



Other Worlds

Chaucer's Classicism

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Chaucer's world was open to the possibility of other worlds—whether within the present earth or beyond, whether within the prevailing belief-system or beyond. This attitude is, I believe, the key to understanding the poet's 'classicism', his compelling depictions of a classical and late antique past which is at once alien and open to Christian commentary and appropriation, tantalizingly different from the present yet crucially formative of the contemporary.¹

Medieval intellectuals were acutely aware of the vast debt which their age owed to pagan arts of languages and learning of many kinds, including military expertise (Vegetius' *Epitoma rei militaris* was read as a textbook of chivalry), the psychology of love (Ovid being the ubiquitous *praeceptor amoris*), and philosophy whether 'practical, poetical or theoretical',² wherein Aristotle reigned supreme, lauded as the philosopher who 'alone' was 'stamped with the approval of all wise men'.³

The desire to improve on Aristotle was, of course, irresistible; the move to subordinate his thought to the superior wisdom of Christianity, a necessity. 'The philosopher' (as he was called honorifically) had argued for the existence of a single unique world (formed by all the matter in existence) and rejected the idea that others might exist.⁴ To the thirteenth-century schoolmen who sought to curtail his extraordinary influence, such a belief placed undue limits on the power of God; from 1277 onwards it was an excommunicable offence to deny that God could create more worlds. Whether God *had* actually done so was another matter; it was widely held that he had not. The formidable logician Jean Buridan (d. 1358/61) was of the opinion that, if God decided to create a large number of additional creatures, in order to make room for them he would simply expand this present world to double, or even one hundred times, its present size, rather than creating a whole new world. But, if God had opted for another world, what would it have been like? An earth within our

earth, existing concentrically? A plurality of worlds existing simultaneously yet separate and distinct from each other (though identical in their composition)? Such ideas were solemnly debated. In the fifteenth century, Nicholas of Cusa (d. 1464) discussed the possibility that forms of life existed beyond the earth, in the sun and the stars,⁵ while his contemporary William Vorilong (d. 1464) wondered if, were another world to be created, Christ would have to visit it and die a second time, in order to redeem its inhabitants.⁶

Coming back down to earth: it was also believed that the present world accommodated many different peoples and races, some of whom followed creeds that were quite different from Christianity. For Chaucer the past was indeed a foreign country, but that foreignness seemed to share characteristics with the cultures of certain countries depicted on the fourteenth-century *mappa mundi*. Such a spirit permeates the poet's many and various iterations of classicism, including *The House of Fame* (a radical confrontation of the differing versions of the Dido story by Virgil and Ovid), the 'romance of antiquity' *Troilus and Criseyde*, *The Legend of Good Women* (in part modelled on Ovid's *Heroides*), and those Canterbury tales recounted by the Knight, the Squire, the Franklin, the Physician, and the Monk. For instance, the 'Knight's Tale', which tells of love and war in ancient Athens and Thebes, is attributed to a man who has fought 'for oure feith' (l. 62) against present-day heathen (i.e. 'Saracens' or Muslims), having participated in various crusades during a long military career (a career which, I believe, is meant to be regarded as distinguished). Furthermore, the Knight seems to have fought alongside heathen against other heathen—as is indicated by the statement that

This ilke worthy knyght hadde been also	[same]
Somtyme with the lord of Palatye	[at one time Palatia]
Agayn another hethen in Turkeye... (l. 65–6) ⁷	[against]

Palatia, now Balat in Anatolia, was a possession of the Muslim emir of Menteshe, for whom the Knight seems to have done some service. 'Being employed as a mercenary, or even fighting for a non-Christian lord, were perfectly acceptable forms of service for a knight, provided... that he did not fight against his own lord or on the side of Muslims against Christians.'⁸ Perhaps we are meant to think of this character as having experienced Muslim prowess from both sides.

It seems certain that some of his real-life equivalents gained a healthy respect for warriors who were motivated by a world-view quite different from their own. Among Christian writers the formidable Kurdish warlord Saladin (Ṣalāḥ ad-Dīn Yūsuf Ibn Ayyūb) was frequently praised for his chivalry, particularly for the relative leniency which he had shown following his capture of Jerusalem—in stark contrast to the bloodbath which ensued when a Christian army took the town in 1099, thus ending the First Crusade. The Knight's admiring account of pagan noblemen who live up to the highest standards of militaristic honour and moral virtue could be

seen as a reflex of his personal experiences of contemporary virtuous heathens. 'Pitee renneth soone in gentil herte' (I. 1761), whether in ancient Athens or present-day Palatia.

As Chaucer eloquently puts it in *Troilus and Criseyde*, the 'forme of speche' has changed over 'a thousand yeer', and certain words which once had 'pris' (currency) now seem foolish and strange (II. 22–4). Yet, in times past, people 'spedde [*prospered*] as wel in love as men do now' (II. 26), and the lasting 'pris' of other civilizing forms of behaviour may also be acknowledged. In *Troilus*, as in the 'Knight's Tale', certain aspects of the heathen Other are being idealized—from a safe distance, as it were. Chaucer's classicism accommodates, indeed enables, a remarkable degree of cultural relativism, which is respectful of cultural difference and reluctant to resort to simplistic forms of Christian triumphalism.

These attitudes may be illustrated with reference to the hero of the Knight's narrative, and the character who may be termed the most virtuous of all Chaucer's virtuous heathen, Duke Theseus. He inherited this commanding figure from his tale's primary source, Boccaccio's *Teseida* (c.1340). In his turn, Boccaccio had been inspired by Statius' *Thebaid* (written AD c.80–c.92), particularly its final book, in which, returning from a war against the Scythians, Theseus is importuned by Argive widows whose dead relatives have been denied burial by the tyrannical Creon. Theseus leads his army to victory against the Thebans; Creon falls victim to his spear, and the widows rush to find and cremate their dead. At which point the narrative ends, followed by an epilogue in which Statius prays for the success of his work and modestly proclaims its inferiority to the *Aeneid*. Of the divisive and deadly love of Arcita and Palemone there is no trace; Boccaccio invented that, by way of continuation of the classical story.

Chaucer brought many things to the tale, including an emphasis on Theseus' 'magnificence', which is defined in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* as the virtue relating to the appropriate expenditure of large amounts of wealth, involving splendour of lifestyle, and greatness and generosity of action.⁹ (Chaucer may well have been influenced by the account of this noble attribute in Giles of Rome's *De regimine principum*, which sought to make Aristotle's practical philosophy available to aristocrats.¹⁰) Whereas Boccaccio had the final battle take place in an already-existing amphitheatre, Chaucer's Theseus commands that a new structure be built for this special occasion. We should not suspect here a misinterpretation of the text of Boccaccio (an Italian writer who, of course, had personal experience of actual Roman structures); the point is rather that Chaucer wants to present Theseus as a builder-king. For this vast new structure the duke chooses the very site where he had discovered the young lovers secretly fighting over Emily (I. 1862). What was illegally hidden has been brought into a public forum of judgement; the young men's passions are to be contained within socially acceptable channels. Thus Theseus seeks to bring order out of chaos, civilization out of strife, and to substitute actual construction for

potential destruction. Furthermore, the 'oratories' of Venus, Diana, and Mars, in which Palamon, Emily, and Arcite pray to their respective deities, are all new constructions, richly adorned with 'noble kervyng' and 'portreitures' (I. 1915, cf. 1938, 1968, etc.) which the Knight describes and commends at some length.

The duke's decorous 'big spending' does not end when those buildings have been completed. For he provides lavish hospitality for all the knights who have gathered 'for love and for encrees of chivalrye' (I. 2184). They are honourably housed and fed (I. 2192–3; cf. 2483), and entertained with much 'mynstralcy'e' and dancing. When the battle's lost and won, the combatants enjoy a further feast of three days' duration (I. 2736), and Theseus, ever the maker, casts his mind to how Arcite's sepulchre 'may best ymaked be' (I. 2855). The description of the elaborate 'funeral servyse' which follows leaves us in no doubt that he has spent a pretty penny on this exceptional event which is worthy of exceptional expenditure.

The amount of power and control Theseus wields through the narrative is impressive indeed. If he wants something done, it gets done. (Unless, of course, the pagan gods decide to intervene. But then Theseus can offer an adept philosophical rationalization, replete with decorous praise for 'Juppiter, the kyng, | That is prince and cause of alle thyng', I. 3035–6.) If he issues a command, it is obeyed. (Unless, of course, the power of love disrupts the rule of law and the dictates of reason. But Theseus can quickly turn that to his advantage.) About to enjoy his triumphal entry into Athens, following his victory over the Amazons, the duke turns his whole army around, leading them to another victory, this time over the tyrant Creon—whom he kills in *mano-a-mano* combat, thereby demonstrating his manly prowess and his bravery in leading from the front.

It is tempting to read this narrative as the Knight's reaction against—maybe even as an escape from—the vicious chaos of the campaigns in which he was involved, with the ever-successful warlord Theseus as the perfect military commander, an idealization which can easily be read as overreaching but which is comprehensible given the lack of leadership and general ineptitude which characterized so much waging of war in the later Middle Ages, including the campaigns on which he fought (as listed in the General Prologue, I. 51–67). Great success always gains attention and often prompts the desire to emulate, to learn its secrets—which probably explains why Honoré Bonet allowed a Saracen sage a long hearing in his *L'Apparicion Maistre Jehan de Meun* (1398), written barely eighteen months after the battle of Nicopolis, when a Christian army drawn from many European countries was roundly defeated by an Ottoman force commanded by Sultan Bayezid I (who ruled from 1389 until 1402), thus bringing to an ignominious end, from Christendom's perspective, the last large-scale crusade of the Middle Ages. In a dream-vision Bonet imagines Jean de Meun (author of the *Roman de la rose*)¹¹ interrogating a series of speakers, including an Ottoman nobleman with skin 'as black as coal'—an exoticizing move comparable with the dark complexion bestowed (with much less respect) on Saladin in one of the

Luttrell Psalter's illuminations.¹² This imposing figure swears 'by Muhammad' that he will speak the truth, however painful it may be for Christians to hear.

'... I am the most noble emissary
That there is in all of Islam;
For I know all languages;
I am of high birth,
And I am a good cleric in our law ['bon clerc en nostre loy' i.e. *our religion*];
I understand something about everything,
And I can write poems, as well,
And can turn the law inside out.' (303–10)¹³

Recognizing that he is in the presence of a 'brave' and 'wise orator' (335), Jean invites this paragon of virtue to recount everything he has seen 'and learned among Christians' (335–8). There follows a thoroughgoing critique of the vanities and divisions of Christianity—which, one may infer, have contributed to the recent spread of Islam.

Here, then, is a non-believer from whom Christian believers have a lot to learn; indeed, a figure who shows up the failings of all too many Christians. That kind of exhortatory contrast was often aired, as for example in the interpretation of Isaiah 23: 4, 'Be thou ashamed, Zidon, for the sea hath spoken', which the 'classicizing friar' John of Wales (d. 1285) offers in his laudatory *Compendiloquium de vitis illustrium philosophorum*.¹⁴ 'Zidon' signifies the secure New Law under which Christians live, while the 'sea' signifies the life of the Gentiles. The premise here is that the heathen lacked, or lack, the stability which comes from Christian truth—and so their superlative words and deeds often put us to shame. For we who know better should do better, yet we fail to excel. Arrogance on our part is quite inappropriate given the extraordinary achievements of pagans who adhered to a different belief system, a faith which they followed with great devotion, performing great deeds in its name.

Such attitudes underlie Chaucer's classicism—which, I believe, is ideologically indistinguishable from, and arguably the driving force behind, what may be termed his Orientalism, as a consideration of the wider cultural context of the 'Squire's Tale' may make clear. In 1243–5, approximately two decades before Marco Polo began his travels in Asia, Persia, China, and Indonesia, William of Rubruck, a Franciscan friar, had made an arduous journey to meet the fourth Great Khan of the Mongol Empire, Möngke (1209–59). At Möngke's court William encountered many competitors for the emperor's support—Muslims and Nestorian Christians (both sects had been in the region since the seventh century) together with Buddhists. In May 1254, Möngke ordered a great debate between the rival factions to determine which faith contained 'more truth' (p. 229).¹⁵ According to William's (self-aggrandizing) account, he himself persuaded the Christians to debate with the Buddhists first, 'since the Saracens agree with us in saying that there is one God and therefore provide allies for us

against the *tuins* [Buddhists]' (p. 231): a fascinating assertion of shared beliefs. This indeed turned out to be a major bone of contention, with William, as the orthodox Christian spokesman, affirming that 'there is only one God' and his Buddhist opponent replying that only 'fools' make such a claim. The Buddhists are 'amazed' at William's assertion that 'everything that exists is good', given their own belief that 'He made half of things evil' (p. 233). (William explains that the Buddhists follow the Manichean heresy, 'to the effect that one half of things is evil and the other half good', p. 232.) When the Buddhist representative asserts that no single god is all-powerful he is laughed to scorn by the Muslims, who then decline the opportunity to engage with the Christians, on the grounds that the Christian faith 'is true' and they themselves eagerly pray for 'a Christian death'. Perhaps, as Peter Jackson suggests, here we have 'a garbled expression' of the Muslim belief 'in Jesus as a prophet of Islam' (p. 234 n. 3).

In any case, the occasion seems to have concluded in a quite convivial way, with everyone drinking heavily. But for William there was no happy ending. A few days later Möngke Khan granted the friar an audience, wherein he was ordered to prepare for his homeward journey (despite William's express wish to pursue his missionary work). Though Christianity came out of the debate very well, 'no one said, "I believe, and wish to become a Christian"', as William ruefully remarks (p. 235). Möngke himself was unmoved, apparently preferring to stay with whatever belief-system he already had.

Möngke's grandfather Genghis Khan (d. 1227), the founder and first Great Khan of the Mongol Empire, was similarly loyal to the 'secte' which prevailed in his day, at least according to Chaucer.¹⁶ At the beginning of the 'Squire's Tale', the 'Tartre Cambyuskan', 'noble kyng' of Tzarev (in south-eastern Russia), is praised for having kept the 'lay' (law) of the religion into which he was born to such a superlative extent that he exemplifies all the virtues appropriate to the ideal ruler and knight. (One may compare the statement which Honoré Bonet put in the mouth of his outspoken Saracen, that he is a *bon clerc en nostre loy*). Cambyuskan is 'So excellent a lord in alle thyng',

Hym lakked noght that longeth to a kyng.	[he lacked nothing that belongs]
As of the secte of which that he was born	
He kepte his lay, to which that he was sworn;	[lawful observance]
And therto he was hardy, wys, and riche,	[wise]
And pitous and just, alwey yliche;	[compassionate constant]
Sooth of his word, benigne, and honorable;	[truthful]
Of his corage as any centre stable;	
Yong, fressh, and strong, in armes desirous	[filled with desire for arms]
As any bachelor of al his hous.	
A fair persone he was and fortunat,	
And kept alwey so wel roial estat	[maintained royal status]
That ther was nowher swich another man.	[such]

(V. 15–27)

Here we may detect an echo of a controversial theological doctrine of the later Middle Ages—that ‘by doing what is in him’ (the *facere quod in se est* principle) a righteous non-Christian, i.e. a person who has not been baptized into the Church, may nevertheless have done enough to receive God’s grace.¹⁷ On this argument, salvation can be attained by a virtuous pagan—someone born in the wrong place and/or at the wrong time and hence unaware of the supreme religion (not having been blessed by a visit from the likes of William of Rubruck).

To make this claim is not to attribute to Chaucer the layman (however learned) privileged knowledge of doctrine so *recherché* that it was the prerogative of professional theologians. The doctrine in question had escaped over the walls of the schools,¹⁸ enjoying sufficient currency to trouble the Augustinian canon Walter Hilton (d. 1396), who—writing in the vernacular—attacks certain men who ‘gretli and grevousli erren’ by saying that ‘Jewis and Sarcenys and paynemes [*pagans*], who lack the Christian faith, may nevertheless be saved.’¹⁹ Hilton summarizes the dangerous argument as follows. ‘Bi keypyng of hire owen lawe’, convinced that their own ‘trouth is good and siker [*certain*] and sufficient to here savacion [*their salvation*], infidels may ‘in that trouthe’ perform many good and righteous deeds, and perhaps if they knew that the faith of Christ was better than theirs they would leave their own faith and follow it, to ensure their salvation. But this is not sufficient, Hilton retorts, because Christ is the sole mediator between God and man, and no one can be reconciled with God or come to heavenly bliss except through him.

Chaucer's classicism, in both its oriental and occidental iterations, does not stray far into that contested territory. The poet is silent on Cambyuskan's prospects for salvation, even as he withholds comment on the final destination of the soul of Troilus. We are simply told that, after being killed by Achilles, Troilus went forth 'Ther as Mercurye sorted hym to dwelle' (*Troilus and Criseyde*, 5. 1826–7), without any specification of where that actually was. A similar reticence marks Chaucer's reference, near the end of the 'Knight's Tale', to the ultimate destination of the soul of Arcite:

His spirit chaunged hous and wente ther, [dwelling]
As I cam nevere, I kan nat tellen wher.
Therefore I stynte, I nam no divinistre . . . [stop speaking theologian/prophet]
(l. 2809–11)

This is consonant with the way in which Chaucer's pagan characters disclaim expert knowledge of matters relating to fate, providence, and ultimate destiny. Dorigen leaves to 'clerkes' all 'disputison' (disputation) concerning why God should make such an 'ydel' (useless) thing as the black rocks that she imagines will destroy her husband's homecoming ship ('Franklin's Tale', V. 890). In similar vein, Palamon leaves to 'dyvynys' (theologians) the problem of what sort of governance could possibly exist in a divine foreknowledge that seems to torment the guiltless ('Knight's

Bersuire's remarks are heavily indebted to the fifth book of Augustine's *De civitate Dei*, where the 'two things' that made the Romans great are identified as 'love of liberty' and 'the desire for human praise'. Here the superiority of Christianity is affirmed by many means, including the argument that its triumph does not require acts of extreme suppression of familial values, of the type often performed by virtuous heathen.²⁵ Torquatus killed his son for disobeying his order not to engage the enemy, even though a victory was won on that occasion, and Marcus Pulvillus continued to dedicate a temple in honour of Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva despite a report that his son had died. Augustine's prime example, however, is Brutus, who had his own sons put to death because they had plotted a restoration of the Tarquinian monarchy and hence conspired against Roman freedom. 'Love of country drove him, and the immense love of praise', but 'what an unhappy man this is, no matter how much his deed may be celebrated in days to come!' (cf. *Aeneid*, 6. 820ff.).

A comparable case of spectacular infanticide features in the 'Physician's Tale', a story attributed to 'Titus Livius' (VI. 1), though the *Roman de la rose* was Chaucer's immediate source. Faced with a travesty of justice which brings his daughter Virginia into the power of the judge who lusts after her, Virginius decides she must die rather than suffer the shame of sexual defilement. He carries his daughter's head to where Apius (Appius) is holding court, a shocking spectacle which incites the populace to rise up against a magistrate whom they distrusted in any case. Thrown into prison, Apius commits suicide. However, the sentence against Claudius, the servant who had been forced to bring a false charge against Virginia, is commuted to exile, thanks to Virginius' plea. His 'pitee' for that man saves his life (VI. 270-4): a rather grotesque contrast with the 'pitous hand' with which he killed his own daughter (VI.226). All the actions of Virginius seem to be performed in the name of absolute justice, which exists above and beyond the decadent version embodied in Apius. Virginius may be the least appealing of Chaucer's virtuous heathen, but in line with the poet's classicism it could be argued that the highest values of that character's time and social situation at once necessitate and justify such a feat.

Similarly, Chaucer's Arveragus believes that 'Trouthe is the hyeste thyng' which a man (or woman) 'may kepe' ('Franklin's Tale', V. 1479), even if this means sending his wife, Dorigen, whose emotional turmoil has led her to make a rash promise, to sleep with another man. (Here, in intriguing contrast with the 'Physician's Tale', the avoidance of sexual defilement is not the ruling moral imperative.) In a close analogue of the Franklin's narrative (perhaps even its source), which forms part of Boccaccio's *Filocolo*, the corresponding character is said to have acted with unnecessary generosity, because his marriage contract with the lady rendered her subsequent promise to another man invalid. That is to say, a firm distinction is made there between generosity and wisdom: the husband-figure was certainly generous with his wife, but maybe he was foolish to do what he did, and thereby lost honour of a kind which cannot be recovered. By contrast, there is no such distinction in 'the Franklin's

Tale'. Arveragus' behaviour may be read as rigorous but commendable—and certainly as extreme. How much simpler it would have been had he ordered Dorigen not to go, perhaps declaring (in the manner of the *Filocolo*) that her promise was not legally binding. But the most noble of the 'good pagans' were absolute for sacrifice and even death, being not numbered in the roll of common men. In Arveragus' mind a woman's gossamer-thin promise obligates two people in love to act in ways quite at variance with their true desires. He is driven by moral conviction of an intensity which far transcends the specifics of the contrived and barely credible love-triangle which serves as its occasion. Here, as with the 'Physician's Tale', Christian readers may look back and wonder at an extraordinary performance of virtue, relieved that they are under no pressure to emulate it—on the authority of no less a theologian than Augustine.

'Chaucer took much pains to put' the Franklin's narrative 'back in Roman times', as J. S. P. Tatlock once remarked.²⁶ Set in heathen Brittany (here termed 'Armorik', Armorica), this tale features characters called 'Arveragus' and 'Aurelius', which are Latin names with ancient British associations. Aurelius prays to Apollo and vows to go on pilgrimage to his 'temple in Delphos' in a speech which also petitions Lucina, Neptune, and Pluto (V. 1031–79). 'Swiche illusiouns and swiche meschaunces [*evil practices*] | As hethen folk useden in thilke dayes [*those days*]' are nervously condemned by the Franklin (V. 1292–3). He seems to lack the aristocratic insouciance with which the Squire and Knight tell their classicist tales. However, his anxiety well exemplifies the suspicion with which ancient lore was sometimes regarded. Greece and Rome had produced many brilliant thinkers; that was not in question. But those same thinkers had worshipped deities who were (according to the Christian commonplace) devils in disguise, to be identified with the disobedient angels who had been cast out of heaven by God. Therefore some pagan sources of knowledge could be dangerously unreliable and indeed entrapping, the stuff of fiendish plots designed to mislead the credulous and capture their souls. The Franklin's narrative seems to offer a prime instance of such an 'illusioun and meschaunce': the apparent removal by a 'magicien' (V. 1184) of the rocks from the coast of Brittany. Yet this shocking incident is presented primarily as a natural marvel with a rational explanation, and definitely not as the outcome of a daemonic pact.

It is true that Aurelius builds up an expectation of some cataclysmic event by praying to the gods for a 'miracle' (V. 1056, 1065; cf. 1299) in the form of a high tide of abnormal duration, which would require interference with the moon's natural course for two whole years—a quite terrifying prospect, evocative of the young man's reckless desires (V. 1066–70). Or, Aurelius continues, the Moon/Lucina/Diana/Proserpina should sink every rock down into her own dark region, i.e. the underworld (V. 1073–5). But neither of these processes is shown as actually occurring during the Franklin's description of the Breton clerk's expert procedure (V. 1261–6), which is curiously unthreatening. The possibility that the rocks may be forcefully

'sonken under grounde' (VI. 1269) is mentioned here, but not pursued. Instead the emphasis falls on what *seems* to have happened, on how things look: 'for a wyke or tweye [a week or two], | It semed that alle the rokkes were aweye' (VI. 1295–6; my emphasis). The Franklin's references here to 'illusioun', 'apparence' and 'jogelrye' (VI. 1264–5) tend to reduce the magician's activity to the level of sleight of hand, a mere conjuring trick, which may be devious but is by no means devilish.

There is no *meschaunce* here, no evidence of evil practice, but rather 'magyk natureel', involving knowledge of the wonders of nature (V. 1125, 1155). When the magician goes about his work he uses nothing more disquieting than a set of accurate astrological tables ('tables Tolletanes...', | Ful wel corrected'; V. 1273–9). These enable him to predict, but certainly not to control, the future. Further, a strong emphasis is placed on the subtlety of his calculations, 'hise equacions in every thyng' (V. 1279). It seems that the magician is something of a scientist (here I have in mind the late medieval understanding of *scientia* as a body of authoritative knowledge and reliable information). The implication is that, thanks to his knowledge of planetary motions, the magician learns that a high tide is coming, which will cover all the coastal rocks. An unusual event perhaps (at least in terms of its scale) but not unnatural; it may last for 'a wyke or tweye' but certainly not for the two years that Aurelius had imagined in his 'ravyng' (V. 1026).

Chaucer's attribution of astronomical/astrological lore to the magician cannot be taken as *prima facie* evidence that his character is dubious, any more than we should stigmatize the Physician for his use of 'magik natureel' in diagnosing his patients ('General Prologue', I. 416). It should be noted that 'general' predictions of such great terrestrial events as plagues, famines, floods, great wars, and the falls of empires were deemed both possible and permissible (though some warned of the difficulty of obtaining precise results). Another branch of the science sought to learn what the weather had in store, with regard to winds, storms, and the like. All of this was in sharp contrast to 'particular' predictions concerning the destinies of individuals, as deduced from the configuration of the stars and planets at their births, which implied that human beings lacked free will and began life with fixed characteristics which determined their behaviour. (It was one thing to say that the stars influenced behaviour—hence the usefulness of astrology in medical diagnosis—but quite another to claim that they predetermined it.²⁷) When Chaucer raises this matter in his *Treatise on the Astrolabe*, he distances himself from a pagan practice which, as a Christian, he must roundly reject: 'Natheles these ben observaunces of judicial matere and rytes of payens, in whiche my spirit hath no feith, ne knowing of her [their] horoscopus'.²⁸

In 'the Squire's Tale' there is not a pagan rite in sight. Which is all the more surprising since, even more than the 'Franklin's Tale', this tale prominently features marvellous events and devices—strange phenomena which could easily have been explained with reference to the duplicitous involvement of devils, those false gods

mistakenly worshipped by the heathen. Instead we have matter-of-fact accounts, quite lacking in spiritual health warnings, of a bronze flying horse which can transport a person to every place he wants to visit in the entire world within a mere twenty-four hours; a 'brood mirour of glas' in which a king can see any misfortunes that will befall his kingdom and a woman can see the future infidelity of the man she loves; a golden ring which gives its wearer the power to understand the language of birds; and an armour-piercing sword which will heal any wound it inflicts if the 'plat' (blunt side) is laid upon it (V. 75–67). All of these are gifts from the 'kyng of Arabe and of Inde' to Cambyuskan on the occasion of his celebration of twenty years of rule. And all of them are presented as human inventions susceptible of rational analysis and 'scientific' explanation. For instance, the Squire seems in no doubt that the bronze horse is a mere machine, albeit a highly sophisticated one, which was 'wroghte' during a long period of time by an ingenious craftsman (V. 128–31). It works through the turning of a system of 'pins' or pegs and manipulation of its reins (V. 312–34), easy to operate if one knows the requisite 'craft' (V. 185, cf. 317). Here is an object of admiration, but no cause for fear or suspicion. Pagan *scientia* can be trusted. Would that we understood it better!

In general, says the Squire, 'lewed people' think the worst about things 'that been maad moore subtilly | Than they kan [*can*] in hir [*their*] lewedness comprehende' (V. 222–3). That should not be read as a blanket condemnation of Cambyuskan's puzzled courtiers as being uneducated and ignorant people. Rather the point is that, if a person does not have sufficient knowledge of how something works, he may deem it threatening, and judge 'to the badder ende', i.e. think the worst (V. 224). Moreover, if no explanation for a mysterious effect is forthcoming, this is not because one does not exist, but simply because one has not yet been discovered. It is well known that glass is made from ashes of fern (according to actual medieval practice). Which may seem strange, given that glass looks nothing like ashes of fern. But that is the fact of the matter, and therefore there is neither cause for debate nor need for wonder concerning this particular artefact.

... somme seiden that it was	[<i>said</i>]
Wonder to maken of fern-asshen glas,	
And yet nys glas nat lyk asshen of fern;	
But, for they han yknownen it so fern,	[<i>so long</i>]
Therefore cesseth hir janglyng and hir wonder.	[<i>chattering</i>]
	(V. 253–7)

In contrast, room for debate remains concerning the origins of thunder, of the ebb and flow of the tides, of spiders' webs, and of mist (V. 258–9)—and indeed, 'of alle thing, til that the cause is wist [*known*]' (V. 260). In that category may be included some of those gifts bestowed upon Cambyuskan. But the narrative is remarkably confident in the existence of ways of making sense of all such wonders.

Even more tantalizingly, Chaucer holds out the possibility of future comprehension of the secrets of the 'slidyng science' of alchemy (VIII. 732). the 'Canon Yeoman's Tale' castigates the charlatans and tricksters who, quite spuriously, claim expertise in this craft. As things stand this 'lore' is fruitless, no successful 'conclusion' having been achieved; here is a 'science' so 'fer us biforn [*far ahead of us*]' that it is impossible to 'overtake' (VIII. 672, 680–2). But what of 'futur temps' (VIII. 875), will it continue to slide away from our grasp then? The Yeoman ends his tale with an anecdote about how Plato refused to name the secret Philosopher's Stone; indeed, all the philosophers swore themselves to silence on this matter. Even more decisively, Jesus Christ himself holds it so dear that he wills it should not be explained, except when it pleases his deity that certain men should be enlightened. But here, it may be argued, is no categorical prohibition of alchemical enquiry but rather the possibility that, one day, Christ may reveal its secrets to the right people. (The converse is that anyone who makes God his opponent will be unable to achieve anything in the pursuit of this knowledge.) We are not dealing with impossibilities of nature, pseudo-knowledge that can never be true, but rather with a body of genuine knowledge so significant that it is 'lief and deere' to Christ himself (an extraordinarily specific claim unparalleled in any known source of Chaucer's tale). Assuming, of course, that we are hearing the voice of Chaucer here, rather than that of a narrator who is harbouring false hopes, despite all the disappointments and deprivations he has endured on account of this 'elyysshe nyce [*foolish*] loore' (VIII. 842). If we can indeed make that assumption, and regard alchemy as 'a site where modernizing values could take root', then the Canon's Yeoman may be seen as representing a version of 'Chaucerian modernity'.²⁹ Alternatively, it may be regarded as yet another reflex of Chaucerian classicism—here is a corpus of past knowledge which, once lost, may be recovered again, made accessible in 'futur temps'. Clearly, then, in the sphere of scientific enquiry, we have much still to learn from the pagans (particularly from Plato, in the case of alchemy), and Christ may fully approve of such secular revelation.

Chaucer's respect for the moral and scientific achievements of the pagans is, it may be concluded, a major constituent of his classicism. But, hardly surprisingly, his tolerance does not extend to the gods they worshipped.

Lo here, of payens corsed olde rites!	[<i>cursed</i>]
Lo here, what alle hire godes may availle!	[<i>their gods</i>]
Lo here, thise wrecched worlds appetites!	[<i>worldly desires</i>]
Lo here, the fyn and guerdoun for travaille	[<i>the end and reward</i>]
Of Jove, Appollo, of Mars, of swich rascaille!	[<i>rabble</i>]

(*Troilus and Criseyde*, 5. 1849–53)

This assertion goes far beyond what was said in the *Astrolabe* treatise. Here Chaucer is condemning the pagan pantheon *tout court*, identifying its worship as an expression of

base human appetites, and claiming that virtuous heathen were ill rewarded for their ardent piety (and, one may infer, their rigorous ethical code) by rascally gods.

Elsewhere the poet indicates his belief that, on occasion, those same gods subverted pagan learning and led potentially wise men astray with false promises and prophecies. (So, then, the Franklin was right to harbour suspicions, even though the particular tale he told failed to substantiate them.) Calkas, Criseyde's father and a priest of Apollo, is an obvious case in point. Although credited with expertise in 'calkulynge' and 'astronomye' (*Troilus*, 1. 71, 5. 115), these sources of knowledge are described in ways which inextricably link them with Calkas' religious practices, the predictions which he solicits and receives from his god, a deity infamous for his ambiguous answers. Evidently Criseyde has Apollo and his Delphic oracles in mind when she declares that 'goddess spoken in amphibologies, | And, for o soth [*one truth*], they tellen twenty lyes' (4. 1406–7). Later, Diomedes suggests that the priest is as duplicitous as his god; Calkas may be misleading the Greeks 'with ambages— | That is to seyn, with double wordes slye' (5. 897–8).³⁰ Most revealing of all is Criseyde's claim that the worship of the pagan gods originated in fear ('drede fond first goddess [*fear first invented gods*], I suppose'), a point she plans to make to her father when arguing that fear made him misunderstand 'the goddess text' (4. 1408–11). This may be an echo of Statius, *Thebaid*, 3. 661, where the remark 'Primus in orbe deos fecit timor' ('fear first made gods in the world') is uttered by Capaneus, a madman and blasphemer, who doubts if prayers can 'really draw causes and hidden impulses of things from the open sky' (3. 558–9).³¹ In Chaucer's reiteration the words become a more substantial castigation of paganism; for a moment Criseyde talks in a way that takes her far beyond her historical location, even anticipating the poem's final condemnation of 'payens corsed olde rites'.

Chaucer introduced an ambiguous oracle into the story which became the 'Knight's Tale' (there being no parallel in the *Teseida*), in a passage which describes how the exiled Arcite dreams of Mercury appearing to him, 'Arrayed... | As he was whan that Argus took his sleep' (I. 1389–90). This alludes to an incident described in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, where Jupiter sends Mercury to kill 'Argus of the hundred eyes'. Mercury first soothes Argus by playing music on his reed pipes, then lulls him to sleep with a story. Whereupon the god strikes 'off the nodding head and from the rock' throws 'it all bloody, spattering the cliff with gore' (*Metamorphoses*, 1. 714–21). For Mercury to appear looking as he did on this murderous occasion hardly bodes well for Arcite's future. That impression is immediately reinforced. Mercury urges Arcite to return to Athens: 'To Atthenes shaltou wende [*shall you go*], | Ther is thee shapen [*destined*] of thy wo an ende' (I. 1391–2). This statement is dangerously ambiguous, for it can mean either that in Athens Arcite shall find an end to his present woe and be joyful (which seems to be how he takes it) or that in Athens he shall find an end to his present woe, indeed to all his woes, since he will meet his death there. Which is, of course, what happens. Mercury's oracle is, at the very least, seriously

misleading, and probably (in Chaucer's view) an indication of divine malevolence, or at least of a careless indifference to human suffering.

Little wonder, then, that Palamon should cry out against the cruelty of the pagan gods in a way which eerily anticipates the exclamation of Shakespeare's Gloucester, 'As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods, | They kill us for their sport' (*King Lear*, act 4, scene 1, 36–7).

... 'O crueel Goddes that governe
This world with byndnyng of youre word eterne,
And writen in the table of athhamaunt [adamant i.e. hardest of stones]
Youre parlement and youre eterne graunt,
What is mankynde moore unto you holde
Than is the sheep that rouketh in the folde?' [cowers]
(I. 1303–8)

A man may be killed like some helpless beast cowering in a pen, or imprisoned, or suffer sickness and great misfortune, even though he is quite guiltless. Where's the justice in that? Even worse, Palamon continues, it seems that beasts fare better than men. A beast, while alive, may act on all its impulses, and does not suffer punishment after death, whereas men are subject to firm constraints in their lives and they must 'wepe and pleyn' in their afterlives (I. 1313–21). Palamon locates the source of his own pain and imprisonment in the intervention of two jealous and angry gods, Saturn and Juno, who, because they bear a grudge against the royal 'blood | Of Thebes', have destroyed almost all of it (I. 1328–31). Arcite agrees with him on this at least: 'Som wikke [harmful] aspect or disposicioun | Of Saturne, by som constellacioun, | Hath yeven us this...' (I. 1087–90).

Contrary to the classical tradition of the Golden Age when Saturn ruled and justice prevailed throughout the world (until he was supplanted by his son Jupiter), Chaucer gives priority to the astronomical/astrological aspect of this planet-god, which was highly negative. According to the account in the *De proprietatibus rerum* of Bartholomew the Englishman (d. 1272) Saturn is a malevolent planet, cold, leaden, and dry, 'and therefore by fables he is painted as an old man'.³² Similarly, Alan of Lille (d. 1202/3) writes that in the abode of Saturn, grief, groans, tears, discord, terror, sadness, wanness, mourning, and injustice hold sway.³³ All of this squares with the description which 'pale Saturnus the colde' (I. 2443) offers of himself: 'Myn is the drenchyng [drowning] in the see so wan; | Myn is the prison in the derke cote [dark hovel]...' (I. 2456–7.). It would seem, then, that any course of action proposed by this terrifying power can be expected to be deadly and unjust. 'In elde [old age] is bothe wysdom and usage' (I. 2448), and old Saturn finds 'in his olde experience an art' (a trick) whereby 'he ful soone hath plesed every part'—that is, he devises a way of satisfying the warring gods Mars and Venus, but without caring about the impact that his action will have on the world of men (I. 2445–6). Mars asked for victory,

Palamon asked for the woman. Saturn seizes on this. As soon as Arcite emerges victorious from the tournament, he asks Pluto to send the infernal fury which causes Arcite's horse to throw, and mortally wound, his rider, thereby ensuring that Palamon gets the girl (I. 2684–91). The opportunism, and self-serving legalism, of Saturn's 'art' are manifest.

The substantial role Saturn plays in the 'Knight's Tale' is wholly of Chaucer's invention. It has no precedent in the *Teseida*, where the deities make up their collective mind without needing to call upon the cold god's problematic 'wisdom and usage', and Venus (quite appropriately, given her patronage of Palamone) instructs Pluto to intervene at the crucial moment. In Chaucer's version of the story, the benevolent 'Juppiter, the kyng' (I. 3035) so lauded by Theseus is an ineffectual figure, hardly able to control division and strife in the pantheon; instead the malevolent Saturn rules the roost. Should we, then, ridicule Theseus' speculations as being sadly, almost laughably, inaccurate, the result of wishful thinking on a grandiose philosophical scale? Or rather regard them as precocious insight into something better, which will be revealed in the future, with the advent of Christ?

To pursue the second of those arguments would be to prioritize the extent of the pagan enlightenment in the 'Knight's Tale', and indeed elsewhere in Chaucer's classicist narratives. Theseus' perfection may be 'shadowy' (to return to John of Wales's phrase) but nevertheless it is perfection of a kind. The fact that the virtuous heathen worship rascally gods is no reason for condemning the men themselves out of hand; such condemnation may well be reserved for the gods—and Chaucer ostentatiously lays it at their door. It could, indeed, be said that the virtuous heathen deserved better gods than the ones they worshipped. Their well-nigh superhuman moral, intellectual, and militaristic feats deserved praise. 'Glory and honour and peace' are merited by 'every one that worketh good', in the words of St Paul (Romans 2: 10), who went on to say,

When the Gentiles, who have not the law, do by nature those things that are of the law; these, having not the law, are a law to themselves. Who shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness to them... (Romans 2: 14–15)

Those sentiments were frequently applied to virtuous heathen by the classicizing scholars of Chaucer's day, who praised such high achievers for walking by the best light they had and striving to ensure that their light was not darkness.³⁴ Hence Cambyuskan is commended for keeping the 'lay, to which that he was sworn', in a way which resulted in behaviour of the highest moral standards. Similarly, Honoré Bonet portrays the 'most noble emissary | That there is in all of Islam' as a *bon clerc en nostre loy*, a man learned in the tenets of his faith. Here is a much tougher case, for this man's many accomplishments are interwoven with his devotion to a belief-system which denies major Christians truths—although Muslims at least agree that 'there is only one God', and perhaps even can admire 'a Christian death', according to William of Rubruck's momentary statement of interfaith agreement. Therefore it was

impossible to argue that, like pagans who lived long ago, the Muslims could not possibly have known better, no superior religion having been available to them—for Christianity was right before them, a major cultural presence in their lives and times.³⁵

However, this distinction was eroded by claims that certain forms of revelation had given some Old Testament and Gentile sages at least an inkling of things to come, a measure of insight which they were free to accept or reject. (The concomitant being that they could be commended for accepting it or criticized for rejecting it.³⁶) Such theological considerations brought past and present non-believers together. But of even greater importance, I suspect, was the weight of evidence deriving from contemporary experience of actual Muslims, particularly by the military men whom English knights fought both against and for, whether the mighty and merciful Saladin or the heathen 'lord of Palatye' whom Chaucer's Knight had no qualms about serving—a fact which features prominently in the General Prologue's account of this character's campaigns, and adumbrates the tales told by the Knight and his son the Squire, both of whom are mentally at home in other worlds of exciting martial adventures and scientific wonders.

Furthermore, many of those wonders were grounded in *scientia* to which (it was widely acknowledged) Muslim philosophers had made major contributions, one of the most eminent being the Andalusian polymath 'Abū l-Walīd Muḥammad Ibn 'Aḥmad Ibn Rušd. Or, as he was named in Latin, Averroes. If Aristotle was *the* philosopher, Averroes was *the* commentator. Different embodiments of heathen authority, then, travelled together, contributing to a vast corpus of knowledge which commanded the utmost respect, even as worries were expressed concerning its consonance with Christian orthodoxy.³⁷ Hence Aristotle had to be challenged for claiming that no other world could exist—and his belief in the eternity of the one and only world also required rejection. When it came to heathen religion, no compromises were possible, except when enlightened pagans were credited with having anticipated Christian monotheism, or when devout Muslims were credited (as in William of Rubruck's testimony) with 'saying that there is one God', and therefore rejecting the polytheism of present-day Buddhists—along with that of ancient Greeks and Romans. The sins of such non-Christians may have been scarlet (according to anxious moralists of the type fictionalized in Chaucer's Franklin), but their books were read.³⁸

...how one can imagine oneself among them
I do not know;
It was all so unimaginably different
And all so long ago.³⁹

So says Louis MacNeice (1907–63), Anglo-Irish poet and one-time lecturer in classics at the University of Birmingham. Having had the 'privilege' at 'Marlborough and Merton' of learning 'a language | That is incontrovertibly dead',⁴⁰ here MacNeice expresses his sense of the impossibility of imagining the glory that was Greece.

When he should be remembering 'the paragons of Hellas' he thinks instead of such quotidian figures as 'the crooks, the adventurers, the opportunists', 'the demagogues and the quacks', 'the women pouring | Libations over graves', 'the trimmers at Delphi', and, of course, 'the slaves'. 'These dead are dead . . .'⁴¹

For Chaucer the classical world was very much alive. He had little difficulty in imagining himself among men and women of pagan antiquity, not just 'the paragons' of virtue but also people like the lamenting women and 'the trimmers at Delphi'. To be sure, he lacked the burden of modern scholarship which weighed heavily on MacNeice. (Though it may be suggested that the reductive late medieval practice of allegorizing pagan gods and narratives in a way which severed them from their roots in historical time and place⁴² was an equally onerous burden, which Chaucer managed to shrug off.) William Faulkner's dictum 'The past is never dead. It's not even past'⁴³ sums up well many of the poet's attitudes to antiquity. That suggestion is supported, I believe, by all the reasons I have put forward above—the continued validity of moral codes of the past for present behaviour, the continued importance of pagan *scientia* for present learning (with the tantalizing thought that, in the case of alchemy for instance, it may have yet more secrets to disclose in the future), and the continued presence of heathen values (however newly manifest) in present society and politics.

On occasion, however, Chaucer seems to offer the past as a protective, and no doubt welcome, barrier to his readers, who may gasp at the ways in which Virginius and Arveragus apply their extreme interpretations of the requirements of justice and truth (confident in the knowledge that they do not have to try such things at home, so to speak), or relieved that a god far superior to the scary Saturn is now known to rule the stars. Yet, even as Chaucer's fictions of antiquity recognize the force of major cultural differences, they consistently assume, indeed affirm, the belief that common human values can triumph over the contingencies of time and place.

Et antiquorum scripta, fidelia conseruatricia premissorum, preterita uelud presentia representant, et viris strenuis quos longa mundi etas iam dudum per mortem absorbit per librorum uigiles lectiones, ac si uiuerent, spiritum ymaginarie uirtutis infundunt.

(Writings of the ancients, faithful preservers of tradition, depict the past as if it were the present, and, by the attentive readings of books, endow valiant heroes with the courageous spirit they are imagined to have had, just as if they were alive—heroes whom the extensive age of the world long ago swallowed up by death.)⁴⁴

Thus Guido delle Colonne introduces his *Historia destructionis Troiae* (1287), a book Chaucer knew well. He was not content to read passively of the ways in which ancient writers had rendered the past as present. Rather Chaucer wished to participate in the process himself, preserving tradition as it appealed to him while producing fresh imaginations which would endow the dead with new textual life. Here is the very essence of his classicism.

Notes

¹ There is a large bibliography on Chaucer and the classical poets. Among representative studies, see John M. Fyler, *Chaucer and Ovid* (New Haven, 1979); Marilyn Desmond, *Reading Dido: Gender, Textuality, and the Medieval Aeneid* (Minneapolis, 1994), pp. 128–62; Christopher Baswell, *Virgil in Medieval England: Figuring the Aeneid from the Twelfth Century to Chaucer* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 220–69; and Jamie C. Fumo, *The Legacy of Apollo: Antiquity, Authority, and Chaucerian Poetics* (Toronto, 2010); together with the relevant material in Rita Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages: Academic Traditions and Vernacular Texts* (Cambridge, 1991), and Kathryn L. McKinley, *Reading the Ovidian Heroine: Metamorphoses Commentaries, 1100–1618* (Leiden, 2001). For the ‘set texts’ studied in medieval grammar schools, and their significance for Chaucer, see Edward Wheatley, *Mastering Aesop: Medieval Education, Chaucer, and his Followers* (Gainesville, Fla, 2000), and Jill Mann, “‘He knew nat Catoun’: Medieval School-Texts and Middle English Literature”, in *The Text in the Community: Essays on Medieval Works, Manuscripts, Authors and Readers*, eds Jill Mann and Maura Nolan (Notre Dame, Ind., 2006), pp. 41–74. On Chaucer and medieval knowledge (and ignorance) of classical ideas of tragedy, see H. A. Kelly, *Ideas and Forms of Tragedy from Aristotle to the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1993), and *Chaucerian Tragedy* (Cambridge, 1997). See also Chapter 10 in this volume by Akbari (on Ovid receptions), Chapter 11 by Hiatt (on Lucan receptions), and Chapter 12 by Wetherbee (on Statius).

² Here I allude to Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, 6. 1 (1025b25).

³ According to the English friar Roger Bacon (d. 1294); *Opus maius*, prima pars, ch. 4, trans. Robert Belle Burke, 2 vols (Philadelphia, 1928), 1. 10.

⁴ Edward Grant, *Planets, Stars, and Orbs: The Medieval Cosmos, 1200–1687* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 150–68.

⁵ Steven J. Dick, *Plurality of Worlds: The Origins of the Extraterrestrial Life Debate from Democritus to Kant* (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 40–2.

⁶ Grant McColley and H. W. Miller, ‘Saint Bonaventure, Francis Mayron, William Vorilong, and the Doctrine of a Plurality of Worlds’, *Speculum* 12:3 (1937), 386–9 (at p. 388).

⁷ All Chaucer references are to *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd edn, ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston, 1987).

⁸ Stephen H. Rigby, ‘The Knight’, in *Historians on Chaucer: The General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales*, ed. Stephen H. Rigby with the assistance of Alastair J. Minnis (Oxford, 2014), pp. 42–62 (at p. 58, cf. pp. 50–2).

⁹ *Nicomachean Ethics*, 4. 2 (1122a).

¹⁰ See Alastair Minnis, ‘*I speke of fôlk in seculer estaat*: Vernacularity and Secularity in the Age of Chaucer’, *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 27 (2005), 25–58 (at pp. 33–5), and Stephen H. Rigby, ‘Aristotle for Aristocrats and Poets: Giles of Rome's *De regimine principum* as Theodicy of Privilege’, *Chaucer Review* 46:3 (2012), 259–313.

¹¹ Presumably Bonet chose Jean de Meun as interlocutor because of his reputation as a satirist.

¹² London, British Library, Additional MS 42130, fol. 82r. On this specific image see especially Debra Higgs Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews: Making Monsters in Medieval Art* (Princeton, 2003), pp. 82, 179, and 188–9. See further Michael Camille, ‘Idols of the Saracens’, in *The Gothic Idol: Ideology and Image-Making in Medieval Art* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 129–64; and Geraldine Heng, ‘Jews, Saracens, “Black Men”, Tartars: England in a World of Racial Difference’, in *A Companion to Medieval English Literature and Culture, c.1350–c.1500*, ed. Peter Brown (Oxford, 2007), pp. 247–70; and Suzanne Conklin Akbari, *Idols in the East: European Representations of Islam and the Orient, 1100–1450* (Ithaca, NY, 2009).

¹³ *Medieval Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Dialogue: The Apparicion Maistre Jehan de Meun of Honorat Bovet*, ed. Michael Hanly (Tempe, Ariz., 2005), pp. 82–3. I have made a few minor changes to Hanly’s translation.

¹⁴ John of Wales, *Compendiloquium de vitis illustrium philosophorum*, prologus, in *Florilegium de vita et dictis philosophorum et Breviloquium de sapientia sanctorum*, ed. Luke Wadding (Rome, 1655), pp. 19–28; cf. Alastair Minnis, *Chaucer and Pagan Antiquity* (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 62–3. The most comprehensive study of the classicizing commentators and compilers of fourteenth-century England remains Beryl Smalley, *English Friars and Antiquity in the Early Fourteenth Century* (Oxford and New York, 1960).

¹⁵ This and the following quotations are from *The Mission of Friar William of Rubrick: His Journey to the Court of the Great Khan Möngke, 1253–1255*, trans. Peter Jackson with David Morgan (1990).

¹⁶ However, there is some debate concerning the identification of Cambyuskan with Genghis Khan. An alternative candidate is Genghis’ grandson Batu Khan (1207–55), founder of the Kipchak Khanate, which invaded Kievan Rus’ in 1237/8; hence Batu could well be said to have ‘werreyed [waged war on] Russye’ (V.10). Whoever this heathen ruler may be, he is certainly virtuous, in line with Chaucer’s classicizing tendencies, which is the point of my argument here. For more on Chaucer’s possible knowledge of Mongul history see Vincent J. DiMarco, ‘The Historical Basis of Chaucer’s *Squire’s Tale*’, *Edebiyat* 1:2 (1989), 1–22.

¹⁷ The bibliography on these issues is substantial; for references see the notes to the chapter ‘Looking for a Sign: The Quest for Nominalism in Ricardian Poetry’, in Alastair Minnis, *Translations of Authority in Medieval English Literature: Valuing the Vernacular* (Cambridge, 2009), on pp. 183–94.

¹⁸ In addition to what was happening in the schools (though occasionally some awareness of relevant academic developments is in evidence), a ‘vernacular virtuous heathen scene’ flourished in the later Middle Ages; see Frank Grady, *Representing Righteous Heathens in Late-Medieval England* (New York, 2005). This is well exemplified by such ‘romances of antiquity’ as the *Roman d’Eneas* and the *Roman de Thebes*, a genre well discussed by Barbara Nolan, *Chaucer and the Tradition of the ‘Roman Antique’* (Cambridge, 1992). See further the essays edited under the direction of Danielle Buschinger, *Le Roman antique au moyen âge: Actes du Colloque du Centre d’études médiévales de l’Université de Picardie, Amiens, 14–15 janvier 1989* (Göppingen, 1992).

¹⁹ *The Scale of Perfection*, 2.3, ed. Thomas H. Bestul (Kalamazoo, Mich., 2000), p. 139. The tolerance sometimes afforded to pagans past and present was rarely extended to Jews, who

generally got the worst of any comparison of faiths, as in Bonet's *Apparicion*. For a particularly interesting and nuanced example, see Peter Abelard's *Dialogus inter philosophum, Iudaeum et Christianum*, included in *Abelard: Ethical Writings: His Ethics or 'Know yourself' and his Dialogue between a Philosopher, a Jew, and a Christian*, trans. Paul Vincent Spade with an introduction by Marilyn McCord Adams (Indianapolis, 1995). For a real-life enactment of such a rigged debate see *The Trial of the Talmud: Paris, 1240*, Hebrew texts translated by John Friedman, Latin texts translated by Jean Connell Hoff, with a historical essay by Robert Chazzan (Toronto, 2012). Contemporary readings of Chaucer's 'Prioress's Tale' tend to split between those who see its anti-Semitism as a sad but inescapable sign of the times and those who detach the narrator from the author, the Prioress being seen as an unsophisticated and provincial bigot.

²⁰ All translations of passages from Boethius are from *De consolazione philosophiae*, ed. and trans. H. F. Stewart, E. K. Rand, and S. J. Tester (Cambridge, Mass., 1973).

²¹ Of course, the value of fame as a spur to great achievement was generally recognized, and often commended. Thus Geoffroi de Charny (d. 1356) urged 'all knights and all men-at arms' to aim 'to attain those heights of valor whereby so many good deeds are performed and win recognition during the lifetime' of great men and for so long after their death. *The Book of Chivalry of Geoffroi de Charny*, ed and trans. Richard W. Kaeuper and Elspeth Kennedy (Philadelphia, 1996), p. 163. But Charnay emphasizes that such men should not be concerned with the 'great deeds' themselves but rather with 'thanking God, that Lord by whose grace these deeds can be achieved' (p. 161). 'There are indeed many, who can achieve such renown for physical achievements, whose souls are afterward lost' (p. 163). Virtuous heathen were supposed to be particularly prone to such dangers.

²² On Christian depictions of 'idols of the pagans' see, in addition to Smalley's *English Friars and Antiquity*, Camille, *The Gothic Idol*, pp. 73–128.

²³ Bersuire, *Dictionarius seu Repertorium morale*, s.v. *fama* (Venice, 1583), p. 100; cf. Minnis, *Chaucer and Pagan Antiquity*, p. 131.

²⁴ *Compendiloquium*, pars 5, cap. 2, ed. Wadding, pp. 292–3; cf. Minnis, *Chaucer and Pagan Antiquity*, p. 31.

²⁵ *De civitate Dei*, v. 18; trans. R. W. Dyson (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 218–21.

²⁶ J. S. P. Tatlock, *The Scene of the Franklin's Tale Visited*, Chaucer Society Publications, 2nd series, 51 (1914), p. 20, cf. pp. 18–19.

²⁷ In *Troilus and Criseyde*, Chaucer eloquently speaks of 'the influences of thise hevenes hye', together with Fortune as the 'executrice of wyrdes [fates, destinies]', as being 'our hierdes' (shepherds, guides), while emphasizing that they operate 'under God', i.e. they are mere secondary causes subject to the all-controlling first cause (III. 617–20).

²⁸ *Treatise on the Astrolabe*, II. 4, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Benson, p. 671.

²⁹ Lee Patterson, *Temporal Circumstances: Form and History in the Canterbury Tales* (New York, 2006), pp. 171, 176.

³⁰ *Amphibologia*, explains Vincent of Beauvais (c.1190–1264?) in his *Speculum doctrinale*, means 'dubious meaning'. As an example he cites Apollo's response to Pyrrhus, 'Aio te . . . Romanos vincere posse'. Here it is unclear as to who will be defeated and who will win—the Romans

or Pyrrhus. *Speculum doctrinale*, iii.92, in *Speculum quadruplex, sive Speculum maius* (Douai, 1624, repr. Graz, Akademische Druck- u. Verlagsanstalt, 1964–5), ii, col. 276. Cf. Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, I.xxxiv.13–16; the source is Ennius, *Annales*, 179. Charles V's most impressive scholar-translator, Nicole Oresme (d. 1382), warns that 'the words of the diviners are sometimes of double meaning, *amphibolic*, two-faced': Oresme, *Livre de divinacions*, ed. G. W. Coopland, *Nicole Oresme and the Astrologers* (Liverpool, 1952), pp. 94–7. Oresme proceeds to quote Cicero's declaration, 'Apollo, thy responses are sometimes true, sometimes false, according to chance, in part doubtful and obscure, so much so that the expositor has need of another expositor' (*De divinatione*, ii.56).

³¹ *Thebaid*, ed. and trans. D. R. Shackleton Bailey, 2 vols (Cambridge, Mass., 2004). On the uses and attributions of the phrase 'primus in orbe deos fecit timor' among medieval commentators, see Minnis, *Chaucer and Pagan Antiquity*, p. 84.

³² *De proprietatibus rerum*, 8.12, in *On the Properties of Things: John Trevisa's Translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus De proprietatibus rerum*, eds M. C. Seymour et al. (Oxford, 1975–88), 1.479.

³³ *Anticlaudianus*, 4.482–3, ed. R. Bossuat (Paris, 1955), p. 121.

³⁴ Cf. Minnis, *Chaucer and Pagan Antiquity*, pp. 56–7.

³⁵ Occasionally English writers indulged in fantasies of Saracen conversion, as for instance in Middle English retellings of the Charlemagne romances which featured Fierabras and Otuel, both of whom came to see the errors of their pagan ways. There is a substantial bibliography on these narratives; for a good start, see Dorothee Metlitzki, *The Matter of Araby in Medieval England* (New Haven, 1977), and Siobhain Bly Calkin, *Saracens and the Making of English Identity: The Auchinleck Manuscript* (New York, 2005).

³⁶ See Minnis, *Chaucer and Pagan Antiquity*, pp. 47–50, 56–9 (esp. pp. 58–9).

³⁷ A convenient list of those worries may be found in Giles of Rome's *Errores philosophorum*, ed. Josef Koch with an English translation by John O. Riedl (Milwaukee, 1944).

³⁸ To rework Hilaire Belloc's words, 'When I am dead, I hope it may be said: | "His sins were scarlet, but his books were read".' *Hilaire Belloc: Complete Verse*, ed. W. N. Roughead (1970), p. 112.

³⁹ *Autumn Journal*, IX; in *Louis MacNeice: Collected Poems*, ed. Peter McDonald (2007), p. 122.

⁴⁰ *Autumn Journal*, XIII; *Collected Poems*, ed. McDonald, p. 130.

⁴¹ *Autumn Journal*, IX; *Collected Poems*, ed. McDonald, pp. 121–2.

⁴² See for example the technique employed in Pierre Bersuire's aptly named *Reductorium morale*, summarized in *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism c.1100–c.1375: The Commentary Tradition*, rev. edn, eds Alastair Minnis and A. B. Scott with David Wallace (Oxford, 1991), pp. 323–4, and Ralph J. Hexter, 'The *Allegari* of Pierre Bersuire: Interpretation and the *Reductorium Morale*', *Allegorica* 10 (1989), 51–84.

⁴³ Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun*, act 1, sc. 3 (Harmondsworth, 1960), p. 81.

⁴⁴ Guido delle Colonne, *Historia destructionis Troiae*, ed. Nathaniel Edward Griffin (Cambridge, Mass., 1936), p. 3; trans. Mary Elizabeth Meek (1974), p. 1.

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