, especially toward his nearest competitor, the Knight."<sup>488</sup>

The *Monk's Tale* is a collection of stories reduced to brief anecdotes. A collection is, by definition, a series of entities having a form similar to, or identical with, an archetype or prototype (or genotype, as in the case of family resemblances). The stories comprising the Monk's collection follow a *de casibus* literary tradition. But each has been carefully structured by a paring or culling, by the rhetorical device of *abbreviatio*, of all material embellishments, framing or digression. The result is that each story, by dint of its brevity, hammers home with blow after direct blow, a simple message, something like "Pride cometh before a fall." This is, obviously, a direct and repetitive attack upon the Monk's adversaries, a final release of pent-up resentment

---

<sup>487</sup> Jahan Ramazani, "Chaucer's Monk: The Poetics of Abbreviation, Aggression, and Tragedy," *The Chaucer Review*, 27 (1993), pp. 260-276 (pp. 268-269).

<sup>488</sup> Ramazani (1993), pp. 269-270.

aimed at those who might be seen to consider themselves somewhat superior to the Monk and who have made it evident in their attitudes to him. It is by this exceptionally clever handling of the Cancer-Capricorn opposition Chaucer and the Monk achieve such impact. Cancer's assimilatory, replicatory principle, whereby the collection is accumulated and expands, is actually defined by the controlling, structuring mechanism of Capricornian *abbreviatio*. Capricorn's astrological function, related in the *melothesia* to the skeletal structure of the body, endeavours to regulate and define shape, and so 'orders' the corpus (Cancer), the collection, comprising the *Tale's* text in such a way as to provide a vehicle for both the Monk's Aries aggression and the Libran theme of the fall of great men. Ramazani clearly perceives this inter-relationship when he writes: "The technical devices of amplification are crammed into the constricted framework of the Monk's tales, where they therefore seem grotesquely inflated...." And "The Monk's meaning is one, and he reiterates it ad nauseum [*sic*]. Yet he dresses the thought in different robes, giving each victim a new name, setting, and description - all within the obvious framework of abbreviation."<sup>489</sup> One might say that Chaucer has done something almost identical in his *Canterbury Tales* with the zodiacal theme, dressing it in different clothes, giving each principle a new name, setting and description - all within the framework of the *melothesia*. The main difference between them is that the Monk's tales send one to sleep with their monotonous rhythm and sameness, whereas Chaucer's depict an infinite variety.

---

<sup>489</sup> Ramazani (1993), p. 267.



## The Nun's Priest's Tale

ℳ

The metaphysical and occult dimensions of reality are symbolised astrologically by Scorpio, the sign that labels "the secrets" in the zodiacal melothesia. When Chauntecleer, the hero of the *Nun's Priest's Tale* has an ominous dream from which he infers that he is to be seized by a yellowy-red beast resembling a hound, a debate ensues as to whether or not it is possible to predict the future by such means. This debate is peripheral to the crucial issue of free will versus fate, a controversy that preoccupied many minds in the Middle Ages, and which has not even yet been resolved except in the perceptions of some die-hard logical positivists.

Scorpio, being related to the immaterial unrealities (the invisible) in the dark and of night, is counterbalanced by the material, physical substance and evidence in the light of day. Chauntecleer and his wife Pertelote are evidently representative of Taurus, the sign ruled by Venus. Pertelote is not only a pragmatic, down-to-earth hen, but she is one of seven - symbolic of the *Pleiades* - the seven stars forming a cluster or nebula in the constellation Taurus, among which is the scintilla of the group, *Alcyone*, of whom Pertelote would thus be representative. Chauntecleer is famous for his voice - another Taurean symbol: "In al the land, of crowyng nas his peer./His voys was murier than the murie orgon" (*NPT*. ll. 2850-2851), claims the Nun's Priest.

Chauntecleer tells a tale himself, one replete with Taurus-Scorpio imagery. He relates an account of two travellers on a pilgrimage who fail to find sufficient accommodation for them both together and so are required to find separate places in which to stay. During the night one of the travellers has a dream in which the other

appears to him and tells him that he will be murdered that night in an oxen's stall. The dreamer takes no notice, but has the dream again. He ignores it the second time too. In the third dream his companion tells him that he has been slain as he had foreseen. If his friend gets up early in the morning and goes to the west gate of the town, "A carte ful of dong ther shaltow se,/In which my body is hid ful prively;/Do thilke carte arresten boldely./My gold caused my mordre, sooth to sayn" (NPT. ll. 3018-3021). This is quite obviously a Taurus-Scorpio opposition. Gettings writes:

The negative side of Mars has rulership over the zodiacal sign Scorpio, and is associated with the sexual parts of the human anatomy, with the 'secrets', as the mediaeval astrologers often called them. The zodiacal Scorpio has held a rather unfortunate association in astrology, and in consequence it has been linked with violence, rapine, sexual license, and with death itself - even with the purgatorial punishments meted out after death.<sup>490</sup>

And Baigent, Campbell and Harvey write:

On a parallel point, Rieder, amongst others, has remarked on the consistent and precise way in which Saturn's entry into the 'money' signs Taurus and Leo (= gold) has coincided historically with dramatic downturns in the market.<sup>491</sup>

Taurus was, in fact, associated not so much with gold *per se* as with treasure, possessions and money generally. And dung, obviously, is associated with Scorpio, being matter 'out-put' from the excretory organ.

---

<sup>490</sup> Fred Gettings, *The Hidden Art - a study of occult symbolism in art* (London: Cassell, 1978), pp. 84-85.

<sup>491</sup> Michael Baigent, Nicholas Campion and Charles Harvey, *Mundane Astrology - an introduction to the astrology of nations and groups* (London: Aquarian Press, 1984), p. 232.

The traveller does as the spirit of his friend has bidden and he finds the body and discovers the murderers. Thus the dream appears to have had prophetic value, which is the point Chauntecleer is making to Pertelote. That brings in the philosophical problem of fate and free will: would the man have been killed had the dreamer acted upon his dream? Or was it not possible for the dreamer to act because the dead man's fate had already been determined? This complex question mirrors the matter of prediction by occult means which was central to the *Miller's Tale* and the story of Nicholas's supposed astrological prediction of the flood, again illustrative of the Taurus-Scorpio-Aquarius-Leo fixed cross.

As the listeners to the *Tale* know, the beast threatening Chauntecleer is a fox, a notorious Scorpio type of creature that uses stealth and sly cunning as means by which he survives, lurking, hiding and resorting to subtle device. In this instance, the fox, daun Russell, uses flattery - not a traditional method employed by foxes - but in this *Tale* animals have been promoted to the status of humans, and humans to that of gods, as Payne has pointed out<sup>492</sup> - so flattery is within his means. That Chauntecleer is made vulnerable by his throat - "And by the gargat hente Chauntecleer" (*NPT*. 1. 3335)- is an ironic subtlety on Chaucer's part; for it is the month of May, belonging to Taurus, the sign associated in the *melothesia* with the throat, and ruled, of course, by Venus. The Nun's Priest states the precise time and date: 3 May at 9 a.m. Standish Henning, in a footnote says that "Taurus reigns from April 20 to May 21,"<sup>493</sup> but that was not so in Chaucer's time, the sun entering Taurus on April 12. In fact, only by that

---

<sup>492</sup> F. Anne Payne, "Foreknowledge and Free Will: Three Theories in the *Nun's Priest's Tale*," *The Chaucer Review*, 10 (1976), pp. 205-206.

<sup>493</sup> Standish Henning, "Chauntecleer and Taurus," *ELN*, 3 (1965), pp. 1-5 (p. 5).

specific medieval date of entry into that sign could the Nun's Priest assert that the sun "in the signe of Taurus hadde yronne/Twenty degrees and oon" (*NPT*. ll. 3194-3195), if the date when Chauntecleer confronts his nemesis is Friday 3 May. If, as Henning says, the sun were to have entered Taurus as late as April 20, then the 21 degrees traversed through the sign by the sun would take it 21 days duration after that, which would have resulted in the date of Chauntecleer's confrontation being May 11.

The fixed cross of the zodiac is completed by the signs Leo and Aquarius. The cock is snatched because the fox's flattery induces in Chauntecleer an overweening pride in display of his personal prowess, an exhibition of Leo egotism. He descends from the beam to put on a show and thereby brings about what threatens to be his demise. But he then resorts to a vocal solution to his predicament, persuading the fox to turn to those pursuing him in order to say:

Turneth agayn, ye proude cherles alle!  
 A verray pestilence upon you falle!  
 Now I am come unto the wodes syde;  
 Maugree youre heed, the cok shal heere abyde.  
 I wol hym ete, in feith, and that anon!

(*NPT*. ll. 3409-3413).

Ignoring the inconsistency here (Chauntecleer hadn't recognised the beast of his dream as a fox), we accept that daun Russell opens his mouth to make such a defiant speech, and that Chauntecleer escapes into a high tree nearby. As the fox later confesses to the cock, his loss of Chauntecleer is due to the indiscretion of jangling "whan he sholde holde his pees" (*NPT*. l. 3435). And as have seen with the *Squire's Tale*, that is the tendency of Aquarius, namely, to talk too much.

## The Second Nun's Tale



The sole example of a hagiographical tale, the *Second Nun's*, tells a part of the legend of St. Cecilia, whose Feast Day, 22 November, fell in medieval times in the period of the sun's transit of Sagittarius, which lasted from 14 November to 13 December. While that might be viewed by most people as an insignificant fact in relationship to the *Canterbury Tales*, its placement in the Sagittarian segment of the zodiacal sequence of the *Tales* suggests to me that it is an interesting coincidence; and in the light of the great number of coincidences preceding this one, it might assume the status of a meaningful one. By comparison, the fact that the new moon for November 1386 (at 8° Sagittarius) fell on St. Cecilia's Feast Day is undoubtedly a meaningless coincidence, though no doubt Chaucer's attention would have been caught by the fact, though not by the appearance, on that date; for a new moon is nearly always invisible. This particular new moon was born mid-morning, 'combust' in the solar rays, and in the evening not to be seen except possibly as a very faint crescent of silver sinking in the wintry sea, for a few minutes, barely, cradled in the beams of the pallid sun.

Sagittarius is the sign of faith (*pietas*) and Cecilia's story is one of miracles resulting from her innocence and her faith in Christ. She marries a young man, Valerian, and before the marriage is consummated she confides to him that she has a guardian angel, who, if Valerian defiles her, will slay him. Valerian, understandably miffed and sceptical, says he will honour her wish to remain a virgin if she will show him the angel. Following her guidance, he travels to another part of Rome, a Geminian

city, where, according to the legend, he encounters Pope Urban. (Perhaps another meaningless coincidence is the fact that Pope Urban's Feast Day is celebrated on 25 May, in the period of Gemini in medieval times, the sign opposite Sagittarius and also part of the mutable mode of the zodiac.) After being confronted with an apparition of an old man carrying a book with gold lettering, Valerian is christened. He returns home and meets his wife and an angel. Valerian and Cecilia are crowned with floral crowns, one of roses and one of lillies, which the angel tells them he has brought from Paradise. Chaucer has here introduced the Virgo-Pisces components of the mutable cross: the rose is symbolic of martyrdom, hence Piscean; the lily is the symbol of purity, hence Virgoan. Gettings writes: "The Piscean imagery of Christ runs throughout mediaeval art, and it is often noted with satisfaction that the Virgin faces the Christ (Pisces) across the zodiacal skies"<sup>494</sup> (A more modern and amusing coincidence is that an English rose named St. Cecilia derives genetically from a seedling called "Wife of Bath".) The flowers transcend mortality: they will not rot nor lose their scent, though only the pure in heart will be able to see them. "Ne nevere wight shal seen hem with his ye,/But he be chaast and hate vileynye" (*SNT*. ll. 230-231).

Valerian tells the angel that he has a brother that he loves very much, whom he would like to have know the truth as he himself now does. If Pope Urban's Feast Day did not, then the two brothers certainly do contribute the Geminian feature of the mutable cross. The angel tells Valerian that God is pleased with his request. Cecilia tells Valerian's brother that if he will renounce his idols and be baptised he too will witness the angel's face. In order to be baptised however, Valerian's brother Tiburce has to visit Pope Urban. Tiburce fears for their lives because Roman Christians were

---

<sup>494</sup> Gettings (1978), p. 40.

persecuted in the time of Urban I. Cecilia tells him that there is a better life than this one and that he should not fear to lose his life in order to gain the other. In expressing that faith she fulfills both her Sagittarian role (that sign being traditionally summed up in the single word 'deus'<sup>495</sup> and generally associated with "weyes of feith and of religioun"<sup>496</sup>) and the theme of the *Tale*; and it is at this pivotal point that Chaucer underscores the Sagittarian theme by allusion to the three faculties of the human mind: memory, imagination and judgment, comparing them to the Holy Trinity:

Right as a man hath sapiences three -  
 Memorie, engyn, and intellect also -  
 So in a beynge of divinitee,  
 Thre persones may ther right wel bee  
 (SNT. ll. 338-341).

Cecilia tells Tiburce much about Christ's gospel, and Tiburce is persuaded thereby to visit Pope Urban with Valerian. Tiburce is christened and thereafter sees the angel daily. Furthermore, his every prayer is answered. Eventually however, Almachius, the town prefect, according to the legend, brought Valerian and Tiburce before a statue of Jupiter and gave the order that anyone who refused to make a sacrifice to that god should be beheaded.

Valerian and Tiburce are executed. Maximus, one of the prefecture's officers, who is so moved by their martyrdom that he himself converts many Romans to Christianity, is whipped to death. Cecilia is brought before Almachius and ordered to make a sacrifice to Jupiter. After a spirited exchange with Almachius, in which she compares his power to a bladder full of wind, the prefect orders that Cecilia be taken

---

<sup>495</sup> Eade (1984), p. 75.

<sup>496</sup> North (1988), p. 203.

home and burned in a cauldron. The flames prove powerless, however, and Almacius sends a servant to behead her. He strikes her three times but with only partial effect. At that time there is an ordinance forbidding a miscreant to be struck more than three times. Half dead, Cecilia continues to preach and after three days she expires. Urban secretly buries her body alongside other saints, and her house is converted to a church.

The selection by Chaucer of a legend in which the pagan god Jupiter features prominently is consistent with the Sagittarian theme of the *Tale*; for in that transitional period during which the characteristics of Greek and Roman gods were transposed to planetary typologies, the sign to which Jupiter was assigned as ruler or lord was, of course, Sagittarius.

A question arises as to the deeper significance of this mutable cross. Gemini, as symbolic of information-processing or perception of sense-data, interacts with Sagittarius, the sign of signification and also of the process of transmission - the Gemini-Sagittarius binary opposition representing the input-output of data. Cecilia is the transmitter; Valerian and Tiburce are essentially receivers. The brothers' perceptions are initially those of the status of unbelievers, those not having faith, representatives of the sign opposed to *pietas*, akin to the men of science today who define knowledge as only that information which can be demonstrated to be not outside the parameters of probability.

Notwithstanding the fact that medieval philosophers were by and large adherents to the nominalist theory of knowledge, Valerian asks for empirical proof of the existence of the angel. This is consistent with the Geminian cognitive approach to knowledge, the antithesis of faith. But one should remember that Gemini is a mutable air sign, indicative of a readiness to change one's mind on the basis of experience.



Gemini is also representative of experimentation: trying alternative ways of processing data or of looking at information; and Valerian makes the journey to Urban in adjusting flexibly to Cecilia's advice, this latter a characteristic of Sagittarius or presumption of the wise.

When Valerian, in true mutable mode, changes from sceptic to believer, he talks to his brother Tiburce, who does not display any scepticism, thus exhibiting the two-fold nature of Gemini, the sign of alternatives. He readily identifies with his brother Valerian and so maintains their emblematic function of twinning, both now being believers.

The cross or challenge they must all bear is indicated by the crowns of flowers: Piscean martyrdom and Virgoan purity in thought and deed. By now the reader is accustomed to Chaucer's reserving the mutable mode of the zodiac for problems of epistemology. In this instance the crux of the problem is whether to believe what someone else says is true when there is no evidence at all presented to the senses. Does one take that initial leap of faith and risk, in order to experience the transcendent phenomenon claimed by someone else? Such a challenge to faith occurs three times in the *Tale*: Valerian has to make it on the basis of faith in Cecilia's claims; Tiburce has to make it on the basis of faith in Tiburce's and Cecilia's claims; and all three have to make that leap as witnesses to Christ. Initially of course, there is not, for Valerian, any sensory experience of the angel; nor is there for Tiburce. And for none of them is there any sensory evidence of a better life than this one. That is the criterion of faith, of course: the evidence of things not seen.

In each instance, such faith (Sagittarius) sits in dynamic tension with the absence of those visual referents justifying such a leap (Gemini); with the necessity to

have pure motives for what they do (Virgo) and with martyrdom consequent upon their suffering (Pisces).

This *Tale* is the last belonging to the mutable mode prior to the telling of the *Parson's Tale* and it is notable for the progression of its main characters beyond the pagan to the Christian state of consciousness.

## The Canon's Yeoman's Tale

¶

It has long been acknowledged that Chaucer's use of alchemical terms and his references to alchemical equipment and processes in his *Canon's Yeoman's Tale* suggest more than a cursory acquaintanceship with alchemy. Such an acknowledgment does not appear, however, to have directed attention to the many coincidences between the alchemical philosophy and process on the one hand and the developing theme of the *Canterbury Tales* as a whole, on the other. I am here suggesting that such attention would not be fruitless. Whilst the close examination of the relationship would be a thesis on its own, and a distracting digression from the main theme of this one, the mere suggestion of the existence of a relationship between alchemy and the *Tales* necessarily entails the inclusion of the role of astrology.

The *Canon's Yeoman's Tale* is itself a lure, a temptation away from the true path, the pilgrim's route to Canterbury. The Canon and his Yeoman are not counted among the original pilgrims participating in the story-telling contest, and their late arrival as outsiders, is, in my opinion, a logical consequence of Chaucer's method of distinguishing truth from falsity in alchemy. Such a distinction lies in two contiguous *Tales*, namely the *Second Nun's Tale* of St. Cecilia, which fulfils the philosophical purpose of the alchemical process, and the Canon's Yeoman's counterfeit purpose, namely that of the alchemical 'puffers' or *souffleurs*, which was to transmute the base metal of lead to that of gold. That counterfeit purpose is pursued along the primrose path hinted at by the Canon's Yeoman when, referring to the Canon's supposed ability as an alchemist, he suggests to the pilgrims that "al this ground on which we been

ridyng,/Til that we come to Caunterbury town,/He koude al clene turnen up-so-  
doun,/And pave it al of silver and of gold" (CYT. ll. 623-626).

Some critics, such as Kittredge,<sup>497</sup> Speirs<sup>498</sup> and Muscatine,<sup>499</sup> have inferred from Chaucer's *exposé* of alchemy that he makes plain his own condemnation of the practice, their views countering Ashmole's assertion that he must have been an expert on the subject. The "calmer" views, as Benson describes them, are those of Brewer<sup>500</sup> and of Ruggiers,<sup>501</sup> who suggest respectively that Chaucer is probably sceptical on practical and religious grounds; and that the views of the Canon's Yeoman must not be confused with Chaucer's, whose final view cannot be known.<sup>502</sup> Yet, as with the subject of astrology, it appears that Chaucer is able to separate the wheat from the chaff, and he does not assume that everyone who takes an interest in those arts must be dim-witted. He looks for what it is that the discerning have found in those arts which holds their interest, and he incorporates into his own work whatever he considers might be of practical use and value.

---

<sup>497</sup> Kittredge (1915), p. 15. Cited in Benson (1987), Explanatory Notes, p. 948.

<sup>498</sup> John Speirs, *Chaucer the Maker*, 2nd rev. edn. (1960), pp. 196-197. Cited in Benson (1987), Explanatory Notes, p. 948.

<sup>499</sup> Charles Muscatine, *Chaucer and the French Tradition: A Study in Style and Meaning* (1957; rpt. 1965), pp. 213-221. Cited in Benson (1987), Explanatory Notes, p. 948.

<sup>500</sup> Derek S. Brewer, *Chaucer*, 3rd edn. (1973), p. 150. Cited in Benson (1987), Explanatory Notes, p. 948.

<sup>501</sup> Paul G. Ruggiers, *The Art of the Canterbury Tales* (1965), pp. 132, 138, 140. Cited in Benson (1987), p. 948.

<sup>502</sup> Benson (1987), Explanatory Notes, p. 948.

There may be little point in analysing the *Canon's Yeoman's Tale* astrologically other than to suggest that, falling at the Capricornian stage of the zodiacal sequence, it is concerned with the cardinal, that is, practical mode of the zodiac; and there is also a consistency in that the *Tale's* subject is alchemy, the practical concern, however pretended, being with efforts to bring about the unity of the elements, the primary one of which is the earth element, from which all is generated and to which all returns.<sup>503</sup> Hence the dominance of the cardinal earth sign Capricorn. The *Tale* is not intended by Chaucer to play a major part in the development of the astrological theme of the *Tales*, but to be paired with the *Second Nun's Tale* and to serve as a warning to the pilgrims not to stray from the path to the New Jerusalem, their soul's destiny.

It is apparent by now that the *Canterbury Tales* is a *magnum opus*, a great work parallel in purpose to the objective of the alchemical philosophers, which was to transmute the base metals of human nature to the highest quality gold of the purified soul. As Ronald Pearsall says: "The rise of Christianity in the west was an important factor in alchemy and analogies were seen between the transmutation of base metals into gold and the transfiguration of man through stress and, at worst, purgatory."<sup>504</sup> And Titus Burckhardt writes: "From the Christian point of view, alchemy was like a natural mirror of the revealed truths: the philosophers' stone, which turned base metals into silver and gold, is a symbol of Christ, and its production from the 'non-burning fire' of sulphur and the 'steadfast water' of quicksilver resembles the birth of Christ-Emmanuel. By its assimilation into Christian belief, alchemy was spiritually fecundated,

---

<sup>503</sup> Lee Stavenhagen (ed. and trans.), *A Testament Of Alchemy - Being The Revelations Of Morienus To Khalid Ibn Yazid* (Dartmouth: Brandeis Univ. Press, 1974), p. 15.

<sup>504</sup> R. Pearsall, p. 9.

while Christianity found in it a way which, through the contemplation of nature, led to a true 'gnosis'."<sup>505</sup>

The first clue that Chaucer intends such a parallel development within the *Canterbury Tales* is the very fact of his using the twelve signs of the zodiac twice over, a process that is in itself puzzling until one understands that the alchemical process, although a single one, is carried out *twice over*,<sup>506</sup> in exact repetition of the same steps. Furthermore, those steps number twelve, and are taken through the twelve gates of knowledge, namely the twelve signs of the zodiac, symbolising the twelve stages of the alchemical process. These are:

TABLE 8

GATE	PROCESS	SIGN OF ZODIAC
1ST	CALCINATION	ARIES
2ND	SOLUTION	TAURUS
3RD	SEPARATION	GEMINI
4TH	CONJUNCTION	CANCER
5TH	PUTREFACTION	LEO
6TH	CONGELATION	VIRGO
7TH	CIBATION	LIBRA
8TH	SUBLIMATION	SCORPIO
9TH	FERMENTATION	SAGITTARIUS
10TH	EXALTATION	CAPRICORN

---

<sup>505</sup> Titus Burckhardt, *Alchemy - Science of the Cosmos - Science of the Soul*, William Stoddart trans. (Baltimore: Penguin, 1971), p. 18.

<sup>506</sup> See dialogue at top of this chapter, which is taken from Stavenhagen (1973), p. 31.

11TH	MULTIPLICATION	AQUARIUS
12TH	PROJECTION	PISCES

Then follows the Recapitulation. The terms used do not have their modern meanings. Calcination, the knowledge gained in the First Gate, is described in great detail by Sir George Ripley in his *The Compound of Alchymy*, and he terminates the description with the words:

You are now within the first gate,  
Of the Castle where the Philosophers dwell.  
Proceed wisely that you may win,  
And go through more gates of that Castle.  
This Castle is round as any bell,  
And gates it has yet eleven more,  
One is conquered, now to the second go.<sup>507</sup>

There follow details of the remaining eleven steps, and by following them closely it becomes apparent, retrospectively, that the *Canterbury Tales* uses terms and processes of the kinds with which the alchemical philosophy is replete.

This is possibly the most appropriate place in which to survey some of the *Tales* to demonstrate their alchemical correspondences, though such coverage is necessarily superficial, first, because I have very little alchemical knowledge, and secondly, because this thesis is concerned primarily with astrology, and only by tenuous linking threads with alchemy.

As the reader has just seen, Cecilia is just one of the outstanding female personalities of the *Canterbury Tales* and it occurred to me that Chaucer marks the

---

<sup>507</sup> Sir George Ripley, *The Compound of Alchymy*, 1591 edn., text modernized by Adam McLean, <http://www.levity.com/alchemy/ripkgates.html> (9 Feb. 1997).

alchemical progress of his great work by the distinctive qualities and conditions of the women who comprise some of the most memorable characters. It should be recalled that the alchemical process is required to be duplicated, first under the moon, then under the sun, symbolically speaking.

The first woman encountered is Emily, a lunar-Cancerean type, rather colourless and insipid, as though she were of a raw, untutored nature, untouched by life, rather naive and easily influenced, as are Cancereans, by the strength of the personalities by which she is surrounded. She may well represent the rather neutral substance, an alchemical 'milk', awaiting contact with something that will 'activate' her.

The sensual Alison of the *Miller's Tale* depicts the base metal, a little tainted by life and emotionally somewhat volatile. While she may lack the ingenuousness of Emily, she is a woman of substance, has a more rounded personality. And when we meet Alison again, it is as the Wife of Bath. This coincidence of names, repeated again when she tells us that her 'gossib' is also called Alison, is, I believe, Chaucer's way of letting us know that there is a linear continuity in the women of the *Tales*, that they are, in one sense, one substance, evolving. Alison's gossib is a kind of 'sample' of herself, and a further evolutionary development of Alison of the *Miller's Tale*. The Wife has already had a number of husbands, a suggestion perhaps that the alchemical 'marriage' has failed a number of times, that the experiments have broken down in the past: too much Mercury, not enough copper (Venus) or iron (Mars), perhaps. She hints at such when she tells us how incompatible was her husband-clerk (Mercury in Pisces, the sign of its detriment). Now, however, things appear to be improving for her; perhaps the alchemical process is advancing satisfactorily.



Alison evolves into Griselda of the *Clerk's Tale*. The process is stabilizing. Griselda somehow passes the crucial tests, perhaps stages at which the alchemical process usually breaks down. Some instability is in fact indicated by the rather fickle behaviour of Maius, Januarie's wife. She 'bonds' with two men, an amalgam that is resolved satisfactorily anyway. May's pregnancy is a cause for optimism that new life, a regeneration of the work, is taking place. And by the time the Man of Law tells his tale of Custance, another representative of Cancer, the sign of the moon's dignity, it would appear that the first stage of acquiring the philosopher's stone is moving to a successful culmination; for Custance is a woman of great virtue. Emily, the original Cancerean, has attained, in Custance, the stage at the Capricorn period, preceding that proliferation or multiplication occurring at Aquarius in the *Squire's Tale*. It is in the *Squire's Tale* that alchemical symbols abound, among them Canacee's walk among the early morning dew "[T]he vapour which that fro the erthe glood/Made the sonne to seme rody and brood" (*SqT.* l. 393), and the reference to the birds, the "foweles that she herde synge" (*SqT.* l. 398). In the Middle Ages dew was, according to Chevalier and Gheerbrant, the "symbol of redemption and rebirth";<sup>508</sup> and its importance in ritual arose from the fact that "it resolves the confrontation between the upper and the lower, the heavenly and the terrestrial waters."<sup>509</sup> It is therefore appropriate that the *Squire's Tale* lies at Aquarius and contains so much Piscean imagery, an amalgam of the two signs of watery substance.

Only at the Aquarian stage can multiplication (i.e. transmutation) be in process, a state represented by proliferation and by birds which symbolise the air element

---

<sup>508</sup> Chevalier and Gheerbrant (1996), p. 289.

<sup>509</sup> Chevalier and Gheerbrant (1996), p. 290.

linking the heavens with the earth. Finally, projection is attained when the soul ascends, at Pisces, transcending all earthly material by means of mutable water. And so it is, with the lunar cycle of the alchemical process reaching its first successful completion with Dorigen of the *Franklin's Tale*, who proves unadulterated despite the most stringent testing and proving. Dorigen of the *Franklin's Tale* (note her name's association with gold) has the black, black rocks made to vanish, covered by the sea (in alchemy having the black material covered by water and made to appear white by using salt). Dorigen's name provides the first hint that the process is now to move beyond the lunar cycle, which culminated with the proliferation of the transmuted substance at Aquarius, into the second alchemical 'round', beginning with this higher quality, pure substance, which takes form in Virginia of the *Physician's Tale*.

But a most drastic procedure has to take place to initiate the solar cycle, the second round of the alchemical work: the head has to be taken off the alchemist's broth. It must be gently removed by the knight. Once that has been done, the experiment can proceed. But it is back to basics, this time with the Merchant's wife of the Geminian *Shipman's Tale*. She, like the Miller's wife in the parallel Geminian *Reeve's Tale*, has no name. She is simply 'the wyf', as was Symkin's woman. The Merchant's wife needs one hundred francs. As we know, alchemical experiments required constant 'feeding' with silver and gold, resulting in the bankruptcy of many who indulged their desire for instant riches.

Progress results. The *Prioress's Tale* contains no earthly woman other than the little schoolboy's mother, but the Virgin Mary places the 'greyn' on the the little boy's tongue, resulting in his singing, possibly a metaphor for the substance in the alchemical bath now simmering satisfactorily. It is the gift of life. It appears to act like yeast upon

flour. Upon removal of the 'greyn', the child is placed upon an altar, suggesting that the process has reached a significantly higher stage of development, an altar usually being higher than its surroundings.

Digressing for a moment, the *Tale of Sir Thopas*, a solar Leo tale, which refers to no woman but the Fairy Queen, describes a process that takes three days, a period of significance in the alchemical process, according to Morienus. It would appear from Prudence, in the *Tale of Melibeus*, that more Mercury is to be added, before the crucial waiting-period of seventeen days to which the *Libran Monk's Tale* covertly alludes, a period during which everything in the bath has to achieve a state of total equilibrium, which is the alchemical significance of the number 17.<sup>510</sup> This *Tale*, one might recall, lies at the sign of the sun's fall, Libra. The whole alchemical exercise, the Great Work, was based on the doctrine of the Fall, according to Titus Burckhardt.<sup>511</sup> Following that period of seventeen days, Pertelote, a lunar hen advises her husband Chauntecleer, a cock, universally a solar symbol,<sup>512</sup> regarding purgation, in the *Nun's Priest's Tale*. Chauntecleer's recounting someone else's dream in which the spirit of a man who has been murdered and left in a cart of dung gives instructions as to how his body is to be recovered (in alchemy the putrefaction of the material buried in horse dung). This suggests a final purification process and leads to the ultimate test: Cecilia of the *Second Nun's Tale* passes successfully the ordeal by fire. Remember that she has been put in a cauldron of fire but the flames are powerless to harm her. Attempts are made to take off her head, but with only partial success, as she is now almost pure

---

<sup>510</sup> Chevalier and Gheerbrant (1996), p. 866.

<sup>511</sup> As reported by Chevalier and Gheerbrant (1996), pp. 13-14.

<sup>512</sup> Chevalier and Gheerbrant (1996), p. 209.

gold, known to alchemists as Roman gold.<sup>513</sup> Surely it is more than a meaningless coincidence that the *Tale* is set in Rome. Cecilia illustrates the stage of 'fermentation' at which the Philosophers' Stone is used preceding 'exaltation', after which should occur the process of actual multiplication or transmutation. Cecilia brings the solar cycle to successful culmination before the proliferation should occur again with the *Aquarian Manciple's Tale*.

It is possible, however, that disaster occurs at that stage, at Aquarius, the sign of the sun's detriment. The substance may have been adulterated because of too much Mercury; for Phebus (the sun), while betrayed by his wife, is made distraught by the white crow who talks too much: that is, too much Mercury, that planet being the symbol of communication. Phebus turns the white crow black. Chevalier and Gheerbrant, referring to the raven, which is equivalent to the crow, write:

Alchemists have always associated the stage of Putrefaction, when matter becomes black, with the raven. They call this stage 'the Raven's Head': it is leprous and must be bleached by 'bathing seven times in the waters of Jordan'. These are the imbibitions, sublimations, cohobations or digestion of matter, all practised under the lordship of fire alone. This is why the black bird is so often depicted on the pages of ancient treatises of Hermetic lore.<sup>514</sup>

This alchemy having proven inconsistent, and distracting for the pilgrims, it is appropriate that the *Manciple's Tale* is followed by the *Parson's Tale*, which brings them back to the true path to the new Jerusalem.

---

<sup>513</sup> Stavenhagen (1974), p. 47.

<sup>514</sup> Chevalier and Gheerbrant (1996), pp. 790-791.

Chaucer as alchemist has the task of transmuting the base currency of language into the gold of good literature. Perhaps he saw himself as a yeoman of the canon.<sup>515</sup>

---

<sup>515</sup> Not, for Chaucer, a conscious association in the sense of literary 'canon', a term which originated during or after the 16th century.

## The Manciple's Tale



Modern astrologers associate the sign Aquarius with the planet Uranus, the latter signifying the freedom instinct, the impulse to break out of crystallized conditions and to rebel against restrictions of any kind. In Chaucer's day, and up until the time of the discovery of Uranus, Aquarius was associated with Saturn. It becomes apparent from the *Manciple's Tale* however, that the expression of Aquarian astrological principles through Saturn was qualitatively distinct from the expression of Capricornian principles through that same planet, which suggests that Chaucer and those cognizant of astrological principles had perceived, without, obviously, being able to realise it, those astrological attributes of Uranus associated with Aquarius, mentioned above.

Aquarius being the sign a step further forward in the zodiac from Capricorn, signifies a reaction against Capricorn's principles of control, regulation, restriction and constraint. Aquarius, as we have seen earlier, being associated with the legs, symbolises the process of circulation, moving around, socialising on the basis of commonalty with one's species, yet maintaining one's uniqueness at the same time by refusing to submerge one's individuality within a group. There is a challenge to authority where such authority would threaten independence.

The *Manciple's Tale* presents Phebus and his wife, representative respectively of Leo and Aquarius. Phebus, an Apollonian character, is very musical and "[p]leyen he koude on every mynstralcie,/And syngen that it was a melodie/To heeren of his cleere voys the soun" (*MancT.* ll. 113-115). Phebus is very proud of his beautiful wife

but is so possessive of her that he "dooth al that he kan/To plesen hire, werryng for swich plesaunce,/And for his manhede and his governaunce,/That no man sholde han put hym from hir grace" (*MancT.* ll. 156-160). The Manciple then makes a claim asserting that one's true nature will out, whatever inducements are offered to behave to the contrary: "But God it woot, ther may no man embrace/As to destreyne a thyng which that nature/Hath natureelly set in a creature" (*MancT.* ll. 160-162). Among his examples he alludes to a bird in a cage, which despite it being treated tenderly and being well fed, will for ever "doon his bisynesse/To escape out of his cage, yif he may./His libertee this brid desireth ay" (*MancT.* ll. 172-174); and to a cat, which, though well fed on milk and meat and having a couch of silk, "...lat hym seen a mous go by the wal,/Anon he weyveth milk and flessch and al,/And every deyntee that is in that hous/Swich appetit hath he to ete a mous./Lo, heere hath lust his dominacioun,/And appetit fleemeth discrecioun" (*MancT.* ll. 177-182).

Phebus's wife, treated like a bird in a gilded cage, has taken a secret lover, "[a] man of litel reputacioun,/Nat worth to Phebus in comparisoun" (*MancT.* ll. 199-200), and in Phebus's absence sends for "hir lemman", says the Manciple, who then queries his own use of the term. Such a query is based on his own social snobbery. Being himself a Leo (the teller of an Aquarius tale), he is conscious of social rank, and in a sententious manner takes pains to point out that there is no difference between a woman of high birth and a poor wench if she uses her body dishonestly, but the words used to describe them are different: the former will be described as "his lady" but the other will be called "his wenche" or "his lemman". Similarly, despite the considerable difference between the potentially large-scale adversity brought by the actions of a titled tyrant and comparatively minor offences by an outlaw of little means, the former

is called "capitayn" (*MancT.* l. 230), and the latter "an outlawe or a theef" (*MancT.* l. 234). The *Tale* is thus concerned as much with the relevance of language to 'class' (an Aquarian referent) as it is to its careless usage.

Upon Phebus's return home, a white crow in his care sings "Cokkow! Cokkow! Cokkow!", the significance of which is obvious, being a pun on cuckold. In response to Phebus's concern, the crow reveals Phebus's wife's adultery and Phebus in impulsive reaction kills his wife with his bow and arrow. He has immediate remorse however, believing that he has been misled by the bird, and in his grief for his wife, refuses to consider the possibility of his having been deceived by her. He regrets his own impulsiveness and warns "O every man, be war of rakelnesse!" (*MancT.* l. 283), impulsiveness being typical of a fire element sign.

Phebus punishes the crow by pulling out his white feathers "And made hym blak, and refte hym al his song,/And eek his speche, and out at dore hym slong/Unto the devel" (*MancT.* ll. 305-307). The crow becomes thereby the victim of his own "jangling". As we saw with the *Squire's* and the *Nun's Priest's* tales, birds are Aquarian (fixed mode air element sign), and Aquarians are indicated by their tendency to talk too much. The remaining signs of the fixed cross, Taurus and Scorpio are indicated by the revelation of the wife's secret, bringing out into the open that which was hidden. In his grief, Phebus, who has destroyed his possessions (afflicted Taurus), accuses the crow with the words "Traitour...with tonge of scorioun,/Thou hast me broght to my confusioun" (*MancT.* l. 271). The fixed cross of the zodiac here consists of proud Phebus (Leo: Phoebus being a solar name and the sun being ruler of Leo); affliction by a talkative bird (Aquarius: being an air element sign and indicative of flocks of birds); secret sex (Scorpio: for reasons mentioned in other *Tales*); and the



loss of possessions (Taurus: possessions being Taurean, as with Griselda in the *Clerk's Tale*, another *Tale* associated with the fixed cross).

Although the *Tale* would appear to give an emphasis to Phebus, its essential subject-matter is actually, as the 'moral' drawn by the Manciple makes clear, the danger of talkativeness, gossip, saying too much.

Admonitions relating to speech proliferate between lines 309 and 362, typifying the Aquarian 'water-pouring', the giving out of moral principles and maxims for living by precept: "Lordynges, by this ensample I yow preye,/Beth war, and taketh kep what that ye seye:/Ne telleth nevere no man in youre lyf/How that another man hath dight his wyf" (*MancT.* ll. 309-312), warns the Manciple. His mother, he says, advised him to "thenk on the crowe" (*MancT.* l. 317-318) and that "A wikked tonge is worse than a feend" (*MancT.* l. 320). "My sone," she said, "ful ofte, for to mucche speche/Hath many a man been spilt, as clerkes teche,/But for litel speche avysely/Is no man shent, to speke generally./My sone, thy tonge sholdestow restreyne/At alle tymes, but whan thou doost they peyne/To speke of God, in honour and preyere./The firste vertu, sone, if thou wolt leere,/Is to restreyne and kepe wel thy tonge" (*MancT.* ll. 325-333). And in like manner she continues for a further 29 lines.

Such prolixity is analogous to the alchemist's 'multiplication' of transmuting metal by the Philosophers' Stone. A black crow is itself an alchemical term, one of the colours of the Great Work "often represented by birds, such as the crow (black), swan (white), and phoenix (red)."<sup>516</sup> In the *Manciple's Tale*, the transformation of a white bird to black suggests that something has gone into reverse or been turned upside-down, that is, broken free of the correct order (the symbolism of Aquarius again).

---

<sup>516</sup> John Read, *The Alchemist In Life, Literature And Art* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson, 1947), p. 17.

## The Parson's Tale



According to D.W. Robertson Jr., medieval Christianity was not a "system", but more a "fundamental attitude" and "essentially a way of life supported by ideals that, because of human weakness, were not often observed consistently."<sup>517</sup> Whether that is true or not, the "fundamental attitude" and the "way of life" were rigorously scrutinized and monitored by a closely organized hierarchy of officers and offices, prescriptions and proscriptions, amongst which those relating to the sacraments and penance especially, are examples. This was the result of decisions made by the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, reinforced by recourse to an earlier decision of the Third Lateran Council of 1179, which together resulted in the development of widespread education of church officials and some laity for the purposes of instruction in church dogma. This included not only the general precepts that constituted official Christian doctrine but also the myriad conditions qualifying the observances of penitence, including auricular confession, amounting to a virtual instruction manual. Confession, for example, was no longer voluntary; it became obligatory. And the conditions of penitence and penance were laid down precisely. It is in those tenets that Chaucer is

---

<sup>517</sup> D.W. Robertson Jr., "Chaucer and Christian Tradition" in David Lyle Jeffrey (ed.), *Chaucer and scriptural tradition* (Ottawa: Ottawa Univ. Press, 1984), pp. 3-32 (p. 4).

evidently exceptionally well versed and rehearsed and he takes excruciating pains to elaborate them in the *Parson's Tale*.

The generally accepted theory regarding Chaucer's original source for the *Tale* was Professor Skeat's contention that "[i]t is now known that this tale is little else than an adaptation (with alterations, omissions, and additions, as usual with Chaucer) of a French treatise by Frère Lorent, entitled *La Somme des Vices et des Vertus*, written in 1279."<sup>518</sup> But in her Preface to *Sources of the Parson's Tale*, Kate Petersen referred, in 1901, to a close resemblance between an Italian tract by Jacopo Passavanti and Chaucer's material. The search for Passavanti's sources led her to a treatise by Raymund of Pennaforte, which, together with a tract by Guilielmus Peraldus, brought the investigation to the ultimate sources of the *Parson's Tale*. Petersen found evidence to justify the conclusions: 1. that the source of the *Parson's Tale*, in general, is a Latin tract by Raymund of Pennaforte,<sup>519</sup> written at least thirty-six years before the *Somme* of Lorent, and affording not only the general structure of the *Parson's Tale*, but also a considerable part of its phraseology; and 2. that the digression on the Seven Deadly Sins, formerly considered to be an adaptation of Lorent's work, is rather that of the *Summa seu Tractatus de Viciis* of Guilielmus Peraldus, which also was written several years before the *Somme*.<sup>520</sup> Since then her findings appear to have been generally accepted and Raymund of Pennaforte's influence on Chaucer given its rightful place in the history of English literature.

---

<sup>518</sup> Kate Oelzner Petersen, *Sources of the Parson's Tale*, Radcliff College Monographs (Boston:Ginn, 1901), p. 1.

<sup>519</sup> Petersen (1901), pp. 78-79.

<sup>520</sup> Petersen (1901), p. 79.

Chaucer has reached the last zodiacal sign, Pisces, and the last of his pilgrims, the Parson, who, as teller, is representative of Virgo. We have seen earlier that Pisces, being the twelfth sign, is analogous to the twelfth house of the horoscope and that both are related astrologically to situations of bondage, restriction, penalties, exile, dependency and confinement. Among those that are associated with confinement is pregnancy, the stage before birth (Aries). That Pisces, the last sign, comes before Aries, the first, is more apparent if one bends a diagram of the zodiacal *melothesia* into its natural circle, so that the feet (Pisces) appear above the head (Aries). Pisces and the twelfth house are also associated with what goes on in private, behind-the-scenes, *in camera*. One such activity is, of course, confession. And another is private sinning, plotting, treachery and, in medieval times, the casting of spells and binding and loosening, the latter two activities being, in one sense, the pagan equivalent of the Christian sinning and absolution. Not for nothing was the twelfth house called *kakos daemon*, the place of the evil spirit. Our previous encounter with Pisces and the twelfth house in this thesis was in the *Franklin's Tale* in which the astrologer employed magic as a means of making the rocks 'disappear'. In the *Parson's Tale*, Chaucer introduces, as we shall see shortly, a rather more sinister activity: the slaying of children.

Penitence is the chief topic of the *Tale*. The Parson emphasizes that fact by citing Jeremiah 6: "*State super vias, et videte, et interrogate de viis antiquis que sit via bona, et ambulate in ea; et inuenietis refrigerium animabus vestris, etc.*" (Between *ParsT*. ll. 74 and 75). As Chauncey Wood points out, "this is one of the few biblical references in Chaucer's work that is labeled - if not by chapter and verse at least by chapter and book... Artistically we have here something he either invented or

was willing to keep: a scriptural reference that is repeated for emphasis, interpreted for clarity, and referred to for identification."<sup>521</sup>

The Parson interprets his quotation for the pilgrims: "Stondeth upon the weyes, and seeth and axeth of olde pathes (that is to seyn, of olde sentences) which is the goode wey,/and walketh in that wey, and ye shal fynde refresshyng four youre soules, etc." (*ParsT.* ll. 77-78). He adds that there are many spiritual paths that lead to Christ and to the "regne of glorie" (*ParsT.* l. 79). And that of those "weyes" there is a "ful noble wey and a ful covenable...and this wey is cleped Penitence,..." (*ParsT.* l. 81).

Penitence is a Pisces state and penance a Pisces act of contrition, but the manner of their description throughout the whole of the *Tale* is typically a Virgoan method of analysis, the breaking down each of their components into ever more piecemeal refinements. That taxonomy, illustrated as succinctly as it is possible to be in trying to cope with the proliferation of clauses describing Penitence, takes the following form:

After a brief outline of the state of mind and attitude necessary for true repentance, the Parson declares that there are three situations in which penitence is necessary: (*ParsT.* l. 95):

a. before being baptised (*ParsT.* l. 97); b. if you commit a deadly sin after baptism (*ParsT.* l. 99); and c: if you commit venial sins after baptism (*ParsT.* l. 100).

The Parson then describes three 'speces' [kinds] of Penitence.

One is *solemn*: a) to be put out of the church for sins such as the slaughter of children, and b) public exposure in church. Another is *commune*: communal penance

---

<sup>521</sup> Chauncey Wood, "Artistic Intention and Chaucer's Uses of Scriptural Allusion" in Jeffrey, D. L. (1984), p. 36.

such as going on pilgrimage barefoot. The third is *private*: private sins, private confession, private penance (*ParsT.* ll. 102-106).

In Myrk's *Instructions for Parish Priests*, written a few years after Chaucer's death, we find listed amongst those who are punished by excommunication, "all that sleen childeren, or distroyen boren or unborn, with drynkes or with witchcraft, & all her consentes."<sup>522</sup> Ireland points out that because Chaucer desired to treat cases of abortion and contraception alike, he omitted reference to the "quickening" of the foetus, and thus departs a little from that significant notion in Raymund of Pennaforte's *Summa de Casibus*, the source of Chaucer's discussion of homicide.

The slaying of children alluded not so much to their murder after birth, but more specifically to abortion. Abortion in medieval times was carried out in great secrecy and most frequently involved the imbibing of poisonous or adulterated drink or eating herbs known to have abortive effects. Of equal relevance to the Piscean elements of the activity, poisoning itself was regarded at that period in history as being closely allied with necromancy, "an invocation of Dark Power with all the dangers for the soul as well as for the body which that entailed."<sup>523</sup> Any interference with the human body was normally associated with medical practice, and doctors relied very much on astrology, which in turn was associated with magic. Whilst the populace might concede that medicine was 'magyk natureel', it wasn't far removed from dabbling with the black arts. And as Helen Cooper says with reference to the Franklin, "Magic, ... even 'magyk natureel', is a perversion in the ordered Christian world."<sup>524</sup>

---

<sup>522</sup> Ireland, R. W., "Chaucer's Toxicology," *The Chaucer Review*, 29 (1994), p. 84.

<sup>523</sup> Ireland (1994), p. 74.

<sup>524</sup> Cooper (1983), p. 154.

Ireland tells us that the Church was involved in the suppression of the activity of abortion by both legal and doctrinal intervention.<sup>525</sup> We may infer then, that the implications for the social *mores* were of such importance that the Parson's strictures relating to the 'slaying of children' would have had much more dramatic impact upon a medieval audience than we today might presuppose.

There are, however, certain qualities or qualifications essential for perfect Penitence: (*ParsT.* l. 107), Contrition of Heart, Confession of Mouth, and Satisfaction. Those three qualities of Penitence are fruitful against three things that anger Christ (*ParsT.* l. 110), which are Delight in thinking, Recklessness in speech and Sinful work (*ParsT.* ll. 110-111).

Penitence can be likened to a tree, the root of which is Contrition (*ParsT.* ll. 112-113). Furthermore, "Penaunce is the tree of lyf to hem that it receyven, and he that holdeth hym in verray penitence is blessed, after the sentence of Salomon" (*ParsT.* l. 127).

Then follows a further breaking-down of Penitence or Contrition. The First Part of Penitence is Contrition of Heart. In Penitence or Contrition, "man shal understande four things", says the Parson: first, what is Contrition; secondly, "the causes that moeven a man to Contricioun"; thirdly, how he should be contrite; and fourthly, what Contricioun does for the soul.

'Contricioun is the verray sorwe that a man receyveth in his herte for his synnes, with sad purpos to shryve hym, and to do penaunce, and neveremoore to do synne" (*ParsT.* l. 129).

*There are six causes which move a man to contrition:*

---

<sup>525</sup> Ireland (1994), p. 87.

i. "First a man shal remembre hym of his synnes; but looke he that thilke remembraunce ne be to hym no delit by no wey, but greet shame and sorwe for his gilt;..." (*ParsT.* l. 133). ii. "The seconde cause that oghte make a man to have desdeyn of synne is this: that, as seith Seint Peter, 'whoso that dooth synne is thral of synne'; and synne put a man in greet thraldom" (*ParsT.* l. 142). iii. "The thridde cause that oghte moeve a man to Contricioun is drede of the day of doom and of the horrible peynes of helle" (*ParsT.* l. 158). iv. "The fourthe point that oghte maken a man to have contricion is the sorweful remembraunce of the good that he hath left to doon heere in erthe, and eek the good that he hath lorn" (*ParsT.* l. 231). v. "The fifth thyng that oghte moeve a man to contricioun is remembrance of the passioun that oure Lord Jhesu Crist suffred for oure synnes" (*ParsT.* l. 255). vi. "The sixte thyng that oghte moeve a man to contricioun is the hope of three thynges; that is to seyn, foryifnesse of synne, and the yifte of grace wel for to do, and the glories of hevene, with which God shal gerdone man for his goode dedes" (*ParsT.* l. 283).

One of the ways in which Chaucer sometimes draws our attention to his use of astrological imagery in his *Tales* is by either omitting something from, or adding material to, his original source. In the section quoted above, he makes two additions that have the effect of transforming the more didactic tenor of Pennaforte into one more suited to private contemplation. Scholars have long been aware of Chaucer's adding an extract from Anselm's *Meditation on the Last Judgment* to the part of the *Tale* concerned with the third cause of contrition: "drede of the day of doom and of the horrible peynes of helle" (*ParsT.* l. 158). Bestul believes that Chaucer's use of the passage from Anselm, "intensifies the emotional quality of this section beyond the sober didacticism of Pennaforte, making it more appropriate for the purposes of



private examination than for doctrinal instruction.”<sup>526</sup> This suggests to me that Chaucer is taking pains to avoid the inclusion of that Sagittarian element (didacticism) in the *Tale*, an interesting exercise, because Sagittarius is one of the signs of the mutable cross of the zodiac, of which both Virgo and Pisces are also components. Although some may see considerable didacticism in the overall effect of the *Parson's Tale*, there is a difference between *educere* and *educare*, the first implying a ‘putting in’ of knowledge and information, which is didacticism in the Sagittarian sense of disseminating other people’s ideas; and the second implying a ‘drawing out’ of a response or reaction and thereby educating the individual’s insight into his or her own spiritual awareness and spiritual resources. It has a more cathartic quality and seems, to me, to be concerned with educating the logic of feelings rather than the logic of thinking. I think this to be what Bestul is suggesting.

The second modification is the section on the Passion at lines 255-282, which, according to Bestul, has no parallel in Chaucer’s source. Both Pennaforte’s *Summa* and the *Parson's Tale* list six causes of contrition, but Chaucer adds as one of the Causes, “remembrance of the passioun that oure Lord Jhesu Crist suffred for oure synnes” (*Parson's Tale* l. 255). Bestul remarks that this section “owes a substantial debt in its general design and in specific detail to meditative literature on the Passion, embodying several commonplaces from that tradition.”<sup>527</sup> This addition by Chaucer compels attention to Pisces; for the Passion is undoubtedly associated with that sign and its

---

<sup>526</sup> Thomas H. Bestul, “Chaucer’s *Parson's Tale* and the Late-Medieval Tradition of Religious Meditation,” *Speculum*, 64 (1989), pp. 600-619 (p. 606).

<sup>527</sup> Bestul (1989), p. 607.

connotations of sacrifice, renunciation and atonement. Recall that Pisces is one of the signs of the 'watery' triplicity, with its connotations of compassion and pathos. Here lie some potentially treacherous undercurrents, however, for in medieval times both devotional literature and fiction depend for their effects upon stimulating the emotions of their readers. Therein lay a path to hell. The emotions, once roused, could divert the Christian from the path of virtue, so the reading of fables was to be avoided. By contrast, devotional literature proffered a prospect of superior reading and an elevation of the mind to the spiritual verities. Visual imagery belonged to both fable and devotional literature too, but concerning the latter, the aim was to transcend it and to "perceive the essence of God through pure intellect..."<sup>528</sup>

Next follows the Parson's counsel as to the manner in which contrition should be expressed and the Parson completes the description of the First Part of Penitence by educating the pilgrims as to Penitence's benefit to the soul.

He then moves on to the Second Part of Penitence: Confession. As an act carried out in confidence and which is both the release from guilt and a means of atonement, it could hardly be more Piscean in symbolism.

"First shaltow understonde that Confessioun is verray shewynge of synnes to the preest" (*ParsT.* l. 318). "And forther over, it is necessarie to understonde whennes that synnes spryngen, and how they encreesen, and whiche they been" (*ParsT.* l. 321).

After describing the two forms that sin takes, he warns that venial sins will lead to mortal sins: "For certes, the moore that a man chargeth his soule with venial synnes, the moore is he enclined to fallen into deedly synne" (*ParsT.* l. 361).

---

<sup>528</sup> Bestul (1989), p. 617.

Then follows a list of the seven deadly sins: *Superbia* (Pride); *Invidia* (Envy), *Ira* (Anger), *Accidia* (Sloth), *Avaricia* (Avarice), *Gula* (Gluttony) and *Luxuria* (Lechery). These are astrologically related to the sun, moon and planets, not to the zodiacal signs. Although Chaucer's allusion to these sins is something of a digression from his chief concern, it does have relevance to the astrological component of the *Tale*. Between 1130 and 1275 the Schoolmen were confronted by the philosophical necessity to rationalise the seven deadly sins, both their number and their natures. In providing such a rationale they would usually try to justify them in terms of a logical system. Surveying different explanations, Siegfried Wenzel found at least three "models", which he calls "the concatenation, the psychological rationale, and ... the cosmological or "symbolic" rationale.<sup>529</sup> It is the latter that is relevant here. This model develops the idea that "man is a septenary", comprising the three powers of the soul and the four elements of the body. Wenzel explains that "the *deformitas* of the three *vires animal* leads to pride, envy, and wrath, while the remaining vices are said to rise 'according to' (*juxta*) the properties of single elements."<sup>530</sup> He amplifies his explanation thus:

According to [the nature of] earth, which is the lowest element, springs *acedia* and greed. *Acedia*, because Greek *melan* is *terra* or *nigrum* in Latin [!], whence the *malencolici*, who are very much troubled by *acedia*.... Greed [arises according to the nature of the earth] because like the earth it is cold and dry; therefore, old men, in whom heat and humidity are lacking, are exceedingly greedy.... According to the nature of fire, however, which is the highest element and is hot and dry, rises gluttony.... And according

---

<sup>529</sup> Siegfried Wenzel, "The Seven Deadly Sins: Some Problems of Research," *Speculum*, 43 (1968), pp. 1-22 (p. 3).

<sup>530</sup> Wenzel (1968), p. 8.

to the nature of water and air, which are intermediate elements, rises lechery.<sup>531</sup>

Following this digression on the seven deadly sins, the Parson continues with his sermon on Penitence:

"Now for as much as the seconde partie of Penitence stant in confessioun of mouth, as I bigan in the first chapitre, I seye, Seint Augustyn seith, 'Synne is every word and every dede, and al that men coveiten, agayn the love of Jhesu Crist; and this is for to synne in herte, in mouth, and in dede, by thy fyve wittes, that been sighte, herynge, smellynge, tastynge or savourynge, and feelynge.' Now is it good to understonde the circumstances that aggregen muchel every synne. Thou shalt considere what thou art that doost the synne, wheither thou be male or femele, yong or oold", [etc.] (*ParsT.* ll. 958-961). This reference to the "fyve wittes" might remind the reader that the previous encounter with them was at the Virgoan tale, that of Melibeus.

The sermon continues in the Parson's Virgoan manner, to set out the detailed conditions of true confession, before explaining the third part of Penitence, "Satisfaccioun".

This taxonomic breakdown of Penitence shows Chaucer combining the two sign principles of Virgo and Pisces in a perfect synthesis. Through the process of exemplifying Virgoan analysis, Chaucer presents the *Tale* as a "meditacioun", and its characterization as such belongs to the late medieval tradition of *meditatio*, usually

---

<sup>531</sup> The treatise "*Quoniam ut ait sapiens*," BL. MS Harley 3823, fol. 65v, cited in Wenzel (1968), footnote 34, p. 8.

associated with contemplative works which recorded an individual's private communion with God, and thus a typical Piscean practice.

Chauncey Wood suggests that Chaucer is interested in "introducing the Parson's sermon on Penance with a single image of the crossroads that both sums up all his pilgrimage imagery to this point, and opens the way for the penitential message that leads to the spiritual pilgrimage that both accompanies and supersedes the earthly one."<sup>532</sup> In the light of those comments, it is both remarkable and ironic, I suppose, that it is only in the *Parson's Tale*, the perfect synthesis of Virgo-Pisces, that a cross of the zodiac is actually absent. This was no doubt intended by Chaucer to indicate that through Christ and penitence we, as pilgrims, may reach, at last, beyond the stage of the crucifixion to at-one-ment (Pisces), in the celestial City of Jerusalem. Furthermore, this is an act and a reward that we all, irrespective of race, class or condition, may share in; for Pisces, the sign immediately after Aquarius, signifies movement beyond such categories that divide. Pisces implies universality. Being the sign opposite to Virgo and its particularization and discrimination, Pisces represents the undifferentiated. Chevalier and Gheerbrant describe it thus:

Here the Moist holds undisputed sway as the principle which diffuses, dilutes, enfolds and welds individual parts into one whole, the latter being as wide as the vastness flowing around us, even as the infinity of the cosmic ocean. The sign is depicted traditionally as a pair of fish back to back joined at their mouths by a sort of umbilical cord. Under their influence we become part of that great universal tide and belong to the community of all peoples on Earth, like a drop of water in the ocean. We are placed, too, in an undifferentiated world, one without distinguishing marks, drowned and confounded in the

---

<sup>532</sup> Wood (1984), pp. 36-37.

obliteration of individuality to the benefit of the limitless,  
going from zero to infinity.<sup>533</sup>

By the time the Parson closes his *Tale* the moon will have moved from 29° Aries at the start of the pilgrimage, through an appropriate 7 degrees, to 6° Taurus. The moon and sun are sitting together on Thomas Becket's ascendant. It is time for the pilgrims to put rivalries aside and, as one body, to enter Canterbury, the New Jerusalem, there to be 'reborn', symbolised by the new moon now forming at 6 degrees of Taurus.

---

<sup>533</sup> Chevalier and Gheerbrant (1996), p. 757.

## Chapter Eight

### Recapitulation

As commentators have frequently pointed out, whether or not Chaucer intended a particular order for his *Canterbury Tales* will probably never be known for certain. But one must first assume that he did, if there is to be any point in trying to ascertain what it was. And such a venture is not, of course, an end in itself. Having arrived at what one infers, from supportive evidence, was Chaucer's intended sequence, possibly revised, one is confronted by the questions as to why he desired one at all, and why that particular one. Why did he not simply tell 24 tales in random order? It goes without saying, that whilst he might have intended the *Tales* to follow a particular sequence in manuscript, he need not have desired all his readers to read them in that same order: he may have not cared how some people read them (he actually advises those who aren't interested in any particular tale to turn the leaf and choose another); whilst for others, the sequence in which they are read might be of crucial import. Among those others to whom he was writing and speaking, I imagine he would include those with an interest in astronomy and astrology; and those with interests in either the Biblical analogues, which may follow a particular historical line of development too; and those interested in alchemy, which had aroused considerable interest by the 14th century.

In retrospect, given the predominant influences of Christianity and astrology, it is hardly surprising that Chaucer amalgamated what were obviously his chief interests, for the purpose of creating his chief work. Astronomical tables had advanced in accuracy and his own competence in astronomy had developed apace. Encounters with

astrology were unavoidable, and we should forget least of all, that he brought to his consideration of it his poetic imagination. That seems forgotten by some critics, who appraise Chaucer's interest from the modern perspective of astrology's questionable scientific validity and the likelihood of someone of Chaucer's intelligence taking an interest in a subject that is generally believed no longer to hold appeal. That, I think, shuts down intellectual curiosity by preempting the verdict from a distorted perspective. What might have been viewed as an eccentric peccadillo for someone like Roger Bacon or Albertus Magnus, is more acceptable for someone whose chosen profession was poet, whose very *métier* was symbolism. The complete history of the constellations at Chaucer's epoch was mythopoeic. How could he avoid uniting Urania with Neptunia?<sup>534</sup> Having received a classical education from literary sources chiefly Greek and Latin, among which were the astronomical and astrological musings and surmises of Plato, Manilius, Boethius and Aristotle, and later surrounded, as he was, by members of an intellectual elite who necessarily had to study astrology as part of their training for medicine, the church, mathematics or philosophy, it might well have been a foregone conclusion that with his interests and competence too, astrology would play a major role in his poetry.

The suggestion that the *Tales* form part five of his *Treatise on the Astrolabe* was made with some slight reservation, politic in case 'part five' is ever discovered. For as long as it remains undiscovered, I consider I have a right to claim the *Tales* comprise what Chaucer had promised his son and that, notwithstanding any other purpose, their central one is to illustrate the fundamental principles of astrology. There

---

<sup>534</sup> Urania, the spirit of astronomy; Neptunia, inspiration and intuition. See Chevalier and Gheerbrant (1996), pp. 1056 and 698.



was no need for him to provide any other material: the *Alphonsine Tables* had supplemented the *Kalendarium*, and numerous tables of astronomical phenomena were available, obviating the need for him to write parts three and four of the *Treatise*.

The *General Prologue* appears to tie in the pilgrims with the planetary typologies; the *Tales* themselves amplify the zodiacal *melothesia* Chaucer has already pointed to in the *Treatise*; and they illustrate the modes, elements, aspects, the evolutionary progression of the zodiac as an archetype of human spiritual development, from egocentricity to social consciousness, from pagan belief to spiritual redemption. The two sets of 12 *Tales* follow the sequence of the zodiacal signs as depicted on both sides of the astrolabe itself and allow Chaucer to meet the requirements of the alchemical process, as described. The conjecture that the *Tales* simultaneously comprise an alchemical treatise is made at this stage somewhat tentatively, but there is far more evidence than I have suggested here, in support of it.

North has shown that many of the *Tales* also point to the relevance of the fixed stars, some of which are also depicted on the astrolabe.

While one or two of the claims staked in this thesis may stand on thin ice, others are quite impressive, notably the coincidence of the recurring doubling that occurs in the Gemini *Tales* (the *Reeve's* and the *Shipman's*), together with the doubling of brothers that occurs in the polar opposite *Tales*, namely the *Merchant's* and the *Second Nun's Tale of St. Cecilia*, which fall at the Sagittarian phase of the solar cycle, the latter incorporating Cecilia's Feast Day. The desire for mastery, by the Wife of Bath at Leo; Griselda's stability and constancy of Taurus interacting with her Scorpio husband Walter's secrecy; the concern with prolixity of words in both the *Squire's* and *Manciple's Tales* at Aquarius; and at Pisces, the coincident concern with

the transcendence of magic in the *Franklin's* and the transcendence by penance, of mortality and sin, in the *Parson's*, provides further correlations of interest. Concern with the mouth and throat and the excretory organs in the Taurus-Scorpio *Miller's Tale* and with the mouth and throat and death in both the *Pardoner's* and *Nun's Priest's* Scorpio-Taurus *Tales* are further evidence of the consistency of zodiacal principles with themes. Those who belong to ethnic groups or races not associated with Christianity are represented at the Capricorn phase in both the *Man of Law's Tale* of Custance in Syria and the *Prioress's Tale* of the child St. Hugh martyred by the Jews. Similar anti-Christian ethics, popularly ascribed to alchemists, emerge at the Capricornian phase, in the *Canon's Yeoman's Tale*. Chaucer has fun at the playful Leo stage of the solar cycle with his *Tale of Sir Thopas*, and becomes prosaic and serious immediately afterwards with his *Tale of Melibee* at Virgo.

Strong evidence has been provided for the linking of the grand themes of a metaphysical kind and of human nobility with the cardinal signs. Chaucer sews into the fabric of the *Tales* a consistent thread of concern for, and sensitivity to, the various functions of language as a means of story-telling, distinct from *Tale*-telling. The *Knight's Tale*, the *Summoner's*, the *Man of Law's*, the *Physician's* and the *Monk's Tale* are stories. They are set in the past; they make no pretence to be accurate records of what really happened; and such freedom allows scope for inspiration to create metaphysical and lofty notions, accompanied by action and most importantly, events. These *Tales* are placed at Aries, Cancer, Libra and Capricorn phases of the solar cycle.

*Tales* depicting human frailties and fallibilities are located at the fixed mode signs Taurus, Leo, Scorpio and Aquarius, notably the *Miller's*, *Wife of Bath's*, *Summoner's*, *Pardoner's* and *Nun's Priest's*, the *Squire's* and the *Manciple's*. They

display language dressed in the mystifying dress of occult terminology; or in the colours of rhetoric and typifying that of social degree and estate, language deployed as a means of influencing and persuading people to adopt various attitudes and values. Situations are rather static. If there is any action, any event, it tends to be quiet, clandestine, at night or in the dark, with few changes of location. And these *Tales* are concerned more with the exploration of language and beliefs than with events and activities. That is consistent with the implicit stability and stillness of this mode of the zodiac.

Those *Tales* concerned with exploitation and gullibility, the unreliability of sense perception as sources of knowledge are situated at the mutable mode signs Gemini, Virgo, Sagittarius and Pisces. As one might by now expect, these *Tales* are characterized by movement, change, lively but unimportant action and numerous events of trivial consequence. Here language as a source of knowledge is adapted to mischief, frivolity and self-deception in the slapstick *Reeve's Tale*, the chicanery of the *Friar's*, the buffoonery of the *Merchant's*, the commercial malarky of the *Shipman's*; and adapted to the personal transition *motif* apparent in the *Friar's*, *Franklin's*, Chaucer's *Tale of Melibee*, and the *Parson's Tale*. Each of those 4 *Tales* falls at a position just preceding the vernal or autumnal equinox, astrologically symbolic of transition. With the mutable mode we might predict changes affecting beliefs and knowledge, trust and faith - each of the signs comprising that mode is ruled by either of two planets symbolic of knowledge, namely Mercury and Jupiter. The first round of the zodiac in this mode concentrates upon the discrepancy between information received through sense perception of physical movement and the facts of the situation; and moves from cunning monkey-tricks at the *Reeve's* to the development of

conscience at the *Franklin's* via intermediary stages at the *Friar's* and *Merchant's*.

The second round of the zodiac in the mutable mode concentrates upon *Tales* concerned with ethics and motivation in action, moving from devious diversions at the *Merchant's* to contrition and atonement at the *Parson's*, via intermediary stages at *Melibee* and the *Second Nun's*.

We must remember that certain established fragments compel the order of some *Tales* to be observed. So the remarkable correspondence between the established sequences and the zodiacal order of signs suggests that the best presentation of the *Tales*, the one given the most elaborate treatment by editors and one of the earliest manuscripts, namely the *Ellesmere*, is probably the one that Chaucer would most likely have acknowledged with approval and delight.

It remains to summarise the reason for Chaucer's inclusion of astrology in such a covert manner as demonstrated in this thesis. One has to remember that Chaucer lived in interesting times - a period of civil unrest, plague, the Great Schism, the turbulent reign of Richard II. This was also a time when astrology was in the ascendancy but the object of intense suspicion and some fear. Although Edward III had shown little interest in astrology, Richard II is known to have been interested in arcane subjects, and Chaucer's interest and writings involving astrology developed during the most chaotic years of that unstable king. Because Chaucer was the first to introduce into English poetry the Italian practice of using astrological symbolism in order to refer to specific times and events,<sup>535</sup> thus giving it a prophetic undertone, he was placing himself in a politically vulnerable position. The confusion of astrology with the perceived powers of sorcery generated rumour upon rumour of secret plots against the

---

<sup>535</sup> Carey (1992), p. 100.

throne. Anyone who was known to practise astrology, particularly someone who, like Chaucer, was in contact with some of the most influential members of the Court, laid himself open to charges of secretly plotting against the throne, of treachery. Whilst one might use the *Secretum Secretorum* to demonstrate the value of astrological advice to a monarch, one might also cite the *Picatrix* and its concern with the use of astrological configurations, the lunar mansions and fixed stars, for the making of images designed to achieve certain ends such as protection, love, success in battle. Who knows what else? Although for the most part distinct in actual practice and motivation, astrology and sorcery both involved symbolism and ritual; both were essentially mystical and secret, so it wasn't necessary, or, perhaps, considered possible, to provide concrete evidence of an astrologer's intentions or deeds. How could one explain the inexplicable? Suspicion and accusation are enough to motivate a witch-hunt. As Hilary Carey says, "Astrologers may have enjoyed some partial immunity from the charge of sorcery or witchcraft, but they were not safe from that of treason...The case of Thomas Southwell and Roger Bolingbroke demonstrates how inflammable the mixture of astrology and politics could become."<sup>536</sup> It was well within half a century following Chaucer's and Richard's deaths in 1400, that astrologers were hanged, including Bolingbroke in 1441.

Doubtless Chaucer considered that by the time scholars and those with more malevolent intent uncovered the extent of his astrological competence and any political implications that might have been buried within the *Canterbury Tales* (and we have seen that there is demonstrably more politics to the *Prioress's Tale*, for example, than

---

<sup>536</sup> Carey (1992), p. 152.

meets the eye), he would be safely tucked up in his grave. Like Arcite, "allone, withouten any compaignye", he can rest easy, letting the alchemy of the *Tales* work, as upon growing grain, within the formerly fallow souls of thousands who search and discover and follow after him.

END

## APPENDIX A

## THE 'BRADSHAW SHIFT'

Riverside Edition Order	The Bradshaw Shift Order	Thesis Order	Sign
1. Knight's Tale	Knight's Tale	Knight's Tale	Aries
2. Miller's Tale	Miller's Tale	Miller's Tale	Taurus
3. Reeve's Tale	Reeve's Tale	Reeve's Tale	Gemini
4. Cook's Tale	Cook's Tale	Cook's Tale	Cancer
5. Man of Law's Tale	Man of Law's Tale	Wife of Bath's Tale	Leo
6. Wife of Bath's Tale	Shipman's Tale	Friar's Tale	Virgo
7. Friar's Tale	Prioress's Tale	Summoner's Tale	Libra
8. Summoner's Tale	Tale of Sir Thopas	Clerk's Tale	Scorpio
9. Clerk's Tale	Tale of Melibee	Merchant's Tale	Sagittarius
10. Merchant's Tale	Monk's Tale	Man of Law's Tale	Capricorn
11. Squire's Tale	Nun's Priest's Tale	Squire's Tale	Aquarius
12. Franklin's Tale	Physician's Tale	Franklin's Tale	Pisces
13. Physician's Tale	Pardoner's Tale	Physician's Tale	Aries
14. Pardoner's Tale	Wife of Bath's Tale	Pardoner's Tale	Taurus
15. Shipman's Tale	Friar's Tale	Shipman's Tale	Gemini
16. Prioress's Tale	Summoner's Tale	Prioress's Tale	Cancer
17. Tale of Sir Thopas	Clerk's Tale	Tale of Sir Thopas	Leo
18. Tale of Melibee	Merchant's Tale	Tale of Melibee	Virgo
19. Monk's Tale	Squire's Tale	Monk's Tale	Libra
20. Nun's Priest's Tale	Franklin's Tale	Nun's Priest's Tale	Scorpio
21. Second Nun's Tale	Second Nun's Tale	Second Nun's Tale	Sagittarius
22. Canon's Yeoman's Tale	Canon's Yeoman's Tale	Canon's Yeoman's Tale	Capricorn
23. Manciple's Tale	Manciple's Tale	Manciple's Tale	Aquarius
24. Parson's Tale.	Parson's Tale	Parson's Tale	Pisces

My ordering, which fits the zodiacal sequence, is the same as the *Riverside's*, with the possible exception of the *Man of Law's Tale*, which I have relocated.

## APPENDIX B

## Abbreviations used in this Thesis

The abbreviations used in this Thesis are identical to those used in *The Riverside Chaucer*. For readers' convenience those are listed below. As with the *Riverside's* practice, line numbers within *Introductions*, *Prologues* and *Epilogues* to *Tales* are incorporated in the abbreviations for the *Tales* themselves.

<i>Astr</i>	A Treatise on the Astrolabe
<i>CkT</i>	The Cook's Tale
<i>ClT</i>	The Clerk's Tale
<i>CT</i>	The Canterbury Tales
<i>CYT</i>	The Canon's Yeoman's Tale
<i>FranT</i>	The Franklin's Tale
<i>FrT</i>	The Friar's Tale
<i>GP</i>	General Prologue
<i>HF</i>	The House of Fame
<i>KnT</i>	The Knight's Tale
<i>MancT</i>	The Manciple's Tale
<i>Mel</i>	The Tale of Melibee
<i>MerT</i>	The Merchant's Tale
<i>MilT</i>	The Miller's Tale
<i>MkT</i>	The Monk's Tale
<i>MLT</i>	The Man of Law's Tale
<i>NPT</i>	The Nun's Priest's Tale
<i>PardT</i>	The Pardoner's Tale
<i>ParsT</i>	The Parson's Tale
<i>PF</i>	The Parliament of Fowls
<i>PhyT</i>	The Physician's Tale
<i>PrT</i>	The Prioress's Tale
<i>RvT</i>	The Reeve's Tale
<i>ShipT</i>	The Shipman's Tale
<i>SNT</i>	The Second Nun's Tale
<i>SqT</i>	The Squire's Tale
<i>SumT</i>	The Summoner's Tale
<i>Thop</i>	The Tale of Sir Thopas
<i>Tales</i>	The Canterbury Tales
<i>Tr</i>	Troilus and Criseyde
<i>WBT</i>	The Wife of Bath's Tale



## APPENDIX C

## THE FINAL COINCIDENCE

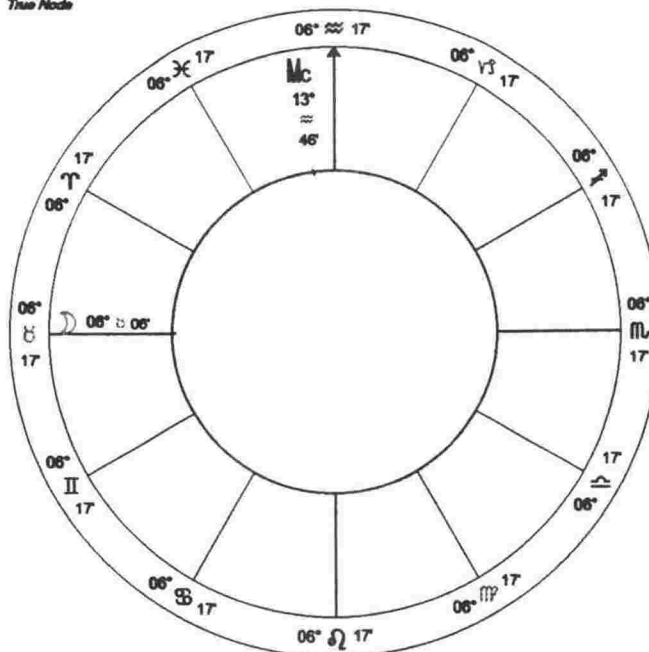
The writer of this thesis had no influence in determining the date on which the viva (the oral defence of the thesis) was held. That was determined by two of its four examiners, Dr. Robert Easting, of Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand, and Dr. Colin Gibson, of the University of Otago, New Zealand. Neither Dr. Easting nor Dr. Gibson has an interest in astrology.

They appointed the time and location of the oral examination, at their mutual convenience, for 2:00 p.m. New Zealand Daylight Time (+13 hrs. on Universal Time: i.e. 1:00 a.m., U.T.) on 7 January, 1998, at Wellington, New Zealand, latitude  $41^{\circ} 18'$  south; longitude  $174^{\circ} 47'$  east. The viva concluded at 3:15 p.m.

The moon was rising in the ascendant house, in  $5^{\circ}$  Taurus, when the viva began. The map below shows the astrological position of the moon at the time the viva concluded, at  $6^{\circ}$  Taurus, precisely in the ascending degree!

Moon rising at viva  
Natal Chart  
7 Jan 1998  
15:20 NZST -13:00  
Wellington  
41S18 174E47  
Geocentric  
Tropical  
Equal  
True Node

Appendix 3  
Conclusion of viva



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abraham, David H. "Cosyn and Cosynage: Pun And Structure In The Shipman's Tale." *The Chaucer Review*, 11 (1976-7), pp.319-327.
- Adams, George R., and Levy, Bernard S. "Good and Bad Fridays and May 3 In Chaucer." *ELN*, 3 (1966), pp.243-248.
- Adelman, Janet. "That We May Leere Som Wit." in *The Pardoner's Tale: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Ed. Dewey R. Faulkner. Englewood Cliffs, NJ.: Prentice Hall, 1973, pp.96-106.
- Al-Biruni, Abu'l-Rayhan Muhammad Ibn Ahmad. *The Book of Instruction In The Elements Of The Art Of Astrology*, trans. R.Ramsay Wright. London: Luzac, 1934.
- Alford, John A. "The Wife Of Bath Versus The Clerk Of Oxford: What Their Rivalry Means." *The Chaucer Review*, 21 (1986), pp.108-132.
- Allen, Judson Boyce and Moritz, Theresa Anne. *A distinction of stories: the medieval unity of Chaucer's fair chain of narratives for Canterbury*. Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 1981.
- Allen, Richard Hinckley. *Star Names*. First published 1899 under the title *Star-Names and Their Meanings*. New York: Dover, 1963.
- Al-Majrītī. *Picatrix -The Latin version of the Ghāyāt Al-Hakīm*. Ed. and trans. David Pingree. London: The Warburg Institute, 1986.

- Ames, Ruth M. *God's Plenty: Chaucer's Christian Humanism*. Chicago: Loyola Univ. Press, 1984.
- Anderson, David. "The Fourth Temple of The Knight's Tale: Athenian Clemency and Chaucer's Theseus." *Studies in the Age of Chaucer, Proceedings*, 2 (1986), pp.113-125.
- Archer, John. "The Structure of Anti-Semitism In The Prioress's Tale." *The Chaucer Review*, 19 (1984-5), pp.46-54.
- Aristotle. *De Anima*. Bk.3. Trans. J. A. Smith,  
<http://swift.eng.ox.ac.uk/jdr/aristo.html>; [gopher://gopher.vt.edu:10010/02/39/27](http://gopher://gopher.vt.edu:10010/02/39/27).
- Augustine. *De Civitate Dei*. Trans. John Healey. Ed. R.U.G. Tasker. London: Dent, 1957.
- Baigent, Michael, Nicholas Campion and Charles Harvey. *Mundane Astrology - the astrology of Nations, Groups and Organizations*. London: Aquarian Press, 1984.
- Baigent, Michael. *From the Omens of Babylon*. London: Penguin, 1994.
- Barton, Tamsyn S. (1) *Ancient Astrology*. London: Routledge, 1994.
- Barton, Tamsyn S. (2) *Power and Knowledge - Astrology, Physiognomics, and Medicine under the Roman Empire*. Michigan: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1994.
- Baum, Paull Franklin. *Chaucer: A Critical Appreciation*. Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 1958.
- Baylor, Jeffrey. "The Failure Of The Intellect In Chaucer's Reeve's Tale." *ELN* (Sept.,1990), pp.17-19.

- Benson, Larry D. (ed). *The Riverside Chaucer*. 3rd edn. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1987.
- Bernardus Sylvestris. *The Cosmographia of Bernardus Silvestris*. Trans. Winthrop Wetherbee. New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1973.
- Berry, Craig A. "Borrowed Armor/Free Grace: The Quest for Authority in *The Faerie Queene* I and Chaucer's *Tale of Sir Thopas*." *Studies in Philology*, 91 (1994), pp.136-166.
- Besserman, Lawrence. *Chaucer and the Bible: A Critical Review of Research, Indexes, and Bibliography*. New York and London: Garland, 1988.
- Bestul, Thomas H. "Chaucer's Parson's Tale and the Late-Medieval Tradition of Religious Meditation." *Speculum*, 64 (1989), pp.600-619.
- Biggam, C.P. "Aspects Of Chaucer's Adjectives Of Hue." *The Chaucer Review*, 28 (1993), pp.41-53.
- Bloomfield, Morton W. "The Friar's Tale As A Liminal Tale." *The Chaucer Review*, 17(1983), pp.286-291.
- Boenig, Robert. "Absolon's Musical Instruments." *ELN* (September, 1990), pp.7-15.
- Boenig, Robert. "Musical Irony in the *Pardoner's Tale*." *The Chaucer Review*, 24 (1990), pp.253-258.
- Boethius, Anicius Manlius Severinus. *The Consolation of Philosophy*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969.
- Bonatus, Guido, *The Astrologer's Guide. Anima Astrologiae: or A Guide For Astrologers. Being The One Hundred And forty-Six considerations Of The Famous Astrologer, GUIDO BONATUS*. Trans. Henry Coley.

- London: George Redway, 1886. Fourth edition 1986, facsimile of 1886 rpt. London: Regulus, 1986.
- Bowman, Mary R. "“Half As She Were Mad”: Dorigen In the Male World Of The *Franklin's Tale*." *The Chaucer Review*, 27 (1993), pp.239-251.
- Boyd, Beverly (ed.). *The Prioress's Tale, The Variorum Edition*, Vol.II. Norman, Ok., and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987.
- Braswell, Laurel. "The Moon and Medicine in Chaucer's Time." *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 8 (1986), pp.145-156.
- Braswell, Mary Flowers. "Chaucer's "Queinte Termes Of Lawe": A Legal View Of The *Shipman's Tale*." *The Chaucer Review*, 22 (1988), pp.295-304.
- Braswell-Means, Laurel. "A New Look at an Old Patient: Chaucer's Summoner and Medieval Physiognomia." *The Chaucer Review*, 25 (1991), pp.266-275.
- Brewer, Derek (ed.). *Writers and their Background: Geoffrey Chaucer*. London: Bell, 1974.
- Brooks, Douglas and Fowler, Alastair. "The Meaning Of Chaucer's '*Knight's Tale*'." *Medium Aevum*, 39,1 (1970), pp.123-146.
- Brown, Keopke Carole. "“It Is True Art To Conceal Art”: The Episodic Structure of Chaucer's *Franklin's Tale*." *The Chaucer Review*, 27 (1992), pp.162-185.
- Brown, Keopke Carole. "Episodic Patterns and the Perpetrator: The Structure and Meaning of Chaucer's *Wife of Bath's Tale*." *The Chaucer Review*, 31 (1996), pp.18-35.

- Brown, Peter. "The Containment Of Symkyn: The Function Of Space In The *Reeve's Tale*." *The Chaucer Review*, 14 (1979-80), pp.225-235.
- Brown, Peter and Butcher, Andrew F. *The Age of Saturn: Literature and History in the Canterbury Tales*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1991.
- Bullard, Melissa Meriam. "The Inward Zodiac: A Development in Ficino's Thought on Astrology." *Renaissance Quarterly*, 43 (1990), pp.687-708.
- Burckhardt, Titus. *Alchemy -Science of the Cosmos - Science of the Soul*. Trans. William Stoddart. Baltimore: Penguin, 1971.
- Burnley, J.D. *Chaucer's Language and the Philosophers' Tradition*. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1979.
- Butler, Christopher. *Number Symbolism*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970.
- Campanella, Tommaso. *The six books of Astrology of Campanella of the Order of Preachers, in which Astrology, from which all the superstition of the Arabs and the Jews has been eliminated, is dealt with on physical principles (physiologic), according to Holy Scripture and the teaching of Saints Thomas and Albert and the great Theologians, in such a way that it may be read with great profit without coming under suspicion from the Church of God*. London: 1629.
- Carey, Hilary M. *Courting Disaster: Astrology at the English Court and University in the Later Middle Ages*. Basingstoke and London: Macmillan Academic, 1992.

- Carpenter, Garth. "Horizontal/Vertical Metaphors and the Meaning of the Asc., M.C. and Zenith Axes." *Réalta, The Journal of the Irish Astrological Association*, 2 (1995), pp.35-41.
- Chaucer, Geoffrey. *The works of Geoffrey Chaucer*. 2nd edn. Ed. Fred Norris Robinson. London: Riverside Press, 1957.
- Chevalier, Jean and Alain Gheerbrant. *The Penguin Dictionary of Symbols*. Trans. John Buchanan-Brown. 2nd edn. London: Penguin, 1996.
- Chiapelli, Carolyn. "Chaucer's Use of SOLAS." *Comitatus*, II (1971), pp.91-92.
- Chaucer, Geoffrey. *The Riverside Chaucer*. 3rd edn. Ed. Larry Benson. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987.
- Cicero, *De inventione*, Trans. John F. Tinkler (1995), <http://english-www.hss.cmu.edu/rhetoric/genres-of-rhetoric.html#virtue>
- Clark, Charles West. *The Zodiac Man in Medieval Medical Astrology*. Diss. Univ. of Colorado, 1979.
- Condren, Edward I. "The Prioress: A Legend Of Spirit, A Life Of Flesh." *The Chaucer Review*, 23 (1989), pp.192-218.
- Conley, John. "The Peculiar Name Thopas." *Studies in Philology*, 73 (1976), pp.42-61.
- Cooper, Helen. *The Structure of the Canterbury Tales*. London: Duckworth, 1983.
- Coopland, G.W. *The Tree of Battles*. Liverpool, 1949. First published as Bonet, Honoré. *L'Arbre des batailles*.
- Cullen, Dolores L. "Chaucer's *The Tale Of Sir Thopas*." *Explicator*, 32 (1974), art.5 (n. p.).

- Curtiss, Joseph T. "The Horoscope In Chaucer's Man Of Law's Tale." *JEGP*, 26 (1927), pp.24-32.
- Cross, F.L., and E.A. Livingston (eds.). *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*. 2nd edn. London: Oxford University Press, 1974.
- Curry, Walter Clyde. *Chaucer and the Mediaeval Sciences*. 2nd edn. London: Allen and Unwin, 1960.
- Dales, Richard C. "Robert Grosseteste's Views On Astrology." *Mediaeval Studies*, 29 (1967), pp.357-363.
- Dawson, Robert B. "Custance In Context: Rethinking the Protagonist of the *Man of Law's Tale*." *The Chaucer Review*, 26 (1992), pp.293-308.
- De Armas, Frederick A. "'El Planeta Mas Impío': Basilio's Roile in *La Vida Es Sueño*." *MLR*, 81 (1986), pp.900-911.
- de Meung, Jean. *Le Roman de la Rose*. Ed. F.Lecoy. Les classiques français du moyen âge, II.
- de Voragine, Jacobus. *Legenda Aurea*. Trans. Granger Ryan and Helmut Ripperger. New York et al: Longmans, Green and Co., 1941.
- DiMarco, Vincent. "Nero's Nets And Seneca's Veins: A New Source for the *Monk's Tale*?" *The Chaucer Review*, 28 (1994), pp.384-392.
- Donaldson, E. Talbot. *Speaking of Chaucer*. Univ. of London: Athlone Press, 1970.
- Eade, John Christopher. *The forgotten sky: a guide to astrology in English literature*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1984.



- Eade, John Christopher. "'We ben to lewed or slowe': Chaucer's Astronomy and Audience Participation." *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 4 (1982), pp.53-85.
- Eckhardt, Caroline D. "The Number of Chaucer's Pilgrims: A Review and Reappraisal." *The Chaucer Review*, 5 (1975), pp.1-18.
- Eisner, Sigmund (ed.). *The Kalendarium of Nicholas of Lynn*. Athens, Georgia: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1980.
- Eisner, Sigmund. "Chaucer as a Technical Writer." *The Chaucer Review*, 19 (1985), pp.179-201.
- Eisner, Sigmund. "Canterbury Day: A Fresh Aspect." *The Chaucer Review*, 27 (1992), pp.31-44.
- Eisner, Sigmund. "The Ram Revisited: A Canterbury Conundrum." *The Chaucer Review*, 28 (1994), pp. 330-343.
- Eliade, Mircea. *The Forge and the Crucible: The Origins and Structures of Alchemy*. 2nd edn. Trans. Stephen Corrin. Chicago and London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1962. First published 1956.
- Ellis, Deborah S. "Chaucer's Devilish Reeve." *The Chaucer Review*, 27 (1992), pp.150-161.
- Fagan Cyril. *Astrological Origins*. St. Paul, Minn.: Llewellyn, 1971.
- Fairchild, Hoxie Neale. "Active Arcite, Contemplative Palamon." *JEGP* 26 (1927), pp.285-293.
- Faulkner, Dewey R. (ed.). *The Pardoner's Tale: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1973.

- Ferris, Sumner. "Chaucer At Lincoln (1387): The *Prioress's Tale* as a Political Poem." *The Chaucer Review*, 15 (1980-81), pp.295-321.
- Ferris, Sumner. "Venus And The Virgin: The Proem to Book 3 of Chaucer's *Troilus And Criseyde* as a Model for the Prologue to the *Prioress's Tale*." *The Chaucer Review*, 27 (1993), pp.252-259.
- Finlayson, John. "The *Knight's Tale*: The Dialogue of Romance, Epic, and Philosophy." *The Chaucer Review*, 27 (1992), pp.126-149.
- Flint, Valerie. "The Transmission Of Astrology In The Early Middle Ages." *Viator* 21 (1990), pp.1-27
- Fowler, Alastair. *Spenser and the Numbers of Time*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964.
- Friedman, John B. "Henryson's Testament of Cresseid and the Judicio Solis in Convivio Saturni of Simon of Couvin." *Modern Philology*, 83 (1985), pp.12-21.
- Fritz, Donald W. "Reflections In A Golden Florin: Chaucer's Narcissistic Pardoner." *The Chaucer Review*, 21 (1987), pp.338-359.
- Gallacher, Patrick J. "Food, Laxatives, and Catharsis in Chaucer's Nun's Priest's Tale." *Speculum*, 51 (1976), pp.49-68.
- Gallacher, Patrick J. "The Summoner's Tale and Medieval Attitudes Towards Sickness." *The Chaucer Review*, 21 (1986), pp.200-212.
- Gallacher, Patrick J. "Chaucer and the Rhetoric of the Body," *The Chaucer Review*, 28 (1994), pp.216-236.

- Ganim, John M. "Double Entry In Chaucer's Shipman's Tale: Chaucer and Bookkeeping Before Pacioli." *The Chaucer Review*, 30 (1996), pp.294-305.
- Garin, Eugenio (ed. and trans.). Della Mirandola, Giovanni Pico. *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem*, 2 vols. Forence, 1946,1952.
- Garin, Eugenio. *La zodiaco della vita: La polemica sull' Astrologia dal Trecento al Cinquecento* (Rome, 1976), trans. Carolyn Jackson and June Allen. *Astrology in the Renaissance, The Zodiac of Life*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983.
- Gaylord, Alan T. "The Moment of Sir Thopas: Towards a New Look at Chaucer's Language." *The Chaucer Review*, 16 (1981-82), pp.311-329.
- Gaylord, Alan T. "The 'Miracle' of Sir Thopas." *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 6 (1984), pp.65-84.
- Gaylord, Alan T. "The Role Of Saturn in the *Knight's Tale*." *The Chaucer Review*, 8 (1986), pp.171-190.
- Gettings, Fred. *The Hidden Art - A study of occult symbolism in art*. London: Cassell, 1978.
- Gingerich, Owen. Rev. of *The Kalendarium of Nicholas of Lynn*. Ed. Sigmund Eisner and trans. Gary MacEoin. *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 4 (1982), pp.149-151.
- Ginsberg, Warren. "This Worthy Lymtour Was Cleped Huberd: A Note on the Friar's Name." *The Chaucer Review*, 21 (1986), pp.53-57.
- Goodall, P. "Allone, Withouten Any Compaignye": Privacy in the First Fragment of the *Canterbury Tales*." *ELN* (Dec.,1991), pp.5-15.

- Goodall, P. "Being Alone in Chaucer." *The Chaucer Review*, 27 (1992), pp.1-15.
- Haddon, Genia Pauli. *Body Metaphors -Releasing God-Feminine in Us All*. New York: Crossroad, 1988.
- Haines, R. Michael. "Fortune, Nature, and Grace in Fragment C." *The Chaucer Review*, 10 (1976), pp.220-235.
- Hamaker-Zondag, Karen. *Astro-Psychology: Astrological Symbolism and the Human Psyche- The traditional wisdom of astrology examined in the light of Jungian Psychology*. Wellingborough: Aquarian Press, 1980.
- Hamilton, Marie Padgett. "Echoes of Childermas in the Tale of the Prioress." *Modern Language Review*, 34 (1939), pp.1-8.
- Hamlin, B.F. "Astrology and the Wife of Bath: A Reinterpretation." *The Chaucer Review*, 9 (1974-5), pp.153-185.
- Hasenfratz, Robert. "The Science of Flatulence: Possible Sources for the Summoner's Tale." *The Chaucer Review*, 30 (1996), pp.241-261.
- Haskell, Ann S. "Sir Thopas: The Puppet's Puppet." *The Chaucer Review*, 9 (1974-5), pp.253-261
- Haskins, Charles H. "The Reception of Arabic Science in England." *English Historical Review*, 30 (1915), pp.56-69.
- Henning, Standish. "Chauntecleer And Taurus." *ELN*, III (1965), pp.1-5.
- Hermann, John P. "Dismemberment, Dissemination, Discourse: Sign and Symbol in the *Shipman's Tale*." *The Chaucer Review*, 19 (1985), pp.302-337.

- Hillman, Richard. "Chaucer's Franklin's Magician And *The Tempest*: An Influence Beyond Appearances?." *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 34 (1983), pp.426-432.
- Honderich, Ted (ed.). *The Oxford Companion To Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1995.
- Hopper, Vincent Foster. *Medieval Number Symbolism - Its Sources, Meaning and Influence on Thought and Expression*. 2nd edn. New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1969. First published 1938.
- Hornsby, Joseph Allen. *Chaucer And The Law*. Norman, Oklahoma: Pilgrim, 1988.
- Ireland, R.W. "Chaucer's Toxicology." *The Chaucer Review*, 29 (1994), pp.74-92.
- Jeffrey, David Lyle (ed.). *Chaucer and scriptural tradition*. Ottawa: Univ. of Ottawa Press, 1984.
- Jenks, Stuart. "Astrometeorology in the Middle Ages." *Isis*, 74 (1983), pp.185-210.
- Johnson, Maureen. "What's In A Name?": Astrology And Onomastics In "*Romeo And Juliet*." Diss. Univ. of Princeton, 1983.
- Jones, Marc Edmund. *Astrology: How and Why It Works*. Rev. edn. Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1969.
- Jones, Roger Stanley. *Physics As Metaphor*. London: Wildwood House, 1983.
- Justman, Stewart. "Trade As Pudendum: Chaucer's Wife Of Bath." *The Chaucer Review*, 28 (1994), pp.344-352.

- Kahrl, Stanley J. "Chaucer's *Squire's Tale* and the Decline Of Chivalry." *The Chaucer Review*, 7 (1972-3), pp.194-209.
- Keiser, George R. "Language and Meaning in Chaucer's *Shipman's Tale*." *The Chaucer Review*, 12 (1978), pp.147-161.
- Kelly, Henry Ansgar. *Chaucer and the Cult of St. Valentine*. Davis Medieval Texts and Studies, Vol. 5. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1986.
- Kennedy, E.S. (ed.) and David Pingree (trans.). *The Astrological History of Masha'Allah*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard Univ. Press, 1971.
- Kenny, Anthony (ed.). *The Oxford Illustrated History of Western Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1994.
- Kitson, Annabella (ed.). *History and Astrology: Clio and Urania confer*. London: Unwin Hyman, 1989.
- Kittredge, George Lyman. *Chaucer and his Poetry*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard Univ. Press, 1915; 1960 reprint.
- Kohanski, Tamarah. "In Search Of Malyne." *The Chaucer Review*, 27 (1993), pp.228-238.
- Kuhn, Thomas S. *The Copernican Revolution: Planetary Astronomy in the Development of Western Thought*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1957.
- Ladner, Gerhart B. "Medieval and Modern Understanding of Symbolism: A Comparison" *Speculum*, 54 (1979), pp.223-256.
- Laird, Edgar S. "Astronomical 'Proporcioneles' in Chaucer's *Franklin's Tale*." *ELN*, 25 (March, 1988), pp.23-26.

- Laird, Edgar S. "Mars In Taurus At The Nativity Of The Wife Of Bath." *ELN*, 27 (September, 1990), p.16.
- Laird, Edgar S. and Olson, Donald W. "Boethius, *Boece*, and Boötes: A Note on the Chronology Of Chaucer's Astronomical Learning." *Modern Philology*, 88 (1990-91), pp.147-149.
- Laistner, M.C.W. "The Western Church and Astrology during the Early Middle Ages," *Harvard Theological Review*, 34 (1941), pp.251-275. Reprinted in Laistner, M.C.W. *The Intellectual Heritage of the Early Middle Ages*. (New York, 1957), pp.57-80.
- Lawrence, William W. "Chaucer's Shipman's Tale." *Speculum*, 33 (1958), pp.56-68.
- Lemay, Helen Rodnite. "Guido Bonatti: Astrology, Society and Marriage in Thirteenth-Century Italy." *Journal of Pop Culture*, 17 (1984), pp.79-90.
- Lewis, C. S. *The Discarded Image*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1964.
- Lewis and Short. *A Latin Dictionary*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987.
- Lilly, William. *An Introduction To Astrology*. London, 1647. Ed. Zadkiel. London: Bell and Sons, 1927.
- Luengo, A.E. "Magic and illusion in the *Franklin's Tale*." *JEGP*, 77 (1978), pp.1-16.
- McAlindon, T. "Cosmology, Contrariety and the *Knight's Tale*." *Medium Aevum*, 55 (1986), pp.41-57.
- McEvers, Joan (ed.). *The Astrology of the Macrocosm*. St. Paul, Minn.: Llewellyn, 1990.

- McEntire, Sandra J. "Illusion and Interpretation in the *Franklin's Tale*." *The Chaucer Review*, 31 (1996), pp.145-163.
- McGalliard, John. "Characterization in Chaucer's Shipman's Tale." *Philological Quarterly*, 54 (1975), pp.1-18.
- Maltman, O.P. Sister Nicholas. "The Divine Granary, or the End of the Prioress's 'Greyen'." *The Chaucer Review*, 17 (1982-3), pp.163-170.
- Manilius. *The Five Books of Manilius*, London, 1697. Rpt. National Astrological Library: Washington, 1953.
- Manzalaoui, Mahmoud "Chaucer and Science," in Derek Brewer (ed.) "*Writers and their Background - Geoffrey Chaucer*." (London: Bell, 1974), pp.224-261.
- Marius: *On The Elements*. Trans. Richard C. Dales. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976.
- Maternus, Julius Firmicus. *Matheseos Libri VIII*. Trans. Jean Rhys Bram. New Jersey: Noyes Press, 1975.
- Means, Laurel. "Electionary, Lunary, Destinary, and Questionary: Toward Defining Categories of Middle English Prognostic Material." *Studies in Philology*, 89 (1992), pp.367-403.
- Metzger, Bruce M. and Michael D. Coogan (eds.). *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1993.
- Middleton, Anne. "The Idea of Public Poetry in the Reign of Richard II." *Speculum*, 53 (1978), pp.94-114.
- Middleton, Anne. "War by Other Means: Marriage and Chivalry in Chaucer." *Studies in the Age of Chaucer, Proceedings*, 1(1984), pp.119-133.



- Miller, Clarence H. and Roberta Bux Bosse. "Chaucer's Pardoner and the Mass." *The Chaucer Review*, 6 (1971-2), pp.171-184.
- Mooney, Linne R. "The Cock and the Clock: Telling Time in Chaucer's Day." *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 15 (1993), pp.91-109.
- Moore, Frank Harper. "Astraea, The Scorpio, and the Heavenly Scales." *ELH*, 38 (1971), pp.350-357.
- Neckam, Alexandri. *De naturis rerum*. Ed. Thomas Wright. London: Longman [et al.], 1863.
- Neugebauer, Otto. "The Early History of the Astrolabe." *Isis*, 40 (1949), pp.240-256.
- Neugebauer, Otto and van Hoesen, H.B. *Greek Horoscopes*. Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1959.
- North, John. "Kalenderes Enlumyned Ben They." *RES* 20 (1969), pp.422-426.
- North, John D. *Chaucer's Universe*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1988.
- Ovid. *The Fasti, Pontic Epistles*. Ed and trans. Henry T. Riley. London: G.G. Bone, 1851.
- Ovid. *Metamorphoses*. Trans. A. D. Melville. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1987.
- Owen, Jr., Charles Owen. "Pre-1450 Manuscripts of the *Canterbury Tales*; Relationships and Significance." *The Chaucer Review*, 23 (1988), pp.1-29.
- Payne, F. Anne. "Foreknowledge And Free Will: Three Theories In The *Nun's Priest's Tale*." *The Chaucer Review*, 10 (1976), pp.201-219.
- Pearsall, Derek. *The Life of Geoffrey Chaucer*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1992.
- Pearsall, Ronald. *The Alchemists*. London: Weidenfield and Nicholson, 1970.

- Peck, Russell. "Number Symbolism in the Prologue to Chaucer's *Parson's Tale*." *English Studies*, 48 (1967), pp.205-215.
- Peck, Russell. "Chaucer and the Nominalist Questions." *Speculum*, 53 (1978), pp.745-760.
- Peck, Russell. "Biblical Interpretation: St. Paul and *The Canterbury Tales*." In David Lyle Jeffrey, (ed.) "*Chaucer and scriptural tradition*." (Ottawa: Ottawa Univ. Press, 1984), pp.143-170.
- Petersen, Kate Oelzner. *Sources of the Parson's Tale*. Radcliffe College Monographs. Boston: Ginn, 1901.
- Pingree, David, ed. *Picatrix: The Latin version of the Ghayat Al-Hakim I, IV*. London: The Warburg Institute, 1986.
- Plato. *Timaeus*. Trans. H.D.P. Lee. London: Penguin, 1965.
- Pratt, Robert A. "Some Latin Sources of the Nonnes Preest On Dreams." *Speculum*, 52 (1977), pp.538-570.
- Ptolemy, Claudius. *Tetrabiblos*. Trans. J. M. Ashmand. Chicago: Aries Press, 1936.
- Pulsiano, Phillip. "The Twelve-Spoked Wheel Of The Summoner's Tale." *The Chaucer Review*, 29 (1995), pp.382-389.
- Ramazani, Jahan. "Chaucer's Monk: The Poetics of Abbreviation, Aggression, and Tragedy." *The Chaucer Review*, 27 (1993), pp.260-276.
- Ramsey, Lee C. "The Sentence Of It Sooth Is": Chaucer's *Physican's Tale*." *The Chaucer Review*, 6 (1971-2), pp.185-197.
- Read, John. *The Alchemist In Life, Literature And Art*. Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson, 1947.

- Reiss, Edmund. "Number Symbolism and Medieval Literature," *Medievalia et Humanistica*. NS, 1 (1970), pp.161-174.
- Ripley, Sir George. *The Compound of Alchemy*. 1591 edn.. Text modernized by Adam McLean, <http://www.levity.com/alchemy/rip gates.html>. 9 Feb.1997.
- Robertson D.W., Jr. *A Preface to Chaucer: Studies in Medieval Perspectives*. Princeton: Princeton Univ.Press, 1962.
- Robertson Jr., D.W. *The Literature of Medieval England*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970.
- Robertson Jr., "D.W. Chaucer and the Christian Tradition." In David Jeffrey Lyle (ed.) *Chaucer and scriptural tradition* (Ottawa: Univ. of Ottawa Press, 1984), pp.3-32.
- Rumsey Lucinda. "The Scorpio of Lechery and *Ancrene Wisse*." *Medium Aevum*, 61 (1992), pp.48-58.
- Sachs, Curt. *The Rise of Music in the Ancient World East and West*. London: Dent,1944.
- Schimmel, Annemarie. *The Mystery of Numbers*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Schweitzer, Edward C. "Fate and Freedom in *The Knight's Tale*." *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 3 (1981), pp.13-45.
- Scot, Michael. *Liber introductorius*. MS BN *graec* 2180, fol.108r Paris: Bibliothèque nationale.

Sherwood Taylor, F. *The Alchemists: Founders Of Modern Chemistry*.

Melbourne et al: William Heinemann, first published 1951, reprinted 1953, 1958.

Siegel, Marsha. "What the Debate Is and Why it Founders in Fragment A of *The Canterbury Tales*." *Studies in Philology*, 82 (Winter, 1985), pp.1-24.

Smyser, Hamilton M. "A View of Chaucer's Astronomy." *Speculum*, 45 (1970), pp.359-373.

Sobel, Dava. *Longitude*. London: Fourth Estate, 1996.

Socola, Edward M. "Chaucer's Development of Fortune in the 'Monk's Tale'." *JEGP*, 49 (1950), pp.159-171.

Spencer, William. "Are Chaucer's Pilgrims Keyed to the Zodiac?" *The Chaucer Review*, 4 (1970), pp.147-170.

Stavenhagen, Lee (ed. and trans.). *A Testament Of Alchemy: Being the Revelations of Morienus to Khalid Ibn Yazid*. Dartmouth: Brandeis Univ.Press, 1974.

Steward H.F. and E.K. Rand (trans.) *The Theological Tractates*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard Univ. Press, 1918.

Strutt, Joseph. *A Complete View of the Dress and Habits of the People of England, from the Establishment of the Saxons in Britain to the Present Time: Illustrated by Engravings Taken from the Most Authentic Remains of Antiquity*: 2 vols. London: Tabard Press, 1976, with critical and explanatory notes by J.R. Planché.

- Tait, Peter S. *Incubus And Ideal: Ecclesiastical Figures in Chaucer and Langland*. Institut for Englische Sprache und Literatur. Univ. Salzburg, 1975.
- Tester, S. Jim. *A History of Western Astrology*. Bury St.Edmunds: Boydell Press, 1987.
- Thorndike, Lyn. *A History of Magic and Experimental Science*. Columbia: Columbia Univ. Press, 1923-41.
- Thorndike, Lyn. "The True Place of Astrology in the History of Science." *Isis*, 46 (1960), pp.273-278.
- Thundy, Zacharias. "Chaucer's Quest for Wisdom in the *Canterbury Tales*." *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 77 (1976), pp.582-598.
- Trinkaus, Charles. "The Astrological Cosmos and Rhetorical Culture of Giovanni Gioviano Pontano." *Renaissance Quarterly*, 38 (1985), pp.446-472.
- Trinkaus, Charles. "Coluccio Salutati's Critique of Astrology in the Context of His Natural Philosophy." *Speculum*, 64(1989), pp.46-68.
- Tschann, Judith. "The Layout Of Sir Thopas in the Ellesmere, Hengwrt, Cambridge Dd.4.24 and Cambridge Gg.4.27 Manuscripts." *The Chaucer Review*, 20 (1985), pp.1-13.
- Tuchman, Barbara. *A Distant Mirror - The Calamitous Fourteenth Century*. First published New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978. London: Macmillan, 1995.
- Turner, Frederick. "A Structuralist Analysis of the *Knight's Tale*." *The Chaucer Review*, 8 (1973-74), pp.279-296.

- Ueno, Naozō. *The Religious View of Chaucer in his Italian Period*. Tokyo: Nan'un-Do, n.y.(1985?).
- Ussery, Huling E. *Chaucer's Physician: Medicine and Literature in Fourteenth-Century England*. TSE Monograph. Tulane: Tulane Studies in English, 19, 1971.
- Wagenknecht, Edward, ed. *Chaucer: Modern Essays in Criticism*. York: Oxford University Press, 1959.
- Waller, Martha S. "The Physician's Tale: Geoffrey Chaucer and Fray Juan Garcia De Castrojeriz." *Speculum*, 51 (1976), pp.292-306.
- Wedel, Theodore Otto. *The Medieval Attitude toward Astrology*. Yale Studies in English LX: New Haven, Conn. 1920.
- Weissman, Hope Phyllis. "Why Chaucer's Wife Is From Bath." *The Chaucer Review*, 15 (1981), pp.11-36.
- Wenzel, Siegfried. "The Seven Deadly Sins: Some Problems of Research." *Speculum*, 43 (1968), pp.1-22.
- Wood, Chauncey. *Chaucer and the Country of the Stars - Poetic Uses of Astrological Imagery*. Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1970.
- Wood, Chauncey. "Artistic Intention and Chaucer's Uses of Scriptural Allusion." In David Lyle Jeffrey (ed.) *Chaucer and scriptural tradition* (Ottawa: Ottawa Univ. Press, 1984), pp.36-46.
- Wrobel, Z. (ed.). *Platonis Timaeus interprete Chalcidio*. Lipsiae, 1876.
- Yates, Frances. *Giordano Bruno And The Hermetic Tradition*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964.

Yager, Susan. "'A Whit Thyng In Hir Ye': Perception and Error in the *Reeve's Tale*." *The Chaucer Review*, 28 (1994), pp. 393-404.

Yeager, R.F. "Aspects of Gluttony in Chaucer and Gower." *Studies in Philology*, 81 (1984), pp. 42-55.

-----