Forms of Mediation: 
Chaucer, Spenser and English Literary History 

by 

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for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy 

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Abstract:

This dissertation argues that Spenser represents his relation to Chaucer as an unresolved dialectic between the desire for an intimate, immediate connection with him, and the recognition of the obstacles and enabling qualifications to it. Spenser’s version of English literary history is the product of a double vision which balances a linear genealogy of direct influence with a more circumlocutory sequence of indirect mediation. From one perspective, Spenser’s Chaucer is partner in an exclusive bond and uninterrupted dialogue: he is the friendly “maister” providing first-hand tutelage in his poetic craft; the fecund source promising a stream of inspired drops straight from his learned head; the Father of English poetry offering a privileged inheritance to his lineal descendent; the “well of English undefyled” infusing his famous soul directly into Spenser’s body. But from the other, Chaucer is only one figure in a far less exclusive and far more polyvocal past: he is the Old Poet whose lessons are transmitted only after being refracted by his successor Lydgate and his contemporary Gower; the canonized literary sovereign whose learned head has been reconstructed by the politicized ideas of his Tudor readers; the adaptable model whose verse can be shaped by the intervening hermeneutic of Ovidian complaint; the printed auctor whose influence comes through the unauthorized and
idiosyncratic texts of his sixteenth-century editors. The diverse components of this double vision mean that Spenser’s engagement with Chaucer extends well beyond Chaucer alone: the recursus to the Chaucerian fontes leads Spenser to swim in extra-Chaucerian waters. And in doing so, the New Poet fashions an English poetic tradition that is more capacious and erratic than scholarship has previously acknowledged. Chaucer and Spenser are at the center of English literary history, but their connection is also guided by people usually kept at the periphery of it.
Acknowledgments

My research was generously supported by fellowships from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, from the Ontario Graduate Scholarship program, and from the Department of English at the University of Toronto. Travel grants were kindly provided by the School of Graduate Studies, by the Department of English, and by Victoria University. Fellowships are sweet, but sage advice is sweeter, and for this I’m grateful to my supervisor, David Galbraith, whose learning, generosity, patience, and wit exemplify the benevolent and engaged humanity to which the humanities should aspire. I’m also deeply indebted to the members of my committee, Suzanne Akbari and Alexandra Gillespie, who value the ideal of intellectual community and actually work to uphold it, and to the appraisers of my dissertation, Elizabeth Harvey and Theresa Krier, whose thoughtful, intelligent comments have helped me see my research anew. Special thanks to Will Robins, who graciously facilitated the reorganization of my committee: Victoria University is fortunate to have him as their President; I’m fortunate to have him as a friend.

The final paragraph, as is conventional in acknowledgments, is reserved for the people who mean the most to me. But my parents exceed all conventions, and have privileged me with a kind of love that is truly exceptional. “Virtute e canoscenza”: the collocation has been soured by Ulysses’ sugared tongue, but I’m confident that my parents, who embody it, have since redeemed it. Sarah Star, light of my world, has made me better and happier than I ever thought I could be, and my debt to her, fortunately for me, will take a lifetime of love to repay.
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Texts and Abbreviations

*The Faerie Queene* is cited from the text prepared by Hiroshi Yamashita and Toshiyuki Suzuki in A.C. Hamilton’s revised Longman edition (Harlow: Pearson, 2001). Spenser’s other works are cited from *The Shorter Poems*, ed. Richard A. McCabe (London: Penguin, 1999). For Chaucer’s poetry, I have used *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd edn. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987) in conjunction with *The Woorkes of Geffrey Chaucer*, ed. John Stow (London: John Kyngston for John Wight, 1561), STC 5076. The majority of my analyses concentrate on textual details shared by the modern and Renaissance editions of Chaucer, so I most frequently quote from the *Riverside*, the text most familiar to the Chaucerians and Spenserians to whom this dissertation is addressed. But when the Renaissance editions are substantively different from the *Riverside*, as is the case with *The Squire’s Prologue* discussed in section V of Chapter 3 below, I quote from Stow’s version of the *Woorkes*, the text most familiar to Spenser. In these cases of substantive variation, I cite the lineation from the *Riverside* along with the signature number from Stow.

In footnotes, bibliographic entries and parenthetical citations, I have used the following abbreviations for frequently consulted journals and poems:

- **BD** *The Book of the Duchess*
- **ChR** *The Chaucer Review*
- **Cpl** *The Complaints*
- **CT** *The Canterbury Tales*
- **Daph** *Daphnaïda*
- **ELH** *English Literary History*
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>ELR</td>
<td>English Literary Renaissance</td>
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<tr>
<td>FQ</td>
<td>The Faerie Queene</td>
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<td>HF</td>
<td>The House of Fame</td>
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<td>JMRS</td>
<td>Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies</td>
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<td>JMEMS</td>
<td>Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies</td>
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<td>LGW</td>
<td>The Legend of Good Women</td>
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<td>Notes and Queries</td>
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<td>RES</td>
<td>Review of English Studies</td>
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<td>SAC</td>
<td>Studies in the Age of Chaucer</td>
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<td>SC</td>
<td>The Shepheardes Calender</td>
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<td>TC</td>
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<td>UTQ</td>
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Introduction

Mediated Origins:
Chaucer, Spenser and English Literary History

I: The Make-Believe of a Beginning:
Mutabilitie and Chaucerian Mediation

In the epigraph for the opening chapter of her Daniel Deronda, George Eliot offers this aphorism on the fictitiousness and necessity of all origins: “men can do nothing without the make-believe of a beginning.”¹ For Eliot, who here finds an origin for her story inside a German casino in September 1865, the aphorism doubles as a commentary on her own narrative methods, which she aligns both with “Poetry,” the flexible art that “has always been understood to start in the middle,” as well as with “Science,” the supposedly “strict measurer” of time that, like an epic on the heroic turnpike road, actually “sets off in medias res” (DD.7). Eliot, the epigraph announces, will follow the same kind of cursus: the originary scene in Germany, during which Deronda first glimpses the uncanny beauty of Gwendolen Harleth, soon incites a series of flashbacks, which returns the narrative beyond its diegetic beginning to prior events in late 1864 and early 1865. The introductory epigraph looks forward to these remembered episodes, and peremptorily suggests that, as alternative origins, they are no more definitive or veracious for their temporal precedence: whether we find “our prologue…in heaven or on earth,” Eliot explains, “no retrospect will take us to the true beginning” (DD.7). With her allusion here to Goethe’s Faust—the seminal model for such a double prologue in the theatre of earth

and the paradise of heaven\textsuperscript{2}—Eliot incorporates into her economy of origins the dynamics of literary history. The intertextual beginnings of Eliot’s art, like her narratological beginning in the town of Leubronn, can be similarly traced to a German past. If her story starts with the “drama” of her invented German casino (\textit{DD.9}), her epigraph looks back to the even earlier drama of her predecessor Goethe—a source that, in its representation of Faust’s biblical translation, had itself already broached the question of origins. “In the beginning there was the deed,” Faust brazenly declares in defiance of the logocentric origin in John’s Gospel.\textsuperscript{3} Eliot takes up Faust’s terms only to invert the priority he had assigned to them. The Eliotian beginning, rather than a real time coincident with the deed, is instead the preliminary fiction upon which all deeds subsequently depend: “men can do nothing without the make-believe of a beginning.”

As a skeptical interpreter of origins, Eliot finds among contemporary philosophers a compelling analogue in Jacques Derrida, whose \textit{Grammatology}, like many works in his protean corpus, develops a critique of beginnings by deconstructing the concepts that are putatively accessible there: “immediate presence,” “the thing itself,” “originary perception.”\textsuperscript{4} In his anti-intentionalist exposition of the \textit{Confessions}, Derrida suggests


\textsuperscript{3} “Im Amfang war die Tat,” cited by line number from \textit{Faust, First Part}, ed. and trans. Peter Salm (New York: Bantam Books, 1985), 1237. The Gospel verse, which Faust transposes into German immediately before revising it, is from John 1.1: “Im Anfang war das Wort” (“In the beginning was the Word”), 1224.

that Rousseau evinces both an assault on mediation and a deep reliance on it: “mediacy is the name for all that Rousseau wanted opinionatedly to efface” (OG.171), but it is also all that is left available to him. Through his pursuit of linguistic, domestic and sexual compensation, in which he makes Thérèse fill the place of Mamma and his vocational ambition, Rousseau creates what Derrida calls a chain of “mediations” (OG.170-71). This sequence leads not to an original plentitude—whether in language, meaning or body—but to additional and “ineluctably multiplying” supplements, a trajectory that prompts Derrida’s culminating affirmation of an irrational logic of origins: “That all begins through the intermediary,” he writes, “is what is indeed ‘inconceivable to reason,’” but it is so (OG.171). As Derrida is likely aware, his theory about origins is itself the product of mediation: the argument that he applies to the Francophone Rousseau may well be shaped, like Eliot’s epigraph to Daniel Deronda, by the intervening past of the German Enlightenment. “Immediacy is derived,” writes Derrida, a dictum that could well be derived from G.W.F. Hegel in his Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion: “immediacy itself is essentially mediated” (LPR.157).5 There, explaining the relationship between original and derivative knowledge, Hegel introduces his own chain of ineluctably multiplying mediations with this familial analogy: “If we say of a human being that he is a father, then the son is mediated and the father appears as the immediate; but in that he is the begetter, he himself is also something begotten. In the same way every living thing, in that it is a begetter, is defined as something originative and immediate; but nevertheless it is itself something begotten and therefore mediated” (LPR.157).

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This dissertation is about Chaucer, Spenser and early English poetry, but I invoke Eliot, Derrida and Hegel to suggest that my chosen topic has affiliations and implications beyond England in the fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries: the origin of English poetry may, inter alia, also illuminate the literary and philosophical theories that have developed after it. English literary history begins with the intermediary and his name is Geoffrey Chaucer. Men can do nothing without the make-believe of a beginning, so Edmund Spenser locates the origin of his English tradition in Chaucer’s “pure well head of Poesie” (FQ.VII.vii.9.4). Spenser is the poetic son begotten by his immediate father Chaucer, but this father is himself something begotten and therefore mediated.

My dissertation addresses the question of origins and mediation in English literary history from several complementary angles. I will suggest that Chaucer is himself a mediator, the medieval interpres who stands between pre-Chaucerian traditions and Spenser’s Renaissance milieu, and who thereby enables lines of imaginative communication among them. But even more prominently, I show that Chaucer comes to have mediators of his own—the poets, editors and commentators who furnish Spenser with frameworks to interpret his predecessor’s accomplishment and develop his distinguished model. This latter focus leads to my cumulative argument for the three chapters that follow, which together span from the 1579 Shepheardes Calender, through the 1591 Complaints and Daphnaïda, to the 1596 Faerie Queene. Spenser represents his relation to Chaucer as an unresolved dialectic between the desire for an intimate, immediate connection with him, and the recognition of the obstacles and enabling qualifications to it. Spenser’s version of English literary history is the product of a double vision which balances a linear genealogy of direct influence with a more circumlocutory
sequence of indirect mediation. From one perspective, Spenser’s Chaucer is partner in an
exclusive bond and uninterrupted dialogue: he is the friendly “maister” providing first-
hand tutelage in his poetic craft; the fecund source promising a stream of inspired drops
straight from his learned head; the Father of English poetry offering a privileged
inheritance to his lineal descendent; the “well of English vndefyled” infusing his famous
soul directly into Spenser’s body (FQ.IV.ii.32-33). But from the other, Chaucer is only
one figure in a far less exclusive and far more polyvocal past: he is the Old Poet whose
lessons are transmitted only after being refracted by his successor Lydgate and his
contemporary Gower; the canonized literary sovereign whose learned head has been
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sixteenth-century editors. The diverse components of this double vision mean that
Spenser’s engagement with Chaucer extends well beyond Chaucer alone: the recursus to
the Chaucerian fontes leads Spenser to swim in extra-Chaucerian waters. And in doing
so, the New Poet fashions and places himself in an English poetic tradition that is more
capacious and erratic than we have previously acknowledged. Chaucer and Spenser are
at the center of English literary history, but their connection is also guided by people
usually kept at the periphery of it.

The capaciousness of Spenser’s poetic past is neatly exemplified in the historical
depth of a single stanza from the Mutabilitie Cantos, in which Chaucer functions as the
point of convergence for several distinct forms of mediation. First printed posthumously
by Matthew Lownes in his 1609 edition of The Faerie Queene, and nominally derived
from the never-finished or otherwise “vnperfite” “Legend of Constancie,” the Cantos
dilate on the beautiful Titaness Mutability, who challenges the legitimacy of Jove’s
monarchical rule, and then presents her case against him at a court presided by the
goddess Nature. This dispute is held at the pinnacle of Arlo Hill where Nature sits on her
arboreal throne surrounded by her fellow gods and by all the creatures of her natural
world. Here, the brilliancy of her clothing overwhelms the imaginative capacity of
Spenser’s “fraile wit” (FQ.VII.vii.7.4), and faced with the difficulty of devising an
adequate description, he invokes the authority of his similarly challenged predecessor:

So hard it is for any liuing wight,
All her array and vestiments to tell,
That old Dan Geffrey (in whose gentle spright
The pure well head of Poesie did dwell)
In his Foules parley durst not with it mel,
But it transferd to Alane, who he thought
Had in his Plaint of kindes describ’d it well:
Which who will read set forth so as it ought,
Go seek he out that Alane where he may be sought.

(FQ.VII.vii.9)

In 1758, the Spenserian editor John Upton suggested that this ninth stanza had been
mistakenly printed in the wrong spot, and that it should actually be situated after stanza
twelve—a judgment shared in general premise if not in specific details by his editorial
descendent, F.M. Padelford, who also thought that this stanza had been “misplaced,” but
speculated that it should really follow the seventh stanza instead.6 The need for these
conjectural emendations arises because, as yet another Spenserian editor puts it, the ninth
stanza “interrupts the continuity of argument” that would otherwise have run smoothly
between stanzas eight and ten, both of which describe the rich foliage in nature’s lush

6 Spenser’s Faerie Queene, ed. John Upton, 2 vols. (London: Jacob Tonson, 1758), 2: 662; and The Works
of Edmund Spenser, ed. Edwin Greenlaw, Charles Grosvenor Osgood and Frederick Morgan Padelford, 11
pavilion, and which seem conjoined by the coordinating logic of “and.” According to Andrew Zurcher, whose contribution to this editorial genealogy is forthcoming, the intervening ninth stanza was probably misplaced by either the copyist of Spenser’s manuscript or the compositor in Lownes’ print shop. Perhaps the stanza was a late addition to the Cantos, and Spenser only wrote it in the margin of his papers without incorporating it clearly into the body of his text. Confronted with the ambiguous placement, the copyist or compositor had to decide where the stanza should be inserted, and his injudicious choice disrupted what would have been the logical sequence of Spenser’s intended thought. This argument has many things to recommend it, not least of which is its implicit reminder that the foundations of English literary history are closely connected with the history of the book. Spenser’s representation of his relation to a distinguished poetic past may be here and elsewhere shaped by the more basic mediating activities of the compositor, copyist or printer.

But Zurcher, like Upton and Padelford, is less persuasive when differentiating Spenser from the mediators who transcribed and printed his works. The traditional explanation for the stanza’s misplacement appeals to a distinction between the logical, sequential intentions of an author and the confused decisions of a copyist or compositor


who, in Zurcher’s words, “blew it” (CM.47)—an assumption that, however necessary and justifiable in this case, also seems unsuited to Spenserian poetics in general, which itself revels in the sudden turn, the disorienting shift and the interrupted narrative.10 So on the only other occasion in The Faerie Queene when he invokes Chaucer by name, Spenser deliberately introduces an interruption, this one on a massive scale. Near the beginning of book four, the appeal to “Dan Chaucer” and his “antique stories” defers the adventures of Blandamour, Paridell and False Florimell for two cantos, and interposes the reconstructed Squire’s Tale between them. The interruption here is not an error but a hallmark quality of Spenser’s romantic interlace.11

The interposing stanza in the Cantos, which is indeed positioned incorrectly, presents a different case, but the editorial explanation of it still invites a similar critique: Spenser is not invariably aiming for linear or unimpeded thoughts. With our traditional focus on these misplaced lines, and the unintentional interruption they create, textual and literary critics alike have overlooked that this passage also effects an interruption of a different kind—one produced not by but in the stanza, and which can be ascribed to Spenser himself.12 This disruption comes in the form of a parenthesis, the rhetorical

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12 For important discussions of this stanza that bypass the interruption within it, see Alice S. Miskimin, The Renaissance Chaucer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), 35-36; John Guillory, Poetic Authority:
scheme by which Spenser describes Chaucer’s poetic fecundity between lines otherwise about the indescribability of Nature’s glorious clothing. The syntactical unit that could move directly from the first noun in line three to the preposition in line five is instead deferred by the earlier insertion of the same preposition, which introduces an expositiorily superfluous but historically significant aside: “old Dan Jeffrey (in whose gentle spright / The pure well head of Poesie did dwell) / In his Foules parley durst not with it mel” (FQ.VI.vii.9.3-5). For Spenser here, as for the classical and Renaissance theorists who informed his craft, the parenthesis functions as one of those figures of “tolerable disorder” that “derive something of their charm from their very resemblance to blemishes” (“habent quandam ex illa vitii similitudine gratiam”). What looks like a misguided or sloppy interposition is actually a deliberate device of great beauty. Quintilian, from whose Institutio Oratoria this aesthetic judgment derives, calls a parenthesis an “interpositio,” and suggests that it “consists in the interruption of the continuous flow of our language by the insertion of some remark” (“dum continuationi sermonis medius aliquisensus intervenit”) (IO.4:IX.iii.23). George Puttenham, whose 1589 Art of English Poesy draws often on Quintilian, anglicizes the parenthesis as “the Inserter,” and explains that it should be used “when ye will seem for larger information…to piece or graft in the midst of your tale an unnecessary parcel of speech,
which nevertheless may be thence without any detriment to the rest” (*AEP*.252). As these and other theorists would put it, Spenser’s parenthesis is a scheme “caste betweene,” “betwixt” or “in the midst” (*AEP*.252) of an otherwise sequential verse.14 And in this rhetorical light, the printing error in the 1609 *Cantos* appears to have produced a fitting (if inadvertent) symmetry with Spenser’s design: stanza nine comes between the direct argument of stanzas eight and ten; the parenthesis then comes between a linear thought within this stanza itself.

As that engrafted parcel of verse indicates, Chaucer was the site for a poetic origin: his spirit housed the primary source and fountainhead of creative composition—a distinction that extends the scope of his earlier laudatory title from book four. Whereas he there served as the glorious “well of English vndefyled,” Chaucer is now tied to an origin that apparently stretches beyond these specifically national borders and applies to all “Poesie” in general. The past tense of the auxiliary verb in line four (“*did dwell*”) suggests that this origin may be identified only retroactively, while its former place in Chaucer’s “gentle spright” hints that it has since been infused into another and more recent writer. The famous spirit that migrated out of Chaucer in book four, and which there “doth…survive” in Spenser, now also carries the “pure well head of Poesie” from the past to the present, from the Old Poet to the New. With his identification of this moving origin, Spenser may thus be fashioning his own authorial identity, but he is equally representing the literary past from which he emerged. On this front his syntax has considerable implications. If a creative “well head” once did dwell in Chaucer himself,

14 The first two quotations in this sentence are from, respectively, Henry Peacham, *The Garden of Eloquence* (1593), ed. William G. Crane (Gainesville: Scholars’ Facsimiles & Reprints, 1954), 198, Dd3v; and Richard Sherry, *A Treatise of Schemes and Tropes* (1550), ed. Herbert W. Hildebrant (Gainesville: Scholars’ Facsimiles & Reprints, 1961), 31, B8r.
Spenser also makes it literally reside within that interposing parenthesis of his verse: he introduces his poetic origin not at the beginning of the sentence but in the middle of its already started sequence. The relationship between Spenser’s rhetorical scheme, and the idea transmitted by it, encapsulates Chaucer’s position in literary history. Like an origin in a parenthesis, “Dan Geffrey” is at once the primary source generating a stream of subsequent English poetry, and a secondary mediator inserting himself in the midst of a preexisting European tradition.

Spenser makes this secondary status the focal point of lines six through nine, in which Chaucer figures as the timid intermediary who comes after a Continental author, and quietly defers to his knowing model. In “his Foules parley,” or at least in Spenser’s representation of it, Chaucer dared not meddle with Nature’s clothing, and left its description with Alain of Lille, the French cleric, teacher and poet who wrote De planctu naturae in a combination of Latin verse and prose around 1160.¹⁵ The first verb in Spenser’s sixth line—“transferd” from the Latin transferre, to bring across—could in another context signal the practice of translatio studii, but Chaucer keeps translatio to its bare minimum.¹⁶ He prompts Spenser to similarly anglicize Alain’s Latin title as the “Plaint of kindes,” but apparently shies away from carrying into his English work the

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¹⁶ On translatio studii, see, for instance, Karlheinz Stierle, “Translatio Studii and Renaissance: From Vertical to Horizontal Translation,” in The Translatability of Cultures: Figurations of the Space Between, ed. Sanford Budick and Wolfgang Iser (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 55-67; and Hassan Melehy, The Poetics of Literary Transfer in Early Modern France and England (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010). See, also, Thomas Cooper, Thesaurus Linguae Romanae et Britannicae (London: Henry Denham, 1578), STC 5699, in which “transferre” is glossed like this: “To cary or bring from one place to an other…to translate from one language to an other” (Llllll 5v.).
more substantive content of Nature’s gown. This was “transferd” not from but to Alain, and Spenser directs his readers there accordingly: “Who will read [of Nature’s array] set forth so as it ought / Go seek he out that Alane where he may be sought” (FQ.VII.vii.9.9). Perhaps, as Craig A. Berry suggests, Spenser affords such priority to Alain in hopes of downplaying the significant changes that Chaucer actually made to De planctu naturae.

In the Parliament of Fowls itself, Chaucer had meddled substantially with Nature’s array, along with the literary tradition behind it, but Spenser remakes him as a passive and “transparent vessel who simply points the way to the original—and more authoritative—source.” Yet there is also a different and hitherto overlooked design to this stanza, one that assigns Chaucer a more active mediating role, and that prevents readers from moving beyond him so quickly. Spenser’s advice to “seek … out that Alane” testifies not just to the authority of this original source but to the continued relevance and shaping influence of its English mediator. In directing readers beyond Chaucer, the stanza also leads them right back to him.

The concluding couplet is Spenser’s version of a bibliographic prompt that Chaucer had deployed throughout his corpus. In his Legend of Good Women, the poet reports only a short part of Dido’s tearful epistle, and then advises “who wol al this letter have in mynde” to “rede Ovyde, and in hym he shal it fynde” (LGW.1366-67); in the House of Fame, Geoffrey declines to describe the agonizing underworld, and directs

“whoso willeth for to knowe” about it to “rede… Virgile, or on Claudian / Or Daunte” (HF.448-50); and in The Monk’s Tale, the eponymous pilgrim offers a limited account of Ugolino’s tragedy, and suggests that “whoso wol here it in a lenger wise” should “redeth the grete poete of Ytaille / That highte Dant” (CT.VII.2459-61), an invitation that echoes his earlier encouragement for “whoso list…to rede” about Zenobia’s battles to seek “my maister Petrark” (CT.VII.2319-25). With his directives for further reading, Chaucer may well defer to the auctorite of his more fulsome predecessors, but he also accrues some authority for himself and his English adaptations. Virgil, Ovid, Dante, Petrarch—Chaucer here pairs his art not with the transitory “makyng” of aristocratic fashion but with the timeless “poesy” of the classical past and with the trecento writing that aspired to this status. The result is what his Lancastrian successors could justly consider as “Dante in Inglissh” (FP.1:Prlg.302), a poetic oeuvre that adorned “Brutis Albioun” with the wisdom, eloquence and privilege of “Daunt in Itaille, Virgile in Rome toun” and “Petrark in Florence” (FP.2:III.3858-60). Chaucer mediates an existing international tradition to launch a new one at home.


In the *Mutabilitie Cantos*, Spenser joins this tradition by adapting Chaucer’s technique of representing it: he treats Alain like Chaucer had treated his Continental *auctores* in the *Legend, The Canterbury Tales* and the *House of Fame*. “Who will read set forth so as it ought, / Go seek he out that *Alane* where he may be sought,” Spenser advises, looking to a pre-Chaucerian past even while channeling a Chaucerian mode: “Who wol al this letter have in mynde / Rede Ovyde, and in hym he shal it fynde” (*LGW*.1366-67). With his concluding lines, Spenser thus qualifies his earlier representation of Chaucer’s passivity and transparency. Even if he did not meddle with *De planctu naturae*, Chaucer still finally dictates the terms in which it will be received. Spenser may recommend a return to Alain, that “original” and “more authoritative source,” but he does so only by absorbing and imitating the language of his English predecessor and intermediary. This mediated return, I will argue, is paradigmatic of Spenser’s approach to his literary precursors, including Chaucer. Spenser’s engagement with his poetic origins, we will see, proceeds by way of the intervening material—the layers of reception, interpretation and tradition—that has since accreted around it.

Chaucer recycles the same motif of bibliographic discovery in the Introduction to his *Man of Law’s Tale*, but he there connects it with a different author. Contemplating the subject of his forthcoming narrative, the thrifty lawyer cites the name of his own creator: “Chaucer,” he claims, has already exhausted all the available stories about devoted female lovers (*CT*.II.45-52). Rather than repeating one of these familiar tales, the Man of Law transfers their telling elsewhere, and directs his audience to this robust Chaucerian codex: “Whoso that wole his large volume seke, / Cleped the Seintes Legende of Cupide, / Ther may he seen the large woundes wyde / Of Lucrestes, and of Babilon Tesbee /
…The pleinte of Dianire and of Hermyon” (CT.II.60-66).21 For the readers who follow this advice and return to the Legend, they would also there see the phraseology that the lawyer now echoes. The invitation that had once guided readers back to Ovid (“rede Ovdye, and in hym he shal it fynde”) has been newly applied to his vernacular follower; the terms in which Chaucer represented his classical predecessor in the Legend now serve the Man of Law to represent Chaucer himself. With this substitution Chaucer constructs his English literary history as a chain of supplements in which the grounds of poetic authority are repeatedly deferred: his pilgrim lawyer instructs readers to seek the “olde” and more fulsome work of Chaucer (CT.II.50), who in turn prompts their return to an even earlier origin in the “ful olde” Ovid.

Chaucer places himself in this sequence by representing his own reception: the Man of Law at once instructs a community of Chaucerian readers, and counts himself among their number. In this respect he again points back to the Legend, the prologue to which similarly depicts a Chaucerian mediation of Chaucerian poetry. There, Chaucer falls asleep and dreams of an encounter with the god of Love, a cantankerous king who censures Troilus and Criseyde, as well as the English translation of the Roman de la Rose, for their apparent affronts against his law. These Chaucerian works, at least in the god’s self-absorbed interpretation of them, have robbed him of his formerly faithful servants: men now eschew Love because women, synecdochically represented by Criseyde, may no longer be trusted. Queen Alcestis, the god’s less irascible companion, wants to quell his rage, so she provides a mitigating interpretation of Chaucer’s oeuvre.

Perhaps he translated *Troilus* and the *Roman* out of ignorance rather than malice, and perhaps his other works encourage devotion to Love rather than disparagement for it. She catalogues his poetic and prose corpus, and cites the *House of Fame*, the *Parlement of Foules*, “Palamon and Arcite” and the *Book of the Duchess*, along with many “balades, roundels and virelayes,” as dutiful contributions to Love’s kingdom (*LGW.F.415-23*).

In their roles as Chaucerian interpreters, the god and Alcestis converge on one major point: they bluntly dismiss the poet’s professed intentions. When he finally speaks in his defense, Chaucer maintains that he wrote *Troilus* and the *Roman* neither with ignorance, nor with malice, but with a careful, benevolent and self-conscious plan:

“All, God woot, yt was myn entente / To forthren trouthe in love and yt cheryce, / And to ben war fro falsnesse and fro vice / By swich ensample; this was my menynge” (*LGW.F.471-74*). This “menynge” would support Alcestis in her earlier assessment of the *Duchess* et al., but she suppresses it anyway: “Lat be thyn arguynge, / For Love ne wol nat countrepleted be / In ryght ne wrong” (*LGW.F.475-77*). Meaning, which for Chaucer here stems from his individual intentions, is for Alcestis and the god determined instead by their absolute judgments. This is a parable. The poet, as Geffrey asserts in the *House of Fame*, may know best where he stands (*HF.1878*), but he cannot finally arrest his reception history. His name, his reputation and his accomplishment, contrary to any self-determining wishes, will necessarily pass into the hands of other readers. There, “myn entente” cedes substantial ground to a god who overwhelms interpretation with anger, or to a lawyer who claims for Chaucer tales that he never wrote.

The Introduction to the *Man of Law’s Tale* may well have informed Spenser’s description of bibliographical search in *Mutabilitie*: the lawyer advises readers to “seke”
Chaucer, and Spenser similarly encourages readers to “seek” Alain. But the Introduction, like the Prologue to the *Legend* or any number of other self-referential moments in Chaucer’s poetry,\(^{22}\) also bequeathed to Spenser a far more fertile and widely applicable idea: Chaucer’s oeuvre is coterminous with the interpretations that mediate it; reading his poetry involves reading about its reception. Prior to Spenser, this was a point most clearly discerned by John Lydgate, learned monk of Bury St. Edmunds and unofficial laureate of the Lancastrian kingdom.\(^{23}\) In his *Fall of Princes*, an encyclopedic collection of tragedies from which E.K. quotes in *The Shepheardes Calendar*, Lydgate mediates Chaucer by building on the precedent of Chaucerian self-mediation.\(^{24}\) Near the start of his first book, Lydgate briefly mentions the tale of Daunus, Aegyptus and their fifty sons and daughters, but defers its narration to Chaucer in these now-familiar terms: whoever “list han cleer inspeccioun / Off this story… redith the legende of martirs off Cupide” (*FP*.1:1.1781-83). Lydgate sends his inquisitive audience back to the *Legend* by using the same locution that Chaucer had there applied to his Roman model: “who wol al this letter have in mynde / Rede Ovyde” (*LGW*.1366-67). In this respect Lydgate writes like the Man of Law who, we will recall, had already effected the same substitution of Ovid for Chaucer, and had

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already directed an audience to the same “large volume.”25 Whereas this reading practice was previously represented inside Chaucer’s corpus, it has now been carried over outside it; Chaucerian self-mediation has, with Lydgate’s Fall, propelled a posthumous tradition of Chaucerian reception.

Such traditions of reception have a substantial and largely unacknowledged importance for Spenser: they guide his engagement with the English poetic past without limiting the final scope of his vision. Spenser makes a major intervention in English literary history, I will argue throughout this dissertation, by defining Chaucerian mediation in the most capacious and multifaceted terms. My three chapters are designed to trace the expansive range of these interceding interpretations, and to illuminate the creative possibilities that they enable. Spenser’s Chaucer is mediated through his medieval contemporaries and his sixteenth-century editors; through his classical predecessors and their varied afterlives; through his own poetry and the books that transmit it. In The Shepheardes Calender, as I demonstrate in Chapter 1, Spenser represents Chaucer by absorbing what John Gower, John Lydgate, William Thynne and John Stow had written about him. Appropriating their ideas about Chaucerian skill, loss, fame and sovereignty, Spenser develops for himself a poetic authority legitimized by the English monarchy, and refashions England’s former triumvirate of canonical authors into a new paired bond between himself and Chaucer. In Daphnaïda, as I show in Chapter 2, Spenser engages Chaucer’s poetry by creating a hermeneutic for it out of Ovid’s Metamorphoses. Adapting Ovid’s depiction of Alcyone’s grave, Spenser devises a theory

25 For a complementary argument, in which Lydgate “writes like” Chaucer’s Clerk, see Seth Lerer, Chaucer and his Readers: Imagining the Author in Late Medieval England (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 22-56.
of English literary history that stretches past the familiar system of genealogical succession, and operates through the spatial and tactile contiguity of written words. In book four of *The Faerie Queene*, as I explain in Chapter 3, Spenser rewrites Chaucer by building an interpretive model from Chaucer’s own works. Reconstructing the latent connections among *Anelida and Arcite*, *The Knight’s Tale* and *The Squire’s Tale*, and working through a variant printed version of *The Squire’s Prologue*, Spenser imagines Father Chaucer both within and beyond a lineage of literary paternity, and crafts a self-revisionary aesthetic which sits at the nexus of the English and Continental canons. For Spenser, these forms of mediation function as fitting extensions of Chaucer’s paradoxical position in literary history. At once starting his national tradition and entering belatedly into an existing European one, standing equally at the well head of writing and in the midst of a parenthesis, Chaucer inscribes the intermediary at the origin of English poesy. Spenser keeps the intermediary at the heart of this tradition, returning to his origin by moving through the plurality of other sources that—whether temporally like Lydgate, or imaginatively like Ovid—come between it and him, between the Old and the New Poet.

Who knows not Spenser’s debt to Chaucer? The paired names of Rosalind and Colin Clout would hardly seem more familiar. According to Helen Cooper, however, the familiarity of this intertextual relationship has not yet been translated into a sufficiently substantial, rigorous or confident body of scholarship. In contrast to his classical and *cinquecento* debts, which have been systematically and enthusiastically discussed, “Spenser’s…Chaucerianism,” writes Cooper, “has elicited no more than a handful of articles. It is as if criticism could still not quite believe that any early modern poet could
be serious in claiming English fatherhood, for all the recognition of the period’s imperative search for native origins.”

Cooper may well understate the contribution of existing scholarship—sixteen journal articles or book chapters about Spenser and Chaucer have been published in the last twenty years; this would be a big handful even for the monstrous Gerioneo—but the validity and perspicacity of her point still hold. Chaucer and his oeuvre provide the old precedent against which a still-anonymous Spenser fashions his new self and new poetry in *The Shepheardes Calender*; the inspiring vision that propels Arthur’s quest for Gloriana in the Legend of Holiness and throughout

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the rest of *The Faerie Queene*; the first words and a discourse of chaste love for the Knight of Chastity and for the mythology of Elizabethan nationalism she subtends; the storytelling frame that drives the *prosopopoeia* and satirical verve of *Mother Hubberds Tale*; the constellation of debilitating grief, classical reception and memorial art that defines the elegiac poetics of *Daphnaïda*; the constitutive narrative and revisionary model that enable the ethical action of the Legend of Friendship; the perspective on aristocratic birth and cultivated gentility that structures how Spenser will fashion a gentleman in the Legend of Courtesy. Chaucer is ubiquitous in Spenser’s poetry, but not in the scholarship about it. In response to this critical lacuna, my dissertation develops a literary history that differs from its few predecessors in both degree and kind: the chapters below illuminate Spenser’s connection to Chaucer with greater detail and a wider range of evidence than has hitherto been provided, but they also articulate a new terminology to synoptically describe this connection in the first place. Spenser’s Chaucer is both the author of individual poems and a discourse of accreted interpretations, both a singular origin for English creativity and the locus of disparate and sometimes foreign traditions, both a pure, primary source and the derivative product of various mediations. These multiple identities define a literary history distinct from those developed by Cooper herself as well as by the tentative body of scholarship she justly critiques. Spenser’s connection with Chaucer stretches beyond him and incorporates other, overlooked English poets, commentators and books; it opens up alternative historical schema that complement and complicate the conventional paradigm of literary “fatherhood”; and it involves a “native” English origin that enables—rather than opposes—a link to those better-studied poets of the classical and continental pasts.
My sustained focus on the mediation of this origin substantially extends the work of Judith H. Anderson, whose comparative studies of Chaucer and Spenser, collected and republished in 2008, have set the terms by which the underexplored field has previously been defined. In the most recent of her essays, which rightly connects The Pardoner’s and Franklin’s Tales to books one and three of The Faerie Queene, Anderson describes Spenser’s engagement with Chaucer in a vocabulary of communication and periodization: “Particularly in the Renaissance, with its desire to recover the past, to return ad fontes … writers tried actually to converse with their predecessors, as Petrarch did literally in his letters to classical authors such as Cicero and Livy. Their conversation with their deepest sources here touched the primary sense of the word converse in the Renaissance itself: ‘to live with,’ ‘to dwell among.’ What follows listens to the conversation between Spenser’s texts and Chaucer’s” (AI.61). The etymological definition, introduced obliquely here, is especially relevant to The Shepheardes Calender, a poem that Anderson only rarely mentions, but in which Chaucer figures as a familiar conversant in various senses of the word. The poet, as Spenser’s herdsmen fondly remember, lived alongside them in the “hils of Kent,” telling his merry, moral and amorous tales, and providing a literary model to be rehearsed and disseminated among a sixteenth-century pastoral community (SC.Feb.91-100; Jun.81-88). Chaucer converses with the shepherds in a shared place, and when there, converses with them in his shared poetry. Anderson recreates this model of transmission and appropriation in her interpretive methodology: she establishes Chaucer and Spenser as participants in a

transtemporal dialogue, habitually beginning her analyses with a quotation from *The Canterbury Tales* before positioning it immediately alongside its representation and revision in *The Faerie Queene*. Chaucer starts the conversation and Spenser, even across the wide gap of time, responds directly to him: “I heard you speak…Now it is your turn to listen” (*RFL*.6).29

The analyses produced by this schema are undeniably insightful, but they capture only one part of Spenser’s double approach to English literary history. Anderson’s analogy with Petrarch is again applicable here, but for reasons that would actually qualify her case. When writing in response to Homer in October 1360, Petrarch laments his inability to understand Greek, a deficiency that has prohibited him from having sustained intercourse with his classical predecessor. “We have no means of communication,” Petrarch repines, but he still holds out hope, however skeptical and languishing, that the situation will soon change (*RFL*.8). “One man”, the Calabrian philologist Leonzio Pilato (d.1366), is at work on Latin translations of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, of which Petrarch has “recently received a sample,” and through which he has gleaned traces of Homer’s “mighty and brilliant mind” (*RFL*.8). Petrarch looks back to his grand, antique origin, and communes with it across time, but he does so with the aid of a less distinguished and more modern intermediary; the venerable conversation between Petrarch and Homer equally involves the linguistic interlocution of the translating Pilato. Spenser’s relation to Chaucer, the poet fittingly styled as “our English Homer,” operates according to similar

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principles: Homer’s scholar Pilato is matched, as E.K. would put it, by Chaucer’s “scholler Lidgate” (SC.Epis.3).30 Whereas Anderson finds solely an exclusive, direct and unobstructed dialogue, Spenser perceives the shifting interplay between immediate communication and its supplementary mediations, between Chaucer’s voice itself and the extra-Chaucerian works that can guide an engagement with it. “The conversation between Spenser’s texts and Chaucer’s” equally relies upon the mediating interpretations of a more polyvocal past, and accordingly, this dissertation listens to the sources that Chaucer himself created as well as to those through which he was constructed.

In my Afterword, which forms a diptych with Chapter 1, I test the applicability of this argument as a more widely relevant theory of English literary history, demonstrating the interplay between immediacy and mediation in a poetic tradition starting with Chaucer and Spenser, and stretching through Dryden and Wordsworth. One of the interpretive advantages of this theory is its ability to maintain a double vision of the past, the capacity to balance disparate approaches to history without finally effacing any of them. My emphasis on the flexibility of interpoetic connections is intended as a corrective to those revisionist literary histories which, in attempting to destabilize a traditional, totalizing scheme, end up installing an equally totalizing one in its place. This is a trend most recently and influentially exemplified by George Edmondson, whose study of Boccaccio, Chaucer and Henryson aims to replace the “passive terms of lineage and inheritance,” so long the mainstays of literary history, with the “active terms of

judgment, negation” and neighbouring.31 His objection to the unthinking reproduction of a genealogical terminology is invigorating and salutary—in the words of Elizabeth Scala, Edmondson opens up a field that otherwise “threatens to become a rigid and stultified scene of reading”32—but his own, opposing theory of literary history champions a hermeneutic that threatens an even greater rigidity. His analyses of neighbour relations treat psychoanalysis as a universal interpretive key that, as Robert R. Edwards and Tim William Machan rightly note, “encounters nothing it cannot flatten and explain” and absorb within its system.33 Like Edmondson, Spenser critiques the immediacy entailed by a strictly patrilineal conception of literary relations, but his goal is to present alternatives in conjunction with it, rather than supplanting it entirely. For the flexible and thoughtful Spenser, the theory of English literary history, like the theory of his Chaucerian origin, produces not a single totalizing system but a consistently evolving challenge to it. What follows elucidates this variability and diversity in Spenser’s challenging engagement with the Chaucerian past.


(Un)couth: Chaucer, *The Shepheardes Calender* and the Forms of Mediation

In at least eighteen texts from the sixteenth century, various literary-historically minded writers group Chaucer with Gower and Lydgate to form England’s version of a poetic triumvirate. The tradition of associating these poets “all thre” is coterminous with traditions that organize the members of the triumvirate into pairs: Tudor authors habitually couple either Chaucer and Gower or Chaucer and Lydgate, the former pairing featuring in at least sixteen texts and the latter in at least fourteen.¹ Despite the prevalence of these various traditions, however, Chaucer’s sixteenth-century connection to Gower and/or Lydgate has played only a tangential role in the criticism concerning the sixteenth century’s preeminent Chaucerian poet: Edmund Spenser.² For instance, Glenn Steinberg’s analysis of Chaucer’s Elizabethan reception and Spenser’s *Shepheardes Calender* begins, as I have done, by noting the popularity of a Chaucer, Gower and Lydgate triumvirate.³ In his subsequent reading of the *Calender* itself, though, Steinberg

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does not bear out his initial invocation of the triumvirate’s importance; he focuses instead on Chaucer alone. His exclusive concentration on the Old Poet produces an account of Chaucer’s reception and the Calendar’s intertextual debts that invites extension. When he speculates, for example, that Colin’s final words might “owe something” to the palinode in Troilus, Steinberg gestures toward an important link between the repetitive “adieu[s]” at the end of “December” (SC.Dec.151-55) and the comparably repetitive “swich fyn[s]” and “lo[s]” at the end of Chaucer’s own little book (TC.V.1828-32, 1849-52). But in doing so, he bypasses the network of medieval intertextuality that intersects with Chaucer’s lines. Gower refigures Chaucer’s repetition of “swich fyn” in the similar string of “such[s]” at the conclusion of the Confessio Amantis (CA.8.3165-67). Lydgate reformulates Chaucer’s repetition of “lo” in the comparable series of “lo[s]” in the epilogue to The Siege of Thebes (ST.3.4628-31). Whatever debt “December” has to Chaucer’s anaphoric palinode may be owed not to Chaucer alone but to a broader tradition of iterative conclusions which recast Chaucer’s lines and in which Lydgate, Gower and Chaucer—the triumvirate codified by his Renaissance reception—all participated.

Acknowledging Chaucer’s connection to these networks of medieval intertextuality and Renaissance reception is not tantamount to asserting that Chaucer is, for Spenser, a poet of the same importance as Gower and Lydgate. The priority that Steinberg in particular, and Spenserians in general, assign to Chaucer, instead of Gower

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4 “The Elizabethan Reception of Chaucer,” 49, n.33.

or Lydgate, accurately reflects Spenser’s own. He registers this priority most acutely in
book four of *The Faerie Queene* when he asserts that Chaucer’s “spirit” survives in him.
As he promises his forthcoming reconstruction of the *Squire’s Tale*, Spenser professes a
special affinity with “Dan Chaucer,” and signals this predecessor’s singularity as a
source of English poetry. When Spenser receives his privileged infusion from the
Chaucerian *fons*, this influence apparently flows from a singular “well of English
vndefyled,” suggesting that plural wells—those wells of Gower and Lydgate—need not
be explicitly acknowledged (*FQ*.IV.ii.32-34).6

Chaucer has a dual status: he is Spenser’s single most important English
predecessor, but he is also one member in a variety of larger traditions. The *Calender*
negotiates this duality, I argue here, by representing its Chaucer in light of several forms
of medieval and Renaissance mediation, incorporating and adapting various ideas from
his fourteenth, fifteenth- and sixteenth-century readers. The *Calender*’s depiction of
Chaucer relies on the Tudor editions that printed Chaucer’s *Works* and on the poems of
Gower and Lydgate that represented Chaucer’s authorial identity. Like the editions that
transmitted and helped construct Chaucer’s corpus, the works of Gower, and in
particular, of Lydgate provided a Tudor audience with vocabularies to discuss and
interpret Chaucer’s accomplishment and influence. The *Calender* integrates some of this
vocabulary into Colin’s poetry in the June eclogue and E.K.’s commentary in the
prefatory epistle. There, these forms of mediation shape the course of poetic succession,

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6 For an elegant explanation of the connection between Chaucer’s “infusion sweete” and Chaucer as *fons*,
see Anderson, *Reading the Allegorical Intertext*, 89. For a hypothesis concerning why Spenser cites
Chaucer alone in *FQ* IV, and for a rare piece that reads Spenser in relation to both Chaucer and Gower, see
Arnold A. Sanders, “Ruddymane and Canacee, Lost and Found: Spenser’s Reception of Gower’s *Confessio
Amantis* 3 and Chaucer’s *Squire’s Tale*,” in *The Work of Dissimilitude: Essays from the Sixth Citadel
Conference on Medieval and Renaissance Literature*, ed. David Allen and Robert White (Newark:
positioning Chaucer as the preeminent predecessor and chief model for new English poets. As the Calendar presents it, however, this Chaucerian model does not exclude—instead it comprises—various medieval and early Renaissance traditions that overlapped with and mediated his work.

I develop these ideas through a series of case studies, each of which examines an element of the Calendar in relation to a form of Chaucerian mediation, and shows the Calendar’s incorporation of English material beyond Chaucer alone. I start by deploying an interpretive strategy advocated by Alice Miskimin in her seminal work on the Renaissance Chaucer, unravelling the “whole web” of intertextual affiliation attendant on a short phrase.7 The seemingly innocuous words “well couth” have a wide range of meanings that helps form the relationship between Colin and Tityrus/Chaucer. In constructing this connection, the Calendar positions Colin, if only temporarily and retroactively, as the inheritor of Chaucer’s poetic legacy, assuming his particular kind of skill as well as his special, imagined bond to the Tudor dynasty. The Calendar’s idea for this Chaucerian and Tudor bond comes through the mediation of Chaucer’s sixteenth-century editors. In the prefatory material to their printed editions, William Thynne and John Stow generate a transtemporal association between Chaucer and Henry VIII that informs the Calendar and its representation of monarchical and poetic power. I elucidate this representation, first, through a reading of E.K.’s gloss on “couth” and the passage from Thomas Smith’s De Republica Anglorum to which it alludes; and second, through a discussion of “June,” “Januarye,” “Aprill” and the shared phraseology that links these eclogues with each other, and that links Chaucer with Colin. In “June,” Spenser further

mediates this latter link, incorporating traces of the medieval poetic triumvirate into Colin’s description of Chaucer. This characterization integrates a commendation that Spenser may have derived from Gower’s *Confessio Amantis* and a plaintive voice that he models on what I call the Lydgateian mode.

I build on this discussion of Lydgate and his mediation by examining his oft-noted but rarely unpacked presence in E.K.’s epistle. Extending my analysis of “couth” to its cognate term, “vncouthe,” I propose that E.K. derives some of his description of Spenser from part of Lydgate’s depiction of Chaucer in *The Siege of Thebes*; this strategic appropriation in the *Calender* enables the transition from the Old Poet to the New. Also, I suggest, E.K. links his status as interpreter to the roles played by Lydgate, and by the Chaucer that Lydgate presents, in *The Fall of Princes*; such connections help fashion an uncommon English genealogy, from medieval to Renaissance, comprised not just of poets but of *interpretes* as well. With this line of analysis, I develop a critical model recently established by William Kuskin, who likewise traces Spenser’s literary lineage to fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. For Kuskin, the substitution of “unknowe” with “vncovthe” in the *Calender*’s epistle silently revises a Chaucerian precedent to suit E.K.’s new version of literary history. But this revision also involves an element of fidelity to a different medieval precedent: E.K.’s modification of Pandarus’ advice helps bring the New Poet in line with a literary history and a Chaucerian poetics first envisioned by Lydgate in the *Siege*. According to Kuskin, moreover, E.K.’s allusion to the *Fall* helps connect Chaucer to a pantheon of classical and continental *auctores.*

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8 *Recursive Origins*, 58-60.
him not only with a group of canonical writers, but also with a group of go-betweens. The Chaucer of E.K.’s epistle, like the Chaucer in the *Fall* and the Chaucer in *Troilus*, is as much Petrarch as Pandarus, as much Seneca as E.K.

By directing attention to Lydgate here, and to Gower, Thynne and Stow earlier, this chapter builds a cumulative argument about the *Calendar* and its representation of literary history. The *Calendar* fashions an English poetic line that runs from Chaucer but that eschews a path of direct descent. It is instead mediated not only through E.K. and the Tudor editors of Chaucer’s *Works*, but also through a medieval intertextual background of which Chaucer—however important, central and unique—is still only a part. To this argument I add one qualification: the mediators on whom I focus provide neither the definitive nor the only ways to understand and represent Chaucer. An abiding characteristic of Chaucerian reception is its diversity, and accordingly, I do not pretend to account for all the responses of Chaucer’s readers or for all of Spenser’s engagements with them. I do not discuss, for instance, the Henrician and Edwardian readers who cast Chaucer as the proto-Protestant author of *The Plowman’s Tale* and who thus aligned him with Langland, *Piers Plowman* and a tradition of anti-clerical satire—a type of mediator that has obvious affinities with Spenser, who instructs his calendar to adore the steps of both Chaucer and “the Pilgrim that the Ploughman playde a whyle” (*SC.Eplg.10*). 9 I tell only one part of the story about Chaucer’s mediators, but it is nonetheless a part with substantial significance for existing scholarship. In my account the *Calendar* creates a

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Chaucer and an English literary past that are more multilayered than we have previously acknowledged. Here, Chaucer is both the father of a great literary tradition and the product of English sources—poetic and otherwise—that we as Renaissance scholars have traditionally excluded from it.

I: Poetic Skill, Monarchical Power: Chaucer from Thynne and Stow to Spenser

In the middle of the *Calender*, and at the midpoint of his life, Colin Clout recollects the years of his youth. Central to this retrospective is his look back on the once vibrant life and passionate poetry of Tityrus, by whom “is meant Chaucer” ([SC].Jun.g.81). Colin explains:

The God of shepheards *Tityrus* is dead,  
Who taught me homely, as I can, to make.  
He, whilst he liued, was the soueraigne head  
Of shepheards all, that bene with loue ytake:  
Well couth he wayle hys Woes, and lightly slake  
The flames, which loue within his heart had bredd,  
And tell vs mery tales, to keepe vs wake,  
The while our sheepe about vs safely fedde.  
([SC].Jun.81-88)

The phrase “well couth” itself implies an element of retrospection, linking Colin’s assessment of Chaucer’s talent back to the beginning of the *Calender* and to a hermeneutic framework that was there established: in “Januarye,” the narrator uses the same phrase and E.K. provides a detailed gloss for it. In this gloss E.K. begins by tracing a brief line of etymological descent, explaining that “couthe commeth of the verbe Conne.” Like the word “couthe” itself, the meaning that E.K. assigns to its root verb also has a history of descent. Before being positioned as part of “Januarye’s” gloss, the meaning “to know or to have skill” had, according to E.K., appeared in a text by “Sir Tho. Smithth,” and been conveyed in a written copy by “his kinseman...M. Gabriel
Haruey” (SC.Jan.g.10). By evoking this history of transmission, as Annabel Patterson and Jennifer Richards have briefly observed, E.K. situates his gloss in relation to a political discourse.\(^{10}\) He alludes to an etymological discussion that Smith presents at the beginning of his account of monarchical history. In this description Smith frames his analysis of England’s political origins with an analysis of lexical origins. Before he traces the beginnings of England’s tradition of the single, national sovereign, Smith provides the roots of the word “King” itself:

That which we call in one syllable king in english, the olde english men and the Saxons from whom our tongue is derived to this day calleth in two syllabes cyning, which whether it cometh of cen or ken which betokeneth to know and understand, or can which betokeneth to be able or to have power, I can not tell.\(^{11}\)

Smith’s *De Republica Anglorum* was written between 1562 and 1565, but it was not printed until 1583; as his gloss suggests, E.K. had access to the text in manuscript form. Despite having a “perfect copie” of Smith’s work, however, E.K seems not to have copied perfectly its etymology. Whereas Smith had divided them between two words, E.K. joins the acts of knowing and having ability under a single signifier. Smith assigns individual meanings to “cen” and “can” that E.K. fuses in his gloss on “conne”: “to know or to have skill.” If “cyning” comes from a word that signifies either “to know” or “to have power,” “couth” comes from a word that can denote both the same meaning as the former and a variant meaning of the latter. By mentioning Smith’s “booke of gouerment,” E.K. thus points toward an etymology that provides a significant point of comparison for


his own. Smith and E.K. present two lines of linguistic descent that meet in a similar
denotative space. The lexical histories that lead from “king” to “cyning” and from
“couth” to “conne” coincide in a shared vocabulary of knowing and having ability,
whether this ability is called “power” or “skill.”

The convergence of these etymological trajectories explains and legitimates a title
that Colin gives to Chaucer in “June.” Chaucer can be here called the “soveraigne head”
of love poetry because the name given to a display of Chaucerian aesthetics (couth) and
the name given to a sovereign (king) may be traced to a common range of meanings. The
distinction between power and skill registers the respective ways in which the sovereign
King and the sovereign Chaucer display their individual abilities. For Smith, the King
manifests his ability in the power to make war and peace; for E.K., Chaucer shows his
ability in the skill to make verse. As E.K.’s epistle glowingly attests, Chaucer evinces an
“excellencie and wonderfull skil in making” (SC.Epis. 2-3; my emphasis).

By connecting Chaucerian and monarchical discourses, the Calender develops a
tradition already codified and mediated by some of Chaucer’s sixteenth-century readers.
Predictably, some of these readers highlight Chaucer’s close relationship with his
contemporary kings, Richard II and Henry IV, by whom he was held in high regard.12

Less predictably, but more pertinently for our Spenserian context, several other readers

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12 See, most importantly, John Leland, De Viris Illustribus, ed. and trans. James P. Carley (Toronto:
Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2010), whose commentary from the mid-sixteenth century (c.1535-
46) also erroneously links Chaucer with Henry V: “Just as he was known to Richard of Bordeaux, King of
England, and was dear to him on account of his virtues, so too he was held in high regard for the same
reasons by Henry IV, and his son, who triumphed over the French” [Nam, quemadmodum Richardo
Burdegalensi, Anglorum regi, cognitus, et uirtutum nomine charus fuit, ita etiam Henrico quarto et eius
filio, qui Gallis triumphauit, eiusdem titulis commendatissimus erat] (710-11). For Leland’s substantial
influence on Renaissance understandings of Chaucer, despite the fact that his work circulated only in
manuscript until 1709, see Geoffrey Gust, Constructing Chaucer: Author and Autofiction in the Critical
link Chaucer not with the monarchs of his own lifetime but with a latter-day figure from
the House of Tudor. According to his sixteenth-century editors, Chaucer should be
aligned with Henry VIII. To depict this imaginative, transtemporal bond, John Stow
opens his 1561 edition of the Works—an edition that Spenser read—by reprinting a letter
addressed to Henry in 1532 by Chaucer’s previous editor, William Thynne. (As recent
bibliographic scholarship has demonstrated, the letter was actually co-written with
Henrician secretary, Sir Brian Tuke). When he represents this letter, Stow implicitly
links Chaucer and Henry as mutual subjects of posthumous commemoration: a
memorialization of Chaucer’s texts a century and a half after the poet’s death prompts the
remembrance of Henry’s reign fourteen years after the monarch died.

In looking back to Henry’s reign, the letter also looks back to a time when
Chaucer was scrupulously edited. As the epistle explains, Thynne undertook both a
“diligent serche” for neglected manuscripts of Chaucer and a diligent correction of the
“errours, falsyties, and deprauacions” of previous editions. Thynne renders Chaucer a
double service: the editor guards the poet’s work against the dangers of obsolescence and
the carelessness of printers. Despite performing his editorial task so thoroughly, however,
Thynne’s philological reconstruction did not consume all his time. While retrieving and
preparing Chaucer’s poem, Thynne was retrieving and preparing Henry’s food. The
editor identifies himself to the King as “your moste humble vassall, subiecte &

13 For the letter in Stow’s edition, see The Woorkes of Geffrey Chaucer (London: John Kyngston for John
Wight, 1561), STC 5076, A2r-A2v. For Spenser’s connection to this edition, see A. Kent Hieatt, Chaucer,
Spenser, Milton: Mythopoetic Continuities and Transformations (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University
Press, 1975), 24; and Miskimin, The Renaissance Chaucer, 247-50. For Thynne’s co-authorship of the
prefatory letter, see Alexandra Gillespie, Print Culture and the Medieval Author: Chaucer, Lydgate, and
seruaunte…chefe clerke of your kechin.” This Tudor philologist and civil servant thus provides Chaucer and Henry with another important point of connection: the poet and sovereign come together through their shared status as figures that have been aided by William Thynne.

If Thynne presents himself as the assistant to both Chaucer and Henry, he also shows that Chaucer and Henry assist each other. For his part Chaucer buttresses the culture and policy of the English kingdom. His works transmit both “excellente lerninge, in al kindes of doctrines and sciences,” evincing the erudition of Henry’s cultured realm, and an ideology “against the conflicting claims of Church and nobility,” pre-emptively attesting the legitimacy of Henry’s monarchical cause. In turn, Henry provides Chaucer with the ideal patron. The King, according to Thynne, is the only person who possesses both the wisdom “in al kindes of doctrine” to appreciate Chaucer’s jewels of learning, and the authority to protect these jewels from detraction. In Thynne’s letter the respective abilities of poet and King are mutually supportive: Chaucer’s skill benefits, and benefits from, Henry’s power.

The Calender builds on the precedent set by Thynne and Stow. Following the lead of these mediating Tudor editors, the Calender fashions its own imaginative link between Chaucer and Henry. “June” develops this link at a lexical level. Here, Colin gives Tityrus a title, “the God of shepheards,” that overtly recalls a label usually given to Pan, “the shepheards God” (SC.Apr. 51). Where the recipient of this title in “June” symbolizes

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Chaucer, the recipient of this title in “Aprill” represents, as E.K. points out, “K. Henry the eyght” (SC.Apr.g.50). As Chaucer and Henry are tied to the same clerk of the Tudor court, to the same process of memorialization and to the same supportive relationship, so too are England’s former sovereign and former sovereign poet tied to the same marker of godly status.

In the Calendar, Chaucer’s location at the nexus of English poetry and English sovereignty provides a model for Colin’s own poetic position. To place Colin at the convergence of Chaucerian skill and royal power, the Calendar creates a series of verbal parallels among “June,” “Januarye” and “Aprill.” In “June,” Colin explains that he was once taught “to make” by Tityrus; in “Januarye,” the narrator affirms that Colin has successfully absorbed the fruits of this instruction. “Well couth he tune his pipe, and frame his stile,” the narrator declares (SC.Jan.10), mirroring the commendation that Colin will later apply to Chaucer: “Well couth he wayle his Woes.” The Chaucerian aesthetic has passed from teacher to student; Tityrus’ ability in plaintive songs of love is reprised in Colin’s ability in his love-complaint to Rosalind. As Tityrus’ talent testifies to his sovereign status, so too does Colin’s skill associate him with the monarchy. E.K. rehearses the terms from his detailed gloss on “couth” in his “ARGVMENT” for “Aprill,” the eclogue devoted to the “honor and prayse of our most gracious souereigne, Queene Elizabeth.” E.K. echoes his suggestion that “couth” is derived from the verb “conne” by now explaining that love has drawn Colin from “conning ryming and singing.” And E.K. recalls his definition of “conne,” “to have skill,” by now advertising Colin’s “skill in poetrie,” which Hobbinol will loyally exhibit on his behalf. These echoes of “Januarye” in “Aprill” outline a trajectory of loss and recuperative surrogacy. The poet
has currently withdrawn from “conning,” but his proxy can provide a supplementary
display of past skill; Colin has abandoned learning and writing, but Hobbinol will show
how Colin indeed “well couth” make his verses. Like the ability identified in “Januarye,”
the talent evinced in “Aprill” is rooted in a Chaucerian heritage. In his “Aprill” argument,
E.K. recalls the language of his prefatory epistle, positioning Colin’s “excellencie and
skill in poetrie” as the descendant of Chaucer’s “excellencie and wonderfull skil in
making.”

When he presents this skill and recites these verses, Hobbinol generates a twofold
connection between Colin and the Queen. On one hand, the substance of these verses
places Colin and Elisa, Elizabeth’s pastoral persona, in a relationship of uneven power:
the dutiful shepherd professes his service to his unblemished goddess. On the other hand,
the transmission of these verses connects Colin and Elizabeth as figures that similarly
deserve praise: Colin’s display of the divine glory in Elizabeth’s reign is also Hobbinol’s
display of the Chaucerian glory in Colin’s song.16 By reciting this poetry, Hobbinol
enables Colin to become Chaucer’s successor in both the aesthetic and political domain.
Colin’s skill recreates Chaucer’s skill, and Colin’s connection to Henry’s daughter
recreates Chaucer’s transtemporal connection to Henry himself. In other words,
“Aprill’s” line of royal descent equally forms a line of poetic descent: Elizabeth takes the
place of Henry; and the skilled poet linked with Elizabeth takes the place of the skilled
poet imaginatively linked with Henry. Louis Montrose, Paul Alpers, Patrick Cheney and

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16 For discussions of Elizabeth’s role in “Aprill” to which my argument is especially indebted, see Louis
Adrian Montrose, “‘The perfecte patere of a Poete’: The Poetics of Courtship in The Shepheardes
Calender,” Texas Studies in Literature and Language 21 (1979): 40-43; and “‘Eliza, Queene of
Peter Herman have all rightly pointed out that “Aprill” adapts Virgil’s fourth eclogue.¹⁷ I am suggesting that “Aprill” offers a fusion of the classical and vernacular traditions, of Romish Tityrus and Kentish Tityrus. Colin’s song brings together the vision of a golden age derived from Virgil with an aesthetic ability and a Tudor bond derived from Chaucer—or, more specifically, from a Henrician Chaucer that Thynne and Stow had helped create.

II: Gower’s Chaucer, Lydgate’s Chaucer: “June” and the Medieval Triumvirate

Although E.K. and Hobbinol assert it in “Aprill,” this monarchical association is not part of the poetics that Colin overtly attributes to himself in “June”; instead, he characterizes his work in more modest terms as “homely.” Colin’s adjective asserts the supposed simplicity and inelegance of his compositional style, as well as the domestic context in which he received it. Colin assumes his workaday form, he claims, through his participation in, and direct contact with, a workaday community that included Tityrus, by whom “is meant Chaucer” (SC.Jun.g.81). Having direct access to the voice and tutelage of tale-telling Chaucer was, apparently, as much a part of Colin’s daily experience as having direct access to the sight of his feeding sheep.

Colin’s claims to compose homely verse and to have lived in a homely community with Chaucer are, however, complicated by the terms in which he presents them. With his four a and b rhymes, Colin appears not the simple maker of a rough poem

but the sophisticated stylist of a formal “tour de force.” And with his praise of the Old Poet, Colin seems not just a primary member of a rustic Chaucerian community—a community itself imagined by mediating Chaucer through the terms of Virgilian pastoral—but also a secondary receiver of a courtly Chaucerian tradition. In suggesting that Chaucer “well couth... wayle his Woes” of love, Colin echoes a phrase that had featured in the *Confessio Amantis*, a monumental story-collection written in the last decade of the fourteenth-century by the poet that E.K. calls “I.Goore” (*SC.Jul.g.177*). At the conclusion of the *Confessio*’s first recension—the recension transmitted both by a manuscript inscribed with the name *Spenserus* and by Thomas Berthelette’s widely accessible editions of 1532 and 1554—Venus, the ruler of love’s “court,” instructs a suddenly old Gower to greet Chaucer. When this greeting occurs, Venus continues, Chaucer should be met with praise. After all, he has performed brilliantly as her “disciple and poete,” and in doing so, has made “as he wel couthe” many “ditees and songes” of love (*CA.8. 2944-45; my emphasis).

The phrase “wel couthe” is common enough in the corpus of Middle and Early Modern English: Chaucer suggests that the crafty Pardoner “well couthe…rede a lesson or a storie”; Drayton explains that the fair Dowsabell “wel couth…twist and twine” her silk; and Malory writes that the heroic Tristan “wel couthe speke the langage” after

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spending seven years in France.\textsuperscript{20} At the end of the \textit{Confessio}, however, this commonplace phrase plays an uncommon role. Gower’s passage is unique in using the phrase “wel couth” to describe Chaucer’s skill as an amorous poet—unique, that is, until the \textit{Calender} in 1579.\textsuperscript{21} Before then, this distinctive passage had played an influential role in Chaucer’s posthumous legacy. Immediately after mentioning Chaucer and his skill, Venus tells Gower to deliver a message to him: Chaucer should “make his testament of love” (\textit{CA.8.2955}). For Thynne and Stow, this message helped determine the content of Chaucer’s oeuvre. There, they found the justification for attributing to Chaucer what we now know as an apocryphal text: \textit{The Testament of Love}, a philosophical treatise written in prose by the Ricardian factionalist, Thomas Usk. Largely on the basis of Venus’ apparent reference to it, Thynne and Stow printed the \textit{Testament} as Chaucer’s own work.\textsuperscript{22} John Leland, who likewise endorsed this apocryphal attribution, similarly read his Chaucer in relation to Gower. In his \textit{De Viris Illustribus}, an ambitious collection of biographies compiled between 1535 and 1546, Leland offers a detailed commendation of Chaucer and his poetry. In doing so, Leland implicitly aligns himself with Gower, acknowledging that the medieval poet had already practiced a similar exercise in praise. “Even if I were to say nothing,” Leland writes, “Gower makes his admiration of Chaucer more than sufficiently clear in his book called \textit{Confessio Amantis}; having taken great


pains to eulogize Chaucer he calls him an outstanding poet” (“Vt ego taceam, ipsemet Gouerus, in libro quititulo Amantis confessio inscribitur, abunde satis declarat quantiusuum Chaucerum fecerit; quem accuratissime prius laudatum eximium uocat poetam”).

Taking pains to produce his own panegyric, Leland looks back to the Confessio and its precedent in Chaucerian admiration.

These sixteenth-century responses to Gower are significant: they demonstrate that several well-read Chaucerians in Tudor England not only consulted Venus’ words from the Confessio, but also used them to shape their understandings and representations of Chaucer. We might add Spenser to this group. Like Thynne, Stow and Leland, Spenser may have turned to the Confessio for a perspective on Chaucer; there he may have found, again like Leland, a precedent in Chaucerian commendation. Possibly recalling the Chaucer of the Confessio, Spenser fashions the Tityrus of “June.” In 1390, Chaucer is the poet who “wel couthe” make songs of love; in 1579, he is still the poet who “well couth” make songs of love.

If it is indeed indebted to Venus’ words, “June” deconstructs a dominant topos of Chaucerian reception. As Lee Patterson observes, many fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth-century authors imagine engaging with Chaucer through unmediated access

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23 De Viris Illustribus, 704-5.

24 Thomas Speght (d.1621), Cambridge graduate, learned schoolmaster and last editor of Chaucer in the sixteenth-century, as well as Francis Thynne (c.1545-1608), antiquarian, herald and son of the Henrician editor, also number among this group. In his biographical description of Chaucer’s education, prefixed to his 1598 edition of the Works, Speght echoes Leland with this note on poetic praise: “Gower in his booke which is intituled Confessio Amantis, termeth Chaucer a worthie poet.” See The Workes of Geffrey Chaucer (London: Adam Islip for Thomas Wight, 1598), STC 5077, B3r. In a corrective response to Speght, also composed in 1598, F. Thynne points out that it is Venus, rather than Gower himself, that commends Chaucer, and he then quotes the relevant passage (“as he well couthe / of dytes and of songs…” in full. See Animaduersions, ed. G.H. Kingsley and F.J. Furnivall (London: EETS, 1875), 18-19.
to his person and his work. In “June,” Spenser may present this fantasy of direct connection to undercut it: what appears to be a first-hand appraisal of Chaucer’s skill can equally be traced to a secondary source. Colin’s putatively personal testimony may adapt Gower’s verse. This adapted judgment of Chaucer’s skill reflects back on the earlier characterization of Colin’s talent. In echoing the Confessio, “June” simultaneously echoes “Januarye,” the eclogue that asserts Colin’s own ability: “Well couth he tune his pipe.” The words “well couth” mark the transfer of compositional style from Chaucer to Colin, but they also suggest that this transfer may not involve just these two poets themselves. It may be enabled by the vocabulary of a third party. Colin establishes and comes to possess the Chaucerian aesthetic not solely through his instruction from Chaucer, but through his recitation of a non-Chaucerian phrase. He succeeds to the Chaucerian style by way of his connection to both the compositions made by Chaucer and the compositions made about Chaucer.

Unfortunately for him, Colin only possesses this Chaucerian inheritance temporarily. Though the characterization of him in “Januarye” suggests that he has absorbed his predecessor’s talent, Colin’s assessment of his own ability in “June” suggests that this talent has since been lost. The shepherd who once “well couth... tune his pipe” (SC.Jan.10) can now only look back on his younger days and former ability with longing: “Tho couth I sing of loue, and tune my pype,” Colin repines (SC.Jun.41). “June” thus yokes a lament for the loss of Chaucer’s life to a lament for the loss of Colin’s youthful ability: Colin simultaneously mourns the loss of a former self and a dead poet that both “well couth” make their complaints of love. Colin links this lost skill and

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lost poet with the loss of his country lass. Colin no longer can sing of love, he explains, because he has been deserted by the discourteous Rosalind. And to represent the sorrow of this desertion, Colin looks to the dead Chaucer for poetic influence:

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Nowe dead he is, and lyeth wrapt in lead,
(O why should death on hym such outrage showe?)
And all hys passing skil with him is fledde,
The fame whereof doth dayly greater growe.
But if on me some little drops would flowe,
Of that the spring was in his learned hedde,
I soone would learne these woods, to wayle my woe,
And teache the trees, their trickling teares to shedde.  
(SC.Jun.89-96)
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Like his appraisal of Chaucer’s ability, Colin’s lament for Chaucer’s death and wish for Chaucerian skill intersect with the poetry of another medieval author. Colin’s lament has, as Douglas Brooks-Davies notes, an important precedent in Lydgate’s *Fall of Princes*. “Chaucer... is ded, allas,” Lydgate here mourns (*FP*. Prlg.246-47), and thereby inserts himself into a lengthy tradition of literary lamentations: he describes his master’s death as his master had previously described Petrarch, “deed and nayled in his cheste” (*CT*.IV.29), and as Petrarch, in turn, had described Virgil in his tomb.Lydgate’s particular representation of this tradition is one for which the *Calender* invites special consideration, since his complaint appears in a context to which E.K. has already directed attention: Lydgate mourns Chaucer’s death only five lines before he labels Chaucer as the lodestar of our language (cf. *FP*.Prlg.252; *SC*.Epis.4).

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To be sure, many English writers beyond Lydgate had themselves bemoaned Chaucer’s death: Hoccleve mourns it in his *Regiment of Princes*; an anonymous author laments it in the *Book of Courtesy*; Ashby recalls it in his *Active Policy*; and Stow advertises it in his 1561 *Works*, which announces even on its title page that “death of [Chaucer] hath wrought his will.” Among the contributors to this extensive mass of laments, however, Lydgate stands out for the obsessiveness with which he reiterates his grievous loss. The sincerity of Lydgate’s grief is dubious; he uses his sorrow opportunistically, promoting himself as the poet who will fill the gap left by Chaucer’s death. His opportunism notwithstanding, Lydgate voices this grief with undeniable and unprecedented frequency: the lament for Chaucer’s death is a defining feature of Lydgate’s corpus. He recalls this death not only in the *Fall* (written c.1431-38), a *de casibus* collection printed by Pynson in 1527, by Tottel in 1554 and by Wayland in 1554, but also on three separate occasions in the *Troy Book* (c.1412-20), a sprawling historical narrative printed by Pynson in 1513 and by Marshe in 1555; in the *Life of our Lady* (c.1421), a devotional work printed by Caxton in 1483 and by Redman in 1531; and in the *Flower of Courtesy* (c.1401), a short plaintive “dyte” edited by Stow alongside Chaucer’s *Works* in 1561 and attributed properly to Lydgate. Thus, though Chaucer’s

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27 Spurgeon, *Five Hundred Years*, 1: 21, 1: 54-55, 1: 57, 1: 96. The mention of Chaucer’s death appears on the title page to only one of the two versions of the 1561 *Works*: it may be found in STC 5076 but not in STC 5075.

death was mourned by writers other than Lydgate, such laments nonetheless share the
general “motif, formula and rhetorical quality” to which Lydgate’s widely disseminated
work was fundamentally tied. The lament for Chaucer’s death is not the exclusive
property of Lydgate’s poetry but a recognizable characteristic of a Lydgatian mode.²⁹

The Lydgatian mode has an important temporal valence. Although Chaucer’s
dead had obviously occurred in the past, Lydgate regularly frames this loss in relation to
his own present moment, his own temporal now. Before describing a military conflict
from Trojan history, for instance, Lydgate offers a lament oriented toward his
contemporary context: “Chaucer now, allas, is nat alyue” (TB.3.550; my emphasis).
Lydgate habitually adopts this present perspective because his master’s death imposes
tangible consequences on his present ability. Without Chaucer alive in his “now,”
Lydgate cannot benefit from the salutary support of his predecessor’s influence. For him,
Chaucerian influence is a potential that remains unfulfilled. As he explains in the Troy
Book and the Life, his poetry could be rid of its errors, could be filled with eloquence,
could be written with a guided pen, if only Chaucer were alive. But, alas, Chaucer is now
dead and the instruction from his learned head will not come (TB.3.550-53); (LL.1640-
55). “June” shifts this deictic “now” to a different, contemporary context: Lydgate’s
present loss becomes Colin’s present loss and Lydgate’s unfulfilled, Chaucerian potential
becomes Colin’s unfulfilled, Chaucerian potential. As Colin here maintains, his poetic
complaint could fly to his love, could pierce her heart, could rebuke his rival, if only

²⁹ For my understanding of “mode” and the quotation in the previous sentence, see Alastair Fowler, Kinds
of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genre and Mode (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University
Press, 1982), 107.
Chaucer’s influence “would flowe” (SC.Jun. 97-104). But, alas, Chaucer is now dead and the drops from his learned head will not fall (SC.Jun.105).

By juxtaposing Colin’s use of the Lydgatean mode with a description of Chaucer and a potential recollection of Gower’s verse, “June” presents England’s familiar poetic triumvirate in a radically rewritten form. Here, Gower and Lydgate are not acknowledged members of a literary tradition, but as I have argued, two unacknowledged providers of textual traces. Rather than two of the famous names in England’s poetic pantheon, they provide just the vestiges of verse in Colin’s speech. In “June,” Gower and Lydgate can stand alongside Chaucer only insofar as their verse has been absorbed in Colin, a new poet who seeks to stand alongside Chaucer. In other words, Spenser remakes the Chaucer, Gower, Lydgate triumvirate into a Chaucer and Colin pair; and he effects this shift not by effacing an old tradition but by assimilating it into the new.

“June’s” engagement with the old tradition has a double-edged effect on Colin’s poetic position. While it helps him stand next to Chaucer, the process of assimilation also casts Colin as a dispossessed heir. Colin’s echoes of earlier poets assert his reception of a Chaucerian inheritance only to sever it immediately. The complimentary phrase from Gower’s Confessio retroactively identifies young Colin as the successor in the Chaucerian style, but the plaintive rhetoric from Lydgate’s corpus marks mature Colin as the unsuccessful suitor of Chaucerian power. The poet who, in the terms of Gower’s verse, could receive Chaucerian skill and “well couth tune his pipe” becomes the poet who, in the terms of the Lydgatean mode, cannot receive a Chaucerian bequest.

Without his Chaucerian influence, Colin cannot send his complaint directly to Rosalind. Instead of being transmitted by his own song, Colin’s “painfull plight” (SC.Jun.
98) will be disseminated by the members of his pastoral community: he instructs his fellow “gentle shepheards” to inform Rosalind of the sorrow she caused (SC.Jun.106-12). Colin counteracts his own limitations with the assistance of intermediaries. Since his own voice cannot be the poetic “messenger” of his plight (SC.Jun.98), he uses human messengers to complain to Rosalind on his behalf; the pathos that cannot fly straight to his discourteous love will instead reach her through the voices of go-betweens. Colin’s appeal to these go-betweens thus strives to accomplish what his appeal to a Chaucerian inheritance cannot. If Chaucer’s learned drops will not help Colin send news to Rosalind, then these shepherds will.

Colin’s appeal to the shepherds outlines a connection between Chaucer and the intermediary’s influence that reflects back on “Aprill.” Whereas the go-between in “June” serves as an external source of aid when Colin cannot receive his Chaucerian inheritance, the go-between in “Aprill” is the very vehicle through which Colin gains this inheritance in the first place. In “Aprill,” Hobbinol and E.K. are the intermediaries. There, they stand between Colin’s utterances and the audience’s understanding, and enable Colin’s succession to his predecessor’s characteristics. Hobbinol transmits the song that allows Colin to take over Chaucer’s imagined bond with the Tudor sovereign. And E.K. transmits the praise (“his excellencie and skill”) that allows Colin to assume Chaucer’s poetic ability. In “Aprill,” unlike in “June,” the drops of influence have indeed flowed from Chaucer to Colin, though they have done so not through a stream of direct descent but through a channel mediated by E.K. and Hobbinol.

“Aprill’s” use of the go-between brings Colin closer to the author who is shadowed under him. Colin’s mediated connection to Chaucer in “Aprill” resembles
Spenser’s own mediated connection to Chaucer in the epistle. Spenser’s role as the still-anonymous New Poet succeeding the Old is announced by the pedantic, interpretive go-between, E.K., and is framed by the advice of Troilus’ creepy, pimping go-between, Pandarus. For his part the Old Poet is also assigned his own interpretive intermediary: Lydgate stands between Chaucer and the reading public and lauds the “Loadestarre of our Language” (SC.Epis. 4). The interventionary activities of E.K. and Pandarus have received substantial scholarly attention, but Lydgate’s mediating presence in the epistle has, with the important exception of Kuskin, hardly been examined. My next section offers both a supplement to accounts which largely bypass Lydgate’s role, and an extension of Kuskin’s initial and productive effort in explaining Lydgate’s influence. To complement his analysis of the Lydgatian word “lodesterre,” I provide a detailed reading of yet another key Lydgatian term. Lydgate, we will see, has an important connection to Pandarus’ advice, to E.K.’s rewriting of it, and to the transition from the Old to the New Poet. Through these connections, the epistle assigns Lydgate a function opposite to the one he had served in “June.” If he provides Colin with one model for the failure to attain the predecessor’s skill, Lydgate also offers Spenser a means and a terminology through which he can receive Chaucerian talent. The means is *The Siege of Thebes* and the terminology is the uncouth.

III: Succession, Mediation and the Uncouth: Paradoxical Poetics from the Old to the New Poet

In the *Calendar* this terminology of the uncouth first appears in E.K.’s silent but salient alteration to Pandarus’ lusty lore: E.K. transforms the proverbial “unknowe unkist” of *Troilus*’ bawd into the “vncovthe vnkiste” of the opening lines of the *Calendar*’s epistle. Such a distinctive rewriting, Annabel Patterson argues, extends the *Calendar* beyond the context of proverbial advice and into the discourse of Elizabethan pedagogy. The word that E.K. inserts—uncouth—plays a central role in the educational program of Richard Mulcaster, Spenser’s teacher at the Merchant Taylors’ School. For Mulcaster, “vncouth” signifies the roughness and peculiarity of the English language which has been largely “vnused” in an academic context. Rather than shying away from this linguistic strangeness, instructors and students should, Mulcaster maintains, engage with these uncouth words in the classroom: English should become a language of education.

According to Patterson, E.K.’s rewriting of Pandarus pointedly develops Mulcaster’s use of the “vncouth.” The word is here assigned a linguistic as well as an aesthetic and economic valence, positioning the uncouth not as a register to be completely abandoned but as an integral part of the *Calendar*’s artistic and social agenda.

Patterson’s discussion of Elizabethan pedagogy provides a valuable context for the *Calendar*’s interpretation, and one to which I will briefly gesture below, but it silently effaces the other pedagogical context that E.K.’s epistle invokes. Her focus on the relationship between master Mulcaster and his scholar Spenser leads her to ignore the connection between “maister” Chaucer and “his scholler Lidgate” (*SC*.Epis.4). The

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32 *The First Part of the Elementarie* (London: Thomas Vautroullier, 1582), STC 18250, Hh2r.
Calender invites consideration of this latter relationship by referring explicitly to the Lancastrian poet, and by recapitulating a collocation among Chaucer, English, the proverbial and the uncouth that had first appeared in one of Lydgate’s works: The Siege of Thebes. This poem, which claims an intimate connection with the tales his “mayster … list endite” (ST.3.4501), played a central and highly visible role in Chaucer’s posthumous legacy. Stow prints it as the final piece in his edition of Chaucer’s Works and advertises it prominently on his title page which announces: “The woorkes of Geoffrey Chaucer, newly printed… with the siege and destruccion of the worthy citee of Thebes, compiled by Ihon Lidgate, Monke of Berie.” For the Tudor audience of this edition, which included Spenser, reading Chaucer’s Works was equally an opportunity for reading Chaucer with Lydgate.33

Lydgate himself encourages this type of reading. In the Prologue to the Siege, he praises Chaucer for the admirable style he displays in relating the speeches of his English pilgrims in The Canterbury Tales. These tales are so captivating, Lydgate suggests, because they feature “many proverbe divers and unkouth” which Chaucer transmits “be rehersaile of his sugrid mouth” (ST. Prlg.51-52). The terms of praise attached to Chaucer in this couplet overtly recall the terms that Lydgate applies to a group of writers and reciters in his lyric “All Stant in Chaunge like a Mydsomer Rose.”34 In his foray into the ubi sunt topos, Lydgate longingly asks where are:


Tullius with his sugrid tonge,
Or Crisotomus with his golden mouthe?
The aureat dytees, that he rade and songe,
Of Omerus in Greece, both North and South?
The tragides divers and unkouth
Of moral Senec...

(ASC.89-94)

The *Siege* suggests that Chaucer has recreated this lost and glorious classical past in a vernacular context. If Seneca’s tragedies once presented material “divers and unkouth,” Chaucer’s works now offer a comparable variety and novelty in their “divers and unkouth” proverbs. And if the world of Ciceronian refinement once featured a “golden mouthe” and a “sugrid tonge,” Chaucer has more recently distributed a similar linguistic elegance through his own “sugrid mouth.” In aligning his master with this classical background, Lydgate suggests that Chaucer has both followed and improved upon his predecessors. He implicitly compares Chaucer’s language not only with the sugared rhetoric of Cicero, but also with what he calls in the *Troy Book* the “sugred wordes” of Homer (*TB*.Prlg.275). Whereas Homer uses his lexical sugar to conceal the falsehoods in his Trojan history, Chaucer uses his sweet style to illuminate his faithful record of the Canterbury pilgrimage. Sugared Homer “hathe transformed... þe trouþe” (*TB*.Prlg.271), but sugared Chaucer embodies it: “Rede his making, who list the trouthe fynde,” Lydgate advises (*ST*.Prlg.43). By producing this sweet veracity, Chaucer selectively remakes classical language in his vernacular discourse. His English displays classical eloquence without transmitting classical deception.

According to the *Siege*’s couplet, Chaucer manifests his classical connection in a linguistic register that is productively paradoxical. The couplet is paradoxical, first, because proverbs are not usually “unkouth,” unknown and strange. Instead, they are
quintessential representations of the culturally familiar—as Chaucer’s Monk declares, they are “ful sooth and ful commune” (CT.VII.2246). To these unfamiliar commonplaces, Lydgate adds a paradox concerning Chaucer’s linguistic refinement. It evokes the sophistication of Homeric verse and Ciceronian rhetoric, but Chaucer’s sugared “mouth” also rhymes with a word that symbolizes a dramatically different aesthetic. The uncouth connotes for Lydgate phrases that are unknown, but also sounds that are harsh, disorderly and rude; for example, he describes the disorganized and unseemly “noyse” made by the Greek camp following Amphiorax’s death as “uncouth” (ST.3.4114). The Chaucerian mouth that disseminates strange familiarities is equally a mouth that transmits harsh fluency.

Lydgate also assigns his Chaucer a connection to various social registers. While the uncouth, as a marker of class and education, refers to the unlettered multitude elsewhere in the Middle English corpus, Lydgate links the word to the aristocracy.35 The “uncouth devyses” that glimmer in the Greek host, for instance, belong not to the lewd but to the lords (ST.3.2662). Lydgate deepens the aristocratic valence of the uncouth by here constructing it against a Chaucerian precedent. His couplet, “Ther men may see many straunge guyse / Of armyng newe and uncouth devyses,” recycles two lines from Chaucer’s gentle-born Knight: “Ther maystow seen devisynge of harneys / So unkouth and so riche, and wroght so weel” (CT.I.2496-97).36 The Knight’s diction is rare among the Canterbury fellowship: the only other pilgrim to use the word “unkouthe” is his similarly aristocratic son, the Squire (CT.V.284). The uncouth may denote the lower

35 For the word’s denotative connection with the unlettered masses, see Middle English Dictionary, s.v. “uncouth,” 5a, 5b; and Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. “uncouth,” A.7(a).

36 This allusion is noted in The Siege of Thebes, ed. Axel Erdmann, 2 vols. (London: EETS, 1930), 2:121.
classes, but it also comes from the mouths of their superiors. In the *Siege*, Chaucer’s connection with proverbs similarly registers a dual link with low and high. Though they can be wielded (to again invoke the Monk) by a popular “commune,” proverbs are in Chaucer’s corpus famously transmitted by one aristocrat to another. They are part of the common property, but proverbs also compose the courtly language that Pandarus shares with Troilus.37 When Lydgate’s Chaucer speaks in the proverbial uncouth, he speaks with both the commoner and the courtier.

By connecting Chaucer’s verse with these divergent discourses, aesthetics and classes, Lydgate credits his master with the advent of a Janus-faced poetics. The first poet “of wel seyinge in oure language,” Chaucer simultaneously looks toward the strange and the familiar, the rough and the fluent, the aristocratic and the popular. Moreover, by rooting this poetics in the uncouth, Lydgate offers an anticipatory corollary to E.K.’s version of Pandarus’ advice. According to Lydgate, Chaucer’s poetry is uncouth even as it is famous, beloved and comparable to the classics: his verse is not “vncoyte vnkyste” but uncouth and kissed.

Spenser matches Lydgate’s Chaucer with the new paradoxical poetics of the *Calender*. Consider, for instance, the poem’s bond to various classes in the dedication and envoy: if he initially sends his “little booke” to Sir Phillip Sidney, Spenser finally

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directs it to follow a “lowly gate emongste the meaner sorte” (*SC*.Eplg.8). With these multiple addressees, the *Calender* participates in a Chaucerian tradition articulated by Chaucer himself and by his scholar. The first and last verses engage Chaucer’s literary legacy by remaking the envoy to *Troilus*, as well by offering a discourse with both aristocratic and popular connections. Put another way, the *Calender*’s opening and closing poems evoke the words of Chaucer’s “go, litel bok” (*TC*.V.1786) in order to pursue the twofold social allegiance symbolized by Chaucer’s proverbial uncouth.

In reformulating this dual class connection, Spenser also adapts Chaucer’s dual language. With his description of the *Calender*’s linguistic project, E.K. transfers a vernacular of the strangely familiar and rudely fluent from the Old to the New Poet. According to E.K., the New Poet’s “framing [of] words” will appear the “straungest” of his many “straunge” characteristics, a linguistic peculiarity that arises not because his words are completely new, but because they are “them selues... so auncient” (*SC*.Epis.23-26). Although “vnused…of most men,” these ancient words were employed by England’s old poets and are employed by England’s “country folke” (*SC*.Epis.28-29, 41). Given both the rarity of its contemporary use and its ancient and rural English heritage,

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Spenser’s language can seem bizarre, uncanny and curious even as it is as natural, customary and familiar as “Nources milk” (SC.Epis.104).

The old words that produce Spenser’s familiar strangeness also contribute to his productively paradoxical aesthetic. Though these words sound rude and rustic, their roughness actually supports the excellence and skill of his making. Effecting a laudable fusion of the rugged and the dazzling, these “rough and harsh termes,” according to E.K., “enlumine and make more clearly to appeare the brightnesse of braue and glorious words” (SC.Epis.68-69). Spenser’s commendable recourse to these old words is thus doubly Chaucerian. His archaisms first reproduce a diction that Chaucer had employed in his own verse, and they then recreate a register previously evinced in Chaucer’s uncouth and sugared mouth. Where his “guerdons,” “clinckes” and “heardgroomes” imitate Chaucer in his ancient vocabulary, Spenser’s natural strangeness and dazzling roughness follow Chaucer in his Janus-faced poetics.

E.K. links Spenser’s development of his predecessor’s poetics with the same label—uncouth—to which Lydgate had previously tied his master’s proverbs. Writing in a largely “unused” English vernacular, as he does in following Chaucer, Spenser writes in what was for Mulcaster an “vncouth” language. By associating Spenser with this term, E.K. applies Lydgate’s corollary about the merits of the uncouth. From E.K.’s perspective, Spenser’s commitment to English should garner him “special prayse” (SC.Epis.78): his use of an uncouth language makes him, like Lydgate’s Chaucer, worthy to be kissed. In so praising Spenser, E.K. also justifies his own interpretive labours. The Calender’s uncouth diction demands that E.K. add “a certain Glosse or scholion for the exposition of old wordes and harder phrases” (SC.Epis.169-70). E.K.’s glosses for this
uncouth language are designed to increase the comprehension of the poem’s reader as well as the importance of the poem’s author. The uncouth words necessitate the type of linguistic apparatus habitually reserved for the works of classical *auctores* and the continental authors who aspired to such classical status. In striving after a similar type of canonicity, Spenser is retracing Chaucer’s steps as set out in the *Siege*. Like Lydgate’s Chaucer before him, E.K.’s Spenser gains a proximity to the classics not by eschewing, but even while utilizing, a language of the uncouth.

The multiple similarities between the Spenser of the *Calender* and the Chaucer of the *Siege* capture a process of poetic succession. As the new English author whose Janus-faced poetics makes his vernacular compositions worthy of classical comparison, Spenser assumes Chaucer’s former position; the New Poet takes over the status of the Old. If it helps initiate what will be called the great tradition of English poets, this process of succession equally contests the assumptions upon which this tradition conventionally rests. In the *Calender*, Spenser assumes Chaucer’s legacy not through a line of uninterrupted, “lineal” descent, nor through the unmediated communion between two geniuses, but through the intervening, interpretive frameworks of a pedantic commentator and of a supposedly “dull,” “incompetent” and marginal author. Spenser becomes the successor to Chaucer’s glorious poetic legacy because E.K recapitulates the terms in

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which Lydgate understood it. E.K. has Spenser take over not just for Chaucer himself but for a Chaucer mediated by Lydgate.

In using Lydgate as a Chaucerian interpreter, the *Calender* also presents Chaucer as a mediating agent in his own right. E.K. asserts Chaucer’s status as a mediator by aligning him with Pandarus: the epistle’s opening proverb is an utterance both used by Pandarus and “sayde” by Chaucer himself. With this double attribution, E.K. elides the voice of the Old Poet into the voice of the go-between; E.K.’s Chaucer is a writer who speaks, as the Henrician court had earlier recognized, the language of Pandarus.43 By connecting these two figures, E.K. presents yet another paradox which he playfully presents in jingling, alliterative phraseology: the esteemed and revered Old Poet shares an idiom with the seedy pimp “bolstering … his baudy brocage” (*SC*.Epis.9). This paradox is funny, and it may even gently question Chaucer’s reliability and moral rectitude, but it is also eminently justified.44 Chaucer did indeed have his own form of “brocage,” one that he practiced with contemporary and classical literature from the Continent. If Pandarus is the pimp who goes between two lovers, Chaucer is his literary parallel: the “grant translateur” who goes between two cultures.45 Pandarus and Chaucer are linked, as John V. Fleming would put it, by their shared status as *interpres*—as individuals who

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43 On Chaucer, Pandarus and the Henrician context, see Lerer, *Courtly Letters*, 1-33.


45 For Chaucer as “grant translateur,” see Robert R. Edwards, *The Dream of Chaucer: Representation and Reflection in the Early Narratives* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989), 34. Chaucer’s mediations were not limited to his poetry. Professionally, he was *negociis regis*, and as such, travelled on diplomatic missions to the Continent where he mediated between different interests and groups at court—a practice that doubtless guided his mediations in poetry. See Craig A. Berry, “The King’s Business: Negotiating Chivalry in *Troilus and Criseyde*,” *ChR* 26 (1992): 236-65.
interpret and transmit existing events and texts and who, in doing so, offer refracted versions of the originals.46 When Pandarus recounts to his niece his discovery of Troilus’ love, the bawd describes not just Troilus’ own feelings and actions; instead, Pandarus modulates these feelings and actions with his own rhetorical flourishes and narrative embellishments.47 Likewise, when Chaucer offers his readers a sonnet from Petrarch, the Old Poet transmits not just Italian literary culture; instead, he represents this culture in his English language and through his personal, poetic preoccupations.48 Pandarus mediates Troilus for Criseyde; Chaucer mediates continental verse for his audience.

In effecting its own alignment between poet and bawd, the Calender’s epistle hints at Chaucer’s status as interpreter of continental texts. E.K. derives his quotation of Lydgate’s Fall of Princes from a section of that poem in which Chaucer’s acts of linguistic intervention are most adamantly emphasized. As Lydgate here explains, the lodestar of our language is renowned less for his creation of entirely new stories than for his skillful “translacioun[s].” The translation of Le Roman de la Rose, the “translacioun” of “Boeces book,” the translation of Origen vpon the Maudeleyne, “Dante in Inglissh” (FP.Prlg.290-320): the Chaucer canon, as Lydgate presents it, comprises the efforts of the linguistic go-between. For him, the first poet “of wel seyinge in oure language” is also the secondary redactor of an earlier tradition; the fons et origo of English literature is


47 TC.II.505-88. For descriptions of this story as the product of Pandarus’ at least partial invention, see Paul Taylor, Chaucer Translator (Lanham: University Press of America, 1998), 157; and Stephen Barney, ed. Troilus and Criseyde (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006), 89.

equally the conduit of continental streams. In Chaucer’s role as inter-linguistic *interpres*, Lydgate identifies a model for his own endeavour of “translacioun” in *The Fall of Princes*. As Chaucer had done in turning the “book which callid is Trophe” into “Troilus & Cresseide,” Lydgate’s *Fall* translates a text by “Iohn Bochas” (*FP.Prlg.287*). As Chaucer had done in *The Monk’s Tale*, Lydgate’s poem renders in English the “tragedies” of this same “Bochas.” This latter Chaucerian precedent, like the work of Laurent de Premierfait, provides Lydgate with his Boccaccio in a pre-read form: Lydgate approaches Boccaccio’s “fall of pryncis” only after Chaucer “the fall of pryncis...dede also compleyne” (*FP.Prlg.249*). As a result, Lydgate will not be translating Boccaccio alone, nor will he be translating only the French Boccaccio prepared by Laurent; he translates a Boccaccio who has already been translated by English Chaucer.\(^{49}\) By positioning England’s lodestar between himself and Boccaccio, Lydgate casts “maistir” Chaucer as his mediator as well. And by identifying himself as yet another *interpres* of Boccaccio, Lydgate establishes an English literary tradition around such acts of interpretive intercession. The mediator of Boccaccio, Lydgate, places himself in a line of English intermediaries that stems from the mediator of Boccaccio, Chaucer.

With its use of Lydgate as a mediator for Chaucerian poetics and its assignment to Chaucer of a mediator’s role, E.K.’s epistle obliquely recalls the *Fall* and its tradition of the English *interpres*. In the tasks he performs, E.K. extends this tradition into Elizabethan England. As Chaucer had done with Boccaccio, and as Lydgate had done with Boccaccio through Chaucer, E.K. subjects Spenser’s *Calender* to a process of

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interpretive intercession. E.K.’s glosses present the *Calender* in a pre-read form. As with both his Chaucerian and Lydgateian precedents, E.K.’s mediations involve their own type of “translacioun”—a translation not from Boccaccio’s Latin and Laurent’s French into Middle English but from the shepherds’ Chaucerian and Lydgateian archaisms to an Elizabethan reader’s contemporary language. By assuming this mediating position, E.K. thus marks himself as the participant in an alternative Chaucerian genealogy. If he places Spenser in a line that descends from Chaucer, the Old Poet, E.K. places himself in a line that descends from Chaucer, the Old *interpres*. At the same time as his glosses help fashion an exclusive tradition of two English authors, E.K. shares in another Chaucerian tradition that is not restricted to such poets alone: a tradition of the go-between. This chapter as a whole has concentrated on this tradition as it is represented by the various texts and figures—Stow and Thynne, the *Confessio Amantis*, the “gentle shepheards,” Hobbinol, Lydgate—that mediate the *Calender’s* depictions of Chaucer, Colin and Spenser. These forms can be productively read in relation to Chaucer’s role in the *Fall* as translator and his role in the epistle as the partner of Pandarus. In this light the *Calender’s* mediations appear not as latter-day corruptions that fail to meet the standard of an initially pure English tradition. Instead, they carry forth a fundamental characteristic of English literary history, a history that was mediated even at its origin: Chaucer.
Reading Alcyon’s Grave: Plaintive Mode and Literary History in Spenser, Chaucer and Ovid

I: From 1579 to 1591: Spenserian Career, Spenserian Complaint

Once he has guided his little Calender toward its reading public, Spenser subsequently directs his literary career along several different, though not mutually exclusive, trajectories. The first moves from the low style of pastoral tunes to the high style of epic strains, a progression that he self-consciously advertises in the opening lines of his 1590 Faerie Queene: “Lo I the man, whose Muse whylome did maske, / As time her taught, in lowly Shephards weeds, /Am now enforst a farre vnfitter taske, / For trumpets sterne to chaunge mine Oaten reeds: / And sing of Knights and Ladies gentle deeds” (FQ.I.Pr.1.1-5). With these lines, which render in English the Latin verses that habitually characterized Virgil’s generic and stylistic development, Spenser links his poetic growth to an ambitious program of literary and political translatio. His first lines transfer the shape of Virgil’s Augustan career to English poetry; the epic poem that bears out this shape then transfers the imperial power of Virgil’s Augustan Rome to the English nation.¹ Spenser joins his multifold translation of a Virgilian past with a partial variation

of the Virgilian subject matter. England’s literary and dynastic ambitions will rise not just through arms and the singular man but through a plurality of knights, ladies, lovers and their gentle deeds. In professing this subject, Spenser approaches his Virgilian model through the mediating influence of Ariosto and his important precedent of plurality—the “донне [e] cavalier” who populate the landscape of *Orlando Furioso.* Having moved past the *Calendar’s* low pastoral, Spenser reaches the epic stage in his Virgilian *cursus* with a *cinquecento* precursor as his guide. The triumphant poem resultant from this ascending trajectory apparently earns a significant prize for its author: Queen Elizabeth awards Spenser an annuity of fifty pounds per annum, and thereby assigns him *de facto* status as England’s laureate poet.

The upward movement from pastoral reeds to heroic deeds corresponds to a career model predicatively outlined in the *Calendar* itself and its October eclogue. This model, initially associated with Cuddie but ultimately connected to Colin, positions the completion of the Virgilian sequence as the first step toward its subsequent extension. The “bigger notes” of “doubted Knights… of bloody Mars, of wars, of giusts” (*SC.Oct.39*) here serve as a medial stage in this post-classical literary career. And as such, they may be followed by a turn to the “somewhat” slacker style of amorous poetry and its songs “of loue and lustihead” (*SC.Oct.51*), and then by a flight “to heauen apace” and its

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hymns of divine virtue (SC.Oct.84). Taking this supra-Virgilian pattern as his goal, Spenser follows his epic *Faerie Queene* with what is, in Patrick Cheney’s influential formulation, the anticipated shift to works amorous and heavenly, presenting, first, his *Amoretti* and *Epithalamion* in 1595 and, second, his *Fowre Hymnes* in 1596. By fulfilling his predicted sequence, Spenser stakes a claim to his contemporary prominence as well as his lasting importance. Along his reinvented *cursus*, he embodies an ideal Renaissance fusion of political interventionism, confident self-promotion, classical fame and Christian glory, which asserts his status—regardless of whether he is officially crowned or not—as laureate. This much is familiar.

With a second poetic trajectory—an itinerary that Cheney’s account largely circumvents, and with which scholarship is far less familiar—Spenser aims to complicate the orderly sequence and laureate ambitions of the first. On this alternative path, the epic *Faerie Queene* precedes not a gentle book of love but a vitriolic volume of *Complaints*, the substance of which spews forth an assortment of sorrowful, choleric and anti-laureate poems, ranging from diatribes against the Elizabethan court to general laments against the world’s vanity. According to his prefatory letter for the “Gentle Reader,” William Ponsonby, the printer of the *Complaints*, has taken it upon himself to assemble these various individual works—some of which have already been circulating separately,

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“hauing bene diuerslie imbeziled and purloyned” (*Cpl.Lt.*7-8)—into a single collection. From Ponsonby’s perspective, his entrepreneurial act of compilation is justified by a similarity in subject matter as well as a probability of authorial intent: the poems “al seeme to containe like matter of argument in them,” and given the frequency with which their author has adopted their plaintive mode, “it may seeme he ment them all to one volume” (*Cpl.Lt.*16-17). The tentative tone of this latter inference conceals Ponsonby’s more intimate knowledge of what his author actually “ment.” Despite his rhetorical claims to the contrary, Ponsonby almost certainly released the volume under Spenser’s personal direction. The likelihood of Spenser’s role in the book’s orchestration and publication is strongly supported by its inclusion of four dedicatory addresses to noble ladies—addresses all written by Spenser himself and all proclaiming his design for a wide, public dissemination of their accompanying poems.⁶

In this light the letter to the gentle reader appears as part of the volume’s pragmatic and calculated fiction—an attempt, perhaps, to shield Spenser from the political backlash and censorship that would ultimately stem from the vociferously satirical *Mother Hubberds Tale*.⁷ Even more to the point, I would add, this fiction fashions Ponsonby on the precedent of E.K. in *The Shepheardes Calender* as yet another Spenserian intermediary, standing between the readers and their author and inciting them

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“graciouslie to entertaine the new Poet” (*Cpl.*Lt.23-24). True to his model, Ponsonby is an anticipatory promoter of his poet, advertising not only the works in the present volume, but also those that will hopefully appear in the future. Spenser has apparently written “The dying Pellican, The howers of the Lord, The Sacrifice of a sinner, The seuen Psalmes, &c,” works known to only a select few readers, having been “looselie scattered abroad” (*Cpl.*Lt.18-20). Ponsonby looks forward to the time when he can “either by [Spenser] himselfe, or otherwise attaine” these various works and “set [them] foorth” for his audience’s appreciative favour (*Cpl.*Lt.20-21). In a similar fashion, E.K., in announcing the *Calender*, had also announced “diuers other excellent works” by the New Poet “which slepe in silence, as his Dreames, his Legendes, his Court of Cupide, and sondry others” (*SC.*Epis.183-85). “Though worthy of many,” these poems are “knowen to few,” and E.K. wants them “put forth” (*Epis.*182-87). Uncouth, unkissed is the intermediary’s creed, and Ponsonby, like E.K., hopes that these uncouth works will not remain so for long.

The connection between these Spenserian intermediaries exemplifies a larger link between the respective volumes that they introduce: the 1579 *Calender* and the 1591 *Complaints*. In his explanation of the “generall argument” to the “whole booke,” E.K. divided the twelve pastoral eclogues into three “ranckes”: the “recreatiue, such as al those be, which conceiue matter of loue, or commendation of special personages,” the “Moral, which for the most part be mixed with some Satyrical bitternesse,” and the “Plaintiue” (*SC.*GnArg.27-31.). In the *Complaints* Spenser returns to the latter two ranks by

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reworking their exhortative spirit and affective energy. The *Ruines of Time* looks back to the November eclogue, transforming its lament for Dido into a lament for Leicester, and repurposing its apostrophic outbursts against worldly mutability. A sentiment from 1579, “O trustlesse state of earthly things, and slipper hope / Of mortal men” (*SC*.Nov.153-54), rings anew in 1591: “O trustlesse state of miserable men, / That builde your blis on hope of earthly thing” (*Cpl.*RT.197-98). Verlame echoes Colin’s sorrowful words, even while chastising Colin himself for no longer telling “his sorrow to the listning rout” (*Cpl.*RT.227). *Mother Hubberds Tale* features a similar element of retrospection, returning to the Maye eclogue and rewriting its critique of ecclesiastical covetousness and idleness. Formerly the targets of Piers’ ire, the clerical desires for “greedie gouernaunce,” to “ligge soft,” and to match rank with “mighty potentates” (*SC*.Maye.121-25) are now manifested by the “formall priest,” an easy-living clergyman who revels in a vocation that is not “halfe so…sore” as it was “of yore” (*Cpl.*MHT.447-48), and who believes that an ambitious group of “iolly Prelates” are “worthie rule to beare” (*Cpl.*MHT.423). The *Visions of the Worlds Vanitie* is equally recollective, revisiting the Julye eclogue and recycling one of its morals on the perils of high estate. Thomalin’s response to the braining of an ascendant Algrin, “loue the lowe degree” (*SC*.Jul.220), resurfaces in the envoy to *Visions*, now removed from the dialogic context in which it had once appeared. Unaccompanied by the lofty Morell and his dissenting voice, the speaker of *Visions* solemnly advises “ye that read these ruines tragicall” to “Learne by their losse” and “loue the low degree” (*Cpl.*VsV.163-4)

By connecting it with the *Calender*, Spenser assigns the *Complaints* two functions in his literary career. On one hand, the volume of moral and plaintive poems is disruptive
to and excluded from the Calendar’s advertised sequence through pastoral, epic, love lyric and hymn. But on the other, it is allied with and an extension of the moral and plaintive poems with which the Calendar and this sequence began. If it interrupts Spenser’s promised movement through different subjects and styles, the Complaints sustains his development of the same particular modes. Spenser’s continued investment in the latter of these particular modes—the plaintive—is the subject of this chapter.

This subject has substantial relevance for our understanding of Spenser’s Chaucerian influence. As medievalists have long recognized, Chaucer’s corpus features various specimens of complaint, which he presents either as distinct self-contained poems, or as shorter units embedded within larger narratives.9 Consider the Complaint unto Pity, the Complaint to his Lady, the Complaints of Mars and Venus and the Complaint to his Purse; or witness the laments from the eponymous woman of Anelida and Arcite, from Dido in the House of Fame, from the Black Knight in the Book of the Duchess, and from the heroines in the Legend of Good Women. In the Introduction to the Man of Law’s Tale, Chaucer self-consciously advertises his reputation as a specialist in this sorrowful mode. There, the lawyer casts “Chaucer” as successor to the classical plaintive legacy, explaining that he has written about more lovers “than Ovide made of mencioun” in his Heroïdes (CT.II.54), the epistolary collection that, in the Middle Ages, provided the fons et origo for individualized complaint.10 In earning his Ovidian pedigree, the Man of Law’s Chaucer has made a book about the unhappy Alcyone, as

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well as a large volume of legends, wherein readers may apparently see: “the pleinte of Dianire and of Hermyon / of Adriane and of Isiphilee …the teeris of Eleyne, and eek the woe of Brixseyde” (CT. II.65-71). For the Man of Law, the link between Chaucer and the plaintive is so reflexive that he may be attributed various laments, like those of Deianira, Hermione, Helen and Briseis, even when he did not actually write them. For his part, Spenser too recognizes and foregrounds Chaucer’s preponderance toward the plaintive. In his “June” portrait of the poet who would “wayle his Woes,” Spenser identifies the expression of complaint—in this case, the complaint of a lover—as a characteristically Chaucerian activity.

As Richard Rambuss has ably demonstrated, the Chaucerian valences for the plaintive mode lend another element of poetic discipleship to Spenser’s 1591 collection, complementing his local and explicitly announced imitations of Virgil, Du Bellay and Petrarch. The Complaints, the venue in which Spenser wails his woe most profusely, extends several specific works from his classical and continental precursors as well as the general plaintive legacy from his Chaucerian past: the New Poet links his career with the Old by continuing to adopt one of his quintessential modes. In this chapter I will ultimately elucidate this literary-historical link and its implications for plaintive poetry through a case-study of Spenser’s Daphnaïda, a Chaucerian imitation bursting with “woeful layes” and firmly linked with the Complaints, sharing its year of publication, its

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11 For the misattributions, and Gower’s connection to them, see B.W. Lindeboom, Venus’ Owne Clerk: Chaucer’s Debt to the ”Confessio Amantis” (New York: Rodopi, 2007), 71-79.

Before turning to this specific instance of plaintive discipleship, however, I would first like to make a more fundamental point and add to Rambuss’s argument an insight pertaining to Spenser’s poetic trajectories. For Spenser, Chaucer functions as a precedent not only for his use of the plaintive mode, but also for his use of this mode to structure a literary career. In 1591 Spenser follows Chaucer not just in writing complaints, but in writing complaints that interrupt a previously announced progression in subject and style.

In early modern scholarship, the terms of this argument have met with significant resistance. According to Patrick Cheney, Kevin Pask and Katherine Craik, for example, Chaucer’s literary output does not permit organization into a coherent, sequential progression. Their point is supported—though only Cheney brushes up against this point in an endnote—by several moments of self-presentation within Chaucer’s oeuvre. In his Retraction Chaucer divides his poetry and prose between two categories: his works of worldly vanity, which he now revokes, and his works of morality and holiness, which he now commends toward the salvation of his soul. This division omits any organization based on chronological, stylistic or generic progression, depicting instead a “maker” who, without a step-by-step course or a preconceived pattern, alternated unpredictably between two kinds of work throughout his creative career. Within each of these individual lists,

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Chaucer presents his works in a seemingly haphazard order and connects them not by a temporal sequence but only by punctuation marks and coordinating conjunctions: “the book of Troilus; the book also of Fame; the book of the XXV. Ladies; the book of the Duchesse…” (*CT.X.1085-87*). In the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*, Queen Alcestis also describes Chaucer’s corpus in a similarly conjunctive fashion. She arranges his oeuvre into books that have offended love, books that have served love and books of “other holynesse” (*LGW.F.424*), but provides no progressive itinerary among these various categories or among their individual poems. Instead, Alcestis lists the poems via parataxis in a catalogue that eschews their chronological sequence of composition: “he made the book that hight the Hous of Fame, / And eke the Deeth of Blaunche the Duchesse, / And the Parlement of Foules…And al the love of Palamon and Arcite” (*LGW.F.417-20*). Given this evidence, I do not intend on refuting Cheney, Pask and Craik and their argument against a Chaucerian career progression. But I would like to suggest a corollary to them: a progressive model, even if it does not account for all the poems in Chaucer’s entire career, does account for a particular segment of it. In this segment, the *Legend* plays a crucial role which marks Alcestis’ conjunctive catalogue as only one potential scheme of Chaucerian career organization.

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II: Progression and Interruption:
Complaint from the *Legend to Daphnaïda*

Chaucer presents his progressive model in the envoy to his *Troilus and Criseyde*, a passage with which Spenser was intimately familiar and with which he worked as the model for his dedicatory address and epilogue in *The Shepheardes Calender*. Having grudgingly recounted Criseyde’s infidelity and instructed women to be “be war” of men, Chaucer directs his book toward the classical canon and begs God for the power to produce a different kind of poem in the future:

> Go, litel bok, go, litel myn tragedye,
> Ther God thi makere yet, er that he dye,
> So sende myght to make in som comedye!
> But litel book, no making thow n’envie,
> But subgit be to alle poesye;
> And kis the steppes where as thow seest pace
> Virgile, Ovide, Omer, Lucan, and Stace.  
> (*TC.V.1786-1792*)

In the stanza’s final two lines, Chaucer explicitly voices a desire that he has already articulated implicitly in the first: with his generic label for the *Troilus*, “tragedye,” Chaucer sends his book to the steps of classical poetry. As Lee Patterson has persuasively demonstrated, a tragedy for Chaucer is a major work written in a lofty style that examines the subject of history. In these respects, it was his medieval equivalent of the classical *carmen Heroicum*, the distinguished historical poem that, like the *Aeneid*, *Metamorphoses, Iliad, Pharsalia* and *Thebaid*, was written in dactylic hexameter, or as the Monk puts it, was “versified…of six feet, which men clepen exametron” (*CT VII.1978-9*). Among these classical works, Chaucer is here most determined to assert

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16 Patterson’s argument, which reappears in various forms throughout his scholarship, may be found in *Chaucer and the Subject of History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 242-43; *Temporal Circumstances*, 98-99; and “Genre and Source in *Troilus and Criseyde*,” in *Acts of Recognition*, 198-214.
his connection with the *Aeneid*, the poem that Dante in canto twenty of the *Inferno* had likewise called a “tragedia” (*Inf.*20.113). Chaucer now ambitiously assumes for his own book the label that Dante once assigned to the work of his classical “maestro.”

With his subsequent gesture toward “som comedye,” the genre to which he now aspires, Chaucer again constructs himself against his Dantean precedent. In canto twenty one, Dante contrasted Virgil’s tragedìa with his own “comedia” (*Inf.*21.2); Chaucer applies this distinction to his own oeuvre, occupying the roles of both the classical and trecento authors and apposing the “tragedy of Troilus with an unnamed future work.”¹⁷

For Patterson, as for Donald Howard and Carolyn Collette, this “future work is surely *The Canterbury Tales,*” the eclectic compilation which, in keeping with medieval pedagogical definitions of comedy, uses a low or mixed style and concentrates on “privatae personae, privatae homines, res privatorum, et humiliate personae.”¹⁸

A sixteenth-century readership could likewise identify *The Canterbury Tales* as Chaucer’s comedy. In his dedicatory letter to Thomas Speght in the 1598 edition of Chaucer’s *Works,* Francis Beaumont, father of the dramatist and member of a Cambridge circle with which Spenser may have been connected, offers this evaluation of Chaucer’s generic and stylistic affiliations: “his Canterbury tales conteine in them almost the same argument that is handled in comedies: his stile therein for the most part is low and

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open…his drifte is to touch all sortes of men.”19 From Beaumont’s perspective The 
Canterbury Tales differs from the canonical Greek and Roman comedies only in its 
unprecedented and commendable originality: “the comedie writers doe all follow and 
borrow one from another,” whereas “Chaucers deuise of his Canterbury pilgrimage is 
merely his owne.” His tragedy is a subject to all poetry, worshipping the feet of the Greek 
and Roman past, but his comedy is its own lawmaker, following nobody but Chaucer 
himself and accomplishing what the Greeks and Romans did not.

Its triumphant narrative notwithstanding, this progressive itinerary is elsewhere 
complicated by Chaucer’s sixteenth-century editors and by Chaucer himself. In all three 
editions of William Thynne, as in the editions of Stow and Speght, the tragedy of Troilus 
seems to have opened up not a direct pathway to comedy but a circuitous mass of 
unfinished business: Troilus is directly followed by the Testament of Cresseid. Written by 
Henryson, but habitually associated with Chaucer in the sixteenth-century, the Testament 
fashions the unresolved narrative elements of Troilus into the matter of a new poem, 
picking up with a Criseyde who has now been deserted by Diomede, stripped of her 
beauty, infected with leprosy and left with no outlet for her sorrows save an impotent 
lament.20 Her lament bulks large in the latter half of the poem, and Thynne, Stow and 
Speght accordingly set it off with a separate section-heading as well as a large running-

19 The Workes of Geffrey Chaucer (London: Adam Islip for G. Bishop, 1598), STC 5077, A5v. For 
Beaumont, his Cambridge circle and Spenser’s potential connection to it, see Stephanie Trigg, Congenial 
Souls: Reading Chaucer from Medieval to Postmodern (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 
2002), 134; and further on students studying Chaucer at Cambridge in the 1560s and 1570s, see David 
Matthews, “Public Ambition, Private Desire and the Last Tudor Chaucer,” in Reading the Medieval in 
Early Modern England, ed. Gordon McMullan and David Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University 
Press, 2007), 80-81.

20 On the association of the Testament with Chaucer, see Kathleen Forni, The Chaucerian Apocrypha: A 
Counterfeit Canon (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001), 106-125. For the literary-historical 
precedents of the Testament’s complaint, see Jamie C. Fumo, “Books of the Duchess: Eleanor Cobham, 
title: “The Complaint of Creseide.” The aspired course from tragedy to comedy has here gone awry and has run, instead, to the plaintive voice of the deserted woman.

The passionate voice of the female complainant also forms the core of the *Legend of Good Women*, the poem that follows Criseyde’s *Testament* in its sixteenth-century editions, and that Chaucer wrote immediately after completing his tragedy. Like the *Testament*, the *Legend* builds on the unfinished business and lingering consequences of the *Troilus*. In his dream-vision, which comprises much of the *Legend’s* Prologue, Chaucer must answer for his *Troilus* along with his translation of the *Roman de la Rose*: an irate god of Love accuses the author of writing heresy against the amorous law and of causing men to wrongfully distrust women. To make amends for his literary transgressions, Chaucer is tasked by the god’s mitigating companion, Queen Alcestis, to perform this strange act of penance:

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Thow shalt, while that thou lyvest, yer by yere,
The moste partye of thy tyme spende
In making of a glorious legend
Of goode wymmen, maydenes and wyves,
That weren trewe in loving al hire lyves;
And telle of false men that hem bytraien
(LGW.F.481-86)
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In lieu of a progression from *Troilus* to the *Tales*, or a variation between tragic and comic subject matter, Chaucer now faces a literary project in which progression and variation are forbidden; his project is, instead, one of a perpetual and iterative accretion, spending the rest of his life, “yer by yere,” amassing more and more stories on the same topic. This assigned compilation of stories stands in direct counterpoint to that comedic compilation,
The *Canterbury Tales*, for which Chaucer had wished, and on which he was actually spending “the moste partye” of his time. One compilation uses a frame narrative to assemble stories of an infinite variety: there, we have narratives of “harlotrie,” or “storial thyng that toucheth gentillesse,” or tales of “moralitee and hoolynesse” (*CT*.I.3179-84). The other uses a frame narrative to assemble stories about a singular event: a good woman is betrayed by a false man.22

When describing these repeated acts of betrayal, Chaucer frequently directs his legends toward the same culminating point: the epistolary complaint. In a finale after the narrative proper, Chaucer reports the letters written, for instance, by Medea as she rues her desertion by the deceptive Jason, by Dido as she makes her “compleynynge” against the false Aeneas, and by Phyllis who “mot compleyne” to the faithless Demophon. As their reporter, Chaucer adopts an equivocal attitude: he positions the complaint as both a necessary and important *telos* toward which his legends are driving and as a tedious burden that can be rapidly bypassed. This double posture is exhibited at the end of the legend of Ariadne. Moved by hatred for a faithless man and pity for a deserted woman, Chaucer turns away from Theseus and a report of his homecoming and toward the titular heroine and her voice of female sorrow. But he has only started to report the substance of this voice when he interrupts it with his own. Addressing her marriage bed “that hast receyved two,” Ariadne exclaims:

‘Thow shalt answere of two, and nat of oon!’

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Where is thy gretter part awey ygon?
Allas! Where shal I, wreche wight, become?
For thogh so be that ship or boot here come,
Hom to my contre dar I nat for drede.
I can myselven in this cas nat rede.’
What shulde I more telle hire compleynyng?
It is so long, it were an hevy thyng.
In hire Epistel Naso telleth al;
But shortly to the ende I telle shal.

(\textit{LGW.2212-21})

Chaucer supplants Ariadne’s line of questioning about the fate of her future with a different question about the content of his poem; the doubtful and multiplying questions that propel a complaint give way, instead, to a blunt and settled question that brings complaint to a halt, “what shulde I more telle hire compleynyng?” According to Chaucer, this sudden stoppage is enabled by the superfluity of his latter-day report: Ariadne’s complaint has already been presented, in all its long and heavy plentitude, by Ovid in the \textit{Heroides}. Given the fullness of Ovid’s account, Chaucer may move swiftly to “the ende” of his legend, which he does with a dizzying rapidity after only six more lines. Both sympathizing with the sorrowful female voice and actively excising it, Chaucer turns to Ariadne’s complaint only to ultimately cut it off and pass the responsibility of its complete transmission to his classical source.

Chaucer pursues a comparable practice of abbreviation in the legend of Dido where, after rehearsing eleven lines from her plaintive epistle, he finally advises the reader “who wol al this letter have in mynde” to “Rede Ovyde, and in hym he shal it fynde” (\textit{LGW.1366-67}); in the legend of Medea where, after recounting a six-line extract from her complaint, he explains that “Ovyde” can ably “hire letter in vers endyte / Which were as now to long for me to wryte” (\textit{LGW.1679-80}); and in the legend of Phyllis where he reports only the elegantly expressed parts of her complaint since “al hire letter,” which
is transcribed in full in *Heroides* II, “wryten I ne may / By order, for it were to me a charge; / Hire letter was right long and thereto large” (*LGW*.2513-15). With his repeated truncation of them, Chaucer identifies these individual legends as parts of a recursive pattern in which the plaintive mode—despite frequent efforts to curtail it—cannot be long discarded: he presents a complaint, abbreviates it and moves quickly beyond it, only to be pulled back to another complaint. The inability to discard complaint exemplifies the larger role of the *Legend* in Chaucer’s literary career. Viewed in relation to the *Legend* and its recursive pattern, the sequence envisioned at the end of the *Troilus* appears as a career trajectory that cannot be immediately realized. Interrupting this direct movement from tragedy to comedy is a cycle of narrativized complaints; his projected progression first gets sidetracked through the indispensable plaintive mode.

The idea of Chaucer’s generic progression, and the effect of complaint on it, may have salient implications for Spenser’s literary career. When initiating his *cursus* in the envoy to the *Calender*, Spenser recalls Chaucer’s announcement of a literary progression in the *Troilus*, sending off the “little booke” that he has just completed and gesturing toward “more” unnamed works that will ultimately follow. To establish the generic and stylistic identity of his present book, Spenser replaces the medieval with the classical, substituting Chaucer’s label of “tragedye” with the initiatory step in the Virgilian progression: pastoral, a type of writing concerned, as he writes in the envoy, with “a shepherds swaine” who sings “All as his straying flocke” feeds (*SC*.Env.9-10). To establish the generic and stylistic identity of those unnamed “more,” Spenser continues along this path, publishing his epic *Faerie Queene* and its Virgilian opening—a course

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which, as “October” suggests, will next assume a supra-Virgilian stature with the love
lyrics of 1595 and the hymns of 1596. Before reaching this track, however, Spenser
returns to Chaucer and refashions an idea from his career. The publications in 1591 may
imitate a function of Chaucerian complaint—its capacity for career diversion—and graft
it onto Spenser’s own progression. For Chaucer, complaint diverts an aspired course from
tragedy to comedy; for Spenser, it diverts a promised course from epic to love lyric. In
this light it seems more than coincidental that his 1591 volume opens with laments from
ten plaintive women, spread across two separate poems: Verlame bemoaning the Ruines
of Time, followed by the Teares of the nine muses divided into nine sections each with
individual running titles. The comparably diversionary Testament and Legend had, in the
Renaissance Chaucer editions, already presented their own sequence of one plus nine, the
latter of which similarly featured nine plaintive accounts set within a larger frame:
Criseyde complaining about her desertion by Diomede, followed by the nine vignettes of
the unfortunate, abused and abandoned heroines. Offering his new sorrowful collection,
the New Poet may match the Old in taking his announced career progression on an
unannounced and plaintive detour.

In the 1591 Daphnäïda—the “coda” to his Complaints—Spenser thus pursues a
twofold imitation of Chaucer.24 He continues to direct his career not along its promised
path but through the diversionary sorrow of a “rufull plaint” (Daph.4), and he uses the
Book of the Duchess as his primary model for it. The imitation of a Chaucerian career
move here coalesces with the imitation of a particular Chaucerian poem. For the scholars
who have studied Daphnäïda, the nature of this latter kind of imitation has played a

24 For the approach of reading Daphnäïda as a fitting “coda” to Complaints, see Rasmussen, “Complaints
and Daphnäïda,” 231.
crucial role. As Duncan Harris and Nancy Steffen, Glenn Steinberg, and Ellen Martin have all observed, Spenser’s rewriting is characterized by a radical transformation in tone: the elegant balance in the *Duchess* between the expression of loss and the recollection of joy, between the generation of pathos and the eruption of humour, becomes in *Daphnaïda* an almost univocal focus on the inescapability of self-consuming sorrow, the hateful condition of our earthly residence and the despicable inconsistency of our heavenly judges.25 Giving voice to this hatred and frustration is the sorrowful Alcyon, a bereaved shepherd who, after much prodding from the poem’s narrator, recounts the tragic death of his young wife, Daphne, and launches into a disdainful and solipsistic complaint about his loss. According to William Oram, George Pigman III and Peter Sacks, this caustic lament represents an excessive grief of which Spenser disapproves, for it undermines the advancement of the mourning process. Once established as the paragon of a problematic excess, for Oram in particular, Alcyon may be treated as a cautionary example to his historical counterpart, Sir Arthur Gorges—a friend of Raleigh and an acquaintance of Spenser who was, as the title-page to *Daphnaïda* suggests, also mourning the tragic death of his young wife, Douglas Howard. Alcyon and his resolution to wallow in perpetual misery are here both an allegory for Gorges and the antimodel that he must transcend.26

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Its substantial cogency notwithstanding, this argument tells only one part of the story. The rest of this chapter tells another part of it by locating a different and hitherto unacknowledged valence for Alcyon’s sorrow. Alcyon and his excessive grief function not just as a foil to be overcome but as a source of uncommon ideas; he offers not simply an antimodel for mourning but a model for history. In voicing his sorrow, I argue here, Alcyon articulates a way of connecting the past and the present that does not rely on structures of genealogy. This extra-genealogical connection offers an alternative to two lines of “lineal descent” which comprise the poem’s background: the family tree stemming from the Howard / Gorges clan, and the poetic tree stemming the father of English poetry.

To advance this argument, I revisit an idea first developed by Donald Cheney in 1983. According to Cheney, Daphnaïda generates an intertextual connection not only with the Duchess, but also with the Metamorphoses, the eleventh book of which provides both the reading material for Chaucer’s bibliophilic dreamer and the namesake—Alcyone—for Spenser’s plaintive protagonist. The significance of this shared name lies, for Cheney, in its literary-historical connection with transcendence: in Ovid’s version of her story, Alcyone is distraught after her husband’s death, but she can ultimately overcome her sorrow through her avian transformation. In Cheney’s analysis, this Ovidian metamorphosis lends a degree of optimism to the end of Spenser’s poem. Like his namesake, the seemingly inconsolable Alcyon may too find a reprieve for his grief.27

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Oram is wisely skeptical of this argument, observing that such optimism ignores the
depiction of Spenser’s Alcyon throughout the poem as well as the interpretations of
Ovid’s Alcyone in the sixteenth century. For many of Spenser’s contemporaries, Alcyone
was defined not by her capacity for transcendence but for her plaintiveness and
helplessness.\textsuperscript{28} I recall this critical debate here to adopt a middle way in it: I follow Oram
in rejecting the specific details of Cheney’s argument, but I follow Cheney in adopting
the general literary historical premise by which he developed it. In \textit{Daphnaïda}, Spenser
does indeed draw on the \textit{Metamorphoses}, but he owes this debt not to its depiction of
transcendence but to its representation of a grave.

With the final words of her complaint, Ovid’s Alcyone imagines the writing on
her own future tomb. Spenser’s Alcyon follows suit, also using his last plaintive words to
anticipate the future: he envisions a time when various pilgrims will pass by his grave
and read the dolorous lays inscribed on it. By constructing it against his Ovidian
background, Spenser fashions this latter grave into what Robert R. Edwards would call a
poetic emblem: a “self-reflexive statement about poetic art” and its place in a literary
tradition.\textsuperscript{29} Herein rests a model of history, and one that deviates from a central paradigm
by which poetic relationships are often organized. The grave in \textit{Daphnaïda} represents a
transhistorical connection, linking Chaucerian and Spenserian poetry, that involves not a
genealogical but a tactile metaphor. This connection, and the poetic imitation that bears it


\textsuperscript{29} Robert R. Edwards, \textit{The Dream of Chaucer: Representation and Reflection in the Early Narratives}
to and builds on Robert W. Hanning, “Poetic Emblems in Medieval Narrative Texts,” in \textit{Vernacular
Poetics in the Middle Ages}, ed. Lois Ebin (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute, 1984), 1-32.
out, figure here less as the descent from a father to his child and more as the touch between past and present.

By developing this kind of touch, Spenser implicates his Chaucer in yet another form of mediation. The mediating force is now an idea from Ovid, which provides Spenser with the precedent for a tactile relationship between the words on a grave. In his hands this Ovidian hint becomes the means to represent his connection with Chaucerian poetry. Spenser mediates his Chaucer by using a reading of the classical past to shape his bond with the medieval past. It is to these classical and medieval pasts that we now turn.

III: Monument and Metamorphosis: Alcyone in Ovid and Chaucer

Having witnessed the transformation of his violent brother into a hawk and the solidification of a similarly violent wolf into a stone, Ceyx, son of Lucifer, King of Trachis and husband of Alcyone, decides to visit Apollo’s temple at Claros, hoping to find council and comfort after these disturbing events. His plan for this maritime voyage launches a captivating narrative about separated lovers and their marital devotion which, as classicists have long recognized, holds a key place in the organizational structure of the Metamorphoses: it culminates the important thematic block, stretching across six books, about “the pathos of love,” and it may even serve as an “alternative ending for the Metamorphoses as a whole.”30 The question of endings is, I would add, thematized in the tale itself, which presents at least two possible conclusions, both of which are organized around the idea of touch. In the first, an ending especially pertinent to our Spenserian context, Alcyone passionately laments her husband’s untimely death and anticipates her

30 The quotations are from, respectively, Brooks Otis, Ovid as an Epic Poet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 263; and Philip Hardie, Ovid’s Poetics of Illusion (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 259.
own, resigning her life without resigning her connection to Ceyx, “I shall neither struggle,” she exclaims:

\[
\text{nec te, miserande, relinquam et tibi nunc saltem veniam comes, inque sepulcro si non urna, tamen iunget nos littera: si non ossibus ossa meis, at nomen nomine tangam. (Met.XI.704-7)}
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(Nor shall I leave you, my poor husband. Now at least I shall come to be your companion; and if not the entombed urn, at least the lettered stone shall join us; if not your bones with mine, still shall I touch you, name with name.)

Envisioning her own epitaph, Alcyone predicts that the written word may supplement two desires that had been previously frustrated. When Ceyx was preparing to depart on his maritime voyage, Alcyone begged him to take her with him, so that they could “endure whatever comes…together” (“patiar…pariterque…quicquid erit”) (XI. 441-3). This wish to stay alongside Ceyx, which he denied when she first made it, is here pursued in a different manner: Alcyone now plans to join her husband not in a ship at sea but in the letters on their shared tomb. Similarly, when Morpheus assumed the guise of Ceyx and appeared in her chamber, Alcyone had reached out and tried to touch him. This wish for contact with her husband, which eluded her in the bedroom, is here too pursued in a different fashion: she now plans to touch not his hand in their bed but his name on their epitaph. The polyptotonic syntax of Ovid’s verse represents the particular kind of touch that Alcyone here imagines: “nomen nomine tangam.”\(^{31}\) This touch will be a metaphorical one, generated through spatial proximity and able to bridge the blank space between their contiguous names.

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\(^{31}\) The importance of polyptoton in Ovid’s verse is described by D.E. Hill, ed. *Ovid: Metamorphoses IX-XII* (Westminster: Aris & Phillips, 1999), 136.
In its supplementary capacity, this metaphorical touch moves Alcyone and her story beyond a series of poetic precedents. When she thinks she sees Ceyx at her bedside and tries to touch him literally, the dreaming Alcyone “groaned tearfully, stirred her arms in sleep and, seeking his body, held only air in her embrace” (“ingemit…lacrimans, motatque lacertos / per somnum corpusque petens amplexituras”) (Met.II.674-75). Her disappointed grasp finds its most proximate forerunner in the previous book of the Metamorphoses, where Orpheus, looking back at Eurydice and seeing her slip into the underworld, frantically extends himself for her hand, but finds only “yielding air” (“cedentes…auras”) (Met.X.58-59). Farther back in the literary tradition, though with equal vivacity, Alcyone’s tearful situation also evokes books two and six of the Aeneid, where Aeneas fruitlessly tries to touch the shades of Creusa and Anchises, each “phantom / sifting through his fingers, / light as wind, quick as a dream in flight” (Aen.II.984-86;VI.809-11); book eleven of the Odyssey, where Odysseus reaches out in vain for the soul of Antikleia, which “fluttered out of” his “hands like a shadow / or a dream” (Ody.XI.207-08); and book twenty-three of the Iliad, where Achilles piteously grasps at the spirit of Patroklos, which vanishes “underground, like vapor” (Iliad.XXXIII.100). For Ovid, Alcyone’s initial recapitulation of this literary-historical pattern is prelude to the provision of an alternative for it. On her tomb, Alcyone will seek the longed-for yet traditionally disappointed touch not in a physical body but in the written word. If one kind of touch has repeatedly yielded nothing save fleeting air, Ovid and Alcyone will instead locate another kind of touch in the realm of perdurable letters.

Ovid also constructs these monumental letters against the precedent set by his *Heroides*. The earlier poem, we will recall, is a compilation of and about “litterae,” where the word signifies the variously tearful, anticipatory and hostile epistles sent between separated or jilted lovers. Like the message inscribed on Alcyone’s hypothetical grave, this other kind of “littera” similarly appeals to the sense of touch. So when Leander longingly writes to his beloved Hero, he predicts that this “happy letter” (felix…littera) will gain a sensual connection with his lady: “soon she will reach forth for thee her beautiful hand. Perchance thou wilt even be touched by her approaching lips as she seeks to break thy bands with her snowy tooth” (“iam tibi formosam porriget illa manum. / forsitan admotis etiam tangere labellis, / rumpere dum niveo vincula dente volet”)

(*Her.XVIII.16-18*). The letter functions as a textual simulacrum for the desire he cannot consummate in person. Separated only by the turbulent Hellespont, Leander is so close to Hero that, as he puts it: “I can almost touch her with my hand, so near is she I love; but oft, alas! this ‘almost’ starts my tears!” (“paene manu quod amo, tanta est vicinia, tango; / saepe sed, heu, lacrimas hoc mihi ‘paene’ movet!”) (*Her.XVIII.179-80*). If not with his corporeal hand, Leander will instead receive his touch through the metonymic form of his letter, the product of his “right hand… upon the sheet” (“cum charta dextra”)

(*Her.XVIII.20*). Alcyone recalls these ideas from the *Heroides*, again using a “littera” to simulate a touch, but she shifts the locus of contact from an epistle to an inscription, from lips touching a letter to name touching name. No longer between a living reader and a textual simulacrum, the projected touch is now imagined entirely through written words. Rather than touching his letter, Alcyone touches Ceyx in letters.
The epitaph, the site of this touch, may well expand another model from the *Heroides*. On several occasions the plaintive heroines use their final words to envision the writing on their tombs. Hypermnestra ends her complaint by telling Lynceus to engrave a “brief epitaph” on her “sepulcher” (“titulo…sepulcra brevi”) (*Her*.XIV 128), Dido finishes her epistle by wishing two lines of “verse” inscribed on her “marble monument” (“tumuli marmore carmen”) (*Her*.VII.194-95), and Phyllis concludes her letter to Demophon with this plan for textual posterity:

Inscribere meo causa invidiosa sepulcro.
aut hoc aut simili carmine notus eris:
phyllida demophoon leto dedit hospes amantem;
ille necis causam praebuit, ipsa manum


(On my tomb shall you be inscribed the hateful cause of my death. By this, or by some similar verse, shall you be known: Demophoon ‘twas sent Phyllis to her doom; / her guest was he, she loved him well. / He was the cause that brought her death to pass; / her own the hand by which she fell.)

The end of her letter implicitly coincides with the end of her life, as Phyllis uses the same “manum”—literally her last word—both to finish writing her epitaph and to kill herself.

She organizes her epitaph’s penultimate line with some equally devastating syntax. In its sequence Demophon is right next to Phyllis (“phyllida demophoon”), an arrangement that ironically represents precisely what he refused to preserve in life: his stable and permanent proximity to his sometime lover. Alcyone, whose husband also sailed away, though for dramatically different reasons, builds on Phyllis’ lead, drawing out the hint of her epitaph while turning it to a new purpose. In her imagined future, Alcyone and

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Ceyx replace Phyllis and Demophon as the paired names on a tomb, but this proximity will now valourize the heroine’s continued bond with her husband instead of branding it in infamy. By projecting this inscribed connection, Alcyone outlines a potential conclusion for her story, and one to which Ovid had previously made recourse. Like his Phyllis, Dido and Hypermnestra, Ovid’s Alcyone envisions her epitaph at the same moment she stops her complaint. After the tomb the rest is silence, or so it appears: “Grief checked further speech” (“plura dolor prohibit verboque”) (Met.XI.708).

But yet the end is not. Despite their seemingly conclusive force, the epitaph’s letters stand neither as Alcyone’s sole legacy, nor as her story’s definitive statement on the forms of touch. Unlike Dido, Phyllis and Hypermnestra in the Heroides, Alcyone goes beyond the symbolic finality of the grave and continues her story, waking up the next morning, leaving her palace, and travelling to the seashore from which Ceyx departed. There, she sees a man’s body bobbing on the waves, soon realizes that it is actually her dead husband, and as she is anxiously rushing toward him, transforms into a bird. Her marital devotion survives her physical metamorphosis. Just before she loses her human form, Alcyone extends her “trembling hands” (“trementes / manus”) (Met.XI.726-27) toward Ceyx’s corpse; as a bird she pursues the same passionate impulse, wrapping her newly-generated wings around his body and kissing his lifeless lips with her newfound beak (Met.XI.736-38). Though these touches are cold and hard, Ceyx, as Ovid insists, does indeed feel them. And the gods feel them too: they show pity for this lamentable display of affection by giving Ceyx an avian form as well (Met.XI.740-42). As the Halcyon birds, the lovers are triumphantly and finally united, gaining a reprieve from death, sustaining their marriage and perpetuating themselves across time by
producing copious offspring. This final sequence thereby provides two counterpoints to
the ideas Alcyone envisioned through her grave. At her story’s second ending, she now
touches not her husband’s name but his lips; she now joins with him not through
memorial lettering but through generative lovemaking. The connective power that
Alcyone predicatively assigned to a monument is instead granted by a metamorphosis.

When Chaucer recounts this story at the opening of his Book of the Duchess, he
takes up the question of closure, imposing yet another and earlier ending on Alcyone, and
omitting both the potentially conclusive Ovidian monument and the properly conclusive
Ovidian metamorphosis. Here is the context: beset by an unexplained and debilitating
sorrow that prevents him from sleeping, the Chaucerian narrator decides to pass his night
by reading a book, a “romaunce” full of “fables / That clerkes had in olde tyme, / And
other poetes, put in rime,” wherein he finds a wonderful account of Ceyx and Alcyone
(BD.52-54). The narrator’s bibliographic description suggests that this tale has a basis in
both the original Ovidian narrative and the latter-day mediations of it: though written in
the “olde tyme” of ancient pagan culture when “men loved the lawe of kinde” (BD.56),
the story is versified not in dactylic hexameter but in some form of rhyme, and it may
thereby garner its implicitly vernacular label of “romaunce” (BD.48).34 The dual
affiliations of the book are here an emblem of Chaucer’s creative process: he crafts his
version of the story with eclectic recourse to the Latin of Metamorphoses XI and to
Machaut’s French redaction of it in La Fonteinne Amoreuse, while also incorporating

34 The specifically vernacular associations of “romaunce” are mentioned by Ernst Robert Curtius, European
Press, 2013), 31-2; and Deanne Williams, The French Fetish from Chaucer to Shakespeare (Cambridge:
Cambridge University Press, 2004), 23. But see also the partial qualification of these associations in Paul
Strohm, “Storie, Spelle, Geste, Romaunce, Tragedie: Generic Distinctions in the Middle English Troy
supplementary interpretations of Ovid from Statius’ *Thebaid* and the anonymous *Ovide Moralisé.* Like Spenser with Chaucer in *The Shepheardes Calender*, Chaucer in the *Duchess* treats a distant predecessor—here, Ovid—less as an isolated author than as a node in literary history, engaging and reworking his poetic corpus itself as well as its reception history.

Though he is of a piece with Machaut in substantially condensing the unusually long Ovidian narrative, Chaucer veers from his French precursor in the extent, nature and self-consciousness of his poetic economy. Having already announced his plan “to tellen shortly” (*BD*.68) and to eliminate textual details for which there is “no nede” (*BD*.190), the Chaucerian narrator caps off his pathetic story with a spectacularly bathetic excision. Prompted by Juno’s unprecedented command, Morpheus enters Ceyx’s dead body, conveys it to Alcyone, and adopting the voice of the zombified King, tells her for “certes” that he is dead, that she should bury his body, and that she should “let be [her] sorwful lyf,” before finally offering the lamentable aphorism, “To lytel whyle oure blysse lasteth”:

> With that hir eyen up she casteth  
> And saw noght. ‘Allas!’ quod she for sorwe,  
> And deyede within the thridde morwe.  
> But what she sayede more in that swow  
> I may not telle yow as now;  
> Hyt were to longe for to dwelle.  
> (*BD* 212-17)

The narrator seems to have translated Ceyx’s aphorism into metafictional terms while inverting its object: where Ceyx and Alcyone had too little time for joy, the Chaucerian

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narrator now has precious little time for sorrow. Like Machaut, for whom this story is also inset within a larger frame and is there told by an amorous knight, the Chaucerian narrator excises Alcyone’s passionate complaint, including her plan for a grave and her epitaphic touch with Ceyx. But unlike Machaut’s Knight, he also omits the joyful sequel in which Alcyone rejoins Ceyx through their avian metamorphoses.  

The phonic connection between lines 213-14 condenses Chaucer’s distance from the Ovidian tradition into a rhyme. In Ovid, the “morwe” after “sorwe” brings a blissful reunion; in Chaucer, the morrow brings only Alcyone’s death.

This newly catastrophic ending, eliminating a metamorphosis easily and habitually subjected to Christian allegorization, has elicited substantial commentary: diverse critics have diversely deemed it a signal of the narrator’s narcissism and interpretive limitations, an indication of Chaucer’s proto-modern secular humanism, or a manifestation of his English literalism and its resistance to theoretical French figuration.  

These assessments may well all be correct, but they are at least partially

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36 For the Ceyx and Alcyone story in Machaut, see The Fountain of Love (La Fonteinne Amoreuse) and Two Other Love Vision Poems, ed. and trans. R. Barton Palmer (New York: Garland, 1993), lines 539-698. The most thorough comparison of Machaut’s Alcyone-story with Chaucer’s is Edwards, The Dream of Chaucer, 74-82.

limited by their comparative methodology, discussing *Metamorphoses* XI and its subsequent redactions, but not the poem that I have argued lies behind it: the *Heroides*. Chaucer cultivates a link between Alcyone and Ovid’s heroines when, in the metafictional introduction to his tale, the Man of Law remembers a “Chaucer” who’s churned out more female love-complaints “than Ovide made mencioun / In his Episteles” (*CT*.II.54-55), and then cites Alcyone as the first example to prove the point. Here, Alcyone heads a catalogue of epistolary women like Dido, Phyllis and Ariadne from the “Seintes Legende of Cupide” (*CT*.II.61), a retroactive association already well supported by the abrupt ending of her story in the *Duchess*. “But what she sayde more in that swo / I may not telle yow as now; / Hyt were to longe for to dwelle” (*BD*.215-17), the Chaucerian narrator flatly declares, anticipating with Alcyone the form of curt dismissal afforded to a plaintive woman like Phyllis in the *Heroides*-inspired *Legend*: “But al hire letter wryten I ne may / By order, for it were to me a charge; / Hire letter was ryght long and therto large” (*LGW*.2512-15).

With this alignment Chaucer draws out what was implicit for Ovid, the poet of *Metamorphoses* XI who had himself already constructed Alcyone in comparison with his earlier heroines. Separated from her love, complaining about her loss, yearning for death and envisioning her tomb, Alcyone there threatens to become another member in a recursive pattern of suffering most obviously exemplified by Dido and Phyllis. Whereas Ovid finally transcends the *Heroides* in *Metamorphoses* XI, going beyond its recursive pattern by granting Alcyone her avian transformation, Chaucer reverses the triumphant process and reads backward through the Ovidian corpus. Isolated, distraught and perhaps even committing suicide, Chaucer’s Alcyone does not move past the pattern of the
*Heroides* but offers another species of it.\(^{38}\) In this respect, what we normally call Chaucer’s omission of the Ovidian metamorphosis might equally be called his *recursus* to an earlier Ovidian *fontes*, pushing Alcyone back toward the source—the *Heroides*—from which she had formerly emerged.

But this *recursus* brings its own omissions. Chaucer also treats Alcyone like the Ovidian heroines as they will be reimagined in his *Legend*, cutting them off before they have given full voice to their complaints, and injecting a different voice in their stead. In place of Alcyone’s sorrow in the *Duchess*, the narrator explains:

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My first matere I wil yow telle,
Wherfore I have told this thynge
Of Alcione and Seys the kyng,
For thus moche dar I saye wel:
I had be dolven everydel
And ded, right thurgh defaute of slep,
Yif I ne had red and take kep
Of this tale next before.
(BD 218-225)
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The common Middle English collocation between “ded” and “dolven” here assumes an uncommon significance, picking up and refiguring several rejected ideas from the Ovidian material that precedes it.\(^{39}\) With grammatical legerdemain, the Chaucerian narrator shifts Ceyx’s declarative and imperative statements into the conditional mood. If the Thracian King informs Alcyone of his death and instructs her to bury his body, the narrator proposes a similar fate for himself only to belie it with a subsequent conjunction:

“*I had be dolven everydel / And ded… yif I ne had red and take kep / of this tale.*”

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this conditional construction, the narrator also condenses traces from the two endings of Ovid’s original story in which Alcyone first envisions her own death and burial before gaining a reprieve in her metamorphosis. The Chaucerian narrator replays this pattern in a single sentence, predicting the potentially fatal consequences of his insomnia and then cancelling them with help from his fortunate reading experience. What happened to Alcyone in Ovid, avoiding a seemingly unavoidable death, now happens to Chaucer’s narrator through her story.

Chaucer supports this association between Alcyone and his narrator by generating various additional points of contact between them. When the narrator cuts off Alcyone’s complaint, he actually recapitulates a practice that he has already applied to himself. Just as he turns away from Alcyone and her sorrow because “my first mater I wil yow telle,” he similarly abridges his own distressful story about the eight-year sickness, insisting that “our first mater is good to keep” (BD.43). Along with his abridged complaint, the narrator also shares with Alcyone—however much in jest—her pragmatic discipleship to Juno. Alcyone pledges a sacrifice to the goddess in return for a dream confirming Ceyx’s fate, and having read about it, the narrator follows her lead. He receives the first matter of his dream only after he has likewise prayed to “Morpheus / Or hys goddesse, dame Juno” (BD.242-43) for sleep, and has similarly promised her a gift so “that she shal holde hir payd” (BD.269). Fittingly, when the narrator suddenly falls asleep, his prostrate body lands “ryght upon” his Ovidian “book” (BD.274). Already

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sharing several characteristics with Alcyone, he now shares with her a physical location:
he has been literally inserted among the pages of her story.

The narrator’s subsequent dream extends this network of connections in the
person of the Black Knight. Though he represents John of Gaunt on the level of historical
allegory, bewailing the premature death of his beloved Blanche, the despairing Knight
also seems both a projection of the narrator’s distressed condition and a mirror image of
Alcyone’s sorrowful state: whereas Alcyone faces the sudden and tragic death of her
husband, the Black Knight bewails the sudden and tragic death of his wife.41 But the
Knight adds an extra component to this pattern of suffering since he is afforded the
opportunity to do precisely what Alcyone and the narrator were not: give full and
unabridged voice to a grievous complaint. Near the start of his dream, the narrator
follows a single “whelp,” likely one of the hunting dogs from Octavian’s retinue, into a
grove lush with flowers and trees where he sees the solitary Knight sitting under an oak.
Without being observed, the narrator approaches this handsome youth and hears him
speak “a rym” of “compleynte to himselve” *(BD.464-65).* “Ful wel I kan / Reherse hyt,”
the previously economical narrator reports:

> ‘I have of sorwe so gret won
> That joye gete I never non,
> Now that I see my lady bryght,
> Which I have loved with al my myght,
> Is fro me ded and ys agoon.

41 For these relationships and the poem’s “triptych” structure, see Helen Phillips, “Structure and
Consolation in the *Book of the Duchess*,” *ChR* 16 (1981): 109, who suggests that the individual stories “are
all so shaped and molded in the telling that they present the same pattern, the same shape of experience, to
the reader.” The allegorical link between Gaunt and the Black Knight has been current in Chaucerian
scholarship since at least *The Woorkes of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. Thomas Speght (London: Adam Islip,
1602), STC 5080, Rr.1r, where a headnote to the poem explains: “By the person of a mourning knight
sitting vnder an Oke, is meant Iohn of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, greatly lamenting the death of one whom
hee entirely loued, supposed to be Blanche the Duchess.”
At the opening of his poem’s second stanza, the Knight repeats and goes beyond the point at which Alcyone had been earlier cut off. Where she was allowed only a fitful and terminal “alas,” he now uses the same exclamation to propel six more lines of verse: “Allas, deth, what ayleth the…” These lines, though they are probably not held up as a model of excellent poetry, are nevertheless rich in rhetorical schemes and phonic effects. The Knight addresses death with an apostrophe and a rhetorical question; develops it through the polyptotonic doubling of “taken” and “toke” and “good” and “goodnesse” as well as the anaphoric, parallel and asyndetonic sequence of “so fair, so fresh, so free, so good”; then finally couples his repeated intensifier with an internal rhyme on “no.” The stylistic fertility of these lines signals a new connection between grief and the expression of it: loss, sorrow and death here lead not to the external imposition of silence but to the creative production of ornamental, memorial art.

The rest of the dream is driven by a similarly memorializing impulse. After the Knight finishes his formal complaint, the narrator continues to eschew his waking concern with verbal economy: he draws the sorrowful youth into a lengthy conversation about the past, and encourages him to fully unfold the causes of his woe. As Phillipa Hardman has persuasively demonstrated, this poeticized conversation resembles several contemporary modes of cultural production, which had likewise tried to aestheticize and memorialize Blanche’s short life and John’s grief over her death. Chief among them is
the elaborately ornamented tomb, complete with “life-sized portrait effigies,” that John commisioned for himself and his wife shortly after her death in 1369, and that Henry Yevele constructed in 1374. Adorning Old Saint Paul’s Cathedral until its destruction in London’s 1666 Great Fire, the tomb memorializes life and loss through its “idealized portrait image” of Blanche, which remembers her as the paragon of feminine beauty, and its “canopied arcading” and accompanying “niches,” which create a space for the still-living mourners to express their grief—effects analogously achieved in the Duchess by the Knight’s rhetorically-stylized and nearly iconic representation of the fair White, and his pitiful effort to solidify himself into the living “image of sorrow.”

The analogy runs even deeper. In a passage that Hardman does not discuss, the Knight describes the years of his carefree and idle youth with this striking simile, the vehicle for which fuses at least two modes of artistic production:

Paraunter I was therto most able,
As a whit wal or a table,
For hit ys redy to cacche and take
Al that men wil theryn make,
Whethir so men wil portreye or peynte,
Be the werkes never so queynte.

(BD 779-84)

Familiar from Aristotle and the Stoics through Ockham and Aquinas, and likely derived directly here from Machaut’s Remede de Fortune, the connection between human cognition and a blank slate ready for inscription may well accrete some new meanings in

the context of Chaucer’s *Duchess*. The poem’s aim at a sort of funerary monumentalization helps activate a specific denotation of “table” in which the word signifies the part of a tomb that bears a written message. So in the fourth book of the *Confessio Amantis*, Gower’s Genius recounts the story of Iphis and his unrequited love for Araxarathen, explaining that, after his untimely death, survivors monumentalized the passionate youth in an “epitaphe,” the “letters graven in a table / Of marbre were and seiden thus: ‘Hier lieth, which slowh himself, Iphis / For love of Araxarathen” (*CA*.IV.3672-75; my emphasis). Araxarathen herself, who pitilessly rejected his affection, has already been metamorphosed into a fittingly flinty stone—a material form she now shares with Iphis on the stone table of his tomb. In his simile the Black Knight pairs the “table,” a surface able to accept a similarly inscribed epitaph, with a second surface that invites the inscription of poetry. The painted “wal” here evokes the opening episode of the narrator’s dream in which he finds himself in a dazzling chamber where “alle the walles with colours fyne / Were peynted, both text and glose, / Of al the Romaunce of the Rose” (*BD*.332-34)—a textualized space where the wall is designed to “cacche and take” the record of a literary tradition and its reception history.

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The same collocation between “wal” and “table” reappears soon after in Chaucer’s corpus, and there similarly aligns the representation of poetry with the engraving of a tomb. Near the start of the *House of Fame*, Geffrey dreams that he has entered a decorated temple of glass in which he sees the opening lines of Virgil’s epic *Aeneid* inscribed and translated into more modest English: “I fond that on a *wal* there was / Thus writen on a *table* of bras: / ‘I wol now synge, yf I kan, / The armes and also the man…’” (*HF*.I.141-44; my emphasis). With this ekphrastic depiction of the Troy story, Chaucer intends to recall not only his earlier *Duchess*, which presented Benoit’s version of the Trojan matter on stained glass windows, but also Dante’s *Purgatorio* and the comparable ekphrasis in its twelfth canto. There, sculpted into a roadway, the pilgrim beholds “Troy in ashes and in caverns” (“Troia in cenere e in caverne”) (*Prg*.XII.61), a painful image that to him resembles “le tombe” set above the dead, “in order that there be memory of them” (“perché di lor memoria sia”) (*Prg*.XII.16-17). Building on his Dantean precedent, Chaucer in the *House of Fame* makes the inscription of a poetic Trojan past also bear the epitaph of its death: “First sawgh I the destruction / Of Troye…” (*HF*.I.151).

This linguistic evidence, attesting the potential meanings for an inscribed “wal or table,” suggests that the Knight’s simile works on two levels of comparison. In a rhetorical capacity, it may align the Knight’s cognitive development with a process of indiscriminate inscription, and thus perhaps with an immature intellecction which injudiciously receives all sense impressions as “ylyche good” (*BD*.803). But on a metafictional level, the simile enables a comparison between the various art forms its

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vehicle evokes, between poetic inscription and epitaphic inscription. In other words, the vehicle of his simile may itself present the interart analogy that connects the Duchess to its historical context. Like the “wal or table” and the twin forms of poetic and epitaphic writing they can receive, the Duchess also links two types of memorial work, producing the monumental poem for White and her husband as an analogy to the monumental tomb for Blanche and John.

These various forms of memorial representation also link the Knight and his dead love to the literary-historical precedent outlined in the narrator’s reading material. As I have argued, the story of Ceyx and Alcyone from Metamorphoses XI offers two potential endings, respectively represented by Alcyone’s predicative inscription on her grave, and by her triumphant transformation into a bird. Chaucer removes both of them when recounting the story itself, but in the subsequent dream, he may recall the former Ovidian ending and draw some ideas from it. In the Knight’s recollection of his early years, Chaucer suggests an internal locus for Alcyone’s formerly external inscription. Epitaphic writing, once imagined by the sorrowful Queen as an inscription on her literal tomb, is now part of a figurative inscription on the Knight’s self. Befitting this newly figurative context, Chaucer resignifies diction from Ovid’s initial conclusion, and assigns a freshly metonymic meaning to his key word “littera.” No longer the plaintive epistle of a deserted woman or the written signs on a grave, the “littera” (Eng. letter) here denotes the knowledge impressed on the table of the Knight’s youthful mind: his “letre” is “love,” a “craft” that he diligently cultivates for the rest of his life (BD.788-91). We have moved from the shapes of alphabetic characters to the shaping of human character.
Chaucer further reinvents the first Ovidian ending when he aligns the *Duchess* with analogous forms of funerary art. Like Alcyone imagining her own death, the *Duchess* links two separated lovers through a monument instead of a metamorphosis: the tomb on which Alcyone can touch Ceyx, name with name, becomes in Chaucer the tomb-like poem commemorating Blanche’s death and John’s grief. What the *Duchess* had once simply omitted is now refigured: if Chaucer initially cuts out the first conclusion from *Metamorphoses* XI, he implicitly redistributes its commitment to inscription and monumentality in the latter half of his poem. As we will see in the next section, Spenser goes beyond his English predecessor by reimagining Alcyone’s grave in a much more explicit fashion, though with equally metafictional intentions: in *Daphnaïda*, her namesake’s tomb provides the surface on which a rewriting of Chaucer may be inscribed.

### IV: Grave Matters: Literary Genealogy and Transhistorical Touch in *Daphnaïda*

When he rewrites both Chaucer and Ovid in *Daphnaïda*, Spenser extends an *ars combinatoria* that he had previously developed in his 1590 *Faerie Queene*. There, in the first canto of the Legend of Holiness, Archimago connives to deceive the Red Cross Knight and inflame an unchaste passion in him. The vile enchanter instructs an evil spirit to visit the cave of Morpheus and bring back a dream about lust. Spenser represents this cavernous residence by drawing primarily on *Metamorphoses* XI, which similarly describes the house of Sleep immediately before Morpheus emerges from it, assumes Ceyx’s shape, and appears to Alcyone in a dream. But Spenser also enriches his Ovidian imitation with supplementary ideas drawn from Virgil in *Aeneid* VI as well as from
Chaucer and his redaction of *Metamorphoses XI* in the *Duchess*. In Ovid, as in Arthur Golding’s Elizabethan English translation of him, the house of Sleep is silent save for the sound of Lethean water, which flows from the bottommost rock (“saxo…ab imo”) through the depths of the cave (*Met*.XI.602). In Chaucer, by contrast, the water lacks these specifically Lethean origins and produces its soothing sound only after an explicit change in elevation, “rennynge fro the clyves adoun” (*BD*.161). On these points Spenser follows the revisionary Chaucer instead of Ovid himself. In book one, the water lulling Morpheus into his sleepy stupor also lacks a Lethean provenance, and runs from a high elevation to a low: “A trickling streame from high rocke tumbling downe” (*FQ*.I.i.41.2).

Like *The Faerie Queene*, *Daphnaïda* again blends *Metamorphoses XI* with the *Book of the Duchess*, but reverses the relationship of priority between them. In 1590, Ovid was the base text into which Spenser incorporated mediating details from the latter-day Chaucer; in 1591, Chaucer now provides the chief model of imitation, while his predecessor Ovid offers the supplementary ideas to enrich and reshape it. With *The Faerie Queene* and *Daphnaïda*, Spenser illustrates the now-familiar idea of how the medieval mediates the classical. But he also exhibits the less common and temporally counterintuitive concept of how the classical could retroactively mediate the medieval.

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Daphnaïda is at once an imitative repetition of, and an inventive response to, the Book of the Duchess, presenting another instance of grief and loss, while arranging it within a new structure and system of character development. Spenser fuses the waking and dreaming frames of his predecessor’s poem, naming his bereaved male complainant after the female protagonist in Chaucer’s reading material, and assigning him a lament that recycles phrases from the Black Knight. Formerly two figures connected by their similarly sorrowful situations, Alcyone and the Man in Black now comprise a single, composite character: Alcyon, the shepherd whose vocation also links him to the pastoral community and plaintive eclogues of Spenser’s Calendar. Like Chaucer’s Black Knight, Spenser’s Alcyon mourns the death of his wife in a formal and highly-stylized complaint, which for him unfolds in seven, clearly demarcated sections, the first six of which recur to the refrain “Weepe Shepheard weepe to make my vndersong” (Daphnaïda 245, 294, 343, 392, 441, 490). Like Alcyone, Spenser’s distraught shepherd focalizes a meditation about endings, which is now pursued in the complaint’s seventh section when the refrain assumes a newly terminal import: “Cease Shepheard, cease, and end thy vndersong” (Daphnaïda 539).

In using this revised refrain to mark Alcyon’s final words, Spenser reaches back beyond Chaucer to his classical precedent in Ovid. Like his namesake in Metamorphoses XI, Spenser’s Alcyon similarly stops his complaint by envisioning his own death, imagining his grave and contemplating the writing inscribed on it—an ending through which Spenser makes explicit what had been implicit and displaced in his predecessors. Whereas Chaucer excised the Ovidian grave and only registered its concern with monumentality elsewhere and indirectly, Spenser remakes it into the culminating and
conspicuously prominent emblem of his poem. And whereas Ovid had finally
transcended Alcyone’s monument with her avian metamorphosis, Spenser reinstates the
former and seemingly premature conclusion as a significant end in itself. *Pace* Donald
Cheney, Spenser evokes Alcyone not primarily to imply the consoling optimism of her
second ending but to recuperate the unrealized creative potential of the tomb that
preceded it. Such potential lies in Ovid’s suggestion that epitaphic writing has the
capacity for touch: “nomen nomine tangam.”

Having thoroughly cursed the transitory state of worldly life, Spenser’s Alcyon
caps off his lament with appeals to a variety of groups, which he addresses in six
anaphorically structured stanzas (“and ye…and ye”), the last of which entreats:

> ye poore Pilgrimes, that with restlesse toyle
> Wearie your selues in wandring desert wayes,
> Till that you come, where ye your vowes assoyle,
> When passing by ye read these wofull layes
> On my graue written, rue my *Daphnes* wrong,
> And mourne for me that languish out my dayes:
> Cease Shepheard, cease, and end thy vndersong.
> (*Daph*.533-39)

For his grave and its epitaph, Alcyon imagines readers who are future versions of
himself: like his envisioned audience, Alcyon is too a pilgrim, wandering restlessly on his
pilgrimage, worshipping his saint, Daphne, and delivering prayers in her honour. The
religiously inflected terms with which Alcyon associates his readership have a pertinent
connection to the sense of touch. Traditionally, at least before the Reformation, an
English pilgrim would visit a gravesite with the probable intention of venerating a saintly
shrine and its accompanying relics. Much of this process was geared toward “tactile
piety” with pilgrims aiming to make physical contact with a manifestation of the divine
on earth, and to reap the bodily and spiritual benefits arising from it. Thomas of Monmouth remembers a pilgrim in Norwich who touched the tomb of little Saint William and regained her abilities to see and walk; Benedict of Peterborough recalls countless pilgrims in Canterbury who kissed the tomb of Thomas Becket and hoped to cure their various ailments; and an anonymous medieval reporter describes a pilgrim in Hereford who touched the tomb of Thomas de Cantilupe and curbed the swelling in his neck.

Like the practitioners of this devotion, their detractors and opponents were equally attuned to the relationship between pilgrimage and touch. When Henry VIII officially abolished pilgrim shrines, for example, the reformist King was explicitly targeting such tactile piety and the apparent idolatry attendant on it. In his Second Royal Injunctions of 1538, the King simultaneously condemned “wandering to pilgrimage” and the “kissing and licking” of all relics as “great threats and maledictions” against God. Under the new dispensation of Henrician reform, tactile piety could persist only by shifting its register away from the literal and toward the metaphoric—from touching in deed to touching “as it were.”

48 The phrase tactile piety is from Georgia Frank, The Memory of the Eyes: Pilgrims to Living Saints in Christian Late Antiquity (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 118-20.


In the final stanza of Alcyon’s complaint, Spenser recalls the legacy of this religious discourse to rewrite it through an Ovidian lens. The sorrowful shepherd imagines that a group of pilgrims will pass by his burial site, but in doing so he ties this process to a different form of touch—one that no longer involves an explicit piety but that, in keeping with a post-Reformation spirit, is properly metaphoric. Here, the touch takes place not through the devout pilgrims around the grave but, as its Ovidian precedent suggests, in the writing on it. The contiguous lettering on an inscribed grave, once linking the classical Alcyone to her husband, now links the various lines of Alcyon’s woeful lays. On this new grave, the touch between two names becomes the touch, as it were, between many plaintive words.

The space imaginatively afforded to these woeful words, which comprise the forty-nine stanzas of Alcyon’s numerologically symmetrical speech, greatly exceeds the convention of epitaphic writing in the English Renaissance. As Joshua Scodel explains, the English poetic epitaph is habitually characterized by its concerted brevity, which turns the physical constraints of a grave to “expressive advantage” by fitting much meaning in little space.51 Spenser displays this epitaphic concision in Virgil’s Gnat, the end of which reproduces the lines inscribed above the gnat’s buried body: “To thee, small Gnat, in lieu of his life saued / The Shepheard hath thy deaths record engraued” (Cpl.VGn.687-88). The pregnant brevity of this epitaph, neatly condensing the poem’s concern with service and recompense into a single couplet, contrasts sharply with

Alcyon’s preferred poetics which—as his anaphoric ending suggests—relies instead on repetition, accretion and expansion.

Alcyon’s distance from the pithy epitaphers testifies to his affiliation with a different group: the verbose complainants of the literary past. Spenser represents this affiliation in a poetics of imitation, forming Alcyon’s epitaph from the words of several preceding—and equally sorrowful and loquacious—sources. When Alcyon praises the pureness and fairness of his lost beloved, when he commends her facility in singing and dancing, when he claims never to have worried about worldly chance in his youth, and when he complains that he is dying on a daily basis and consuming himself in pain, his words echo Chaucer’s *Duchess* and the various laments voiced by the Black Knight. Or when Alcyon vows to dwell in the solitary shade, to spend the night in plaints and the day in woe, to take partnership with the sorrowful nightingale, and to welcome the misery-augmenting cries of his fellow mourners, his words echo Spenser’s own August eclogue and the sestina that Colin composed and Cuddie recited.52

As with their shared words, Alcyon and his sorrowful predecessors share a common, literary identity. The Black Knight is a poet, fashioning both an amorous “song” for the young White as well as a “rym of ten vers or twelve” upon her death (*BD*.463). Cuddie and Colin are also versifiers, the former delivering a song to Perigot and Willie, and outlining the “perfecte paterne of a Poete” for E.K. (*SC*.Oct.Arg.170), the latter composing elegant poems for Eliza, Rosalind and Dido, and providing the person under whom “the Authour selfe is shadowed” (*SC*.Epis.133-34). Alcyon has a similar

status, turning “Sweet layes of loue to endlesse plaints of pittie” in the catalogue of court writers from Colin Clovts Come Home Againe (CCCHA.387), and offering Arthur Gorges the pastoral persona for his manuscript poetry. Comprised of verses shared by these various poets, the epitaph imagined for Alcyon’s grave has an overtly metafictional valence. The grave stands not just as a monument in a poem but as a monument of poetry; it commemorates both the past of Alcyon’s life and the past of literary history.

The metafictional significance of Alcyon’s epitaph is coterminous with, and perhaps directly influenced by, the representation of his namesake’s grave in Arthur Golding’s *Metamorphoses*, a verse translation of Ovid’s entire poem and a work in which Spenser “read deeply.” In reporting the final words of Alcyone’s complaint, Golding links the writing imagined on her tomb to the writing of poetry. “Like a faithful wife,” Alcyone vows to remain her husband’s companion even in death:

> the hearse
> Shall join us, though not in the selfsame coffin, yet in verse.
> Although in tomb the bones of us together may not couch,
> Yet in a graven epitaph my name thy name shall touch.
> (*Met [Gld] XI.813-16*)

By translating the Latin “littera” into the English “verse,” Golding uncovers and renders explicit a meaning that was only implicit in Ovid’s original. As we saw in section three, the word “littera” most commonly signifies in the classical canon either an epistle or a

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letter from the alphabet. In his eleventh book, Ovid uses it to denote an epitaphic
inscription, a meaning that Golding registers in his phrase “graven epitaph.” Beneath
these surface denotations, however, the meaning of “littera” may also shade toward what
we, building from its Latin root, now call literature. So when discussing the
memorializing capacity of a poet’s verses (“poetae versu”), Cicero’s Quintus claims that
an oak tree will survive beyond its physical demise for as long as Latin literature
(“Latinae…litterae”) has a voice to commemorate it (Leg.I.296).55 In his own description
of posthumous commemoration, Golding activates the latent meaning of “littera.” The
metaphoric contiguity between Ceyx and Alcyone here obtains not simply in an
inscription but in a verse, the same poetry-specific word that Golding uses to characterize
both Ovid’s entire work (Lat. carmen) (Met [Gld] I.4) and his English translation of it
(Met [Gld] Pref.178). As in Daphnaïda, Alcyon(e)’s tomb is the place of poetry. Spenser
goes beyond Golding in lengthening the tomb’s inscribed verse into an elaborate literary
composition. This monumentalized verse is now made up not just of names but of many
different verses.

Like the “August” sestina, the verses on Alcyon’s tomb are the shared poetry of
several distinct figures. Alcyon speaks these verses in the present, but they also carry
traces of words once voiced by the Black Knight as well as by Colin and Cuddie. The
surface of Alcyon’s imagined tomb is thus stratified with various layers of time, bearing
both the present, original verses of Alcyon and the vestiges of verses originally produced

University Press, 1966), abbreviated as Leg and cited parenthetically by book and page number. For the
lexical history of the word “literature” with particular focus on its new meaning in Renaissance England,
see Stephen Greenblatt, “What is the History of Literature?” Critical Inquiry 23 (1997): 460-81; and Sean
Keilen, Vulgar Eloquence: On the Renaissance Invention of English Literature (New Haven: Yale
University Press, 2006).
at several different points in the poetic past—in Chaucer’s distant past of 1374 and in Spenser’s recent past of 1579. On this monument of literary history, these poems form a relationship of spatial proximity through which they, following the Ovidian logic, have the capacity to touch. To be sure, this sounds like a rather au courant way of thinking about literary history, especially in light of George Edmondson’s study about poetic neighbourhoods and their spatial relationships, as well as Carolyn Dinshaw’s work in affective historiography and its touch across time. My point is, though, that this is also an old way of thinking about literary history and one for which Spenser provides the emblem. To imagine a transhistorical connection in which the poetry of the past is contiguous with the poetry of the present, Spenser offers Alcyon’s grave.

According to Dinshaw, the importance of a multi-temporal, tactile connection lies in its deviation from and destabilization of a historiographical norm. Viewed in relation to a history of contiguous connections, this norm—which, for Dinshaw, is most frequently a history wherein past, present and future are connected in a teleological chain of linear causality—appears no longer as a natural or inevitable system but as only one

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among several alternatives. Alcyon’s grave, and the historical arrangement it envisions, serve a similar function. The normative structure in *Daphnaïda*—its default way of linking past, present and future—is genealogical succession. Daphne articulates this genealogical principle in her last wishes, which Alcyon tearfully reports at the end of the second part of his complaint. Though ultimately imagined as part of his epitaph, these wishes are the thematic and structural counterpoint to it. If Alcyon’s final words envision a tactile bond, Daphne’s final words voice the type of connection from which he deviates. Daphne will soon ascend to her heavenly residence. “Yet ere I go,” she entreats her husband:

\[
\text{‘a pledge I leaue with thee} \\
\text{Of the late loue, the which betwixt vs past,} \\
\text{My yong *Ambrosia*, in lieu of mee} \\
\text{Loue her: so shall our loue for euer last.} \\
\text{Thus deare adieu, whom I expect ere long:’} \\
\text{So hauing said, away she softly past:} \\
\text{Weep Shepheard weep, to make mine vndersong.} \\
\text{ (*Daph.*288-94)}
\]

The *rime riche* between the second and sixth lines here links the events of Daphne’s life to a period in historical time: the passing of Daphne’s life marks her love with Alcyon as a bond from the past. To sustain this connection, as Daphne advises, Alcyon should transfer his affection to their daughter, Ambrosia, who is alive in the present and who will, as the link between her name and immortality suggests, perpetuate their love long into the future. In progeny lies the power to project a relationship across time; the past

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of Daphne’s life and love are connected to the present through a line of genealogical
descent.

This line, of which Ambrosia is the present and future representative, also extends
backward to the more distant past, going long beyond the life and death of her mother.
Before making his blunt declaration that Daphne “now is dead” (Daph.184), Alcyon had,
using what the narrator calls a “riddle” (Daph.177), referred to his lost love as a “faire
young Lionesse” born “an auncient Lions haire” (Daph.107, 122). The poem’s narrator is
confused by this symbolic terminology, but its readers are not. Guided by the title-page
and its mention of Douglas and Henry Howard, we recognize Alcyon’s dead beloved as a
descendant of the Howard family for which the Lion provided the long-standing armorial
sign.60 Spenser constructs this riddling reference against a Chaucerian precedent. In the
Book of the Duchess, the Black Knight had similarly puzzled his narrator by describing
his loss in equally metaphoric language, calling his White a beloved “fers” checked by
the malevolent Fortune (BD.655-60).61 By changing the vehicle of this riddling metaphor,
Spenser places a newfound emphasis on the logic of lineal descent: he substitutes the
Chaucerian terminology of chess with the explicitly genealogical discourse of familial
inheritance. This discourse connects Daphne and her daughter, the poetic representations
of Douglas Howard and Ambrosia Gorges, in a family tree of Lions, stretching through

60 W.A. Sessions, Henry Howard, The Poet Earl of Surrey: A Life (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999),

149.

61 BD’s engagement with the terminology of chess is covered in Guillemette Bolens and Paul Beekman
125-138.
their immediate predecessor, Henry, 2nd Viscount Bindon, all the way into medieval times.

In alluding to the distant past, Spenser assigns a special role to Henry’s great-grandaunt, Anne Howard, whom he makes a focal point of his dedicatory epistle. There, this female progenitor proves doubly influential, providing a link not just for the Howard clan but for all of the poem’s respective families. Writing to the Marchioness of Northampton, the poem’s dedicatee, Spenser explains that he undertook his work both because of the esteemed reputation of the deceased Douglas and because of the goodwill he feels for her husband: “Master Arthure Gorges…whose house… your Ladiship by mariage hath honoured, so doo I finde the name of them by many notable records, to be of great antiquitie in this Realme” (Daph. Epis. 7-10). To “honour” this noble family, the Marchioness married Thomas Gorges, Arthur’s uncle and a man whose genealogy overlaps with that of his nephew’s dead wife. About the Gorges family, Spenser writes: “so linially are they descended from the Howards, as that the Lady Anne Howard, eldest daughter to Iohn Duke of Norfolke, was wife to Sir Edmund, mother to Sir Edward, and grandmother to Sir William and Sir Thomas Gorges Knights” (Daph. Epis. 492). Viewed in relation to this interlocked pedigree, the recent union between Arthur and Douglas, Alcyon and Daphne, becomes the reunion of the two ancient houses: Gorges and Howard, families once linked in the marriage of Edmund and Anne. As the product of this Howard/Gorges reunion, Ambrosia is thus even more important than Daphne’s dying wishes would overtly suggest. In this genealogical system, Ambrosia represents a

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62 Cogent summaries of these genealogies are available in Gibson, “The Legal Context of Spenser’s Daphnaïda,” 43-44; and W.L. Renwick, “Commentary,” Daphnaïda and Other Poems (London: Scholartis, 1929), 175.
principle of continuity that connects not just Daphne to Alcyon but an entire network of Renaissance families to their medieval forefathers.

In the sixth and seventh sections of his complaint, however, Alcyon turns away from Ambrosia and the power of genealogical continuity invested in her. Vowing to wander the world in restless penitence, preparing for his reunion with Daphne in heaven, Alcyon evokes the *Metamorphoses*, but tellingly conflates two of its myths:

...as the mother of the Gods, that sought
For faire *Eurydice* her daughter deere
Throughout the world, with wofull heauie thought;
So will I trauell whilst I tarrie heere.

(*Daph*.463-66)

Initially aligning himself with Ceres, the “mother of the Gods” who frantically scoured the countryside for her abducted daughter, Proserpina, Alcyon quickly moves toward a different identity, falling into the role of Orpheus yearning for his “fayre *Eurydice*.” Alcyon overtly claims to reenact a relationship between a parent and child, but as his substitution of Eurydice for Proserpina suggests, he actually hopes to simulate the bond between a husband and wife. In other words, his plan for his remaining days plays out the conflation of his Ovidian pretexts. In devoting his life to his dead “loue that was,” his “Saint that is” (*Daph*.379), Alcyon is more an Orpheus than a Ceres, ignoring Ambrosia, his daughter and his legacy for the future, and remaining fixated on Daphne, his wife and his bond to the past. With his final stanzas, which return to the *Metamorphoses* and his namesake’s lament, Alcyon goes even farther in discounting his daughter, leaving her conspicuously absent from his roll call of the pastoral community, those shepherds and damsels who will survive after his death, and hopefully, deck his “hearse … with Cyparesse” (*Daph*.528-29). In place of his daughter, Alcyon imagines a grave, preferring
this monumental means to project his past into the future: he forgets the promise of progeny and seeks, instead, to preserve his bond with Daphne in an epitaph.

For Patrick Cheney, William Oram and David Lee Miller, Alcyon’s final words bear witness to his flawed, boorish character and its corrosive effects on those around him: he is unapologetically derelict in his paternal duties, shirking his responsibilities to Ambrosia and thereby leading the narrator to efface her memory as well.63 But Alcyon’s horrendous parenting also has symbolic significance. In rejecting his role as father, Alcyon simultaneously rejects genealogical succession as the basis for his transhistorical continuity, substituting his family ties with his bond to various readers and writers: the future pilgrims who will mirror his identity and pitifully mourn around his grave, as well as the past poets whose verses are inscribed on it. Forgetful of this fatherhood, Alcyon undercuts his link of lineal descent with, on one hand, his affective connection to the future and, on the other, his tactile connection to the past.

As Raphael Falco has persuasively demonstrated, many sixteenth-century authors develop an analogy between familial and poetic history: “the sociological impulse to establish a pedigree, so much a part of Elizabethan courtly life, bears an important relation to the need among Elizabethan writers to justify their literary practices. Just as courtiers strove to establish the ancient roots of their line, poets in the period began to put together a literary family tree.”64 With Alcyon, Spenser acknowledges this analogy and


offers a negative corollary to it: just as he looks beyond his biological genealogy, Alcyon looks beyond the logic of a literary genealogy.

In England’s poetic family tree, Chaucer traditionally holds the paternal position: George Puttenham, discussing the natural partnership between authors and kings in his 1589 *Art*, calls Chaucer “the Father of our English Poets,” implicitly aligning him with Homer, “the father of… [all] Poets”; George Gascoigne, analyzing metrical patterns in his 1575 *Notes*, labels Chaucer “our Father,” using the first person plural pronoun to incorporate all English authors into this genealogical filiation; Robert Greene, introducing the final story in his 1590 *Cobbler of Canterbury*, has his Summoner appeal to “ould Father Chaucer,” tracing the Elizabethan tale-telling collection back to its paternal source; Thomas Hoccleve, mourning Chaucer’s death in the 1415 *Regiment of Princes*, affectionately apostrophizes his “maistir deere and fadir reverent” as the “universel fadir in science”; and an anonymous pedagogue, presuming to teach England’s children in the 1477 *Book of Curtesye*, instructs them to read “fader Chaucer, maister galfryde,” the “fader and founder of ornate eloquence.”65 This tradition of paternal appellation reaches its apotheosis in the 1700 *Preface* to the *Fables Ancient and Modern* in which Dryden, arguing that poets share “lineal descents and clans as well as other families,” casts Chaucer as the “Father of English Poetry,” and places him in a

distinguished genealogy leading to Spenser and Milton. In *Daphnaïda*, Spenser too situates literary history alongside a similarly genealogical framework, charting what he calls the lineal descents of the Howard and Gorges clan before creatively imitating “the Father of our English Poets” and his *Book of the Duchess*. If the preface identifies the medieval forefathers for Arthur Gorges, the poem itself seems to identify a medieval forefather for Spenser.

As I have been arguing, however, Spenser also advances an alternative to this conventionally paternalistic terminology, using Alcyon to displace a genealogical stemma with a grave. Thanks to Alcyon’s fatherly negligence, Spenser’s final, culminating emblem privileges not the relationship between a parent and child but the bond between various nearby verses. Accordingly, Spenser’s connection with Chaucer here relies less on a line of lineal descent and more on a space where the traces of their past poetry can metaphorically touch: the epitaph turns the vertical relation between father Chaucer and child Spenser into the inconsistently-arranged proximity of Chaucerian and Spenserian poetry, where vestiges of each are variously above, below or next to each other based on their place in the memorial inscription. “Perhaps no ideology,” writes Ethan Knapp, “is so central to the institution of literary history as that of filial piety… It is, indeed, hard to imagine a form of literary history that would not be genealogical.”

*Daphnaïda* imagines literary history otherwise: on its projected grave, poets and poems typically linked by consanguinity are now linked by contiguity.

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Their contiguous connection fashions a poetic tradition wherein uninterrupted influence and direct imitation comprise only one component. To be sure, Daphnaïda is stimulated by and imitates several specific sources, drawing directly on the Book of the Duchess and the August eclogue, but its combination of these poetic precedents, arranged alongside each other on the grave, presents a different kind of intertextual case. Though they both feature complaints, “August” never alludes to Chaucer’s Duchess, and in the Calender itself, Colin’s sestina seems deliberately divorced from a line of direct influence, Chaucerian or otherwise. Whereas E.K. takes pride elsewhere to identify literary-historical connections, noting when a passage “imitateth Virgils verse” (SC.Jan.gl.57) or copies “Chaucers verse almost whole” (SC.Feb.gl.35), the normally prolix expositor here falls silent: E.K. leaves all thirty-eight lines of the sestina without a single gloss. Perhaps these lines were late additions to the Calender’s collection and E.K. did not have time to fully explain them, but whatever the reason, his conspicuous silence still produces a significant consequence. Distanced from its potentially recognizable sources—say, the fourth eclogue of Sannazaro’s Arcadia—the sestina of “Colins own making” highlights its principle of internal generation rather than its literary-historical precedents, building each new line by recycling one of its own preceding words: “Ye wastefull woodes beare witnesse of my woe, / Wherein my plaints did oftentimes resound…The walled townes do worke my greater woe: / The forest wide is fitter to


resound…Thus all the night in plaints, the daye in woe / I vowed haue to wayst, till safe and sound…The memory of hys misdeede, that bred her woe: / And you that feele no woe, when as the sound…” (SC.Aug.150-187; my emphasis).

When Alcyon incorporates elements of it into his projected epitaph, however, the sestina gains a new literary-historical attachment, standing near the incorporated verses from the *Book of the Duchess*: the inscribed monument now places, for instance, Colin’s former vow to “wake and sorrow all the night / With Philumene, my fortune to deplore” (*Daph*.474-75) alongside the Black Knight’s former complaint that he “daylie die[s] / And pine[s] away in selfe-consuming paine” (*Daph*.435-46). Their spatial arrangement on the grave connects these poems, even when a line of direct influence does not obtain between them: though not an imitation of the *Duchess*, the “August” sestina still metaphorically touches it; while not tied in a sequence of cause and effect, the *Duchess* and “August” are still linked in history.

The indirect connection between these plaintive poems reflects back on the June eclogue. As we saw in the preceding chapter, Colin here wishes for an intimate connection with the shepherd Tityrus, by whom “is meant Chaucer,” aspiring to receive plaintive power straight from the Chaucerian *fons*, and in turn, to send an inspired complaint straight to his faithless lass, Rosalind: “But if on me some little drops would flowe, / Of that the spring was in his learned hedde…Then should my plaints, causd of discutesse, / As messengers of all my painfull plight, / Flye to my loue” (SC.Jun.93-99).

When his hopes are disappointed—“But since I am not, as I wish I were” (SC.Jun.105)—Colin enlists help from the members of his pastoral community, asking them to “Beare witnesse” to Rosalind’s unfaithfulness and report on his behalf the distress she caused
him (SC. Jun. 106-112) — a task that Cuddie takes up when he recites Colin’s plaintive
sestina in “August.” In *Daphnaïda*, Alcyon extends Cuddie’s chain of transmission by
echoing and repurposing the sestina, using its sorrowful language to mourn a dead love
rather than a faithless one. By juxtaposing parts of the sestina with parts of the *Duchess*,
Alcyon similarly follows Cuddie’s lead and works on behalf of Colin, helping circumvent
his professed limitations from “June.” Colin may not yet have received any drops straight
from Chaucer’s learned head, but on the grave this does not inhibit his connection to his
poetic precursor: his sorrowful verses can still join the tradition of Chaucerian complaint,
standing alongside it without needing influence from it.

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When Spenser died in 1599, his admirers picked up where he left off and turned another
gRAVE into the site of interpoetic affiliations. In his *Reges, Reginae, Nobiles & alii in
Ecclesia Collegiata B. Petri Westmonasterii Sepulti* from 1600, William Camden
commends Spenser as England’s principal poet, notes his untimely death and provides
this transcription of his epitaph:

Hic prope Chaucerum situs est Spenserius, illi
Proximus ingenio, proximus ut tumulo.

Hic prope Chaucerum Spensere poeta, poetam
Conderis, et versu quam tumulo proprior.
Anglica, te vivo, vixit plautsitque Poetis;
Nunc moritura timet, te moriente, mori.

(Here plac’d near Chaucer, Spencer claims a Room / As next to him in
Merit, next his Tomb. / To Place near Chaucer, Spencer lays a Claim; / Near him in his Tomb, but nearer far his Fame. / With thee our English
verse was rais’d on high; / But now declin’d, it fears with you to die.)

These Latin lines, perhaps composed by one of the poets who threw their “mournfull
verses” into the grave at Spenser’s funeral, record the now-familiar arrangement wherein
Chaucer and Spenser share a resting place in the south transept of Westminster Abbey.\(^70\)

The decision to bury Spenser “neere to Chaucer,” as Camden later puts it in his 1630 *Annales*, proves a foundational moment for the memorialization of England’s poetic tradition. When Spenser arrives, the Abbey ceases to have one poet in the corner and starts to have a Poets’ Corner; the monument for a single author becomes the monument for multi-authorial connections across time. The epitaph describes these connections through imitation, recycling terms once used by Pietro Bembo when he celebrated the dead Sannazaro (d.1530) and his relationship with Virgil: “Da sacro cineri flores. Hic ille Maroni / Syncerus musa proximus ut tumulo” (“Offer flowers to these holy ashes: here lies / Syncerus, nearest to Virgil in inspiration as in his tomb”).\(^71\) In reappropriating these lines, the Westminster inscription befits the subject it commemorates. Like Spenser in his *Shepheardes Calender*, his epitaph invites a specific kind of subreading, whereby the name of Virgil can be discerned beneath the name of Chaucer. Just as he inherited Virgil’s former moniker as Tityrus in the *Calender*, Chaucer here occupies Virgil’s

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former place in the line on an inscribed grave. “Hic ille Maroni” now becomes “Hic prope Chaucerum.”

By imitating this model, however, the epitaph also, and paradoxically, creates a literary history wherein imitation plays only one part. The inscription nowhere identifies Spenser as a rewriter of Chaucerian sources, and it evokes his status as Chaucer’s poetic son only in oblique terms, perhaps gesturing toward the practice of burying family members in the same ancestral plot. The emphasis lands, instead, on proximity as an end in itself, a relationship that here obtains not only in the intellectual closeness of their minds, or the physical closeness of their bodies, but also on the surface of the epitaph. Its syntax places “Chaucerum Spensere” right next to each other, “nomen nomine tangam.” This grammatical play well suits the poet of Daphnaïda, providing a chiasmic realization of the literary-historical connection imagined by Alcyon’s grave: one epitaph once joined verses from these poets; another epitaph now joins these poets in a verse.

Like his Westminster epitaph, Spenser’s poetry is, as I have argued throughout this chapter, an object for the study of literary-history as well as a self-conscious theorization of it. In his publications of 1591, Spenser conceptualizes his interpoetic link to Chaucer with various shifting and dynamic schemes. He connects with his predecessor conceptually, as when he follows a literary cursus through the diversionary mode of complaint; verbally, as when he recycles words and phrases from the Book of the Duchess; genealogically, as when he gestures toward the familial line descending from Father Chaucer; and spatially, as when he organizes the traces of several poems into a

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contiguous arrangement. To this list we may add a scheme shared by the works of 1591 and 1579 in which Spenser creates his bond indirectly, reading Chaucer through the mediating ideas of Gower, Lydgate, Stow and Ovid. The diversity of these schemes implies a larger theoretical point: Spenser’s link to the poetic past exceeds the explanatory capacity of any single or continuously-implemented paradigm, regardless of whether it uses the familiar terms of *imitatio* or the perhaps less familiar terms of proximity and transhistorical touch. Spenser is a theorist against theory mechanically-applied: he resists the type of universal hermeneutic that would turn literary-historical interpretation into a homogenous and repeatable act, a “rigid and stultified scene of reading.” As such, Spenser fashions his bond with Chaucer as a moving target. Sometimes following Chaucer’s career, sometimes imitating Chaucer’s verse, sometimes claiming Chaucer’s paternity, sometimes transsuming Chaucer’s mediators, sometimes touching Chaucer’s poetry with his own, Spenser writes a literary history of experimental and flexible connections, engaging the past as easily in a genealogical stemma as on Alcyon’s grave.
Literary Paternity, Narrative Revival, Self-Revision: Chaucer’s Soul(s) from Spenser to Dryden

As commentators since at least John Upton have noted, Spenser begins his putative reconstruction of Chaucer’s *Squire’s Tale* in book four of *The Faerie Queene* with a near-verbatim quotation of *The Knight’s Tale*: “Whylome as antique stories tellen vs” (*FQ.*IV.ii.32.1).¹ Since the Knight is the Squire’s father and since the relationship between predecessor and successor poets is habitually figured as one of lineal descent, many critics have understandably treated Spenser’s juxtaposing of these two Canterbury tales as confirmation that intertextuality in general, and his intertextual dynamic with Chaucer in particular, should be framed in genealogical terms. In blending allusions to the tales, Spenser seemingly invokes literary history’s lineality to suggest that he, like the Squire to the Knight, is the son of father Chaucer. While the investigation of these filial dynamics has yielded much valuable scholarship, such as the recent work by Andrew King, Helen Cooper and Judith H. Anderson, it has left another salient subject unexamined.² In directing prolonged attention to *The Knight’s Tale* and *The Squire’s*

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Tale, numerous critics have: first, bypassed (or, at least, cursorily treated) the third Chaucerian poem that Spenser here invokes; and, second, overlooked that this third poem generates an intertextual relationship in which paternal descent plays only one part.

The third poem is *Anelida and Arcite*, which serves Spenser as the model of his complaint against “cursed Eld” (*FQ*.IV.ii.33.6), and serves for Chaucer as one component in a larger project of narrative reinitiation, memorial reconstruction and creative self-revision. As I demonstrate below, Chaucer pursues this process beyond the scope of *Anelida* in *The Knight’s Tale* and *The Squire’s Tale: Anelida* has an unexplored presence in *The Faerie Queene* as well as an important thematic bond with the two other Chaucerian poems that Spenser there cites.³ Acknowledging this allusion thus allows the works that Spenser assembles to be read not just as a dyad, connected by the familial identities of the individuals by whom the poems are narrated, but as a triad, linked by the ideas of destruction and revival, deferral and supplementation, vision and revision that

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the poems collectively transmit. As the tales of a father and son and as two parts of a larger assortment of texts collected in a single place, *The Knight’s Tale* and *The Squire’s Tale* form a genealogical stemma, but they also participate in something comparable to a manuscript or print compilation.

This chapter describes two ways of reading the compilation, tracing two itineraries among its three Chaucerian poems. In a chronological reading, moving through *Anelida* to the *Knight’s* and *Squire’s Tales* in the order of their composition, the compiled poems inspire Spenser’s process of narrative supplementation: his decision to pick up and reinitiate stories that had previously been left unfulfilled. In a retrospective reading, starting with *The Squire’s Tale* and working back to the Knight and *Anelida*, the compilation guides Spenser’s self-revisionary aesthetic: his tendency to revisit and transform his own earlier poetry into new, updated compositions. Spenser applies these Chaucerian lessons, I argue here, to enable his revival of Chaucer’s “labours lost” (*FQ*.IV.ii.34.2). This means that Chaucer himself functions as Spenser’s latest form of Chaucerian mediation. As he had done with Lydgate’s *Siege* in *The Shepheardes Calender* and with Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* in *Daphnaïda*, Spenser now finds the framework to interpret Chaucer’s precedent within Chaucer’s own oeuvre. Chaucer is the subject of Spenser’s rewriting as well as the model for how to do it; this figurative father affords the opportunity as well as the techniques by which his successor can advance a literary tradition and produce additional poetry. In composing this poetry, as I suggest in Sections I, II and III below, Spenser expands his authorial identity: he first adopts a role

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4 On Spenser, Chaucer and memorial reconstruction, see Rebeca Helfer, *Spenser’s Ruins and the Art of Recollection* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), esp. 281-82, a discussion substantially extended by the present chapter.
in addition to that of the son, and ultimately adopts a role that allows *The Faerie Queene* to operate beyond the conditions of a paternalistic literary system. As with his revival of Chaucer’s labours, Spenser models his move beyond the scheme of fathers and sons on a member in his Chaucerian compilation. Given its adherence to the compilation’s precedent, this move represents not a final rejection of Chaucer and his literary paternity, but rather Spenser’s commitment to following a father who himself both engaged with and looked beyond paternalistic discourse.

I. Unfulfilled Stories, Partial Memories: *Anelida and Arcite, The Knight’s Tale, The Squire’s Tale*

In his Chaucerian compilation, Spenser places lines from *Anelida* that, in their original context, help form what Louise O. Fradenburg has rightly called the poem’s quasi-elegiac trajectory. Bemoaning the damage that time has inflicted upon the “olde storie” of a beautiful queen and her false lover, these lines describe a situation of textual and memorial loss that demands the narrator’s labours of recuperation and revival. In undertaking this recovery, the narrator will be aided, he hopes, by the “vois” of the Muse Polyhymnia. As he puts it, she will help his poetic ship reach the safe haven at which a devoured story becomes a plentiful memory (*AA.*10-20). This projected linear journey from presumably stormy seas toward a poetic port, however, operates alongside a circular movement established by the poem’s first and final stanzas, and by the similar material they address. Before beginning his passionate complaint against “elde,” the narrator

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entreats Mars in his “grisly temple” to “be present” as a force that, like the Muse, will sustain and direct (“contynue and guye”) the journey toward memorialization (AA.1-7). After finishing her passionate complaint against Arcite, Anelida brings the poem back to the temple of Mars when she offers a sacrifice at his altar (AA.351-57). It appears that the return to Mars will be further pursued. In the latter stanza the narrator organizes Anelida’s journey to and actions at Mars’s temple into a temporal progression (“when that...and sith...and unto”), a sequence that seemingly signals a formal shift from complaint back to narrative, from the accretion of an emotional vocabulary directed at Arcite’s unfaithfulness to an unfolding description of consecutive events connected to Mars’s shrine.

Despite his apparent promise of such a forthcoming tale, however, the narrator does not fulfill it: his text breaks off immediately. Rather than reaching the haven of memorial fullness, the poem lingers indefinitely in the temple, and leaves Anelida’s potential “storie” there “out of oure memorie” (AA.14). By starting with an invocation to Mars and concluding with a promised but unrealized account of the events in his shrine, Anelida suggests that its attempt at textual reconstruction is intimately connected to its failure to complete this endeavour. The temple of Mars is both a prompt and an obstacle to remembrance: it offers the figure that “contynues” a memorial song, and the site at which the continuation of this song gets deferred. In looking toward Mars and his temple,

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6 For the potential story as it pertains to Anelida’s status as an “unfinished” poem, see Suzanne C. Hagedorn, Abandoned Women: Rewriting the Classics in Dante, Boccaccio and Chaucer (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 99-100.
we find the force that helps restore an “olde storie” as well as the absent narrative that guarantees that this restoration will be achieved only in part.⁷

John Norton-Smith thinks that the concluding and underdeveloped return to Mars is a scribal interpolation, but it is entirely consistent with Anelida’s general (and authorial) inclination toward the introduction of ultimately unfulfilled narratives.⁸ An invocation of Statius, an epigraph from the Thebaid, a description of Emily, Hippolyta and that “noble prince,” for example, project a narrative directly linked to Theseus (AA.22-42). But like Anelida, whose experience in the temple remains unfinished, Theseus is another devotee of Mars—he displays the god’s image on his banner (AA.31)—whose story breaks off before completion. Theseus’s tale represents a literal and narratological path untraveled. The poem presents his “wey” to Athens only to leave him suspended on his ride and follow an alternative route: the “slye wey” of Anelida and Arcite (AA.46-48).

Using Theseus’s ride as an opportunity to switch focus is a significant move, since it is recapitulated and transcended at the opening of The Knight’s Tale. Recalling the transition employed by the narrator in Anelida, the Knight’s declaration, “lete I this noble duc to Atthenes ryde” (CT.I.873, cp. AA.45-46), treats a forward look toward a homecoming in the future as a chance to cast a backward glance at a Scythian conquest in

⁷ A variant in Stow’s 1561 version of Anelida furnishes some additional insights about Mars’s temple and its role in the process of memorial reconstruction. In the poem’s final line on Aaa5r, we are told that we “may plainly here” (cf. “shal after here” in the Riverside) a description of Mars’s temple, but this does not occur. Specific details about the temple seem at once accessible to the reader’s memory and absent from the memorial description that the poem actually provides. Such memory cannot be recovered in one place alone; instead, it must be formed through the amalgamative effort of multiple poems.

⁸ John Norton-Smith, “Chaucer’s Anelida and Arcite,” in Medieval Studies for J.A.W. Bennett, ed. P.L. Heyworth (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 85. The Riverside editors acknowledge but are not persuaded by Norton-Smith’s argument; they print Anelida’s final stanza as an authorial part of the poem. I agree with this decision. The final stanza is presented as authorial in all early modern editions of Chaucer’s Works.
the past. The repetition of *Anelida’s* phraseology and its technique of transition, however, are offset by the difference in the Knight’s treatment of this alternative “wey” (or, in the more appropriate metaphor, of this adjacent field). Rather than introducing a story that will consume the remainder of the poem, as was the case in *Anelida*, the Knight’s interruption of the Athenian ride maps the alternative terrain of Scythia as ground that, though it may briefly be surveyed through *occupatio*, cannot be fully traversed through direct narrative. As the Knight’s announcement “and ther I lefte, I wol ayeyn bigynne” (*CT*.I.892) suggests, this direct narrative involves the resumption of the previously deferred Athenian way, a movement that reinitiates the march delayed not just since the start of the Scythian summary but since *Anelida* pursued its “slye wey.” By narrating beyond the moment at which Theseus had twice been left, the Knight follows a trajectory that *Anelida* had left unfulfilled. This proves productive: Theseus is now confronted with a different kind of interruption, one imposed not by a narrator who abandons his course but by wailing women who spur him and *The Knight’s Tale* toward Thebes in general, and Arcite and Palamon in particular (*CT*.I.896-1024).

In its complaint against wicked “elde,” *Anelida* introduced a project of memorial reconstruction, and *The Knight’s Tale* continues it too. Combating the threat of devouring time, the Knight disseminates a “noble storie” among listeners who facilitate its survival. As the Muse was to do in *Anelida*, the Canterbury pilgrims offer a “vois memorial” in affirming that *The Knight’s Tale* is “worthy for to drawen to memorie” (*CT*.I.3112). By reviving a past that *Anelida* absented, and by placing this past in the pilgrims’ minds, *The Knight’s Tale* demonstrates that the preservation of “olde storie[s]” is conducted in an
ongoing process rather than in a single definitive act. Narrating and reconstructing the past are continuous endeavours that can begin in one place and be pursued in another.

It is a long way from Thebes and Athens to Cambyuskan’s court, but the third member of Spenser’s textual triumvirate—The Squire’s Tale—is closely linked to the Knight’s gesture of reinitiation and becomes implicated in an ongoing process of reconstruction. Immediately after outlining the scope of his forthcoming story and immediately before his tale breaks off, the Squire echoes his father’s terms of narrative resumption: “And ther I lefte I wol ayeyn bigynne” (CT.V.670). Though the Squire’s announcement evinces, in promise, a connection to The Knight’s Tale and its move of narrative continuation, the conclusion of pars secunda actually recalls Anelida and its habitual fragmentation. Like the narrator in Anelida, who gestures toward a story in Mars’s temple that does not materialize, the Squire promises a trajectory of future events that remains absent (CT.V.652-70). As the narrator in Anelida leaves Theseus suspended on his ride to shift focus from an Athenian procession to an amorous betrayal, so does the Squire leave Canacee perched in her endeavours (“lete I Canacee hir hauk kepyng” [CT.V. 651]) to direct attention from the powers of her ring to Cambyuskan’s conquests (CT.V. 661-62).

Given these similarities between The Squire’s Tale and Anelida, it is highly suitable that Spenser aligns the poems through a shared discourse of temporal destruction, and adopts the posture of the Knight by echoing his voice: “Whylome as antique stories tellen vs” (FQ.IV.ii.32.1). More than just appropriate, his alignment and adoption are strategic, for they enable Spenser to cast his restoration of the Squire’s absent narrative as a process analogous to the Knight’s reconstruction of Anelida’s
unfulfilled story about Theseus. Like the Knight’s reinitiation of *Anelida*, Spenser revives *The Squire’s Tale* by pursuing the narrative that follows an announcement of “and ther I lefte I wol ayeyn begynne.” Like the Knight with Theseus, Spenser commences his revival by picking up with a figure whose actions have been temporarily deferred by a transitional phrase. Rather than subscribing to the Squire’s promised order and starting with the alternative way of Cambyuskan, Spenser begins with the suspended Canacee, her affinity for beasts and birds, and the magic of her ring that could “staunch al wounds” (*FQ*.IV.ii.35-39). This Chaucerian practice of narrative reinitiation is registered in the formal divisions of *The Faerie Queene*’s fourth book. Spenser establishes the relationship between the end of one canto and the beginning of another as akin to the dynamic between *Anelida* and *The Knight’s Tale*. As *Anelida* leaves Theseus on his way to Athens for *The Knight’s Tale* to continue his ride, so too does *The Faerie Queene* leave the – mond brothers in preparation for battle to “reserue” this material “for a Canto new” (*FQ*.IV.ii.54.9). A reconstruction of the devoured *Squire’s Tale* cannot be immediately accomplished; like Theseus’s journey, it must be pursued in multiple textual locations.

Suggesting that *The Knight’s Tale* functions as a valuable model for the process of narrative deferral and revival helps extend an existing critical tradition that has emphasized the tale’s status as a model of *The Faerie Queene*’s narrative mode. As scholars since at least A. Kent Hieatt have noted, canto three in book four, and the combat for a woman’s love that it stages, situate the Squire’s characters within a framework that directly recalls and creatively reworks his father’s plot.⁹ For one recent critic, this rewriting of *The Knight’s Tale* exemplifies the New Poet’s ambition to claim

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superiority over the Old, since Spenser displays the confidence to engage not simply with
_The Squire’s Tale_, which “is incomplete,” but with a tale that is “not only complete but
can plausibly be regarded as Chaucer’s masterpiece.”¹⁰ The general thrust of this
argument may well be accurate—Spenser indeed strives to overgo Chaucer—but its
specific terms establish a dichotomy that is not borne out either by the reception history
of _The Knight’s Tale_ or by the tale itself.¹¹

Consider the affinity between two interpretations of Chaucer’s poetry, both of
which were transmitted in the 1561 folio of his collected _Works_. For John Stow, the
folio’s editor, _The Squire’s Tale_ was lacking because it wanted the concluding narrative
its teller promised: “there can be founde no more of this foresaid tale, whiche hathe ben
sought in diuers places” (Wrks.F3r). For John Lydgate, the “monke of Berie” from the
folio’s title page, _The Knight’s Tale_ was comparably limited because it wanted the
historical background that its teller tangentially evoked.¹² In response to this gap,
Lydgate offers his own Canterbury tale, _The Siege of Thebes_, and in it demonstrates that
the sworn brothers of _The Knight’s Tale_ provide only a partial articulation of a far fuller
history of fratricidal strife. Not the misguided fancy of a prolix monk, the incompletion of
_The Knight’s Tale_ is fundamental to the posture that its economical narrator adopts. “I dar
nat telle,” “list me nat to write,” “me ne list…to telle”: _The Knight’s Tale_ is full of

¹⁰ Guy-Bray, _Loving in Verse_, 43.

¹¹ Spenser’s claim to superiority is ably discussed in Patrick Cheney, “‘Novells of his devise’: Chaucerian
and Virgilian Career Paths in Spenser's Februarie Eclogue,” in _European Literary Careers: The Author
from Antiquity to the Renaissance_, ed. Patrick Cheney and Frederick de Armas (Toronto: University of

¹² Stow’s comment is covered by Joseph A. Dane, “‘Tyl Mercurius House He Flye’: Early Printed Texts
_Works_, see Robert R. Edwards, “Translating Thebes: Lydgate’s _Siege of Thebes_ and Stow’s Chaucer,” _ELH_
70 (2003): 319-41, and Chapter 1 above.
expressions that proclaim the story a product of relentless abbreviation and omission, and that suggest that the narrative’s masterful polish is not antithetical to, but contingent on, the transmission of a less than total account. 

Stories need not be, like Anelida for Chaucer and The Squire’s Tale for Spenser, ravaged by time in order to be substantively incomplete. Instead, as The Knight’s Tale shows, a poem can be seen as deficient at the moment of publication as a result of absences—the account of Perotheus’s descent to hell, the details of Emily’s secret rites, the “thousand mo” examples after Croesus’s in Venus’s temple (CT.I. 1200, 2284, 1954)—that its author intentionally generated.

The compression of the Knight’s narrative has evident implications for a project of reconstructing and preserving the past. The type of memory that the pilgrims can draw will lack all the elements that the Knight, as he puts it, “list nat drawen to memorie” (CT.I.2074). One of these elements is Anelida herself, whose “noble storie” the Knight neglects to reinitiate in favour of his “noble storie” about Theseus (cf. CT.I.3111 and AA.13). In my reading The Knight’s Tale thus represents not a terminal point but only another stage in the ongoing process of narrative revival and memorial preservation that Anelida introduced. As such, The Knight’s Tale stands not in the relation of wholeness to the fragmentation of The Squire’s Tale, but as yet another poem that presents narrative gaps, partial memory and that, like Anelida, requires another place to be “purse[w]ed.”

As I will demonstrate below, Spenser shares this perception, for he reconstructs The

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13 On the points of incompletion in The Knight’s Tale that The Siege of Thebes completes, see Spearing, Medieval to Renaissance, 66-87. The most thorough comparison of these poems is offered by James Simpson, “‘Dysemol daies and fatal houres’: Lydgate’s Destruction of Thebes and Chaucer’s Knight’s Tale,” in The Long Fifteenth Century: Essays for Douglas Gray, ed. Helen Cooper and Sally Mapstone (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997), 15-34. For The Knight’s Tale as incomplete, see Elizabeth Scala, Absent Narratives, Manuscript Textuality and Literary Structure in Late-Medieval England (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan 2002), 102. I am also indebted to her for the useful term, “absent narrative,” that I borrow throughout.
Squire’s Tale, in part, by deploying the potential of a narrative gap that The Knight’s Tale created. Spenser adopts the Knight’s posture of narrative reinitiation in order to surpass the Knight himself and supplement an absence that he had imposed. Filling this lacuna, however, leads not to the generation of closure or wholeness but to a meditation on the difficulty of making an end and to the production of another absent narrative.

II. Transmigration and Transformation: Spiritual Affinity in Chaucer, Spenser and Dryden

Spenser engages with this gap in his depiction of events that have become centerpieces of Faerie Queene criticism: the transmigration of the –mond brothers’ souls. Transmigration holds special significance within the confines of book four: first, because it fuels the continuous action of, and provides epic machinery to, the battles in canto three; and, second, because it recalls the description of Chaucer’s literary afterlife in canto two. The passing of Priamond’s and Diamond’s souls into Triamond parallels the process of “infusion sweete” (FQ.IV.ii.34.6) by which Chaucer’s soul survives in Spenser.14 Transmigration also holds particular importance within the general scope of English literary history: Dryden employs the latter infusion in his argument for an imagined genealogy descending from Chaucer, “the Father of English Poetry,” to Spenser, Milton and then, if only implicitly, to Dryden himself.15 Dryden links himself to this spiritual


15 Quotations from the Preface to Dryden’s Fables Ancient and Modern are from The Works of John Dryden, ed. Edward Hooker and H.T. Swedenberg, 20 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1956-2000), hereafter abbreviated as FAM and cited parenthetically by volume and page number. For Chaucer as the “Father of English Poetry,” see 33; the Chaucer, Spenser, Milton genealogy is on 25. Quotations from Dryden’s Palamon and Arcite are cited by volume, book and line numbers from the same edition.
register, advancing his claim to membership in England’s literary lineage through his professed bond to Chaucer’s soul; infused in Spenser, this soul is allegedly congenial to Dryden’s own. His transhistorical bond gives Dryden the confidence to “presum[e] farther” than Chaucer “in some Places” where he “was deficient” in the text proper of the 1700 Fables, Ancient and Modern (FAM. 7: Pref.40).

Dryden’s attention to Chaucer’s soul dovetails with his focus on one of the souls in Chaucer’s poetry. This interest is most acutely represented in Palamon and Arcite, his translation of The Knight’s Tale in which he alters the significance of a passage describing Arcite’s death. I will discuss Dryden’s rewriting in greater detail below, but I mention his expansions here because they pinpoint a particular moment in The Knight’s Tale—a moment on which Spenser also capitalized—that presents not completion and closure but absence and unfulfilled potential. Having suffered a fatal fall from his horse, Arcite, under the watchful eyes of his beloved Emily and his former foe Palamon, “sigh’d his Soul away” (PA.7: 3.843), or as Chaucer’s Knight explains it:

His spirit chaunged hous and wente ther,  
As I cam nevere, I kan nat tellen wher.  
Therfore I stynte; I nam no divinistre;  
Of soules fynde I nat in this registre,  
Ne me ne list thilke opinions to telle  
Of hem, though that they writen wher they dwelle.  
Arcite is coold, ther Mars his soule gye!  

(CT.I.2809-15)

In light of Spenser’s textual triumvirate, the Knight’s refusal to specify the fate of Arcite’s soul is especially noteworthy, marking a point at which the father’s narrative

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style closely resembles that of its predecessor and that of his son. Like the Theseus of *Anelida* on his ride, the Arcite of *The Knight’s Tale* is yet another worshipper of Mars whose expected journey is abruptly abandoned. Where the *Anelida* narrator changes course without having Theseus, as he did in Boccaccio’s *Teseida*, continue his way toward Athens, the Knight stops and redirects his narrative without having Arcite, as he did in the *Teseida*, pursue a flight to the eighth sphere. In generating this absent narrative, the Knight pushes his habit of excision to an extreme. He multiplies excuses for his omission: I am not a theologian, my register cannot account for souls, I do not want to disseminate unconfirmed opinion. In his tale the Squire similarly uses a bevy of excuses to mark a discursive limit. He professes that his tongue, his knowledge, his linguistic competency, his rhetorical prowess and his sense of stylistic propriety all prevent him from describing Canacee’s beauty (*CT*.V.34-41). Like the Squire with Canacee, the Knight with Arcite here literalizes *occupatio*’s usually only feigned claims of inability, and replaces the detailed account that *occupatio* usually produces (see, for example, the account of the funeral at I.2919-66) with an equally detailed array of reasons for withholding description.

The Knight marks his discussion of the soul as one defined by what could have been told. In explaining that he does not want to recount what others have “writen,” the Knight gestures toward a discourse on the soul’s post-mortem fate from which he might, if he “list,” draw. His absent narrative stems not from a paucity of material out of which

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he could construct a story but from his personal preference to refrain from transmitting it. Rather than providing a void of complete silence, the Knight’s discussion of the soul offers a reminder of the narrative possibilities that he has deliberately left unfulfilled. The Knight’s declaration of what he will not tell seems in sharp contrast to the final promises of additional narratives in *Anelida* and *The Squire’s Tale*, but all of these passages produce comparable results. They suggest, on one hand, a topic from which a potential narrative could develop: a description of the events in Mars’s temple, a discussion of Canacee’s ring, an account of an opinion about the soul’s fate. But they provide, on the other, surviving texts in which the potential is unrealized.

In cantos two and three, Spenser intends to supply just such a narrative that is “no where to be found” (*FQ*.IV.ii.32.5). And as his description of the events following Priamond’s death suggests, Spenser did not limit himself to the absent narrative at the end of *The Squire’s Tale*. After his throat is slit by Cambell, Priamond “let forth his wearie ghost” and:

> His wearie ghost assoyld from fleshly band,  
Did not as others wont, directly fly  
Vnto her rest in Plutos griesly land,  
Ne into ayre did vanish presently,  
Ne chaunged was into a starre in sky:  
But through traduction was eftsoones deriued,  
Like as his mother prayd the Destinie,  
Into his other brethren, that suruiued,  
In whom he liu’d a new, of former life deprivued.  

(*FQ*.IV.ii.13)

While Spenser’s list of the paths that Priamond’s soul did not follow is expository superfluous (canto two has already provided a detailed explanation of what the fate of the brothers’ souls will entail [IV.ii.52]), it is intertextually significant for at least two reasons. First, it activates some of the potential that the Knight had introduced but not
fulfilled; unlike the Knight, Spenser explicitly engages the views of those who “writen wher [souls] dwelle.” In citing multiple perspectives from this discourse, Spenser also forms his narrative from it, deploying Pythagoras’s hypothesis to guide all of the spiritual transfers in canto three. With his soul-driven narrative, Spenser thus applies the Knight’s posture of revival to *The Knight’s Tale* itself. As the Knight develops his narrative from an idea *Anelida* abandoned, so too does Spenser build his story from an idea that the Knight dismissed. If the Knight pursues the journey of the “noble prince,” Spenser develops the journey of the soul.

Second, Spenser’s list positions Priamond’s soul within a broader literary tradition of post-mortem flights. The metempsychosis that he experiences distinguishes his fate from the unspecified trajectory of Arcite’s soul in *The Knight’s Tale* as well as from the earthly descent, airy evaporation and celestial stellification to which Turnus’s, Dido’s and Caesar’s souls are respectively subjected in *The Aeneid* and *The Metamorphoses*. By setting his discourse on souls among Chaucerian, Virgilian and Ovidian alternatives, and by applying Pythagoras to the revival of a Canterbury tale, Spenser casts himself as the author who can successfully fuse the classical and English traditions. Such a fusion had already been effected in *The Knight’s Tale* itself, yet in *The Faerie Queene*, the tale functions not just to legitimate Spenser’s English classicism with a distinguished precedent but to enable it in the first place. For medievalists like A.C. Spearing, *The Knight’s Tale* provides evidence of a classical tradition in fourteenth-century English literature. For Spenser, the tale provides a missing narrative that, in its

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potential to be supplemented in a different textual location, allows this tradition to be continued and developed.¹⁹

By developing a tradition of English classicism around the register of souls and in a putative reconstruction of *The Squire’s Tale*, Spenser offers a framework for understanding his intertextual relationship with Chaucer. Rather than being dictated by the predecessor’s unidirectional influence, the effort to revive and relate antique stories are contingent on multidirectional exchange. If reconstructing the Squire’s unfulfilled narrative depends on Chaucer’s providing a soul to Spenser, Spenser’s pursuit of the Knight’s unfulfilled narrative depends on Spenser’s providing a soul for Chaucer’s text. The act out of which Dryden’s literary genealogy develops—successor Spenser’s spiritual inheritance from predecessor Chaucer—is not the terminal or sole event in literary relations but only one stage in a reciprocal intertextual process. The grant of a soul is the bequest that enables “Lineal Descent” (*FAM*. 7: Pref.25) and the means through which linear influence is reversed.

Dryden is similarly committed to establishing an intertextual reciprocity, for he stresses his reliance on Chaucer as well as Chaucer’s dependence on the *Fables’* literary service. Dryden would remain unable to write without his medieval predecessor to provide a textual model, but Chaucer would remain unable to be read without his Augustan successor to correct the “places” where he “was deficient” (*FAM*. 7: Pref.40). Dryden’s account of Arcite’s post-mortem fate includes one such correction; or to offer a formula that Dryden’s diction invites, Chaucer’s congenial soul enables a rewriting of the “Kindred Soul” (*PA*.7: 3.819) that Chaucer created: Arcite. Dryden follows Chaucer’s

Knight in withholding specific details about Arcite’s posthumous journey and in providing an elaborate justification for doing so. But he also reformulates the reason why this unfulfilled narrative has been produced at all. Arcite’s soul leaves his body:

But whither went his Soul, let such relate
Who search the Secrets of the future State:
Divines can say but what themselves believe;
Strong Proofs they have, but not demonstrative:
For, were all plain, then all Sides must agree,
And Faith it self be lost in Certainty.
To live uprightly then is sure the best,
To save our selves, and not to damn the rest.
The Soul of Arcite went, where Heathens go,
Who better live than we, though less they know.

(\textit{PA.7: 3.844-53})

Whereas the Knight’s discursive limit expresses an uncertainty that leads him to avoid theological speculation (“I nam no divinistre”), Dryden’s limit registers an uncertainty that allows him to offer an explicitly theological commentary. For him, the narratological decision to omit the journey of the heathen soul represents a broader Christian decision to preserve mystery and eschew the certainty that would render belief moot. Dryden alters \textit{The Knight’s Tale} by resignifying its limit. It is now necessitated not by the lack of an appropriate register or of the status of a divine but by an ethical demand to maintain the existence of faith. Spenser treats the Knight’s unfulfilled story as an opportunity to supplement incompleteness and fashion a new narrative. Dryden treats the same unrealized tale as an opportunity to preserve incompleteness and assign it a strategic and revised role.

In making his revision, Dryden reshapes the Chaucerian past from which he is lineally descended as well as the personal past that he himself has created. The fate of the righteous heathen was a subject that Dryden had earlier broached in *Religio Laici, A Poem* in which he had not distinguished himself from, but adopted the role of, one who would “relate...the Secrets of the future State.” If heathens were unintentionally ignorant of Christian truth and lived virtuous lives, their souls, Dryden maintained against Athanasius, might reach heaven where they “with Socrates may see their Maker’s Face” (*RL.2*: 210). Though not identical to Socrates, Arcite too is a virtuous pagan who “better live[s] than we” contemporary Christians. As such, he seemingly has the potential to share the sight of the divine. But in his Chaucerian translation, Dryden leaves this potential unrealized, excluding any overt description of Arcite’s Christian salvation; his soul travels merely to that ambiguous place “where Heathens go.” With this exclusion, *Palamon and Arcite* retroactively fulfills the wish of that “judicious and learned Friend” from *Religio Laici*’s preface, a prudent reader who thought that Dryden had written “perhaps too boldly on St. Athanasius,” and who suggested that this was a subject “wholy to omit” (*RL.2*: Pref. 99). Whereas Dryden had previously rejected his friend’s advice, he now follows it: his Chaucerian translation treats specific details and bold declarations about the heathen’s salvation as matter to leave out. *Palamon and Arcite* reworks *The Knight’s Tale* by resignifying its discursive limits, even while engaging *Religio Laici* and marking it as poetry that exceeds these bounds.

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At least insofar as *Palamon and Arcite* suggests, *Religio Laici* committed not an irresponsible transgression but an ethically sensitive one. Since it established the theological value of uncertainty, the discourse on the soul in *Palamon and Arcite* can retroactively position that found in the earlier poem as a manifestation of exemplary faith. *Religio Laici* was the product not of the infallible certainty that *Palamon and Arcite* shuns but of the subjective and indeterminate “thought” on which true belief rests (*RL*: Pref.99). By using a translation of *The Knight’s Tale* to retroactively frame *Religio Laici*’s discussion of souls, Dryden ties the reception of Chaucerian poetry and of his own together: the process of rewriting Chaucer leads Dryden to rewrite himself.

The ways in which Spenser and Dryden employ the Knight’s gap—supplementing it with a new narrative, using it as a chance to revisit one’s own work—are comparably represented in the earliest engagement with the same lacuna: that made by Chaucer himself in the epilogue to *Troilus and Criseyde*. He here returns to the spiritual register and realizes the potential that *The Knight’s Tale* left unfulfilled. Troilus’s ascent to the eighth sphere is modelled on the same passage that the Knight had omitted: Arcite’s posthumous flight in the *Teseida*. In exceeding the Knight’s discursive limit and following the soul after death, the *Troilus* narrator explains that his protagonist’s journey provides him with an understanding different from that which he possessed on earth.

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22 For *Troilus*’s rewriting of *The Knight’s Tale*, and its use of the *Teseida*, see Stephen A. Barney, “Explanatory Notes,” in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 1057. The relationship between *The Knight’s Tale* and *Troilus*, in terms of their respective places in the chronology of Chaucer’s oeuvre, remains a vexed question of scholarship. As Robert K. Root suggested long ago, the question might be finally unresolvable: see *The Poetry of Chaucer: A Guide to Its Study and Appreciation* (New York: P. Smith, 1950), 167-68. For the purpose of this chapter, I follow the argument of Derek Pearsall in *The Life of Geoffrey Chaucer: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 153, 169; and Donald Howard in *Chaucer: His Life, His Works, His World* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1987), 270-79, that *The Knight’s Tale* was composed before *Troilus*. According to Pearsall, *The Knight’s Tale* was written in 1381-82; *Troilus* might have been started at the same time, but Chaucer was still at work on it until at least 1385. For an alternative order and an analysis of the problems attendant on developing a chronology of Chaucer’s works, see Christopher Cannon, *The Making of Chaucer’s English: A Study of Words* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 99-100.
The narrator subsequently translates Troilus’s personal perspective into a broader “moralite” for his audience to follow. If the figure about whom the narrator speaks can scorn the “blynde lust” of the world from his lofty viewpoint, so should the “yonge, fresshe folkes” to whom the narrator speaks also shun “worldly vanyte” by casting their faces upward toward heaven (TC.V.1835-38).  

This moralization is the direct result of describing Troilus’s celestial ascent and his subsequent view from the eighth sphere. His condemnation of worldly work brings a change in perspective from the third person singular and third person plural to the first person plural. Troilus’s lofty gaze shifts attention from the experience of a Trojan “he” and Trojan “hem” to the experience of what is, for the narrator, “oure” English context (TC.V.1823-25). A specific view from the past yields a general perspective for the present: Troilus’s contemptuous sight ultimately touches, and should guide, “oure werk” and “oure herte.” The poem concludes by applying this “moralite” to the present situation. With his final words, the narrator orients himself and his audience toward the divine by praying the three-in-one to shield “us” from invisible and visible foes (TC.V.1863-69). The last event of the poem’s diegesis, the flight and sight of Troilus’s soul, offers the perspective that enables the extra-diegetic content in the poem’s final stanzas. The journey of Troilus’s soul represents the “fyn” of Troilus the man (TC.V.1828), but it also facilitates the terminal moralization that makes a “fyn” to Troilus the book. And since this journey stems from pursuing the Knight’s absent story, Troilus suggests an idea pertinent to our Spenserian context: supplementing an absent,

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23 Analyses of Troilus’s epilogue are legion. I am particularly indebted to the studies of E. Talbot Donaldson, Speaking of Chaucer (London: Athlone Press, 1970), 97; and A.C. Spearing, Readings in Medieval Poetry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 127-29.
Chaucerian narrative is the means through which a Chaucerian poem is brought to an end.

III. Fathers and Followers: Cambina, Spenser and their Lineages

Spenser sets himself in opposition to this idea. His narrative about the soul’s fate creates a radically different effect from that produced by Troilus’s flight. This effect is illustrated when, in the midst of their fierce battle, Cambell deals Triamond a seemingly fatal wound to the armpit and Triamond, his previously raised sword still descending, delivers a stupefying blow to Cambell’s crest. They both fall:

> Which when as all the lookers on beheld,  
> They weened sure the warre was at an end,  
> And Iudges rose, and Marshals of the field  
> Broke vp the listes, their armes away to rend;  
> And Canacee gan wayle her dearest frend.  
> All suddenly they both vpstarted light,  
> The one out of the swownd, which him did blend,  
> The other breathing now another spright,  
> And fiercely each assayling, gan afresh to fight.  

*(FQ.IV.i.35)*

Here, the transmigration of souls helps create a narrative that moves not linearly toward a definitive conclusion but cyclically back to the start of the action. Though the eldest brother has seemingly suffered a second death, and though “all the lookers on...weened sure that warre was at an end,” Spenser’s deployment of the register of souls ensures that Triamond can breathe new life and fight “as if but then the battell had begonne” *(FQ.IV.i.36.2)*. The treatment of Cambell comparably contributes to the action’s recursivity; instead of approaching the terminal point of death, he constantly regains his strength, heals his wounds, and appears as fresh as “some newborn wight” *(FQ.IV.i.23.5)*. Where Triamond’s cyclical regeneration stems from Spenser’s
development of The Knight’s Tale, Cambell’s recursive pattern emerges from Spenser’s reinitiation of The Squire’s Tale. The object which effects this perpetual rebirth—Canacee’s ring—is one of the only elements that Spenser derives from the latter poem as he reconstructs its terminal gap. In going beyond both the discursive limit of The Knight’s Tale and the surviving text of The Squire’s Tale, Spenser pursues two ideas—the fate of the soul after death and the power of the magical ring—that facilitate the deferral of narrative closure. Troilus’s supplementation of The Knight’s Tale enables the Chaucerian text to come to “swich [a] fyn,” but Spenser’s engagement with the same lacuna, and with that at the end of The Squire’s Tale, creates a Chaucerian text that, like the combatants in it, struggles to effect an end.

To resolve this struggle, Spenser turns not to Cambell, Triamond, or machinery stemming from lacunae in The Knight’s Tale or The Squire’s Tale but to Cambina. In causing the warriors to forget their enmity and drop their swords, she replaces the recursive pattern of a combat that moves repeatedly back to its beginning with the linear movement of a procession that leads forward to Satyrne’s tournament (FQ.IV.iv.5). Cambina’s ability to end this impasse comes at the expense, as Lauren Silbermann neatly puts it, of “genealogical probability,” since Spenser has not mentioned Agape’s fourth child until her marvelous entrance at stanza thirty seven. While he explains Priamond, Diamond and Triamond’s conception from the loins of their rapist father, leading us to expect a similar backstory for their sister, Spenser leaves the circumstances of Cambina’s birth conspicuously absent from the narrative; her father is never discussed. Cambina has a paradoxical status: she is both an agent of completion and a facilitator of incompletion.

24 Silbermann, Transforming Desire, 97.
On one hand, she generates narrative closure, breaking the stalemate created by Spenser’s supplementation of gaps in *The Knight’s Tale* and *The Squire’s Tale*. On the other, she produces narrative openness, presenting a gap of her own around the story of her conception.

In giving Cambina her dual role, Spenser recapitulates the consequences created by the gap-filling flight of the soul in *Troilus*. Like Cambina, Troilus too produces a narratological paradox of open closure: his celestial ascent marks the termination of his life and his book, but it also allows another story to remain absent. After adopting Troilus’s model and expressing hostility for worldly appetites, the narrator makes this summary pronouncement on the initial lust and terminal fate of his hero: “And thus bigan his lovyng of Criseyde, / As I have told, and in this wise he deyde” (*TC.V*.1833-34). Recalling the beginning of the story (“thus bigan”), these lines also recall that this beginning has not been brought to its promised end. The initial announcement of the poem’s “matere” suggests that it intends to tell “of Troilus in lovyng of Criseyde, / and how that she forsook hym er she deyde” (*TC.I*.55-56). These couplets from books one and five have a formal symmetry and share a rhyme, but juxtaposing them reveals their more substantive difference. The later couplet reverses the identity of the dead character from Criseyde to Troilus, and thereby displaces the story of her death that we have anticipated since book one. By supplementing *The Knight’s Tale* and following Troilus into the eighth sphere, the narrator applies the “moralite” that brings his poem to an end. But in doing so, he also reverses attention to Troilus’s rather than Criseyde’s death, and

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imposes an end to the diegesis that leaves no room in the poem for her story to be finished.

The stern “moralite” with which *Troilus* concludes is the product of what Carolyn Dinshaw calls masculine reading: the attempt to control representatives of the unruly feminine like the text and Criseyde by fixing a single, univocal meaning upon them.26 But the failure to close Criseyde’s narrative reveals that such control has its limitations. Like Theseus’s full ride in *Anelida* and the post-mortem journey of the soul in *The Knight’s Tale*, Criseyde’s death is an absent narrative that has the potential to be pursued in another place—a place that, in turn, can assign her an alternative signification that escapes her former narrator’s control. In his *Testament of Cresseid*, Henryson realizes this potential: he relates Criseyde’s death and uses the reinitiated narrative to extend the meaning she had been earlier assigned.27 Both *Troilus* and the *Testament* cast Criseyde as an exemplum that suggests the need for lovers to be wary of falsity (*TC*.V.1785; *Test*. 561-67). But only the *Testament’s* narrator, through his account of her leprosy-induced demise and his concluding moralization of it, can signify her as a cautionary tale of “fals deceptioun” leading to a pitiful, lonely end: the “sore conclusioun” of disfigurement and death (*Test*.610-16). Another place attaches another meaning to her: her example now indicates that “worthie wemen” must avoid the terminal fate of Criseyde herself. By leaving a gap in Criseyde’s story and making its supplementation possible, *Troilus* allows


its seemingly univocality to become the site of future development. Like Dryden’s silence concerning Arcite’s soul, the story of Criseyde’s death in *Troilus* uses textual absence to achieve a thematic function. Its narrative gaps, open to supplementation, are the means through which interpretive closure and stability can be subsequently undercut.

Like Chaucer’s absent narrative about Criseyde’s death, Spenser’s missing story about Cambina’s conception shares this status as a strategic absence. By not mentioning her father, Spenser sets Cambina, and the conclusion she creates, apart from the precedent provided by *The Knight’s Tale*. Like *The Faerie Queene* with its seemingly endless battle between Cambell and Triamond, *The Knight’s Tale* presents what appears to be an irreconcilable conflict: the apparently contradictory promises made by Mars and Venus to Arcite and Palamon (*CT*.I.2438-42). Saturn ultimately resolves the latter conflict, arranging an infernal fury to propel Arcite to his death at his moment of triumph (*CT*.I.2684), and in doing so, ensuring that Arcite receives his promised victory while Palamon receives his promised Emily. Spenser distinguishes his work by resolving his third canto in book four not through the agency of a supreme parent like Saturn, but through a figure who operates without the need of such a father.

This fatherless resolution has metafictional implications. As Vaughn Stewart has persuasively demonstrated, Cambina represents poetry in general and Spenser’s poetic power in particular. Her caduceus is iconographically connected to the idea of literary creativity, and her role in repairing the effects of martial strife resembles Spenser’s task in repairing the effects of temporal strife suffered by *The Squire’s Tale*.28 Cambina offers an alternative both to the fatherly resolution effected by Saturn in *The Knight’s Tale* and

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to the Knight’s posture of narrative reconstruction and reinitiation. As a daughter who appears without the presence of a father, and who provides Spenser with a different guise than that of the Canterbury father, Cambina symbolizes not just Spenserian poetry, as Stewart suggests, but a type of Spenserian poetry that exists outside the dynamics of paternal lineage that *The Knight’s Tale* and *The Squire’s Tale* have traditionally represented. If going beyond the narratives created by a father and son leads Spenser to introduce a figure of resolution, this figure then allows *The Faerie Queene* to go beyond the poetic history that such fathers and sons populate. Pursuing and extending paternal and filial poetry creates, in other words, the conditions in which an extra-paternal and extra-filial poetry may be introduced.

Spenser’s engagement with, and supersession of, paternal and filial poetry represents his sophisticated application of an idea offered by the third poem in his Chaucerian compilation. In addition to its several unfulfilled narratives, *Anelida* provides one of the many lines that stand behind Spenser’s famous declaration of Chaucerian pursuit. “I follow here the footing of thy feete,” Spenser announces in an echo of Chaucer’s declaration to pursue the tracks of his poetic predecessors: “First folowe I Stace, and after him Corinne” (IV.ii.34.8; *AA*.21). Statius is a poet of established authority and has firm ties to a multi-generational lineage that runs, at least insofar as *La Commedia* suggests, from his father Virgil to his son Dante.29 In contrast, Corinne is a poet known in little else than name, with allegiances that run not to a documentable

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written authority but to the untraceable sources of fleeting experience. In his invocation, Chaucer thus ties his poetry to a figure whose recognizable debts and renowned reputation help form a literary genealogy, and to a figure whose uncertain origins and mysterious identity belie her easy insertion in such a poetic stemma. What I have called Spenser’s alignments with the Squire, the Knight and Cambina might finally be called the means through which Spenser follows the follower of Statius and Corinne. By connecting himself with filial, paternal and extra-paternal poetry, Spenser pursues the tracks of “the Father of English Poetry,” a father who both rooted himself in, and extended himself outside, this paternalistic tradition.

IV: Spenser Rewriting Chaucer and Spenser: Revisiting the Chaucerian Compilation

Near the middle of a section concerning “Spenser’s imitations of Chaucer” from his 1762 Observations, Thomas Warton quotes four lines from book six of The Faerie Queene (VI.ix.5.2-5) and identifies various literary precedents refracted in them. These lines, which recount Calidore’s initial sight of “shepheard groomes, / Playing on pypes, and caroling apace, / The whyles their beasts there in the budded broomes / Beside them fed,” capture for Warton both Spenser’s “distant imitation of Chaucer,” and “more immediately,” Spenser’s “imitation of himself” (Obs.1:157).31 This pastoral scene builds, as Warton points out, on a passage featuring similar “heardgroomes,” “budded broomes” and piping from Spenser’s Februarie eclogue (SC.Feb.35-40), a poem that itself draws on Chaucer’s House of Fame and its prior description of “herde-gromes,” “bromes” and

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30 Norton-Smith, “Anelida and Arcite,” 95-96; and Summit, Lost Property, 44-45.

song (HF.III.1224-26). The end result from this chain of imitations is a multilayered, intertextual palimpsest, in which both The Shepheardes Calender and, at one less visible remove, The House of Fame, may be discerned beneath the surface of The Faerie Queene’s sixth book: self-rewriting and Chaucerian rewriting coexist at various levels in the same Spenserian passage. Enabled by Warton, the remainder of this chapter argues that self-revision opens for Spenser yet another way of pursuing Chaucer’s poetic tracks: Spenser follows his literary father by also following himself.

For Renaissance literary-historians, Warton’s canny insights about book six have more relevance than he explicitly claims: they provide new interpretive purchase on Spenser’s complaint in book four against “cursed Eld,” a stanza that Warton quotes and connects to its Chaucerian source, but does not discuss, immediately before offering his remarks on Calidore’s pastoral environs (Obs.1:156-57). As we have already seen, the context for this lament, and its rewriting of Chaucer, is itself Chaucerian. In the previous stanza, Spenser explains that the heroic actions and exemplary loves of his protagonists—Triamond, Cambell, Canacee and Cambina—were once brilliantly recorded by “Dan Chaucer” in The Squire’s Tale. As a result of his literary labours, Chaucer deserves a distinguished and authoritative place in fame’s eternal catalogue. As for his tale itself, however:

  wicked Time that all good thoughts doth waste,
And workes of noblest wits to nought out weare,
That famous moniment hath quite defaste,
And robd the world of threasure endlesse deare,
The which mote haue enriched all vs heare.
O cursed Eld the cankerworme of writs,
How may these rimes, so rude as doth appeare,
Hope to endure, sith workes of heauenly wits
Are quite deuourd, and brought to nought by little bits?

(FQ.IV.ii.33)
As Warton first observed, and as I suggested at the start of this chapter, Spenser models his lament for Chaucer’s destroyed text on Chaucer’s own complaint against textual decay in *Anelida and Arcite*. But this is only part of the story: Spenser’s rewriting of Chaucer is here conjoined to Spenser’s rewriting of himself. Whereas book six presents a chain of imitations, in which Spenser imitates his imitation of Chaucer, book four presents a compilation of imitations, in which Spenser combines phraseology rewritten from *Anelida* with phraseology rewritten from various places in his existing corpus. He grafts Chaucer’s curse against “Eld” on to a question about the future survival of “rude… rimes,” which reshapes *The Ruines of Rome* and its similar question about the fate of base “verses” in “posteritie” (*Cpl.RR*.435-42); a description of the “cankerworme of writs,” which reprises book two of *The Faerie Queene* and its comparable identification of books “all worm-eaten, and full of canker holes” (*FQ*.II.ix.57.8-9); and an emphasis on a “moniment” and “wicked Time,” which reworks, among many other Spenserian poems, *The Ruines of Time* and its comment that all “moniments of earthlie masse, / Devour’d of Time, in time to nought doo passe” (*Cpl.RT*.419-20).32

Spenser’s fusion of Chaucerian and self-revision is legitimized, and perhaps directly influenced, by guidelines codified in the handbooks of classical and humanist rhetoric. These principles are influentially laid out by Quintilian in his *Institutio Oratoria*, one of the chief inspirations for Erasmian *copia* and one of the mastertexts in nearly every program of Renaissance pedagogy, including that of Richard Mulcaster, Spenser’s

teacher at the Merchant Taylors’ School. In his oft-quoted tenth book, Quintilian suggests that the ideal rhetorician should hone his craft by reshaping the words and thoughts of his worthy predecessors, but he should not stop there. It is “useful not only to paraphrase the work of others, but to modify our own in various ways, deliberately taking up some thoughts and turning them in as many ways as possible, just as one shape after another can be made out of the same piece of wax” (“Nec aliena tantum transferre, sed etiam nostra pluribus modis tractare proderit, ut ex industria sumamus sententias quasdam easque versemus quam numerosissime, velut eadem cera aliae aliaeque formae duci solent”) (IO.4:X.v.9-10). For Quintilian, this exercise in self-revision proves a key theoretical point, showing that present rhetoricians need not be unavoidably inferior to, or feel oppressively limited by, those of the past. If a rhetorician can reshape his own words, Quintilian suggests, then there is more than one way in which any thought may be elegantly expressed: the “road” (“viam”) to creative success has not been “blocked… [by] our predecessors” (“praeclusam…prioribus”) any more than it is blocked by our protean selves (IO.4:X.v.7-8). Rather than the singular pattern against which all copies

must inevitably pale, the words of the canonical past offer just one among many valuable models, and as such, may be engaged, refashioned and rivalled.

Like Quintilian’s rhetorical manual, Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*—a quintessentially rhetorical poem—uses the idea of self-revision as a means to rival an authoritative past, one represented in book four by Chaucer, his *Squire’s Tale* and those various Chaucerian poems connected to it.34 Spenser’s dual pursuit of Chaucerian and self-revision enables a competitive relationship with his predecessor in which imitation, as Quintilian would repeatedly assert, is “not… restricted to words” (“non…tantum in verbis”) (*IO.4:*X.ii.27). His engagement starts at, but soon extends beyond, the level of an individual expression, ultimately using his self-revisions to equal Chaucer’s model of the self-revisionary creative process. In doing so, Spenser paradoxically asserts both his debt to and precedence over his precursor, showing how he can follow Chaucer as well as how Chaucer can follow him. Spenser thereby deviates from several once-familiar paradigms of literary-history: his Chaucer is not an unshakable authority, burdening his belated descendant with a poetic anxiety, but an enabling source, empowering his successor to advance a literary tradition, to reshape his precedent and, finally, to supersede it.35 And whereas Spenserian scholarship usually treats Chaucer and his *Squire’s Tale* as simply


the sources of incompletion and fragmentation, I will argue that they also offer a more substantial example, modeling how to rewrite poetic predecessors, especially oneself.  

This argument is designed to supplement the foundational study of book four and its link with the English literary past: Jonathan Goldberg’s *Endlesse Worke: Spenser and the Structures of Discourse*. According to Goldberg, Spenser’s reconstruction of *The Squire’s Tale* involves the acquiescence of authorial agency and the obliteration of the authorial self: Spenser “must abandon his voice entirely to Chaucer’s, effecting a loss of voice so complete as to permit Chaucer to write through him” (*EW*.31-32). Thirty-five years have passed since the publication of *Endlesse Worke*, and in the interim, several scholars—Judith H. Anderson, Anne Higgins, Craig A. Berry, Vaughn Stewart—have implicitly or explicitly offered caveats to Goldberg’s provocative yet problematic argument. The following pages significantly extend this tradition of revising Goldberg’s work, again directing special focus to the ideas of voice, imitation and control. I pursue my challenge in greater detail than has hitherto been offered, shifting the conventional approach and starting my critique with an important, but previously

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36 On *The Squire’s Tale* as a locus of incompletion, see most recently Stewart, “Friends, Rivals, and Revisions,” 75-109. I agree with Stewart in thinking that Spenser simultaneously “wishes to surpass Chaucer and…to kneel before Chaucer’s poetic glory” (99), but I significantly extend his work by locating both *The Squire’s Tale* and Spenser’s engagement with it beyond the customary terms of Chaucerian fragmentation. I also develop Stewart by elucidating the previously unnoticed importance of Chaucer’s *Anelida* and Chaucer’s sixteenth-century printed editions for *Faerie Queene* IV, for which see note 38 and passim.


overlooked, book-historical perspective. Before revising the details of Goldberg’s argument, I revise the unexamined body of bibliographic evidence on which his argument draws. In other words, my return to Goldberg also fills the substantial critical lacuna left by all the more recent scholarship that has since responded to him.

Goldberg frames his conclusions about Spenser’s Chaucerianism in relation to *The Squire’s Prologue* as it appears in F.N. Robinson’s then-standard 1957 edition of the collected *Works*. For Goldberg, the prologue exemplifies the Squire’s status as a narrator who habitually surrenders his poetic voice, who passively acquiesces to demands imposed upon him, and who thereby anticipates Spenser’s reputed surrender and acquiescence to Chaucer in book four. As I show, however, Goldberg’s characterization of the Squire is complicated by the text of *The Squire’s Prologue* in John Stow’s 1561 edition of Chaucer—the edition that Spenser most likely read—or in any other printed edition of *The Canterbury Tales* and *The Works* from Caxton’s in 1477 to Urry’s in 1721. Unlike the text quoted by Goldberg, *The Squire’s Prologue* in Stow introduces a narrator who assertively dictates his poetic program and who ensures his voice will be heard, outlining the type of rewriting that becomes an impetus for creativity in the tale proper. When he reconstructs the tale in *The Faerie Queene*, Spenser registers the connection between Chaucer’s Squire and Chaucerian creativity. There, Spenser uses his allusions to *The Knight’s Tale* and *Anelida* to frame *The Squire’s Tale*, positioning it as the culmination of an exercise in Chaucerian self-revision in which these three compiled poems jointly participate. Spenser identifies this exercise as his distinguished and

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enabling precedent, but he ultimately—and paradoxically—renders it secondary to and contingent on his own revisionary aesthetic.

V: Stow’s Text, Chaucer’s Revisions: Reading the Renaissance Squire’s Tale

Having just heard in The Merchant’s Tale about the woe in marriage, the Host, at least in Robinson’s edition of Chaucer’s Works, turns to the Squire with these instructions:

“Squier, com neer, if it youre wille be, / And sey somwhat of love; for certes ye / Konnen theron as muche as any man.” “Nay,” responds the Squire, “but I wol seye as I kan / With hertly wyl; for I wol nat rebelle / Agayn youre lust; a tale wol I telle” (CT.V.1-6). In Goldberg’s analysis of this short prologue, the Squire has been placed “in the position of having to fulfill… [the] demands” of the pilgrims in general and the Host in particular, the self-appointed “iudge” and “gouernour” of the pilgrimage (CT.I.813-14; A6r), who expects that his authority will be respected and who directs the Squire to speak about love, the topic to which he seems so devoted (EW.34). The Squire’s initial response of “nay” implies that he had not actually planned on offering an amorous tale, nor is he, in fact, as well versed in love as the Host and his fellow pilgrims believe. His deferential vow not to “rebelle,” however, suggests that he is nevertheless prepared to tailor his poetic will to the will of another, and tell a tale that confirms the Host’s misidentification of his expertise. In surrendering to this assigned narrative program, the Squire is, according to Goldberg, “sacrific[ing]… his own sense of himself” (EW.35). To his sacrifice in the prologue, the Squire adds a coterminous sacrifice in the tale, abandoning his narrative agency and allowing his tale to be told, first, in the voice of the foreign

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emissary who speaks to Cambyuskan and his court and, second, in the voice of the
deserted falcon who complains to Canacee (EW.37-38). In Goldberg’s assessment,
Spenser recapitulates this double resignation. Like the Squire with the Host, Spenser
pursues not his independent narrative agenda but the poetic “wyl” of his authority,
namely, a Chaucer who presumably wishes that his destroyed tale will be recovered and
reproduced as it was originally written. To fulfill this implicit demand, Spenser, like the
Squire with the emissary and the falcon, moves aside, effaces his voice, and lets Chaucer
speak through him (EW.31-44).

Their force and sophistication notwithstanding, Goldberg’s arguments should be
qualified on both literary-critical and book-historical grounds. Goldberg partially
acknowledges—as his subsequent critics have not\(^\text{41}\)—his susceptibility to such a
bibliographic challenge, which he attempts to quell in this footnote justifying his analysis
of The Squire’s Prologue: “Although I work from the introduction to The Squire’s Tale
that appears in modern editions, the major editions of Chaucer in the sixteenth century
did not print this link. However, this need not mean that Spenser was unaware of what we
now regard as the authoritative text. There were many more Chaucer manuscripts extant
in the sixteenth century than there are now, and readers then were not confined to printed
books. The analysis of The Squire’s Tale that I offer reinforces the meanings to be read in
the invitation to the squire to tell his tale” (EW.36, n.2). By suggesting that Spenser “read
widely in manuscripts,” Goldberg makes, however indirectly, a salutary point concerning
the Renaissance reception of medieval texts: the advent of print, and the attendant mass

\(^{41}\) For scholars who critique Goldberg’s work without discussing his use of bibliographic evidence, see the
studies cited in note 10 as well as Theresa M. Krier, “Time Lords: Rhythm and Interval in Spenser’s
reproduction of certain medieval poems, brought a sustained investment in the manuscript medium rather than the total demise of it.42 This valuable observation, and the body of manuscript evidence it opens up, do not, however, necessarily support the inferences Goldberg derives from them. Among the eighty-two known manuscripts that transmit part or all of *The Canterbury Tales*, the vast majority actually coincide with the Renaissance printings in omitting the “authoritative” link from which Goldberg works. Among those manuscripts which do transcribe some form of this prologue, the majority identify its deferential speaker as the Franklin and not the Squire.43 Even if Spenser read a manuscript of *The Tales*, a fact that itself has never been demonstrated, the hypothetical manuscript would have been more likely to take him farther away, instead of closer to, “what we now regard as the authoritative text.”

Taking Spenser even farther from this text are the “major editions of… the sixteenth century,” books characterized not just, as Goldberg suggests, by the absence of the now familiar link but by the presence of another. The substance of the other link—which remains constant in all the Renaissance editions and which connects *The Squire’s Tale* to the preceding *Man of Law’s Tale* in 1561—is as follows. Thoroughly impressed by the erudite lawyer and his “thriftie tale,” the Host calls on the Parson to speak,

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expecting “by Goddes dignitie” that this “learned m[a]n” will also tell a worthwhile story 
(CT.II.1165-69; E5v). The Parson immediately rebukes the Host for his sinful swearing; 
in response, the Host swears again, labels the Parson a Lollard, and announces to the 
pilgrims that “this loller here woll prechen vs somwhat” (CT.II.1177; E5v). The 
introduction of and promise for the Parson’s sermon are, however, suddenly derailed by a 
surprising interruption: “Naie by my fathers soule, that shall he nat / Saied the Squier, 
here shall he nat preache” (CT.II.1178-79; E5v). Following up on his abrupt intervention, 
the Squire directs the tale-telling contest away from a pious “predicacion” and the 
theological difficulty it may sow by introducing his story with these words to the Host:

    I warne thee beforne, 
    My ioly bodie shall a tale tell, 
    And I shall ringen you so merie a bell, 
    That I shall waken this companie. 
    But it shall not been of Philosofie, 
    Ne Phisike, ne termes queinte of lawe. 
    There is but littell Laten in my mawe. 

(CT.II.1184-90; E5v)

These lines, along with the larger passage in which they appear, are the source of 
considerable disagreement among the thirty-three manuscripts in which they are extant: 
one manuscript identifies their speaker as the Shipman, six others connect them to the 
Summoner, and still twenty-six more attribute them to the Squire.44 While the general 
substance of this link is almost certainly authorial, the identity of the intervening pilgrim 
is, in the case of the Squire, most likely the result of scribal ingenuity. Presented with a 
presumably disorganized and incomplete text, numerous scribes attempted to create

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44 For the disagreement, see Robert A. Pratt, “The Order of The Canterbury Tales,” PMLA 66 (1951): 
1141-67; Lee Patterson, Temporal Circumstances: Form and History in The Canterbury Tales (New York: 
Palgrave, 2006), 25-35; and Simon Horobin, “Compiling The Canterbury Tales in Fifteenth Century 
continuity between the link and their sequence of the tales, attributing the interruption to whatever pilgrim—most commonly the Squire—whose story followed the Man of Law’s in their exemplar. Despite originating as an act of scribal resourcefulness, however, the attribution of this link to the Squire gains substantial authority through the medium of print. During the first century of its print transmission, the link is always presented as *The Squire’s Prologue*, appearing as the authorial text in the editions of William Caxton, Wynkyn De Worde, Richard Pynson, William Thynne and John Stow. The link was so firmly connected to the Squire that it remained with him, even when the location of his tale changed. Between 1476 and 1561, the tale moves from between the Man of Law and the Merchant, to between the Merchant and the Franklin, and then back again following the Man of Law. Throughout each of its positional shifts, *The Squire’s Tale* is introduced by its teller’s interruption of the Parson and the subsequent address to the Host.

The well-established presence of this interruption in Stow and all its printed precursors help qualify Goldberg’s description of the Squire’s character. Instead of sacrificing himself to the Host’s misguided assessment, or passively surrendering to the Host’s authoritative command, the Squire in Stow aggressively asserts his individual voice and forcefully assumes the power to revise the official, prescribed plan. In place of a deferential promise not to “rebelle,” Stow’s Squire stages a temporary usurpation,


undermining the Host, assuming his usual role as narratological “gouernour,” and
dictating for all “this companie” the course of the tale-telling contest. The vigor with
which he effects his usurpation similarly qualifies the description of the Squire in The
General Prologue. There, the Squire appears the paragon of modesty and obedience, a
“curteis… lowly and seruysable” youth who dutifully carves before his father and social
superior, the Knight (CT.I.99-100; A2v). The behavior of the Squire in his printed
prologue adds a new dimension to his initial representation, establishing him as a more
paradoxical figure: this Squire combines deference and aggression, self-effacement and
self-assertion, a respect for authority and a deviation from it.

As he prepares to announce his forthcoming story, the Squire proffers a stern alert
to the Host, “I warne thee beforne,” recalling a similar injunction delivered by the Host in
the introduction to the previous tale, “I warne you all the rout” (CT.II.16; D5v). Formerly
part of the Host’s command to hurry up and proceed with The Man of Law’s Tale, his
warning has now been repurposed, his voice reappropriated: the Host is no longer
prescribing a plan but receiving one. With its connection between echo and self-
assertion, The Squire’s Prologue works against Goldberg’s logic of verbal sacrifice: the
repetition of this prior utterance (“I warne…”) actually enables the Squire to powerfully
exercise his voice, “I shall waken this companie” (CT.II.1187; E5v). When he does
indeed begin his rousing tale, the Squire is similarly concerned, though on a much larger
scale, to repeat previous utterances without forfeiting his voice. The Squire’s narrative is
propelled by the words of other speakers: those of the emissary in pars prima and those
of the falcon in pars secunda. But the prominence afforded to prior voices demands the
Squire’s sustained presence and activity, rather than his effacement or obliteration. As
Alan Ambrisco has rightly observed, the speeches from the emissary and falcon were initially delivered in foreign languages; their words assume an English form and reach the Canterbury pilgrims only after being filtered through the Squire and his active translation.47 The tale’s intelligibility depends on the Squire keeping his translating voice in the narrative and not entirely withdrawing from it.

In recalling and translating speeches formerly made by the emissary and falcon, the Squire also reworks tales previously told by his fellow pilgrims. As scholars since at least Marie Neville have observed, the Squire cultivates a special connection with the Knight, transforming the characters, along with the rhetorical, lexical, generic and philosophical elements, which comprised his story:48 the Knight’s commanding Theseus, duke of unparalleled fame and power (CT.I.859-63), becomes the Squire’s ruling Cambyuskan, whose own “renoun” and conquests are unrivalled in any “regioun” (CT.V.9-16); the Knight’s vow to move “shortly to the point,” and bring his “longe tale” to its “ende” (CT.I.2965-66), becomes the Squire’s promise to soon make an “ende” of his own and reach the “knotte” of his story (CT.V.401-8); the Knight’s indirect account of Theseus’ lavish feast, which avowedly rejects description while actually providing it (CT.I.2197-2207), becomes the Squire’s even more indirect summary of the Mongols’ wedding dinner (CT.V.61-75); and the Knight’s connection to The Consolation of Philosophy, which looms large in Theseus’ “Firste Movere” speech (CT.I.2986-3074), becomes with the Squire the different quotation from Boethius in the falcon’s complaint (CT.I.607-9). The Squire recurs to the Knight’s romance motifs, narrative organization,


sustained *occupatio* and Boethian wisdom to resituate them within a new chivalric aesthetic which prioritizes, as Anne Middleton and Seth Lerer cogently put it, a wondrous and affective eloquence over his father’s grave sententiousness.49 His echoes of *The Knight’s Tale* empower his revision of its precedent.

In the 1561 edition, the revisions in the story proper dovetail with the Squire’s assertive introduction to it. If the substance of *The Squire’s Tale* looks back on the Knight’s narrative, the interruption in *The Squire’s Prologue* looks back on what happens after this narrative ends. When “the Knight had… his tale itold” (*CT*.I.3109; C5v), the Host directs the Monk to tell the next story, proposing a sequence of speakers—the miles then the monachus—that proceeds according to the social hierarchy of the estates system (*CT*.I.3118-19; C5v).50 His hierarchal plan is, however, emphatically overturned by Robin the Miller, the churlish labourer who interrupts the proceedings with his drunken yelling, undercuts the Host’s aim to “wirche thriftely” (*CT*.I.3131; C5v), and vows to follow the Knight with a narrative requital. In his subsequent tale, the Miller sustains his impulse toward political contestation and bears out his promise of poetic retaliation: his forceful intervention introduces a story that reworks and pointedly critiques *The Knight’s Tale* and its chivalric ideology.51 *The Squire’s Prologue* and *Tale* recall and transform


51 My understanding of class tension in *The Miller’s Prologue* is derived from Lee Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 244-45.
this pattern. Trying to shift from the Lawyer to the Parson, the Host again appeals to his principle of thriftiness (CT.II.1165; E5v), outlining a sequence of speakers that moves through the pilgrimage’s “learned men in lore” (CT.II.1168: E5v). But like the Miller before him, the Squire interrupts to challenge the schema: his aggressive intervention outlines a tale that, in its apparent rejection of philosophical, legal, medical and Latin terminology (CT.II.1188-90; E5v), disables the Host’s desired arrangement of institutionally educated men. Subsequently, and again like the Miller, the Squire uses his intervention to launch his rewriting of The Knight’s Tale. He here reconceives the Miller’s approach, striving less to critique the Knight’s chivalric system than to expand its scope and alter its function. In other words, the Squire’s revisionary echoes of The Knight’s Tale are themselves enabled by a revisionary act: his reprisal of the Miller’s interruption in the prologue creates the opportunity for further revision in the tale itself.

When pursued at length, this revisionary impetus extends beyond the Canterbury frame and, though unbeknownst to the Squire, encompasses prior works in the Chaucerian corpus. As Alfred David, Elizabeth Scala and Lesley Kordecki have observed, the tale is closely connected with Anelida and Arcite, the early lyric that moves from the victorious Theseus and his homecoming procession to the titular figures and the devastating dissolution of their relationship. There, the narrator bemoans Arcite’s infidelity, chastises “Lameth” as the first bigamist (AA.150-53; Aaa4r), pities his heroine’s sudden faint (AA.169-70; Aaa4r), and rails against man’s natural desire for

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“newfanglenesse” (AA.141; Aaa4r). All of these textual details are taken up in *The Squire’s Tale*: Chaucer repurposes them here within a new scenario of abandonment, which involves a deserted bird instead of a deserted woman. For Chaucer, this instance of reappropriation exemplifies his more widespread impulse toward recycling and transforming the *Anelida*. To propel *The Knight’s Tale*, we remember, Chaucer revives the same procession toward Athens that his early lyric had first introduced. Those “old stories” about Theseus at the opening of *The Knight’s Tale* (CT.I.859; B1r) are provided by “Stace of Thebes” (CT.I.2294; C1r), but also by Chaucer of England.\(^5^4\) As the second rewriting of *Anelida* on the Canterbury pilgrimage, *The Squire’s Tale* joins this existing intertextual relationship and forms several affiliations with its prior participants. *The Squire’s Tale* parallels *The Knight’s Tale*, running alongside it back to their shared textual origin: “if the *Knight’s Tale* is a mature rewriting of *Anelida and Arcite*,” writes Lee Patterson, “then the *Squire’s Tale* is a satiric version” (I shall return to the ideas of maturity and satire shortly).\(^5^5\) But *The Squire’s Tale* also overlaps with *The Knight’s Tale*, engaging their shared, distant origin under the influence of a second, more proximate one: *The Squire’s Tale* effects its rewriting of *Anelida* through a simultaneous return to and rewriting of *The Knight’s Tale*.

This double revision is most acutely evinced in the opening events of *pars secunda*. Having journeyed into a luxurious park with several attending women, Canacee

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\(^{55}\) *Chaucer and the Subject of History*, 75.
encounters an inconsolable falcon that utters fearsome screams and beats herself with her wings. When Canacee expresses her compassion “tho shrigh this faucon yet more spitously / than euer she did, and fel to grounde anone / and lieth a swoune deed as is a stone…And after that she of swoune gan abreyde / right in her haukes leden thus she seyde:

‘That pite renneth soone in gentyl hert
(Feling his similitude in paines smert)
Is proued alday, as men may se
As wel by werke as by authorite
For gentle herte kepeth gentilnesse
I se wel that ye haue of my distresse
Compassion, my faire Canace
Of very womanly benignite
That nature in your principles hath sette
But for non hope for to fare the bette
But for to obey vnto your hert fre
And for to make other beware by me…
Myne harme I wol confessen or I pace.’
And euer while that one her sorowe tolde
That other wepte, as she to water wolde…

(CT.V.472-96; F2r)

Anelida’s once tear-filled face, passionate voice and languishing body—when Arcite betrays her, “she wepeth, waileth and swouneth pitously / to grounde deed she falleth as a ston” (AA.169-70; Aaa4r)—have been reprised in avian form: the falcon now provides her own unceasing tears, spiteful shrieks and stony faint. Chaucer’s transformation of Anelida’s suffering is part of his more subtle adaptation of the narrative sequence by which her suffering was once followed. After Anelida revives from her faint, the narrator moves from a diegetic to an extra-diegetic perspective and addresses his audience of “thriftie women,” advising them to beware of and learn from the “ensample” that this case of infidelity provides (AA.197-203; Aaa4r). The narrator then turns back to Anelida, who has penned “with her owne hande” a lengthy complaint to the faithless Arcite
In *The Squire’s Tale*, Chaucer recapitulates the pattern of moral admonishment and passionate complaint, but changes the actors by whom, the audience for which, and the manner in which, each is presented. Previously divided between the narrator and Anelida, the roles of pedagogue and complainant have since been fused in a single figure, the lamentable falcon. She presents her sorrowful case, now expressed by an oral “leden” instead of a written “hande,” with the instructional aim “to make other beware by me” (*CT*.V.490; F2r). As the narrator had done with Anelida, the falcon has made herself an “ensample,” one now offered at a diegetic level to a group of compassionate, rather than “thriftie,” women: Canacee and her ladies “ten or twelue” (*CT*.V.383; F1v).

This multifold reprisal of *Anelida* initially proceeds by way of the Squire’s second poetic precursor. Before the falcon, like the narrator in *Anelida*, warns that “men louen of kynde newfanglenesse” (*CT*.V.610; F2v cf. *AA* 201-02; Aaa4r), she echoes a line, “pitie renneth sone in gentle hert” (*CT*.I.1761; B5r), previously presented in *The Knight’s Tale*. The recycled phrase signals Chaucer’s more substantial revision of the entire episode in which it had earlier appeared. Stumbling upon an unlicensed fight between a wounded Arcite and Palamon, the former having broken the conditions of his banishment, the latter having broken his imprisonment, Theseus promptly concludes to execute them both. When his capital sentence is answered by the tears of Hippolyta, Emily and their company of women, however, Theseus reverses his decision. He offers a more merciful verdict, feeling compassion for lovers and women in his gentle heart

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56 For Chaucer’s reuse of the line in *The Squire’s Tale* and *The Merchant’s Tale*, see Helen Cooper, *The Structure of The Canterbury Tales* (Athens, GA.: University of Georgia Press, 1984), 89, whose argument about the self-referentially of *The Canterbury Tales* I develop here.
The Squire’s Tale recalls this assortment of wounded bodies, tearful eyes and compassionate feelings, and reorganizes them within a new system of gendered relationships. What was once a sequence of male suffering, female sorrow and male compassion—the bleeding bodies of Arcite and Palamon incite the women to tears which, in turn, sway Theseus into his display of noble benevolence—has been remade into a transaction comprised entirely of females. The wounded body and pitiful case no longer belong to either of the combative, male cousins but to the self-lacerated, female falcon. The suffering bird stands before a new type of female onlooker who combines various characteristics from Hippolyta and Emily, on one hand, and Theseus, on the other. Both the weeping lady and the benevolent noble, Canacee offers her tears not as the spur to a man’s gentle heart but as a testament of her own.

Unpacking the simultaneous revision of The Knight’s Tale and Anelida helps extend the existing critical tradition on The Squire’s Tale, which has rightly emphasized its status as a metafictional text. Lindsey M. Jones neatly encapsulates this tradition when she explains that the tale is “a narrative poem designed to examine the craft of poetic composition.” Numerous critics, Jones included, have suggested that the tale’s metafictional aim is to satirize the Squire as an immature and unskilled poet; admired in The General Prologue as a practiced versifier who “coulde songes make, and wel endite” (CT.I.95; A2r), the Squire later proves a clumsy artist encumbered by awkward rhymes, rhetorical superfluity and self-indulgent prolixity. In this line of argumentation, the Squire is a poet whom the urbane Chaucer holds up for mockery and from whom the

mature Chaucer naturally distances himself.\textsuperscript{58} But the revisionary aesthetic in the tale suggests a different valence for its metafictionality. For all its apparent clumsiness, for all its teller’s seeming immaturity, \textit{The Squire’s Tale} nevertheless crystalizes a crucial paradigm of poetic creativity from which Chaucer strives to connect himself and his oeuvre. Declining recourse to a literary source from classical antiquity or the Italian \textit{trecento}, Chaucer creates a new tale by revisiting and revising his old works. Viewed as the site of Chaucerian self-revision, \textit{The Squire’s Tale} seems designed less to mock its naïve teller than to construct a literary history around its emerging author. In it, Chaucer turns \textit{Anelida} and \textit{The Knight’s Tale} into the substance of tradition—poetic material that transcends ephemerality to be transmitted, imitated and redacted in the future. “First I follow Stace and then Corinne,” Chaucer writes in \textit{Anelida} (\textit{AA}.21; Aaa3r), announcing the traditions that he will imitate and develop. In \textit{The Squire’s Tale}, Chaucer assumes the status he formerly assigned to his classical predecessors: Chaucer now follows, and builds on, Chaucer.

VI: Chaucer’s Footsteps, Spenser’s Revisions: \textit{Faerie Queene} IV from England to the Continent

A paradoxical combination of deference and aggression; a use of echo which functions not to effect an obliteration of self but to fuel a poetic reappropriation; a simultaneous rewriting of \textit{Anelida} and \textit{The Knight’s Tale}; the construction of a literary tradition

through the practice of self-revision—these are the ideas exemplified by Chaucer’s Squire and the Renaissance printings of his prologue and tale. And in the fourth book of *The Faerie Queene*, they are also the ideas around which Spenser’s Chaucerianism revolves. Here, Spenser creates his own prologue to the Squire’s tale, prefacing his story of “fayre Canacee” with twenty seven lines that praise Chaucer’s famous poem, lament its piteous degeneration, and announce a plan for its recovery. In the final stanza of his prologue, Spenser addresses Chaucer with this plea:

> Then pardon, O most sacred happie spirit,  
> That I thy labours lost may thus reuiue,  
> And steale from thee the meede of thy due merit,  
> That none durst euer whilsth thou wast aliue,  
> And being dead in vaine yet many striue:  
> Ne dare I like, but through infusion sweete  
> Of thine owne spirit, which doth in me surviue,  
> I follow here the footing of thy feete,  
> That with thy meaning so I may the rather meete.

>(*FQ.*IV.ii.34)

As Vaughn Stewart has rightly observed, Spenser assumes a twin role as devotee and rival, hoping to worship Chaucer and improve upon him.59 This dual status, I would add, extends the precedent set by Stow and the early modern editions. Like their paradoxical Squire, Spenser here blends cautious courtesy and ambitious self-assertion: his wariness of striving “in vaine” like those unnamed “many” gives way to the confidence of succeeding where they failed; his deferential appeal to Chaucer for “pardon” shades into the forceful usurpation of stealing his deserved glory; and his promise of dutifully following Chaucer’s “feete” is qualified by a partial deviation from them. His deviation appears two stanzas earlier when he invokes the once-extant record of Cambell, Triamond and their former enmity: “Whylome as antique stories tellen vs, / Those two

59 Stewart, “Friends, Rivals, and Revisions;” 100.
were foes the fellonest on ground” (*FQ*.IV.ii.32.1-2). Spenser recalls the opening line of *The Knight’s Tale*—“Whilom, as olde stories tellen us” (*CT*.I.859)—but carefully revises its adjective: Chaucer’s “olde” becomes Spenser’s “antique.” To Spenser’s post-medieval ear, “olde” comprised only one syllable, and as such, it needed to be replaced with his disyllabic alternative to fit within *The Faerie Queene*’s decasyllabic line. Like the Renaissance Squire with the Host’s warning, Spenser recycles his predecessor’s words only to assertively reframe them: Spenser follows Chaucer’s tracks, but he also refashions Chaucer’s metrical “feete” with a creative act of “foot surgery.”

Spenser exercises a similar kind of latitude with *Anelida*, one of those “olde stories” that lie behind *The Knight’s Tale*. In his proem to the lyric, Chaucer had vowed to compose in English an “olde storie, in Latyn which I fynde / Of quene Anelida and fals Arcite / That elde, which that al can frete and bite / As hit hath freten mony a noble storie / Hath nygh devoured out of oure memorie” (*AA*.10-14). In Spenser’s thirty third canto, quoted above, these lines reappear transformed: the former appeal to the Latin poem is muted by Spenser, who would have us subread this classical tradition through the “well of English vndefyled” (*FQ*.IV.ii.32.8); a story that maintained at least a partial degree of currency, only “nigh deuoured” from the collective mind, becomes for Spenser a text that lacks even this partial presence, “quite deuourd, and brought to nought” (*FQ*.IV.ii.33.9); and cursed “elde,” the force that “all can frete and bite,” is granted by Spenser an even more physical, material existence as the “cankerworme of writs,” a title that filters Chaucerian imitation through the Spenserian description of Eumnestes’ chamber (*FQ*.II.ix.57.6-9). Spenser’s modifications to *Anelida* combine with his prior change to

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60 Berry, “Spenser’s Continuation,” 117.
The Knight's Tale in subjecting Chaucer’s poetry to a Chaucerian precept: “one of the lessons Spenser learned from Chaucer,” writes Judith H. Anderson, “is how to treat a source.”\textsuperscript{61} In his handling of The Knight’s Tale and Anelida, Spenser displays the results of his poetic education. As The Squire’s Tale had shown, and as Spenser now shows, echoes of The Knight’s Tale and Anelida actually invite their creative variation, whether this revision involves the identity of a gentle heart or the substance of a metrical unit, the identity of a female complainant or the title of a villainous “Eld.”

Like the Squire’s reprisal of the Miller’s interruption in Renaissance editions of his prologue, Spenser’s revisions to these Chaucerian poems create the opportunity and justification for the tale proper to unfold. Where the Squire’s intervention defers the Parson’s sermon, declaring the need for his new tale and its forthcoming stimulation, Spenser’s revisions to The Knight’s Tale and Anelida defer Satyran’s tournament and assert the need for the tale’s forthcoming reconstruction. For Spenser, the first revision interrupts the narrative’s linear progression with a retrospective look to the distant past and its “antique” stories; the second follows this past through time by explaining that these once heroic stories have since been destroyed. With his paired rewritings, Spenser charts a trajectory from past glory to present loss, and through it, creates the space and demand for his tale as a necessary act of textual recovery. He announces this inset tale by joining the Chaucerian tradition of poetic rewriting. As I have emphasized, Chaucer propelled The Squire’s Tale through his simultaneous return to Anelida and The Knight’s Tale, the old Chaucerian fields from which he fashioned his new poetic corn. Spenser now returns to the same poems and applies to his corpus the idea underlying their

revision. He assembles the same collocation of texts and, as we saw earlier, adds alongside it his own instance of self-rewriting: his echoes of *The Ruines of Rome*, book two of *The Faerie Queene* and *The Ruines of Time*.

To explain Spenser’s general impulse toward re-reading and rewriting his work, Anne Lake Prescott writes: “Spenser’s favorite reading matter, more vivid to him even than the works of Chaucer, Ariosto, Tasso and du Bellay, or any text except possibly the Bible, was the poetry of Edmund Spenser.”62 In the fourth book of *The Faerie Queene*, Spenser’s self-revisions testify not only to the vividness he perceived in his poetry, but also to the care he took in developing English literary history. His creative engagement with his “favorite reading material” equally generates his bond with his favourite medieval predecessor. By here rewriting lines from his *Complaints* and his 1590 *Faerie Queene*, Spenser asserts his filiation with, and continuation of, a Chaucerian poetic technique—the same technique that *Anelida*, *The Knight’s Tale* and *The Squire’s Tale* had collectively represented. The New Poet follows the Old not by replicating the letter of his text, nor by copying the meter of his verse, nor still by surrendering entirely to his voice. Instead, self-revising Spenser follows Chaucer’s self-tracing steps: “I follow here the footing of thy feete” (*FQ*.IV.ii.34.9)—fittingly, Spenser’s announcement of his Chaucerian connection manifests that connection in action. Claiming to follow the poet of the self-revisionary *Squire’s Tale*, Spenser rewrites a line inspired by Statius’ *Thebaid*.

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Lucretius’ *De rerum natura* and Chaucer’s *Troilus*, but also by his own *Shepheardes Calender*: “followe them farre off, and their high steppes adore” (*SC*.Epil.11). 63

Spenser extends his revisionary and self-revisionary poetics in his reconstructed tale, moving now to the rewriting of thematic patterns. He organizes his tale around a twofold reworking of the Squire’s narrative prospectus. At the end of his *secunda pars*, Chaucer’s Squire promises to “speke of Cambalo / That faught in lystes with the bretheren two / For Canacee, er that he myght hire wynne” (*CT*.V.667-69). In Spenser’s hands the fight against two siblings becomes instead a fight against “three brethren bold” (*FQ*.IV.ii.41.1) in which Cambalo, now renamed Cambell or Cambello, no longer strives to gain the love of his sister for himself but to identify a worthy and exogamous husband for her. 64 To select this husband, Cambell stages a tournament, and Spenser revises *The Knight’s Tale*. Cambell’s strategy for adjudicating among his sister’s suitors redacts the practice previously pursued by Chaucer’s Theseus, who had similarly organized an institutionally sanctioned combat to adjudicate between his sister-in-law’s lovers. Cambell goes even farther than Theseus with his involvement in martial arbitration: whereas Chaucer’s Theseus only designed the amphitheater and set the rules for a tournament, Spenser’s Cambell actually fights in one. Like Theseus at the end of his tale, Cambell is finally part of a tetrad: the bonds of marriage, kinship and friendship that link


Theseus, respectively, to Hippolyta, Emily and Palamon are reformed in the connections that tie Cambell to Cambina, Canacee and Triamond.65

When the members of the latter group “all accorded goodly were,” they rise together, jointly depart from the tournament, and collectively attest their connection both to The Knight’s Tale as well as to the old Chaucerian story that underlies it. “Those warlike champions,” Cambell and Triamond:

both together chose,
Homeward to march, themselues there to repose,
And wise Cambina taking by her side
Faire Canacee, as fresh as morning rose,
Vnto her Coch remounting, home did ride,
Admir’d of all the people, and much glorifide.

(FQ.IV.iii.51.4-9)

The same Chaucerian poems with which Spenser had prefaced his tale are once again refigured at its end; on a topos transmitted by The Knight’s Tale and Anelida, Spenser now provides his variation. A noble group coming home after a fierce battle; the sounding trumpets ringing in their ears; a golden chariot streaming through a crowd of admiring onlookers; a beautiful woman dazzling all with her fairness and freshness—the elements in Spenser’s scene are the shared property of a literary tradition that runs from Statius’ Thebaid and Boccaccio’s Teseida to Chaucer’s twin Athenian poems and the homecoming episode with which they both begin. The “trompes” that once announced Theseus, coming home after his battle with the “aspre folk of Cithe” (AA.22-35), now sound anew for Spenser’s tetrad, coming home after the battle between Cambell and Triamond (FQ.IV.iii.51.2). The “char of gold” that once held Hippolyta and Emily (AA.36-39) is remade in the “coch” with “gold and many a gorgeous ornament”

65 The Chaucerian valences of Spenser’s tetrad are outlined in Hieatt, Mythopoeic Continuities and Transformations, 75-94. The similarities between book four and Chaucer’s Knight’s Tale are surveyed by Higgins, “Spenser Reading Chaucer,” 22-24.
(FQ.IV.iii.38.7), which now carries Cambina and Canacee. The “brightnesse of the beaute” in Emily’s face (AA.41) now shines in the lovely Canacee, “fresh as morning rose.” In The Knight’s Tale and Anelida, as in The Faerie Queene, these triumphant processions are underscored by a more sinister element of compulsion. Like Hippolyta and Emily, who ride peacefully and magnificently only because Theseus has conquered their Amazonian society, Triamond and Cambell move calmly and gloriously only because Cambina has smote them with her potent caduceus and made them drink her mind-altering nepenthe. But Spenser’s rendition of this coercion, which prefers Cambina’s magical intervention to Theseus’s martial domination, makes these Chaucerian resonances shade into their reversal. Whereas Chaucer’s characters journey home because the powerful “regne of Femenye” (CT.I.866) has been overcome, Spenser’s characters journey home because a powerful female force has been effectively applied. Like the Chaucerian echoes in his prologue, Spenser’s concluding recollection of The Knight’s Tale and Anelida alters their precedent. He shares with Chaucer in the topos of a homecoming journey only to reject the logic of female subjugation upon which the Chaucerian homecoming was contingent.

In the original Squire’s Tale, Chaucer’s simultaneous engagement with the same poems—The Knight’s Tale and Anelida—was an act of self-revision; in the reconstructed Squire’s tale, Spenser makes this practice his own. His other change to the Squire’s narrative prospectus—the transformation of two brothers into three—is actually doubly revisionary, enabling the rewriting of the 1590 Faerie Queene as well. The first half of its first book is structured around interlaced conflicts with another “three brethren,” Sansfoy, Sansjoy, and “the blody bold” Sansloy (FQ.I.ii.25.7-9). When the eldest of the brothers
fights against Red Cross, the Knight of Holiness emerges victorious, decapitating his enemy and sending his “grudging ghost” to the underworld, “whether the soules doe flye of men, that live amis” (*FQ*.I.ii.19.7-9). Three cantos later, Sansjoy attempts to avenge his brother’s death, but he too is subdued by Red Cross; the joyless heathen avoids a similar decapitation only because Duessa covers his prostrate body in a cloud of smoke, and evacuates him from the battlefield into “Plutoes balefull bowres” (*FQ*.I.v.14.8). In book four Spenser reworks this existing, Spenserian subject matter: he reforms the villainous triumvirate of Sansfoy, Sansloy and Sansjoy, “all three bred / Of one bad sire” (*FQ*.I.ii.25.7-8), into the virtuous trio of Priamond, Diamond and Triamond, “[b]orne of one mother in one happie mold” (*FQ*.IV.ii.41.3). Spenser describes the latter trio in superlative terms: “Three bolder brethren never were yborne” (*FQ*.IV.ii.41.2), assigning them an epithet—bold—once earned by the fraternal triumvirate from book one. In transferring the adjective, Spenser resignifies it: with the –mond brothers, this characteristic boldness no longer refers to acts of transgressive force but to displays of proper knightly courage.

Exhibiting his bravery in combat with Cambell, the bold Priamond suffers a mortal wound. His soul takes a path that recalls and rejects both the posthumous trajectory of Sansfoy’s “ghost” as well as the resting place of Sansjoy’s body. When Priamond lets “forth his wearie ghost” (*FQ*.IV.iii.12.9), we will recall, it does “not as others wont, directly fly / Vnto her rest in Plutoes griesly land” (*FQ*.IV.iii.13.2-3). Rather than following the injured Sansjoy, the dead Sansfoy, or his distant archetype, Virgil’s Turnus, into an underworld residence, Priamond’s soul travels through “traduction” into

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66 For the epithet bold and its connection to the Sans-brothers, see *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A.C. Hamilton, et al., 49.
his elder brother (*FQ*.IV.iii.13.6-9). Spenser revises his Virgilian and Spenserian precedents to articulate an idea of renewal: Sansfoy’s soul and Sansjoy’s body were once conveyed out of the world, but Priamond’s soul gains a continued presence in it. For Spenser, this Pythagorean regeneration dovetails with his Chaucerian engagement: the same vivifying process that Spenser presents in the tale—namely, traduction—also spurs him to reconstruct the tale in the first place. Spenser dares to pursue his act of poetic revival only because Chaucer’s soul has apparently been infused in him. With traduction, Spenser finds the idea that rewrites the subterranean flights from the first book of his *Faerie Queene* as well as the means that enables his privileged bond with Chaucer; the soul of a self-revisionary predecessor survives in his successor, who incorporates another soul in his own act of self-revision.

Spenser’s adaptation of the first book of *The Faerie Queene* combines with his changes to *The Knight’s Tale* and *Anelida* in articulating a particular kind of fidelity to the original *Squire’s Tale*. As I have argued, his fidelity is best described not as a complete acquiescence to Chaucer’s authority, nor as a total sacrifice to Chaucer’s voice, but as a recreation of the impulse behind Chaucer’s creative process. He learns how to imitate Chaucer, as Erasmus would put it, by studying Chaucer’s own techniques of imitation, refashioning not simply the surface of his poetry but the method underlying its genesis. Spenser matches Chaucer by rewriting the poems that *The Squire’s Tale* had

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67 The connection among Sansfoy, Sansjoy and Virgil’s Turnus is noted in ibid, 47, 74.

68 For scholars who have observed the similarity between these various instances of traduction, but who have not made the connection between traduction and Spenserian self-revision, see Anderson, “Spenser’s Archive,” *Reading the Allegorical Intertext*, 89; Berry, “Spenser’s Continuation,” 119; and Martin, “Spenser, Chaucer and the Rhetoric of Elegy,” 106.

69 See *Collected Works of Erasmus*, 28: 400: “In short, we must learn how to imitate Cicero from Cicero himself. Let us imitate him as he imitated others”; and *Opera Omnia: Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami*
itself rewritten, and by appropriating the principle of self-revision out of which *The Squire’s Tale* was developed. In paradoxical fashion, Spenser provides a faithful reconstruction of *The Squire’s Tale* precisely because he refuses to be perfectly faithful to any authoritative voices and poems that had come before him—whether those preceding poems were written by Chaucer or Spenser. “What is the good,” asks Erasmus’ Bulephorus in *Ciceronianus*, “of a son being like his father in physical feature if he is unlike him in mind and character?” (“Quid enim refert, si filius parentem oris lineamentis referat, quum ingenio moribusque sit dissimilis”). Spenser, claiming kinship with his literary father, matches Chaucer in his self-revisionary mind.

In doing so, Spenser avoids a secondary, subordinate or inevitably belated position: his revisionary impulse allows him to assert a form of precedence over his self-revisionary model. Spenser manifests such primacy in his retroactive engagement with the third book of *The Faerie Queene*, first published in 1590. At that time, the Legend of Chastity concluded with a joyous reunion between Scudamour and Amoret, the once-separated lovers whose passionate embrace finally provokes “halfe” envy from an observing Britomart (*FQ*.III.xii.46.6). When the first installment of *The Faerie Queene* was republished alongside three new books in 1596, however, Spenser had subjected his conclusion to his characteristic self-revision. Instead of a blissful embrace, Scudamour now participates in an impotent rescue mission; overcome by fear and despair for his lover’s safety, Scudamour departs with Glauce “further aide t’enquire” (*FQ*.III.xii.45.8).

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70 *Collected Works of Erasmus*, 28: 448; and *Opera Omnia*, 1-2, 709.
As a result, Amoret is newly disappointed in her hope for a reunion, and is instead left alone in “new affright” with Britomart (FQ.III.xii.44.9). Spenser’s self-rewriting is a spur for the action of book four, the first canto of which begins with the newly formed pairs of Britomart and Amoret, Scudamour and Glaucce.

This enabling revision positions Chaucer and his self-revisionary Squire’s Tale in a relationship of multidirectional precedence. In the chronological sequence of English literary history, Spenser follows Chaucer in his self-revisionary poetics; but in the narratological sequence of the 1596 Faerie Queene, Chaucer, who does not appear until the second canto of book four, follows the earlier self-revision of Spenser. By constructing this relation of shifting priority, Spenser extends a central dictum of Renaissance imitation. “No one,” Quintilian explains, “can draw level with a man whose footsteps he feels bound to tread: the follower is inevitably behind” (“Eum vero nemo potest aequare cuius vestigiis sibi utique insistendum putat: necesse est enim semper sit posterior qui sequitur”) (IO.4.X.ii.10). For Spenser, by contrast, one can indeed tread in a predecessor’s footsteps without always lagging behind him. Though claiming to follow Chaucer’s self-tracing feet in canto two, Spenser and his self-revisions have already led the way.

The revisionary process, if it has an explicitly named and English source in Chaucer, may also be traced to a series of international precedents. We see such a self-generating method in Virgil, whose Aeneas retraces his footsteps through Troy even as the Aeneid itself retraces the steps already laid out by Orpheus in the Georgics; in Ovid, whose Ars Amatoria incorporates a whole verse from Heroides VIII, but now uses it to

signal the poet’s excitement for artistic and amorous triumph rather than Hermione’s despondent recollection of past grief; and in Horace, whose first Ode samples his own Epistles and Epodes, and from them builds a newly comprehensive list of military, mercantile, political, agricultural and poetic careers.\textsuperscript{72} We see this method in Dante, whose Carlo Martello from the Paradiso looks back to the Convivio, quoting the opening line of its first canzone, only to reframe it within a new scheme of celestial movement and human causation; in Petrarch, whose Triumphi remembers his earlier self alongside his earlier Rerum vulgarium fragmenta, and looks forward to seeing Laura in heaven even as it looks back to her previous place in his scattered rhymes; and in Boccaccio, who on the tenth day of storytelling in the Decameron, returns to his Filocolo and refashions two of its questione-d’amoure into new novelistic narratives for Lauretta and Emilia.\textsuperscript{73} We see it in Marot, whose elegy for Louis of Savoy ruefully remembers the portents of her death, even as he remembers diction previously used in his paraphrase of


Virgil’s first Eclogue; in du Bellay, whose fourth sonnet in the *Antiquités* translates one of his own Latin poems from the *Tumuli*, but changes its formerly first-person speaker into a third-person perspective; and in Ronsard, whose *Cartel pour le combat à cheval* circles back to his thirtieth sonnet *Pour Hélène*, and retraces the earlier steps of its ballet dance.\(^{74}\) We see it in Boiardo, whose *Orlando Innamorato* recurs to his *Amorum libri*, and transforms its golden chains, once binding the desperate lover, into the noose-like rope that now binds the venomous monster of Castle Cruel; in Ariosto, whose Astolfo in the *Cinque canti* reprises his role from *Orlando Furioso*, and having been captured again by Alcina, though now without hope of “the protection St. John once gave” him, narrates to Ruggiero another story of sinful imprisonment; and in Tasso, whose Erminia in *Gerusalemme liberata* flees into the pastoral landscape of the *Aminta*, and like the titular character in that drama, though now in the voice of a female knight, there expresses a love complaint, envisions her death, and hopes that an arboreal inscription will win some posthumous pity from her beloved.\(^{75}\) The practice of self-revision, carried across this


long tradition, involves the individual as well as the collective, both a return to one’s own earlier poetry and a recollection of the similarly-minded poets who have come before it; the self-reviser at once engages his own work, and joins a transhistorical community of self-revisionary creativity. Spenser may not have read all the poems that I have included in this community, but he knew many of them, studied their authors throughout his life, and could well recognize himself and Chaucer as individual representations of a more multinational, self-revisionary practice.

Camille Paglia, writing about Spenser’s connections to Chaucerian and Continental poetry, offers this deliberately provocative thesis: “Scholars begin English literature with Chaucer and list Spenser as his disciple. But English literature would have remained merely national if it had really followed Chaucer. I would argue that Spenser made English literature world-class only by abandoning Chaucer and eradicating his influence.”

Despite its robust rhetorical force, this argument falls apart on its sharp opposition between Chaucer’s national poetry and the international status to which Spenser aspired. Far from representing a narrow insularity, Chaucer directed English poetry toward “Virgile, Ovide, Omer, Lucan, and Stace” (TC.V.1792), and fashioned an English art continuous with the Italian “clerk…Petrake” (CT.IV.25-31) and the “wise poete of Florence, / That highte Dant” (CT.III.1125-27): the “well of English vndefyled,” as Spenser calls him (FQ.IV.ii.32.8), could double as a conduit to Continental sources. Book four of The Faerie Queene really follows Chaucer and the footing of his self-tracing feet, but from Spenser’s perspective, these tracks could also point toward the

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76 Camille Paglia, Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 171.
“steppes” of classical antiquity, of the French Renaissance, of the Italian trecento, quattrocento and cinquecento. With his Anelida, his Knight’s Tale and his Squire’s Tale, Chaucer instantiates a commonplace of poetic creativity that, when represented retrospectively in 1596, imaginatively aligns his national English oeuvre with the self-revisionary and world-class work of Virgil, Petrarch, Ariosto and the rest. Engaging these Chaucerian poems alongside his own, Spenser moves through his English predecessor to give this commonplace a new locus in The Faerie Queene. “Dan Chaucer”: the name may finally signify not just the greatest poet of the English Middle Ages but the mediating channel through which Spenser claims his creative affinity with a broader, European literary tradition.
Afterword

Wordsworth’s Chaucer:
Mediation and Transformation in English Literary History

I: Immediacy and Mediation:
Chaucer, his Readers and The Prelude

Near the middle of the third book of his Prelude, “Residence at Cambridge,” Wordsworth recalls the principal poets of England’s literary tradition and describes his formative perceptions of them. He evokes Spenser, remembering a brother and friend moving through the clouded heaven. He evokes Milton, remembering an angelical boy bounding in a scholar’s dress. But, first, he evokes another poet and remembers how: “Beside the pleasant Mill of Trompington / I laugh’d with Chaucer, in the hawthorn shade / Heard him, while birds were warbling, tell his tales / Of amorous passion” (Prld.3.278-81). As most annotated editions of The Prelude indicate, Wordsworth here links the narrative of his autobiographical poem with a narrative from the literary past. He incorporates into his personal account an allusion to The Reeve’s Tale, a story that similarly features two scholars from Cambridge, and that similarly takes place “At Trumpyngtoun, nat fer fro Cantebrigge” where “ther gooth a brook, and over that a brigge, / Upon the whiche brook ther stant a melle” (CT.III.3921-23).¹ To recall his engagement with Chaucer,

Wordsworth rewrites a Chaucerian poem, reimagining both the personages it once described and the pilgrims who once related it. He transforms Aleyn and John, the students of “Cantebrigge” (CT.III.3990) who walked beside the Mill of Trompington before exacting their violent and sexual revenge on the Miller, Symkyn, and his family. He transforms, too, the Reeve, the ornery pilgrim who tells his fabliau of rape and retaliation to avenge the preceding tale from the pilgrim Miller, Robin, about a cuckolded carpenter (CT.III.3913-20). He transforms, finally, the Cook, the enthusiastic listener who laughs along with the Reeve after hearing his churlish story of harlotry and supposedly just deserts (CT.III.4325-29). In The Prelude these characters, pilgrims, and the network of relationships that they form are refigured in the roles played by the medieval and Romantic poets. Reprising Aleyn and John, the Cambridge scholars visiting Trompington’s banks, there now appear at Trompington a different pair of Cambridge-educated men, Chaucer and Wordsworth. And reprising the Cook and the Reeve, the one filled with laughter and the other inducing it, there now appear a different laughing and tale-telling tandem, Wordsworth and Chaucer. With these various metamorphoses, Wordsworth distances his autobiographical account from the manifold layers of mediation in The Canterbury Tales. There, the episode of Trompington Mill was initially described by a pilgrim narrator, then heard and interpreted by a pilgrim audience,

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48. Wu also notes Wordsworth’s familiarity with the 1721 edition of Chaucer’s Works. For Wordsworth’s possible use of Stow’s 1561 edition of Chaucer’s Works, see Wordsworth’s Reading: 1770-1799 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 28. Here, Wu suggests that Wordsworth was reading The Canterbury Tales as early as 1787.

subsequently recalled and rehearsed by pilgrim Chaucer, then written down and presented in book form to the broader reading public. But in Wordsworth’s account, this complex chain of communication, with its diverse participants and variously oral and written media, is not registered. Instead, Wordsworth describes a scene of Chaucerian tale-telling characterized by its simplicity, its intimacy and its exclusivity—by its fantasy of Chaucer’s words proceeding directly to Wordsworth himself.

In transforming many of the Canterbury mediators and depicting his intimate connection with Chaucer, however, Wordsworth also, and paradoxically, opens his Chaucerian engagement to a far less intimate and far more mediated domain: the four-century long history of Chaucer’s reception. Wordsworth’s description of his direct and amicable relationship deploys a topos already well worn by Chaucer’s medieval and post-medieval followers—the Lydgate, Hoccleves, Scogans, Skeltons and Drydens who had, for nearly half a millennium, asserted a similarly immediate and congenial bond with England’s Old Poet.3 Among the manifold documents that transmit this topos, two poems stand out as especially contiguous with The Prelude and its representation of Chaucer. The first is William Mason’s Musaeus, a pastoral elegy written in commemoration of Alexander Pope, modelled on Milton’s Lycidas, and printed in at least fifteen publications between its composition in 1747 and the end of the eighteenth century.4

According to this ‘monody’s’ spectacular account, Chaucer leaves his posthumous home

3 On this topos, see Lee Patterson, Chaucer and the Subject of History (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 14; and Stephanie Trigg, Congenial Souls: Reading Chaucer from Medieval to Postmodern (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), xv.

among the Muses, returns to the earth and, using the Middle English couplets of *The Canterbury Tales*, delivers a resounding commendation of Pope’s poetic excellence. Chaucer presents his panegyric in a setting that anticipates Wordsworth’s Trompington landscape. He too tells his tale while positioned next to a brook, surrounded by singing birds, and assuming he shares a place with Mason’s narrating swain, reposed under the “hawthorn shade” (*Mus*.22). Mason and Wordsworth also intersect in their respective presentations of literary genealogy. *Musaeus* follows Chaucer’s panegyric with comparably laudatory verses from the freshly revived Spenser and Milton. The order in which *Musaeus* has the three poets appear allegorizes the order of English literary history; the stream of English verse, like the sequence of these encomiastic speakers, originates with Chaucer and then flows through Spenser and Milton. *The Prelude* recapitulates the same sequence of Chaucer, Spenser and Milton, but welcomes Wordsworth, not Pope, as the fourth among the old triumvirate’s company.

In *Musaeus*, Chaucer bears the mark of his Renaissance reception. He there appears under his pastoral cognomen, Tityrus, a name deployed not by Chaucer himself but for him in Spenser’s 1579 *Shepheardes Calender*. Wordsworth’s Chaucer also resembles the Chaucer of the *Calender*. In Spenser’s June eclogue, Colin, the shepherd “vnder whose person the Authour selfe is shadowed” (*SC*.Epis.133-34), and Hobbinol, the author’s “very speciall and most familiar freend” (*SC*.Jan.g.59), inhabit the same stock pastoral landscape that Mason and Wordsworth will later reiterate. When standing in the shade, listening to the birds singing and the water flowing, Colin looks back on a time when he would listen first-hand to Tityrus, by whom “is meant Chaucer” (*SC*.Jun.g.81), remembering a poet who was “with loue ytake,” and whose verses would
“wayle [the] Woes, and lightly slake / The flames” of his amorous desire (SC.Jun.84-85).

The pastoral Chaucer of the *Calender*, who tells his tales of passion to the attentive Colin, matches the Chaucer of *The Prelude*, who in a pastoral landscape tells his tales of passion to the attentive Wordsworth.

*Musaeus* and the *Calendar*, whether or not they are his direct sources, help comprise an important discourse of Chaucerian engagement of which Wordsworth is certainly conscious, and toward which he habitually looked. Here, he uses it to qualify his fantasy of Chaucerian affinity. Having transformed many Canterbury mediators, Wordsworth suggests that he has remembered Chaucer’s voice first-hand. But since his record of his direct encounter sounds much like the works of Mason, Spenser and many others, it seems equally the case that, to remember Chaucer’s voice, Wordsworth has also remembered the voices of a different type of intercessor: those of the authors and their characters who had engaged, redacted and mediated Chaucer’s poetry in the centuries following his death. Wordsworth recalls his experience not just with Chaucer, nor just with Chaucer’s works, such as *The Reeve’s Tale*, but with a more general tradition of posthumous interpretation that Chaucer and his works had accreted. The first-hand Chaucer that Wordsworth recollects is equally a Chaucer that has been handed down.

The traditions of interpretation through which Chaucer was handed down, and Wordsworth’s negotiation of them, are the subject of this chapter. I argue that Chaucer’s interpretive baggage, developed over his long reception history, enabled Wordsworth’s bond with him. As the examples of Spenser and Mason suggest, Chaucer’s readers articulated various paradigms of reception—vocabularies to describe his poetic accomplishments and techniques to imagine a relationship with him. These paradigms,
themselves diverse, complex and at times contradictory, comprise a body of received knowledge that shapes Wordsworth’s understanding of Chaucer. Wordsworth never recapitulates any of these paradigms wholesale, but he does deliberately incorporate certain elements from them to structure his own engagements with Chaucer, and to define his authorial identity as Chaucer’s poetic successor. Wordsworth receives his Chaucerian influence by selectively working through the influence of Chaucerian reception. His response to four centuries of Chaucerian mediation involves not its complete elimination, nor its complete reproduction, but its strategic and silent reappropriation.

I first examine the Preface to Lyrical Ballads, analyzing its footnote about Chaucer’s language and its attendant comments concerning poetic diction. My design here is to supplement Thomas A. Prendergast’s brief but important argument about the Preface which, as he correctly suggests, establishes a linguistic connection between Chaucer and Wordsworth’s “rustics” (LB.743).5 As I show, this connection is only one of Chaucer’s identificatory affiliations: the bond between Chaucer and the rustics functions in concert with a bond between Chaucer and Wordsworth. The footnote in particular, and the Preface in general, position Wordsworth as the heir to several Chaucerian talents: his ability to “purify” a language from its grossness and to maintain a disciplined poetic propriety. Before Wordsworth assumes them in 1800, these Chaucerian abilities had been codified by his reception history. The terms of Wordsworth’s Chaucerian inheritance derive not just from Chaucer but from his intercessory interpreters, stemming

respectively from a long tradition of Lydgateian panegyric and from Dryden’s *Fables*, *Ancient and Modern*.

I extend my examination of Dryden’s dual connection to Chaucer and Wordsworth by discussing a sonnet—titled “Edward VI”—from the 1822 *Ecclesiastical* series. Wordsworth again defines his connection to Chaucer in relation to Dryden’s prior engagement with him. The method and alleged defects in Dryden’s Chaucer translations are here the precedent and foil that enable Wordsworth’s affective bond with his medieval predecessor. In forming this connection, Wordsworth recalls a version of the poet mediated by the English Reformation and its commentators: Chaucer, the proto-Protestant. Wordsworth’s redaction of the Protestant picture—which he pursues through a sophisticated engagement with *The Prioress’s Tale*, its typological hermeneutic and its ‘Catholic’ past—serves two purposes. It first grants Chaucer a liminal position in the history of English theology, and then casts him as a religious and poetic precursor who, despite his visionary authority, could still be surpassed by Wordsworth and his own vatic power.

These analyses of Wordsworth’s Chaucer, which extend the argument of my dissertation into the Romantic period, are intended to fill what Bruce E. Graver has called “a serious gap in . . . scholarship.” About the relationship between “Wordsworth and Chaucer we know next to nothing,” writes Graver in his 1998 introduction to the *Translations of Chaucer and Virgil*; and eighteen years later, the scholarly investment in studying the Wordsworth/Chaucer connection is still, as Karen Hodder has more recently noted, far from matching Wordsworth’s investment in his own study of Chaucer. My contribution to this field, on one hand, follows Graver in demonstrating that
Wordsworth’s engagement with Chaucer can also “reveal much about [Wordsworth’s] attitudes toward [other] important predecessors” and, on the other, extends Graver by effecting this demonstration beyond Wordsworth’s Chaucer translations themselves.\(^6\) To be sure, my consideration of these intervening predecessors is not a move that Wordsworth invariably encourages. In a comment recorded by Christopher Wordsworth Jr., and relayed to him by Henry Crabb Robinson, W. Wordsworth was seemingly concerned to limit—rather than multiply—the number of poets in Chaucer’s company. When “I began to give myself up to the profession of a poet,” Wordsworth reportedly declared, “I was impressed with a conviction that there were four English poets whom I must have continually before me as examples—Chaucer, Shakespeare, Spenser and Milton. These I must study, and equal if I could: and I need not think of the rest.”\(^7\) In the _Lyrical Ballads_ and the _Ecclesiastical Sonnets_, Wordsworth pursues his goal of equaling Chaucer, but he does so only by adopting a far less exclusive program of study. Wordsworth matches Chaucer not by ignoring but by thinking about “the rest”—and in particular, by thinking about and reworking what “the rest,” whether great poets or otherwise, had written about Chaucer.

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\(^6\) Graver’s comments may be found in *Translations of Chaucer and Virgil*, ed. Bruce E. Graver (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 3. All quotations from Wordsworth’s translations are cited parenthetically by line or page number from this edition, henceforth abbreviated as _ChTrans_. For Hodder, see “Wordsworth and Chaucer’s _Manciple’s Tale_,” in *Transmission and Generation in Medieval and Renaissance Literature: Essays in Honour of John Scattergood*, ed. Karen Hodder and Brendan O’Connell (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2012), 141.

When *Lyrical Ballads*, first published in 1798, was revised and reissued in 1800, readers encountered an important difference even before opening the book. The 1800 title page announces poems composed by “W. Wordsworth”: the formerly anonymous volume becomes the literary property of a named author. The insertion of this name is, as Kenneth Johnson has rightly suggested, supported by the insertion of the new Preface. The title-page presents the name of an authorial self and, in turn, the Preface pursues a project of authorial self-construction.° Central to the project is Wordsworth’s development of his own place in English literary history—a place he establishes, in large part, through his professed concentration on “low and rustic life” and his attendant linguistic program:

The language too of these men is adopted (purified indeed from what appear to be its real defects, from all lasting and rational causes of dislike or disgust) because such men hourly communicate with the best objects from which the best part of language is originally derived; and because, from their rank in society and the sameness and narrow circle of their intercourse, being less under the action of social vanity they convey their feelings and notions in simple and unelaborated expressions. Accordingly such a language arising out of repeated experience and regular feelings is a more permanent and a far more philosophical language than that which is frequently substituted for it by Poets, who think that they are conferring honour upon themselves and their art in proportion as they separate themselves from the sympathies of men, and indulge in arbitrary and capricious habits of expression in order to furnish food for fickle tastes and fickle appetites of their own creation.* (LB.744)

The asterisk directs readers to the bottom of the page and to a short footnote, the substance of which warrants a more extended exposition than it has previously received:

“It is worth while here to observe that the affecting parts of Chaucer are almost always

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expressed in language pure and universally intelligible even to this day.” As Markham Peacock pointed out long ago, the note, like the Preface as a whole, is most likely the product of a collaborative process with Coleridge playing at least some part in its composition. Despite Coleridge’s potential participation in its genesis, however, the note itself seems designed not to highlight his involvement but to leave him anonymous in the background. In lieu of a connection between two contemporary collaborators, the note joins two temporally distant authors—not Coleridge and Wordsworth but Wordsworth and Chaucer. This latter connection is created through a lexical echo, in which the diction of the note recalls the diction of the Preface proper. The first adjective describing Chaucer’s language has just appeared, in cognate form, in Wordsworth’s explanation of the changes he has made to the language of rustic men. Chaucer’s poetry presents a “pure” language; Wordsworth’s poetry presents a language “purified.” With this echo, Wordsworth directs his linguistic program toward a Chaucerian telos: he adopts the language of men, purifies it from all “rational causes of dislike or disgust,” and thereby matches the linguistic purity already present in Chaucer’s most affecting parts.

With its praise for linguistic purity, Wordsworth’s Preface joins a long-standing tradition of Chaucerian engagement most famously represented by Spenser and Dryden. They respectively identify Chaucer as the “well of English vndefyled” (FQ.IV.ii.32.8) and the first locus of “Purity [in] the English Tongue.” This purity arises, or so the conventionally exaggerated claim runs, from Chaucer’s linguistic entrepreneurialism. So

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in Dryden’s account, Chaucer’s language was pure because Chaucer himself eliminated the displeasing elements that previously existed in England’s native speech: English supposedly achieves its initial purity after he cleanses it through a process of refinement (FAM.7: Pref.26). The same process is also singled out by: Thomas Fuller, who claims that Chaucer “refined our English Tongue,” making him “the Homer of his Age”; Edmund Burke, who refers to late-medieval times as a period when the “Language” was “refined by Chaucer”; and Robert Southey, who claims that Chaucer “at once refined and enriched” the English language, “rejecting what was barbarous” in it.11 Chaucer’s oft-affirmed status as a linguistic refiner—as someone, that is, who brought the language to a higher state of purity—is ultimately rooted less in the philological evidence of lexicographers than in the reverential rhetoric of his first readers.12 As Seth Lerer observes, Chaucer’s “earliest imitators … saw him as purifying English from the rudeness of the Anglo-Saxon,” a perception powerfully articulated in The Fall of Princes where Lydgate explains how his “maistir Chaucer dede his besynesse, / And in his daies hath so weel hym born, / Out off oure tunge tauoiden al reudnesse.” Coming in the wake of this and numerous similar commendations, many of Chaucer’s subsequent

11 The quotations from Fuller, Burke and Southey may be found in Caroline F.E. Spurgeon, Five Hundred Years of Chaucer Criticism and Allusion, 1357-1900, 3 vols. (New York: Russell & Russell, 1960), 1:240; 1:498; 2:183.

12 But see Thomas Tyrwhitt, The Canterbury Tales of Chaucer, 5 vols. (London: T. Payne, 1775-78), 4:1-46 for a later reader who acknowledged this reverential rhetoric, quoting Spenser on the “well of English undefiled,” but who also subjected Chaucer’s language to philological scrutiny. Tyrwhitt used his philological method to refute a counter-tradition of linguistic commentary, exemplified by Richard Verstegan, which claimed that Chaucer had “corrupted and deformed the English idiom by immoderate mixture of French words” (4:1). In Tyrwhitt’s revisionary linguistic history, French had blended with English long before the fourteenth century. This Norman-Saxon dialect then “prevailed in the age of Chaucer,” and as Tyrwhitt puts it, still “remains to this day the language of England” (1:28-29)—a judgment that obliquely anticipates Lyrical Ballads and its footnote about Chaucer’s language, “universally intelligible even to this day.”
commentators remained, in Christopher Cannon’s apt phrase, “studiously Lydgatian.”

The idea of Chaucer as a “master who purified the English language” is, as David Matthews points out, the building block of a lengthy tradition that runs through: John Skelton, whose 1495 *Garland of Laurel* presents Chaucer as the poet who “oure Englysshe rude so fresshely hath set out”; John Leland, whose 1540 *Commentarii de Scriptoribus Britannicus* celebrates Chaucer’s lifelong pursuit to bring English “to such purity” (“ad eam puritatem”); Francis Beaumont, whose prefatory epistle for Thomas Speght’s 1602 edition of Chaucer’s *Works* directs readers back to the *Fall* and the linguistic commendation in it; Timothy Thomas, whose 1721 collection of testimonials in John Urry’s posthumous edition of the *Works* quotes Lydgate directly on the Chaucerian purification of English “reudnesse”; and T.R. Lounsbury, whose 1892 survey of the Lydgateian tradition ends by claiming Chaucer as “the great refiner and purifier of our speech.”

In the *Preface* to *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth recapitulates the Lydgateian collocation, apposing Chaucer against a familiar backdrop of the English language, its commendable purity and a process of purification. But the terms of this collocation have been reorganized so that its last idea applies not to the great medieval predecessor but to his Romantic successor. The process of linguistic reformation, habitually tied to Chaucer

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and his purification of English from its original rudeness, now belongs to Wordsworth: he similarly purifies the language of English men from its displeasing features. With his reorganization of terms, Wordsworth uses the discourse of Chaucerian interpretation in his endeavour to match the refined quality of Chaucer’s language. Wordsworth’s poetry becomes pure, like Chaucer’s affecting parts, once he has done to a rustic’s language what Chaucer had allegedly done to the English language as a whole. John Guillory thinks that Wordsworth is conspicuously ambiguous concerning the methodology and consequences for his process of purification. He “gives no example of the principle of selection at work, and only the vaguest sense of what is actually subtracted from that language really spoken by men (‘purified indeed from what appears to be its real defects, from all lasting and rational causes of dislike or disgust’).”¹⁵ But however vaguely and parenthetically he explains his linguistic practice, Wordsworth has actually given away a great deal about the literary-historical affiliations that this practice entails. The process of purification places Wordsworth in a distinguished line of poetic descent, attesting his ability to assume and reinvent the linguistic legacy of England’s first poetic purifier, Chaucer.

In asserting his literary lineage, Wordsworth partially rewrites the alleged nature of his predecessor’s accomplishment. The Lydgateian strand of reception had also cast Chaucer’s pure vernacular as a language of stylistic luxuriousness, distinguished for its polysyllabic Latinisms, its highly-wrought conceits and its scholarly sophistication. Chaucer purified English by adorning it with the flowers of golden rhetoric. The putative result of this adornment is a Chaucerian lexicon lauded, in repetitive fashion, for its

“eloquence,” for its “pullisshyd eloquence,” for its “ornate eloquence,” for its “crafty and sugred eloquence,” and so on.16 In these formulations, the pure Chaucer equally produces an artificial and ornate diction that the *Lyrical Ballads* would programmatically resist. Accordingly, Wordsworth also rejects Chaucer’s reputation for such sugared speech. In a comment recorded by Robinson, for instance, Wordsworth places Chaucer’s language alongside that of Burns as a paragon of natural sensuality.17 Similarly, in the *Preface* itself, Wordsworth distances Chaucer’s diction from the ornamental and the overwrought. He connects it not (as Lydgate had done) with the golden rhetoric of Parnassus but with the unadorned simplicity of the country. The Chaucer footnote is attached to a sentence valourizing the speech of rustic men for its “simple and unelaborated expressions,” and its status as a “more permanent . . . language” than that of many recent “Poets.” This linguistic accessibility and durability find a literary analogue, the footnote suggests, in a Chaucerian diction that is “almost always” intelligible even after four hundred years. By establishing this analogy, Wordsworth ties his predecessor’s poetics to a register consistent with his own linguistic project. Chaucer’s pure language, affecting and comprehensible “even to this day,” resembles not the ornate speech championed by his immediate followers, nor the poetic diction of a Latinate Gray, but the durable phraseology of an English countryman.

Wordsworth qualifies his point about Chaucerian durability. Obliquely registered in his footnote with its adverb “almost,” this caveat is more overtly presented in his

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translations of four Chaucerian poems, the first drafts of which he wrote the year after publishing the Preface to Lyrical Ballads. Wordsworth’s versions of The Prioress’s Tale, The Manciple’s Tale, Troilus and Criseyde and The Cuckoo and the Nightingale address the exceptions to what is, with Chaucerian intelligibility, “almost always” the case. In them, Wordsworth strives to deviate as little as possible from Chaucer’s Middle English originals, preserving their “sprinklings of antiquity,” such as syllabic stress, along with much of their syntax, vocabulary, rhyme-scheme and dénouement. But such fidelity has its limits. “[S]o much… is the language altered since Chaucer’s time,” Wordsworth would write in his brief introduction to the first printing of The Prioress’s Tale, “that much was to be removed” and modified from the Middle English text to ensure its “fluent reading” and “instant understanding” (ChTrans 36). With his revisions, Wordsworth resists loose paraphrase or systemic rewriting and instead targets unintelligibility at the level of the individual word or phrase. In his extract from Troilus, for instance, his substitutions of “sely” with “simple,” “spille” with “destroy,” “yates” with “gate,” “enchesoun” with “occasion,” and “stynten” with “end” all attempt to clarify potentially obscure Middle English words (cp. TC.V.529, 588, 603, 675, 686 with ChTrans 11, 70, 85, 157, 168). And in pushing for lucidity, Wordsworth supplements the perspective on Chaucerian diction previously articulated in Lyrical Ballads. Whereas the Preface suggests that most parts of Chaucer’s language have remained universally intelligible despite historical change, the translations suggest that other parts have been subject to it; these must be reformed to guarantee “instant understanding.”

The limits of Chaucer’s linguistic currency actually reaffirm his connection to the rustics. Chaucer and a rustic similarly speak a language that is commended for its
transhistorical durability, even as it is deemed in need of Wordsworth’s partial alteration. However permanent, rustic language demands purification; however enduring, Chaucerian language demands translation. By pursuing these two types of linguistic amendment, Wordsworth establishes multivalent roles for Chaucer and for himself: he casts Chaucer as the model for and subject of a process of linguistic intervention, and casts himself as the recipient of and contributor to the discourse of Chaucerian reception. In *Lyrical Ballads*, the Lydgateian strand of this discourse provides Wordsworth with the idea of a purifying Chaucer, the precedent against which Wordsworth constructs his own endeavour of linguistic purification; in *Troilus* et al., Wordsworth provides this discourse with a translated Chaucer, the text in which Chaucer’s language has been reconstructed for the nineteenth century.

In contributing to the tradition of Chaucerian interpretation, Wordsworth looks back to an old model, fashioning his stance as a translator through his implicit contradistinction to Dryden and his paraphrases of Chaucer in the *Fables, Ancient and Modern*. As Graver has ably demonstrated, Wordsworth opposes his attempt to follow Chaucer’s syntax against Dryden’s habitual rearrangement of word order; to preserve Chaucer’s rhymes against Dryden’s frequent substitution of his own; to retain Chaucer’s stress and accent against Dryden’s imposition of a more polished meter—his attempt, in short, at minimal deviation against Dryden’s “wanton deviation.” In what follows I use

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18 Graver’s argument is in *Translations of Chaucer and Virgil*, 6-7. For “wanton deviation,” see *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Middle Years, 1806-11*, ed. E. de Selincourt, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969), 191: “Chaucer I think he [Dryden] has entirely spoiled, even wantonly deviating from his great original, and always for the worse.” The phraseology here echoes Wordsworth’s 1802 *Appendix to Lyrical Ballads* in which he chastises the modern poets whose artificially passionate language is “distinguished by various degrees of wanton deviation from good sense and nature” (*LB*.762; my emphasis). Perhaps Wordsworth thinks that these poets have similarly swerved from a Chaucerian precedent. Chaucer, we will see, could function as a byword for good sense, and could stand as a faithful
the *Preface* to *Lyrical Ballads* to offer an addendum for Graver’s argument. In the
*Preface*, as in the translations of the subsequent year, Wordsworth looks back to the
*Fables*, but in doing so, he establishes a different relation to Dryden’s precedent.
Whereas the translations distance Wordsworth from the method of Dryden’s Chaucerian
modernizations, the *Preface* aligns Wordsworth with the terms provided by Dryden’s
Chaucerian criticism. According to Graver, “the whole Chaucer enterprise” is for
Wordsworth “an attempt to define himself in relation to Dryden.”¹⁹ In the *Preface*, I
would add, Wordsworth defines himself in relation to Dryden as well as in relation to a
Chaucer that Dryden’s prose criticism had constructed.

Wordsworth pursues this process of authorial self-definition in his explanation of
his poetic style. He has made a concerted effort to avoid “what is usually called poetic
diction,” and has instead brought his language “near to the language of men,” looked
“steadily at his subject,” rustic life, and expressed his ideas in “language fitted to their
respective importance.” To expound the benefits and losses attendant on his linguistic
and stylistic practice, Wordsworth uses these literary-historical terms:

> Something I must have gained by this practice, as it is friendly to one property of
> all good poetry, namely, good sense; but it has necessarily cut me off from a large
> portion of phrases and figures of speech which from father to son have long been
> regarded as the common inheritance of Poets. I have also thought it expedient to
> restrict myself still further, having abstained from the use of many expressions, in
> themselves proper and beautiful, but which have been foolishly repeated by bad
> Poets, till such feelings of disgust are connected with them as it is scarcely
> possible by any art of association to overpower. (*LB*.748)

In overtly asserting his separation from one literary inheritance, Wordsworth implicitly secures his membership in another. If avoiding a large portion of poetic phrases distances Wordsworth’s style from a long-standing, Augustan tradition of artificial expression, such avoidance, as Judith W. Page rightly suggests, enables his stylistic connection with an even earlier literary line: one descending from Chaucer and from the purity, intelligibility and durability present in almost all of his language’s affecting parts.\textsuperscript{20} Wordsworth’s linguistic and stylistic project separates him from a phraseological exchange between father and son, even as it links him to the father of English poetry. And given this link, the good sense that Wordsworth claims to have gained and the restriction he claims to have practiced seem not only the general properties of all “good poetry,” but also his specific inheritance from his literary father.

The terms of this Chaucerian inheritance are initially set by Dryden. In the \textit{Preface} to his \textit{Fables}, Dryden turns to “say somewhat of \textit{Chaucer} in particular,” and then declares:

\begin{quote}
In the first place, As he is the Father of \textit{English} Poetry, so I hold him in the same Degree of Veneration as the \textit{Grecians} held \textit{Homer}, or the \textit{Romans Virgil}: He is a perpetual Fountain of good Sense, learn’d in all Sciences; and therefore speaks properly on all Subjects: As he knew what to say, so he knows also when to leave off; a Continence which is practis’d by few Writers, and scarcely by any of the Ancients, excepting \textit{Virgil} and \textit{Horace}. One of our late great Poets is sunk in his Reputation, because he cou’d never forgive any Conceit which came in his way; but swept like a Drag-net, great and small. (\textit{FAM} .7: Pref.33)
\end{quote}

With fitting symmetry, Dryden uses the “first place” of his Chaucerian analysis to establish Chaucer’s first place in England’s literary genealogy and, in turn, to assert the reverence that this place deserves. As he subsequently suggests, however, Chaucer’s

venerability stems not from a mere accident of chronological primacy but from his careful practice of a particular poetic skill. Dryden buttresses his valourization of this specific talent, the ability to “speak properly,” by first commending its Virgilian and Horatian precedents and then by depreciating the “late” Cowley. He neatly captures the contrast between Chaucer and Cowley through a pair of aquatic images. Chaucer is the fountain, the glorious source endowed with an endless supply of native judgment, distributing its learned resources in decorous and controlled proportion. Cowley is the dragnet, the blind device unable to refuse anything in the water, plundering every poetic conceit in its path. Chaucer, still unceasing with his “good sense,” stands continently at the head of a poetic stream; Cowley, now justifiably “sunk,” sweeps indiscriminately in its depths.

Dryden’s depiction of the proper and sensible Chaucer has a robust afterlife. This passage is reproduced in the manifold eighteenth-century editions of the Fables as well as in numerous eighteenth-century discussions of Chaucer’s life and poetry. Thomas’s collection of testimonials in the 1721 edition of Chaucer’s Works, Birch’s 1743 volume of Illustrious Persons, Berkenhout’s 1777 Biographia Literaria, Lipscomb’s 1795 modernizations of The Canterbury Tales and Butler’s 1799 Chronological Table, for example, all quote Dryden’s judgment approvingly. And in doing so, each publication helps reinforce the dual status that Dryden had here assigned his Chaucer. In the works of these latter-day Chaucerians, as in Dryden’s Preface, Chaucer is both a once-living

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father and a still-flowing fountain, both the past progenitor of England’s “Lineal Descents and Clans” and the ever-current source of “good Sense,” both the medieval *origo* of English poetry and the perpetual *fons* of English propriety. The frequent recapitulation of Dryden’s analysis nicely supports Tom Mason’s argument about Chaucer’s eighteenth-century reputation: if Chaucer’s legacy is significantly shaped and positively enhanced by Dryden’s *Fables*, this salutary influence stems from Dryden’s Chaucerian translations as well as Dryden’s Chaucerian criticism. The *Fables* bequeath not just the modernized texts through which readers could understand Chaucer’s specific tales, but also a critical vocabulary through which readers could describe and appreciate Chaucer’s general accomplishment.

Like these eighteenth-century scholars before him, Wordsworth looks back to, and incorporates select terms from, Dryden’s vocabulary of Chaucerian criticism. In the *Preface* to *Lyrical Ballads*, however, these terms function less to commend Chaucer than to construct the authorial identity of his commendable heir. The virtues for which Dryden had praised Chaucer become, in the *Lyrical Ballads*, foundational characteristics of Wordsworth’s own poetics. The admirable restraint once credited to the “properly” speaking Chaucer descends to Wordsworth in the form of his “abstinence” from tarnished expressions; if Chaucer knew when to “leave off” from a superfluous Cowleyean conceit, his “continence” survives in Wordsworth who knows when to leave off from a bad poet’s disgusting phrase. This restraint testifies to his place downstream from the Chaucerian *fons*: the good sense found in predecessor Chaucer has descended to Wordsworth and the

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“good sense” of his unadorned poetry. To derive his Chaucerian characteristics, Wordsworth looks beyond Chaucer alone, and instead engages a larger tradition of mediation. He can share in Chaucer’s good sense and proper restraint only because Dryden, and the century of critics who recapitulated Dryden’s ideas, had helped describe these characteristics in the first place.

By incorporating this tradition of mediation and engaging Dryden’s depiction of Chaucer, Wordsworth also reworks Dryden’s depiction of himself. The sensibility and propriety that Dryden attributes to Chaucer, and that Wordsworth assumes as his own, played a central part in Dryden’s own process of authorial self-definition. Near the midpoint of his Chaucerian analysis in his Preface to the Fables, Dryden recalls his initial description of Chaucer’s decorous skills. As he had done before, Dryden again acknowledges Chaucer’s admirable forbearance, his commendable judgment and his superiority to Cowley, who is here rebuked for overlooking the “depth of [Chaucer’s] good Sense.” But this time around, Dryden adds an important qualification to his earlier description of Chaucer’s virtues. “Sometimes… though not often,” writes Dryden, Chaucer forgets his habitual propriety and “knows not when he has said enough” (FAM.7: Pref.39-40). These occasional slips into excess and “Redundancy” do not, according to Dryden, negate Chaucer’s status as the fountain of good sense or the paragon of poetic abstinence, but they do allow another writer to enter his waters: Dryden himself. For Dryden, these slips are the means to gain his own share of Chaucer’s sensible continence. Chaucer sometimes exceeded the bounds of propriety, and Dryden will eliminate such breaches in the text proper of his Fables; he claims his inheritance of Chaucerian restraint by decorously revising the few unrestrained sections of Chaucer’s
poetry. Chaucer is the source of England’s poetic continence; Dryden is its modern practitioner.

In the *Preface* to *Lyrical Ballads*, Dryden thus stands between Chaucer and Wordsworth in two respects, functioning as the mediator for Wordsworth’s Chaucerian legacy as well as a prior and intervening claimant for it. His preceding claim helps Wordsworth define his own literary-historical position through comparison. Like Dryden, he casts himself as heir to Chaucer’s sensibility and restraint; but unlike Dryden, he identifies a more contemporary poetic object on which to exert his Chaucerian virtues. Whereas Dryden’s sense and moderation target superfluous conceits employed by father Chaucer himself, Wordsworth’s sense and control target expressions foolishly repeated by a more recent group of “bad Poets.” This difference in purpose registers a larger distinction between Dryden, Wordsworth and their respective postures toward the Chaucerian past. To manifest his Chaucerian restriction, Dryden replaces the phraseological excess in Chaucer’s own works with a properly rewritten and restrained “Modern Art” (*FAM.7*: Pref.32). To showcase his Chaucerian restraint, Wordsworth eliminates the phraseological excess of which modern art is comprised.

In describing the phrases from which he will abstain, Wordsworth joins together the various facets of his Chaucerian inheritance, putting them toward the cooperative pursuit of a common goal: he here links his poetic continence with his linguistic purification in a shared effort to prevent various types of “disgust.” As Wordsworth’s Chaucerian restraint helps him avoid the “feelings of disgust” prompted by the phrases of bad poets, so does Wordsworth’s Chaucerian refinement help him eliminate the occasional “dislike or disgust” prompted by the language of rustic men. Endowed with
these Chaucerian characteristics, Wordsworth’s poetics simultaneously eschews, on one hand, the repugnant elements of artificial poetry and, on the other, the distasteful elements of ordinary speech. In Wordsworth’s aesthetic, this dual assault generates an affective consequence. With disgust removed, gone is an impediment that threatens to obstruct both the achievement of pleasure, and the salutary feeling encouraged by it: sympathy. By rooting this removal in his inherited Chaucerian traits, Wordsworth squares a literary-historical project with a socio-cultural one, aligning his focus on the legacies of his poetic predecessors with his focus on the feelings of his present community. “We have no sympathy but what is propagated by pleasure,” Wordsworth would ultimately write in the 1802 Preface (LB.752). In 1800, Wordsworth had already used his Chaucerian influence—his linguistic purity and propriety—to clear the affective obstacle which stands in pleasure’s benevolent path.

III: Affective Community, Typological Reading:
The Prioress and the Ecclesiastical Sonnets

Two decades after the publication of Lyrical Ballads, Wordsworth continued his effort to engage a Chaucerian literary history, to negotiate its affective power, and to establish his own place within it. The Chaucerian connection in Wordsworth’s literary career is neatly exemplified by the composition and publication history of his modernized Prioress’s Tale. Wordsworth began working on his translation in 1801 and the project was alive again two decades later: he returned to and revised his original manuscript draft in 1819, first published the poem in 1820, and republished it, after adding an important prefatory note, in 1827. His long-term focus on The Prioress’s Tale and its medieval author is also attested, as I demonstrate in detail below, in “Edward VI,” a sophisticated sonnet from
Here, in the midst of describing England’s religious Reformation under the Tudors, Wordsworth appeals to Chaucer and his tale, and as in *Lyrical Ballads*, yokes his engagement with Chaucer to a discourse of Drydenic mediation:

> “Sweet is the holiness of Youth”—so felt
> Time-honoured Chaucer when he framed the lay
> By which the Prioress beguiled the way,
> And many a Pilgrim’s rugged heart did melt.
> Hadst thou, loved Bard! whose spirit often dwelt
> In the clear land of vision, but foreseen
> King, Child and Seraph, blended in the mien
> Of pious Edward kneeling as he knelt
> In meek and simple Infancy, what joy
> For universal Christendom had thrilled
> Thy heart! what hopes inspired thy genius, skilled
> (O great Precursor, genuine morning star)
> The lucid shafts of reason to employ,
> Piercing the Papal darkness from afar!

*(ES.2.23)*

Once held by Dryden in his renditions of *The Knight’s Tale*, *The Wife of Bath’s Tale* and *The Nun’s Priest’s Tale*, the status of Chaucerian translator has now been assumed by Wordsworth. The sonnet opens with, and is structured around, the theme “Sweet is the holiness of Youth,” a phrase derived not from the *Fables* but from Wordsworth’s own translation of *The Prioress’s Tale*. The phrase is a Wordsworthian addition to Chaucer’s poem and an eminently striking one at that: it is the only line in the whole translation entirely of Wordsworth’s invention, and its inclusion necessitates the conspicuous insertion of an eighth line to the previously seven line rime royal stanza (*ChTrans* 61).²⁴

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²³ Quotations of Wordsworth’s *Ecclesiastical Sonnets* are from *Sonnet Series and Itinerary Poems, 1820-1845*, ed. Geoffrey Jackson (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), abbreviated as ES and cited parenthetically by section and sonnet number.

²⁴ Wordsworth’s addition to *The Prioress’s Tale*, and his auto-citation of it in “Edward VI,” have been previously noted in Abbie Findlay Potts, *The Ecclesiastical Sonnets* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1922), 268; Stuart Robertson, “Chaucer and Wordsworth,” *MLN* 43 (1928): 104-105; *The Poetical Works*...
By recalling his original phrase in “Edward VI,” Wordsworth gives a specific slant to his posture as Chaucerian translator, identifying himself as someone who productively extends his predecessor’s model, rather than unwaveringly replicating it. In doing so, Wordsworth surprisingly adopts a posture not altogether distinct from one previously maintained by Dryden. In addition to curbing Chaucer’s putative redundancy, Dryden’s *Fables* also “presum’d farther in some Places” than the Middle English originals, adding new lines when Chaucer had not “given his Thoughts their true Lustre” (*FAM.7*: Pref.40). Wordsworth’s addition to *The Prioress’s Tale*—the line, as Stuart Robertson once cogently put it, singled out for “special accomplishment” in “Edward VI”—smacks of this Drydenic latitude. Though it avoids matching Dryden in the sheer volume of his novel insertions, Wordsworth’s original line does, like the Augustan rewritings, extend the substance of Chaucer’s text, and grant a Chaucerian thought an additional degree of luster.

By quoting his extension in “Edward VI,” Wordsworth assumes a more active role to the one he had played in the Chaucer translations. Whereas he had earlier defined his method by its difference from Dryden’s poetic presumption, Wordsworth now revises his stance to assert his privileged place in literary history: his presumptive addition claims not a newfound support for Dryden’s translations and their wanton deviations but superiority over them. The line Wordsworth adds to Chaucer has precisely the poetic qualities that Dryden’s modernizations lacked. As Wordsworth explains in a letter to Walter Scott, Dryden shows his great wants in *Palamon and Arcite*, a translation of *The
Knight's Tale produced by a poet without a “lofty sense of moral dignity,” a language of ennobling passions or a “tender heart.” This final limitation is especially problematic since it was a quality possessed by Dryden’s original, Chaucer, and by at least one of his characters. As “Edward VI” suggests, Chaucer is so much a poet of passion and tenderness that, had he lived to see the little King, joy would have thrilled his heart and inspired him to write. The Prioress shares her author’s emotional nature. Though she expresses, as Wordsworth suggests in a note to his version of the tale, much anti-Semitic bigotry, she allegedly balances her hatred with “tender-hearted sympathies” for the Christian clergeon and his mother (ChTrans 36).

Wordsworth’s comments about this supposed sensitivity recall the lexicon of Chaucer’s poetry. In his description of her in the General Prologue, Chaucer notes—with an irony that Wordsworth either misses or ignores—that the Prioress is “all . . . conscience and tendre herte” (CT.I.150). But Wordsworth’s remarks about these sensitive hearts also reflect back on Wordsworth himself and his original line, “Sweet is the holiness of Youth.” If Chaucer may be glorified because his heart would have been moved by Edward’s youthful piety, Wordsworth may be valourized because it was he (and not Chaucer) who was moved to write this line about the “holiness of Youth” in the first place. Similarly, if the Prioress may be commended because she has “tender-hearted sympathies,” Wordsworth may be acclaimed because one of these tender feelings is not the Prioress’s but his own. By showcasing his tenderness, Wordsworth places himself alongside the Prioress and Chaucer in a transhistorical community of shared affect. While Dryden is implicitly barred from this fellowship on account of his affective deficiencies,

his exclusion here stems from a partial recollection of his poetic presence rather than a complete elimination of it. His reception of Chaucer provides Wordsworth with the posture through which and the foil against which he creates his affective community. Wordsworth connects with the Chaucerian past by adopting the role of active translator that Dryden outlined and by supplying the tenderness that Dryden lacked. Put another way, Dryden is here a discardable intermediary: he provides the intervening framework for Wordsworth to form a relationship with Chaucer and a Chaucerian character, but is himself ultimately excluded from it.

The tenderness that joins together the medieval and Romantic poets is doubly connected to Edward, the clergeon, and their displays of piety. For Chaucer and Wordsworth, the “holiness of Youth” is the product of their tender, poetic compositions and the potential source of their tender sympathy for displays of religiosity. This confluence of literature and religion finds its symbolic corollary in Chaucer’s status as “morning star”: whereas Wordsworth’s affective community links tender poetics to a tenderness-inducing piety, Chaucer’s stellar title links the history of poetics to the history of piety. Wordsworth had assigned a literary-historical meaning to the morning star in several earlier works. The *Letter Supplementary to the 1815 Preface* and the *Letter to Mathetes*, for example, call Chaucer the “morning-star of English Poetry,” a label that positions his work as a luminous sign that marks both the end of England’s previous poetic darkness and the coming of its ultimately brilliant poetic tradition. In the ecclesiastical sonnet, Chaucer’s star again opposes a surrounding darkness, but the scope

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of his poetic luminousness extends even further. It is now “piercing” not just the literary but “the Papal darkness from afar.”

In spreading Chaucer’s light into the religious realm, Wordsworth recalls the power that he had previously assigned to Chaucer’s contemporary, John Wycliffe. The same Letter to Mathetes that identifies Chaucer as literary star commends Wycliffe and his daring theology for shooting “orient beams through the night of Roman superstition” (PW.2:12). “Edward VI” attributes a similarly penetrating power to Chaucer, and thereby casts him as Wycliffe’s ally against the papacy; instead of a passive literary onlooker to Wycliffite reform, Chaucer is his fellow theological light. Fittingly, Chaucer’s symbolic title has a Wycliffite connection. A tradition that likely begins with Bale, and that runs throughout the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, labels Wycliffe “the morning star of the Protestant Reformation.”27 By associating Chaucer’s piercing poetry and his emblematic title with the discourse of Wycliffite proto-Protestantism, Wordsworth positions his medieval predecessor as the point at which two future trajectories coalesce. As morning star, Chaucer promises both the dawn of English literary history, and along with Wycliffe, the dawn of the English Reformation.

In yoking Chaucer and Wycliffe, Wordsworth inserts himself into a long-standing tradition of Chaucerian interpretation. Historiographers and scholars in Tudor England habitually draw the same connection, and identify Chaucer as a proto-Protestant, a “right

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Wicklevian” that “saw into religion as much almost as even we do now.” Wordsworth recalls this tradition to revise one of its fundamental characteristics. For the Renaissance scholars and occasional poets, John Bale, John Foxe and Francis Thynne, Chaucer manifests his proto-Protestantism in what we now call his apocryphal works of anti-papal and anti-fraternal polemic: the Plowman’s Tale, Jack Upland and the supposedly censored Pilgrim’s Tale. Wordsworth, by contrast, couples his version of the proto-Protestant Chaucer with a poem of a drastically different theological orientation: The Prioress’s Tale, a story narrated by a representative of the Catholic institution and that includes not anti-papal polemic but a Marian miracle, a worshipped image and a saintly shrine. Wordsworth juxtaposes his anti-Roman Chaucer with a Chaucerian tale that seemingly offers a stereotypical representation of “Roman superstition.”

Wordsworth juxtaposes depictions of Protestantism and Catholicism throughout the Ecclesiastical series; and as Anne Rylestone and Regina Hewitt have ably demonstrated, Wordsworth’s personal opposition to the Roman Church and to Catholic Emancipation did not prevent his sonnets from enumerating certain values of the Catholic


past. A similarly dual process of condemnation and valourization may obtain in Wordsworth’s “Edward VI” and *Prioress’s Tale*. His denunciation of the darkness in the medieval papacy does not preclude his approbation for the heartfelt tenderness in a Catholic nun. In the final analysis, however, “Edward VI’s” allusion to Chaucer’s eminently ‘Catholic’ poem has less to do with providing a partially positive perspective of the Catholic tradition, and more with introducing a hermeneutic model for Catholicism’s expropriation. As handled by Wordsworth, *The Prioress’s Tale* outlines doctrinal characteristics of Catholicism, but it also offers an interpretive methodology for its appropriation and supersession by Protestantism.

*The Prioress’s Tale* articulates its model of appropriation and supersession in the typological relationship between the Old and New Testaments, between the Old Law of the Jews and the New Law of the Christians. In typological history, events and personages in the Old Testament prefigure corresponding events and personages in the New: shadowy types under Moses’s covenant are fulfilled in and superseded by gracious antitypes under Christ’s ministry. To capture this supersession, the Prioress situates the murdered clergeon and his sorrowful mother, the “newe Rachel,” against the backdrop of Herod’s massacre of the Holy Innocents, alluding to the account of it in Matthew 2:16-


18—a text that itself alludes to the old Rachel weeping for her lost children in Jeremiah 31:15. The incorporation of Jeremiah in Matthew, the Old Testament in the New, encourages exegetes to read the gospel typologically. The grieving Rachel here becomes a type for two similarly grieving figures: the Roman mothers who lament the slaughter of their Holy Innocents and the Christian Church which “laments her tender lambs who have been killed.”32 By evoking this scriptural history and its attendant hermeneutic, the Prioress grafts the clergeon’s mother onto these existing typologies. According to the Prioress, the old Rachel becomes the type of another “new” sorrowful woman: the clergeon’s mother. As antitypes of the first Rachel, these second Rachels succeed to the inheritance initially bequeathed to the Jewish matriarch. The promised restoration of Rachel’s lost children, the symbolic representatives of Israel, is ultimately fulfilled by the Innocents’ mothers, the Christian Church and the clergeon’s mother: their lost children, the children of the new Israel, are restored in heaven through Christ’s sacrifice.33

Wordsworth positions “Edward VI” in relation to the Prioress’s logic of prefiguration and supersession. Yet he connects this logic not to the Jewish matriarch or to Chaucer’s Jews but to the Christian clergeon. Here, the little boy’s religiosity embodies Christian law in its still-developing form: though he is under the New Law, the clergeon can still be superseded and made new. Wordsworth suggests as much when he describes the posture in which Edward manifests his commendable piety. His


comportment—Edward is “kneeling . . . In meek and simple Infancy”—recalls a series of textual precedents. On one hand, this pose derives from the foundational records of Edward’s life and of his contribution to Reformation theology. According to the record of his coronation ceremony, the historical Edward knelt in front of the high altar and the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer, before being presented as King.34 Moreover, according to his Book of Common Prayer, Edward and all English Protestants kneel during communion “for a sygnificacion of the humble and gratefull acknowledgyng of the benefites of Chryst.”35 These twin acts of kneeling have a distinctly Protestant valence. In the former case, Edward kneels to receive the crown from the chief advocate of England’s continued Reformation (indeed, at the coronation itself, Cranmer allegedly instructed Edward to sustain the attack on Roman bishops and Catholic images).36 In the latter, Edward kneels to receive communion from within a Protestant perspective on transubstantiation. When kneeling, he neither adores an idol, a putatively Catholic practice “abhorred of all faythfull christians,” nor consumes any “reall or essencial presence… of Christ’s naturall fleshe and bloude” (BCP:393).

In addition to its basis in Edward’s historical life, Edward’s posture in Wordsworth’s sonnet also has a literary precedent: The Prioress’s Tale and its description of the clergeon’s devotion. At his school the clergeon too “kneel[s]” in simple infancy

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34 The record of Edward’s coronation is reproduced by Gilbert Burnet, “Collection of Records” in The History of the Reformation of the Church of England (London: Richard Chiswell, 1681), Mmm3v-4r. For a more recent appraisal of the coronation, see Jennifer Loach, Edward VI (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 29-38.


when he worships an “ymage” of Mary (CT.VII.505). By connecting Edward’s piety with this literary precedent, Wordsworth establishes the grounds for a typologically-inspired reading, which applies a formerly scriptural hermeneutic within an extra-scriptural context. When apposed to his Tudor counterpart, the clergeon can represent both the type of the youthful devotee and the practitioner of a devotion transcended by a latter-day form. Kneeling in his infancy, the clergeon provides an anticipatory figure echoed by Wordsworth’s similarly kneeling Edward; and given the records of Edward’s theology, his corresponding posture testifies not to the perseverance of Catholicism but to its supersession. In other words, Wordsworth’s Edward supersedes the kneeling clergeon by resignifying him: formerly the embodiment of Catholicism’s worship of Marian images, at least insofar as a post-Reformation reading would suggest, the kneeling, youthful devotee ultimately symbolizes Protestantism’s dual commitment to the removal of such images and the rejection of transubstantiation. If the clergeon’s mother becomes a second and privileged Rachel in the age of Catholicism, Edward becomes a new and reformed clergeon in the age of Protestantism.

Wordsworth uses the divide between the ages of Catholicism and Protestantism as a framework against which to set Chaucer’s authorial identity. To place Chaucer in this scheme of periodization, Wordsworth calls Chaucer the “precursor,” a title that refers not just, as Christopher Cannon suggests, to a poetic predecessor but also, as The Prelude indicates, to St. John the Baptist (Prld.10.307).37 Chaucer’s assigned connection to the biblical precursor dovetails with his status as the morning star: if morning-star-Chaucer signals the coming of, and prepares the way for, English literature and the English

37 For Cannon’s suggestion, see “The Myth of Origin,” 654-55. The link between John and “precursor” is also registered in the word’s earliest, denotative sense; see OED, s.v. “precursor,” 1a.
Reformation, so does precursor-John signal the coming of, and prepare the way for, Christ. In his preparatory capacity, John is too a “morning star,” one whose light is ultimately superseded by that brighter “morning star” in the book of Revelation.38 Attendant on John’s anticipatory function is an important corollary pertaining to periodization. As Christ’s precursor, John resides at the threshold between two ages of scriptural history. On one hand, John stands as the marker for, and a participant in, the new epoch of Christ’s ministry. Matthew 11:12, for instance, places John squarely on the later side of a period divide, here represented by a temporally-inflected preposition: “all the prophets and the law prophesised until John.” On the other hand, however, John remains at least partially attached to an older age and separated from the full privileges of the new. Immediately before distancing him from the Old Testament prophets, the gospel of Matthew equally distances precursor John from the subsequent epoch and its members: “the least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he.”39

By assigning Chaucer the status of precursor, Wordsworth develops an analogy between John’s threshold position in the Bible’s scriptural history and Chaucer’s threshold position in England’s ecclesiastical history. In this analogy Chaucer is split between eras of Catholic and Protestant practice as John is split between eras of Old and New Law. To establish one facet of Chaucer’s medial position, Wordsworth and his Church chronology locate the English precursor after the temporal period in which he lived, and after the epochal break represented by the dissolution of the monasteries and


39 John’s position in the middle of an epochal transition is ably described by Walter Wink, John the Baptist in the Gospel Tradition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 111-12.
the foundation of the new state-religion. Chaucer enters Wordsworth’s historical stream not as it passes through Ricardian and Lancastrian times, but after it has moved through Henrician England and has reached Edward’s Reformation reign. Yet Wordsworth also distances Chaucer from this later, Protestant period by identifying the partial limitations of his sight. The Chaucerian spirit that often “dwelt / In the clear land of vision” cannot, according to Wordsworth, actually foresee Edward himself. Instead, Chaucer remains linked to an earlier age and perceives only Edward’s shadowy Catholic type, the little clergeon. Chaucer is pulled toward a later Protestant epoch only to be, like his fellow precursor John, pushed back into a preceding period.

The precursor-Chaucer, if he finds a prior biblical analogue in John the Baptist, also has a later English counterpart in Wordsworth himself. Wordsworth outlines his role as a sort of precursor, pulled between the conditions of his own period and the sight of the future, in the final sonnet of his *Ecclesiastical* sequence. Here linking Chaucer with yet another John (the Apostle, not the Baptist), Wordsworth’s “Conclusion” subjects these two authors and their respective visions to his own poetic revision, asking:

Why sleeps the future, as a snake enrolled,
Coil within coil, at noon-tide? For the Word
Yields, if with unpresumptuous faith explored,
Power at whose touch the sluggard shall unfold
His drowsy rings. Look forth! that Stream behold,
That Stream upon whose bosom we have pass’d
Floating at ease while nations have effaced
Nations, and Death has gathered to his fold
Long lines of mighty Kings—look forth, my Soul!
(Nor in that vision be thou slow to trust)
The living Waters, less and less by guilt
Stained and polluted, brighten as they roll,
Till they have reached the Eternal City—built
For the perfected Spirits of the just!

(ES.3.28)
With his self-directed imperative (“look forth, my Soul!”), Wordsworth commands his own metaphysical place alongside Chaucer’s “spirit” as a resident in what “Edward VI” had called the “land of vision.” And when he receives and trusts in his sight, the sight not just of past and contemporary worlds but of the future’s trajectory, Wordsworth transcends the optical limitations of this land’s earlier resident. In seeing the holy stream roll through his own nation and its time, and flow into the “Eternal City” and its atemporality, Wordsworth gains the kind of bright, future vision that the Chaucer of “Edward VI” could only grasp darkly. In other words, Wordsworth’s prophetic vision announces his role as a new and reformed English precursor, the poet who (like Chaucer with the Reformation) anticipates a future time, but (unlike Chaucer with Edward) actually glimpses what the future entails. In describing the substance of his future and exceeding the sight of the old English precursor, Wordsworth is equally rewriting a scriptural text: the Book of Revelation. Like John the Apostle in his awesome vision, Wordsworth too looks forward at the Eternal City and its promise of a post-apocalyptic age; but unlike John, Wordsworth anticipates a future that gets better, not worse, before the end of time.40 Instead of the descent into a series of plagues, fires and brandings, Wordsworth sees the rise of increasingly bright, pure and unpolluted waters. By yoking his departure from John’s text to his simultaneous divergence from Chaucer’s sight, Wordsworth assigns his religious investment a profound poetic efficacy. And in doing so, he offers an anticipatory challenge to what would soon become a critical commonplace: the intensification in his Christian faith was accompanied by a decline in his poetic powers. According to the final sonnet, by contrast, Wordsworth’s religious commitment actually enables his strength as a poet. In relating his vision of the Eternal City, his vision

40 On the final sonnet as a rewriting of Revelation, see Rylestone, Prophetic Memory, 106.
of Revelation revised, Wordsworth manifests the power to surpass not simply a canonical theologian but a canonical poet—his power, that is, to exceed the Chaucer of “Edward VI” by seeing and composing a poem about the future uncoiled.

In displaying his supremacy, Wordsworth introduces yet another temporal component to what is, as I have argued throughout this chapter, his multi-temporal engagement with Chaucer. Wordsworth’s Chaucer, like Spenser’s, is a Chaucer of the longue durée. To rework his medieval predecessor, Wordsworth looks not just to the fourteenth century and to Chaucer’s works themselves, but also to the four hundred years of Chaucer’s posthumous reception. He studies The Reeve’s Tale and The Prioress’s Tale as well as the pastoral Chaucer, the amorous Chaucer, the purifying Chaucer, the sensible and continent Chaucer, the translated Chaucer, and the proto-Protestant Chaucer. For Wordsworth, a look toward his Chaucerian past equally involves a look toward Chaucer’s own future. The “Conclusion” to the Ecclesiastical Sonnets offers a different type of future sight. To surpass Chaucer here, Wordsworth finally glances at a future shaped not by the reception of a Chaucerian interpreter but by the vision of his own prophetic soul.
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